

Strategic thinking moves brand to centre stage of business

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Reputation is more important as a metric than profit, and in the super-connected world, the margins for error are small and getting smaller. This is according to Gordon Cook, head of Vega, the School of Brand Innovation.

Cook, who will be presenting a unique branding course Strategic Brand Marketing at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) in November, says that branding should be both the king and the queen on the chessboard.

"Branding is the most undervalued part of business but actually it is the strategic imperative," he says.

In the global brand war Apple has recently edged Google out of the top spot - ending the search engine's four-year reign as the world's strongest brand, according to a new study by brands agency Millward Brown.

The folk over at Millward Brown believe that Apple has achieved this because of its meticulous attention to detail, the increasing presence of its gadgets in corporate environments, its luxury brands pricing model - the more expensive it is, the more coveted - and its unfailing dedication to creating great products and, very importantly, great experiences for its consumers.

To this, Cook would add that Apple is brand centric. "Everything they do at the company adds value to the brand," says Cook.

He says that there is no business without a brand; there is no bottom-line without a brand; the brand generates the top line. He says that people need to think of business differently because consumers are thinking differently and are becoming more and more discriminatory. So, reputation becomes essential as it is the final effect of brand strength.

Reputation has a lag effect before it hits the bottom line," says Cook.

Shaking up the general conception of what marketing, communication and branding should be for today's business, Cook is well known in South Africa for helping those who attend his courses to unlearn what they know and throw away their business plan templates. Instead, they learn to think strategically and move away from formulaic ways of building brands.

"We still hear about communication as promotions, but promotion has passed its sell-by date. Today there is a need for an Integrated Brand Communication," he says.

"We are now talking about marketing 3.0. Marketing 1.0 was product centric. Marketing 2.0 was customer centric and now, marketing 3.0, is human centric. There are so many strategic opportunities when using the latest thinking," says Cook.

The most current and provocative brand building and marketing debates are brought into the classroom, with a number of illustrative case studies. The programme considers the role of social media, and whether it is a fad or a revolution, but also focuses on the importance of sensory experience in gaining brand advantage.

"Today, any marketing strategy that does not aim to stimulate as many senses as possible, fails to make a significant impact," says Cook.

The Strategic Brand Marketing course runs from 7 to 9 November at the Graduate School of Business. For more information on the course please contact Alison Siebritz on 021-406-1490 or visit www.gsb.uct.ac.za/strategicmarketing.

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