

brand strategy

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STRATEGIC THINKING

The storytelling guru

An interview

TRENDSPOTTER

The human face of branding

Anne Bahr Thompson says brands that bring communities together will resonate deeper with consumers



Consumers are seeking emotional connections in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami. The challenge for brands and brand experiences is to offer new means of individuality and personal expression. Relationships and empathy are all important.

This trend has led to more inclusive events such as 'cuddle parties' which are offered in the US as a way to get adults sharing friendly, non-sexual physical contact. This builds on the work of brands such as Friends Reunited, which bring together communities of old school or workmates across the world.

People want to link together even while acting separately. The Mobile Clubbing phenomenon sees people gather together at locations such as London's Waterloo Station to dance for 15 minutes while independently listening to music on their iPods. In Copenhagen, 'Hvem er ibyen' ('Who's in town') enables its members to scan their free ID card at terminals in cafes, bars and clubs to notify pre-selected groups of friends by SMS of their whereabouts.

Innocent Drinks is another brand with a human face. The British smoothie company has quickly gained a loyal following through its acknowledgement that "modern living makes it hard to be healthy", friendly tone of voice, and commitment to "doing good things".

Even companies without an overtly humanitarian stance are offering consumers the chance to make a difference. Cosmetic company Avon runs a 'Crusade for Breast Cancer' to appeal to consumers' human side (see page 20). Sports company Nike has linked up with cyclist Lance Armstrong to create the LiveStrong yellow armband that supports cancer sufferers.

The challenge for companies is to follow these examples and push the boundaries of corporate behaviour. Consider how to give your brand a personal feel. Consumers are no longer satisfied with faceless services – after all, we're all only human. Anne Bahr Thompson is founder and managing partner of strategic consultancy Onesixtyfourth, anne.thompson@onesixtyfourth.com

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