

The Importance of Brand Extensions: Reaching Beyond Your Comfort Level

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Once upon a time there was a rubber company. Soon after the company incorporated, in 1888, a gentleman by the name of Ford invented the automobile. The rubber company wanted to get people interested in cars and travel by car in order to increase their rubber output. They published a guide with that goal in mind.

The guide was so detailed and helpful that it has the dubious distinction of helping the Germans invade Belgium. Today, it is one of the most sought-after travel, hotel, and restaurant guides published.

That guide helped the rubber company sell a few tires along the way, as well, transforming the Michelin Rubber Company into the Michelin Tire Company.

The story is an example of a brand extension. These are services or products that grow naturally out of your core offerings.

Another example of a brand extension from the past: The birth of commuter rail lines introduced a great new way to travel and relieve the congestion caused by those pesky cars mentioned above. The problem was that the rail lines generated no revenue on weekends. So the intrepid rail line owners built amusement parks at either end of the lines and soon the trains were operating at full capacity on the weekends.

And one from present-day: The battery company Energizer recently conducted a survey about Baby Boomers. Not surprisingly, they found that Boomers are living longer and leading more active lives than their parents, yet still have room for improvement in long-term health. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of baby boomers feel younger than their chronological age, and more than half (55%) said they feel healthier than their parents were at the same age. Yet according to the National Center for Health Statistics, half of Americans ages 55 – 64 have high blood pressure and two in five are obese.

Based on the study that they originated and conducted, they launched a program out of their specialty battery division entitled "Keep Going. Live Healthy!" and teamed with fitness expert Denise Austin and well-known Boomers to launch it. The company is also partnering with audiologists to provide expertise on hearing loss prevention, as well as aligning with physicians who will provide tips on diabetes management and heart health.

In addition, the program features grassroots events, including community health fairs and free health screenings.

According to Energizer, the program is a year-round campaign to educate people about better ways to live a healthy, active lifestyle—with some help from key battery-powered devices.

Did you catch the last part, *With the help from key battery-powered devices?* That's brand extension. Live a healthier life and, while you are using different devices such as glucose monitors, blood pressure monitors, hearing aids, and insulin pumps to do so, consider powering them with Energizer batteries. And we will help you. Go to the Web site. Tell us about yourself. Join our fitness movement. And receive discounts for battery purchases.

What can we learn from the bunny?

Energizer is in the process of implementing classic crusader marketing tactics, harnessing an army of ambassadors through social media and community convergence. Here are some takeaways:

- Sponsor a study. Energizer took it upon itself to do original research based on timely and popular issues and audience segments—Baby Boomer health. What original research can you sponsor?
- Tie it to a cause. The company took the results—Boomers think they are healthy but really need work—and tied to a cause of getting fit. What is your cause?
- Collect information. When you go to the Web site and register for the promotion, the company collects key information about you and your battery-buying habits. They'll be better able to market to you based on these selections and will likely collect more information in the future as they look to intersect your interests. How are you collecting information? Or, an even more fundamental question, do you collect information at all?
- Tie it to products and services. At the end of the day, the promotion ties back to battery sales—plain and simple.

Is healthcare missing an opportunity?

One could argue that a hospital or health system should have been the one to initiate a promotion like this, enlisting Energizer as a partner. Radio Shack did something similar a few years back when it launched a line of health-related products, the same products that need those batteries, by the way.

Hospitals also missed a brand extension with retail health clinics. Some are now pushing to catch up but the more heavily-funded Wal-Mart and CVS clinics, among others, have already left the gate.

A brand extension can be a great tool to increase brand awareness, bring together cause and community, and tie back to your core mission. But it takes visionary internal leadership as well as a visionary board to reach beyond their comfort zone to accomplish this.

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