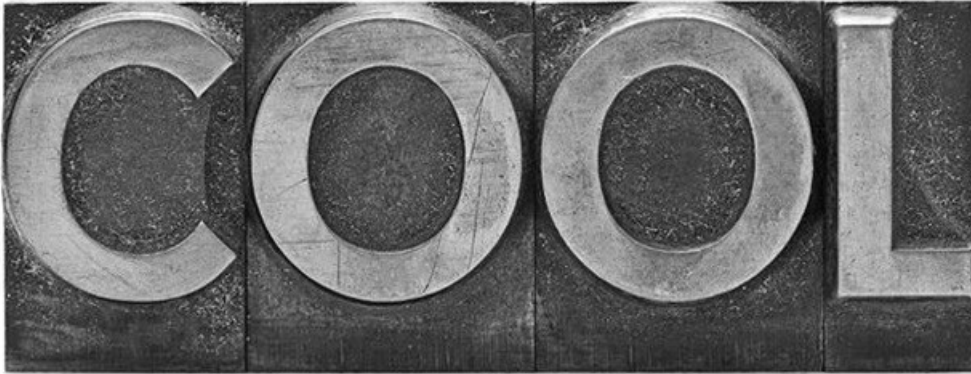


Harnessing the longevity of 'cool'

By  Danny Bryer

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One brand has maintained its cool factor for seven years running, but how did they do it?



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Explaining a joke kills the punchline, and analysing what's cool can become a clinical exercise – a dissection that removes the element of cool before the body is even cold. There's a fly-by-night fad, a trend soon forgotten, and then there's perennial cool, the marketing gift that keeps on giving. Being named the Coolest Hotel Group in SA for seven years in a row, we've learned how staying ahead of your customers' needs and wants helps to position your brand.

Before looking at what makes a brand cool, it's important to examine the differences between fads, trends and being cool; they're not all linked. A fad is something either created by or for consumers – the latest collectable toys or cards for kids, a particular fashion or hairstyle. A shrewd marketer can develop a product and enough hype around it to get it rolling, and its growth may be exponential, but then it's gone, consigned to the dustbin of history (unless there's a repeat, retro fad). Trends last for longer and they're more governed by consumer preferences. Trends can be marketed to, but they must be carried and supported by people. You can't create a trend without it being backed up by significant support. Cool, on the other hand, is an inherent quality, you can generate it, but, more often than not, you either have it or you don't.

It's easy to confuse cool with a snapshot moment: think of those iconic images of Audrey Hepburn or James Dean on coffee mugs around the world, forever sultry in black and white, aloof. The photographer captured a moment, but these images shouldn't be what defines cool. A better celebrity example to choose (sticking to that metaphor) would be Keith Richards, whose subversive attitude has defined the rock 'n roll lifestyle for decades. That's pretty cool.

Whether you're a hotel group, and app developer or a shoe producer, you no doubt want to tap into the power of being cool. In an age of viral videos, we've seen how easily mass attention can be stirred up. Rarely does this translate to sustainable profitability, the curious truth is that remaining true to your market and staying on trend to feed into the cool epithet is an ongoing process that incorporates a number of facets.

Flashy ads

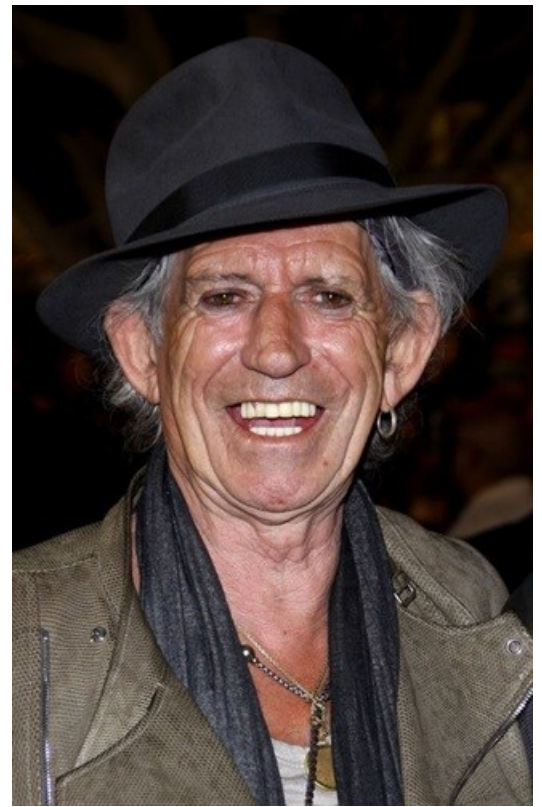
Advertising is great for getting audiences to sit up, but few manage to keep this interest going. A great ad can reach millions of people – think of the Superbowl extravaganza every year and the immense amounts of marketing budget that go into securing ad space for the event – but do those ads translate into sales? In the case of local fast food company, Nandos, the advertising is very much part of their brand, witty, friendly and personable – it speaks to a mass market for whom the brand has become an aspirational part of their lives.

What we consider cool as a brand is not unusual: innovation, originality, authenticity and uniqueness. When you're dealing with a forever-young market made up of forward thinking, progressive individualists, you need to stay one step ahead.

Just Yahoo it

The world's iconic brands have built this into their marketing strategies, it's no good hitting the big time for a season and then drifting back into a market of product or service parity. You have to stand out. As unbelievable as it may seem now, Yahoo and others were determined to lead the race when it came to being the globe's leading search engine. Indeed, Google used to be Yahoo's official search engine, prior to Google becoming by far the bigger global brand. It's not limited to the customer-facing brand, every element of the brand including how employees are engaged with is innovative, original, authentic and unique, the kind of presentation that has become aspirational to competitors.

The main driver of marketing is your consumer – how your product is presented, how they interact with it – experience it – is what should govern your strategy. They have preferences, and you can develop what you're doing around those. By giving your customers what they want, how and when they want it, you're personalising what you have to offer. They feel that you're speaking directly to them, and that's the holy grail of marketing. Your voice echoes theirs, your response is to their call.



Keith Richards

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Staying ahead is essential when it comes to trendsetting. Anticipating how customer needs evolve over time allows you to present what they want, before they even know they want it. For us, that means we're able to give a great stay experience, but the same is true of almost any product or service.

Sustainability means that this is not a finite process, but it's rather an ongoing process that will yield ongoing results, providing longevity to your reputation that can be harnessed for future success.

ABOUT DANNY BRYER

Danny Bryer is Area Director, Sales, Marketing and Revenue Management, Protea Hotels by Marriott.
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