

Character Building for Brands

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The WPP BRANDZ™ study has recently included a 'character' measure for brands

The brand is a 'story'

A product may be recognisable by a consumer (a mobile phone, a soap powder, a bank) but it is unlikely to get very far if it does not have a 'story'.

The 'story' of a product is the accumulation of experience, hearsay and identifying characteristics that reside in its identity – the brand. (Even consumers choosing 'shop's own' are usually choosing a brand because it is the retailer that acts as such.)

And, of course, all the best stories have a main character.

Archetypes - CharacterZ™

Human behaviour, it is widely accepted, is largely driven by unconscious reasoning. Individuals tend not to notice these influences and when attempting to explain their behaviour usually fall back on justification rather than real knowledge of such causes.

Vital experiences, situations and conflicts, according to psychologists such as Jung, can connect at a subconscious level with the human being's genetic predisposition to represent them in a fantastical or mythological way. This is the Archetype. Jung insists that it is not the archetype itself that is conscious, but rather its materialisation in myths, stories and narrations.

The Archetype can be defined simply as a model of a person, personality or behaviour. It is essentially part of the brand 'story' represented in one mythic or fantastical 'character':

Personality	What is the brand like?
Values	What does the brand believe in?
Emotions	What does the brand feel like?
Competences	What is the brand good at?

Of course other diagnostics and metrics within BRANDZ™ also answer some of these issues, but the new CharacterZ™ element adds considerable depth.

'Character' can connect consumer needs with the brand

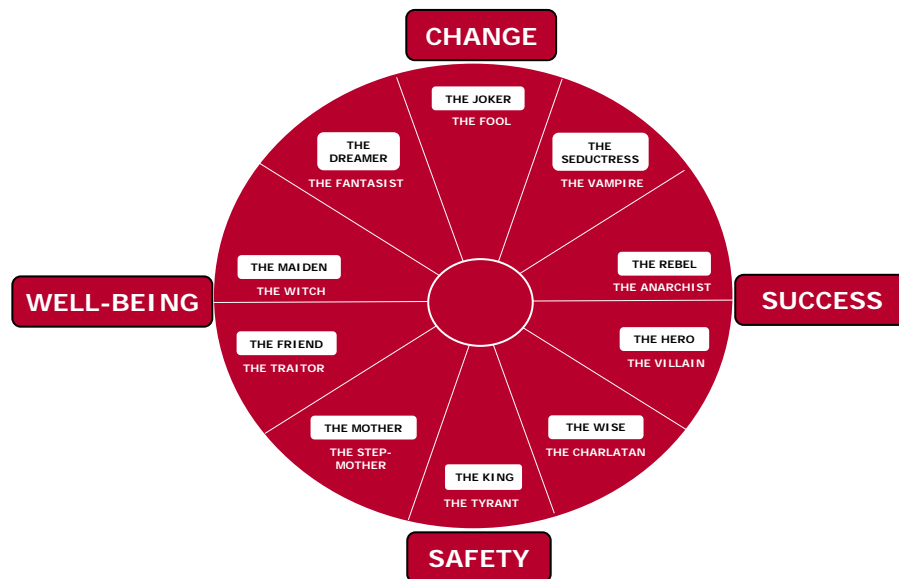
The desires and needs of consumers for a brand experience encompass cognitive (facts - what does the brand do/offer?), sensorial (senses – what is the experience like?), emotional (feelings – what does the brand arouse in me?) as well as symbolic elements (signs and associations – what does the brand remind me of?).

The Character or Archetype can be a bridge in cementing the connection between these consumer needs and the brand by emphasising the unique appeal, reminding consumers of the brand experience and being a shortcut in the memory for future purchase. So we see Apple (iphone) as being 'sexy', 'desirable', 'different', 'creative' whilst Microsoft is 'in control', 'trustworthy', 'straightforward', 'wise'.

The Ten Characters

BRANDZ™ has developed ten 'characters' following extensive qualitative and quantified research (see 'Has your brand got character?' by Susan Hall/Helen Fearn in the Reference Section on the BRANDZ™ site).

These are based on a Jungian analysis of Anima (feminine), Animus (masculine), Self and, uniquely, Shadow (the negative side of the otherwise positive characters).



Early analysis of the first 1,400 brands measured (across 13 categories and 18 countries) shows that most brands are positive rather than negative in character and we get a fair spread of the different characters both within a category as well as across the countries.

Microsoft is a masculine brand and is *Wise* whilst Apple is a feminine *Seductress*.

Wise/(Charlatan)

The *Wise* character is the most positive and is represented in myth by King Solomon, Merlin, Gandalf or the Alchemist. His authority comes from his intellectual powers and subsequent application of wisdom. The Charlatan is his 'shadow' who uses his knowledge to deceive but is ultimately not credible. There are indeed some brands that exhibit this character – but they will be nameless in this paper (as will other negative examples). Brands that are *Wise* tend to be seen as specialists and experts in their field backed by knowledge and science and often leading in technology or the application of technology. Thus Toyota and Nokia are classified as *Wise* across many countries. These three brands (in the USA) share characteristics of trustworthiness, wisdom and straightforwardness but each has a further, different distinguishing characteristic: Microsoft '*in control*', Toyota '*desirable*' and Nokia '*friendly*'.

Strong characters have layers and depth.

Overall the character of the Wise and its shadow tend to represent:

Wise
Humility, credibility, admiration
and **guidance**

Charlatan
Evasiveness, immorality, madness,
complexity and **fraud**

King/(Tyrant)

The *King* is power. Mythological examples might be Beowulf or King Arthur. The Pharaohs, the Emperors of China, Maharajahs and other great monarchs are also reference points. Giants and even gods are kings of a sort.

The *King* potentially is able to dominate, protect and lead. Nike's '*Just do it*' is an example of a ruler's edict. And the aspects that reflect this are high ratings on '*assertive*' and '*in control*'.

The *Tyrant* is power that has been subverted for selfish means and thus can strike terror into the hearts of the subjugated and not a great platform for a brand.

King

Power, leadership, strength
and **justice**

Tyrant

Selfishness, obsession, injustice, greed
and **arrogance**

In terms of colour, Gold (for the *King*) rather than Black (for the *Tyrant*).
A Lion rather than a Killer Whale.

Hero/(Villain)

The third 'male' character is that of the *Hero*. He is typically '*brave*' and '*adventurous*'. We breathlessly follow the *Hero* in his quest for success against all evil – Ulysses, Rambo and Spiderman.

The *Villain* shows an unhealthy contempt for others and thus loses the admiration that is inherent in a *Hero*.

Hero

Admiration, hope, popularity
and **success**

Villain

Envy, narcissism, self-centeredness
and **superficiality**

Davidoff, Timberland and Beck's Bier (in Germany) are all *Heroes*.

Rebel/(Anarchist)

In developing our characters, we unearthed one that was of particular relevance to brands that try to buck the trend, to disturb the status quo – the *Rebel*. They may not be so '*trustworthy*' but they are attractive, nevertheless, particularly to those who have shared values of adventure and exploration. So we see that Alfa Romeo, Diesel and Virgin Mobile are all *Rebels*.

The *Anarchist* is an out of control *Rebel*.

Rebel

Difference, revolution, conviction
and **innovation**

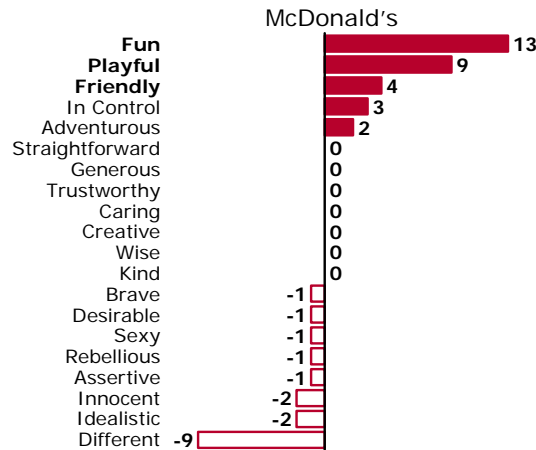
Anarchist

Obsessiveness, weakness, marginality
and **delinquency**

These brands are not faint-hearted and their success is in not trying to appeal to everyone.

Joker/(Fool)

McDonald's is perhaps the best example of a *Joker* brand. The fun, humour and image of happiness are intrinsic to its character.



A true *Joker* is genuine and can exude a feeling of warmth and well-being. When this is not present and the humour is inappropriately deployed the brand can become tainted and seen to be a *Fool*.

Joker

Happiness, fun, humour, positivity
and **impulse**

Fool

Lacking in judgement, foolhardiness
and **immaturity**

Mother/(Step-Mother)

At the heart of the feminine *Mother* character is affection, sensitivity and the very essence of nature. This character has the immense capacity of giving and nourishment. Estee Lauder is a good example of a *Mother* brand. The *Step-Mother* is full of spite and fails to care.

Mother

Care, protection, support, abundance
and **love**

Step-Mother

Negligence, hate, disinterest
and **emptiness**

Friend/(Traitor)

A *Friend* overlaps in many aspects with a *Mother* but is more focussed on reliability, trust and straightforwardness rather than caring. The bigger brands tend to feature more as *Friends* (as is the case for the *Wise*). Familiarity breeds friendship with brands. The *Traitor* selfishly deceives this trust.

Friend

Stability, honesty, closeness
and **reliability**

Traitor

Selfishness, calculation, abandonment
and **falsehood**

The anchor and the steady rock, rather than the treacherous knife that stabs in the dark.

Avon, Carling and Levi's all tend to be classified as *Friends*.

Maiden/(Witch)

The *Maiden* has the core value of innocence as well as being kind and friendly. In contrast, the *Witch* is all darkness and calculation.

Brands like Clinique (in the USA) and the Co-operative (UK) have these *Maiden* characteristics. They are virtuous and venerated rather than being enjoyed. They have elements of perfection, beauty and are less pragmatic in their outlook. They can be inspirational and symptomatic of a clean and pure lifestyle.

Maiden

Humility, kindness, virtue
and **innocence**

Witch

Darkness, secrecy, vengeance
and **trickery**

The *Maiden* is the fragrant lily or the white swan, whilst the *Witch* is the black cat or night bat.

Seductress/(Vampire)

Venus, Aphrodite or the Geisha. Sensual, voluptuous and unashamedly erotic. These brands are full of life and immensely desirable. Marks & Spencer (UK), Lancia (Italy) and Chanel (USA) have all been successfully promoted and advertised with strong sensual imagery to reflect their brand characteristics. The shadow side, the *Vampire*, in extreme circumstances is seen as 'dirty' and even 'obscene' and thus runs the danger of being morally rejected.

Seductress

Attraction, mystery, pleasure
and **desire**

Vampire

Repellent, dangerous, shadowy
and **manipulative**

Seductress brands are admired and desired for what they are, for the experience they deliver, and not for what they do (which is more the territory of the *Hero*). They are often more exclusive and sophisticated brands.

Dreamer/(Fantasist)

The last of the ten characters is that of the *Dreamer*. A complex character with a mix of creativity, difference and idealism. Prêt A Manger fits the type. The other side of the *Dreamer* is the relatively unhealthy excess of the *Fantasist*.

Dreamer

Charm, surprise, openness
and **imagination**

Fantasist

Irrational, unconsidered, spontaneous
and **unrealistic**

Most positive brand character

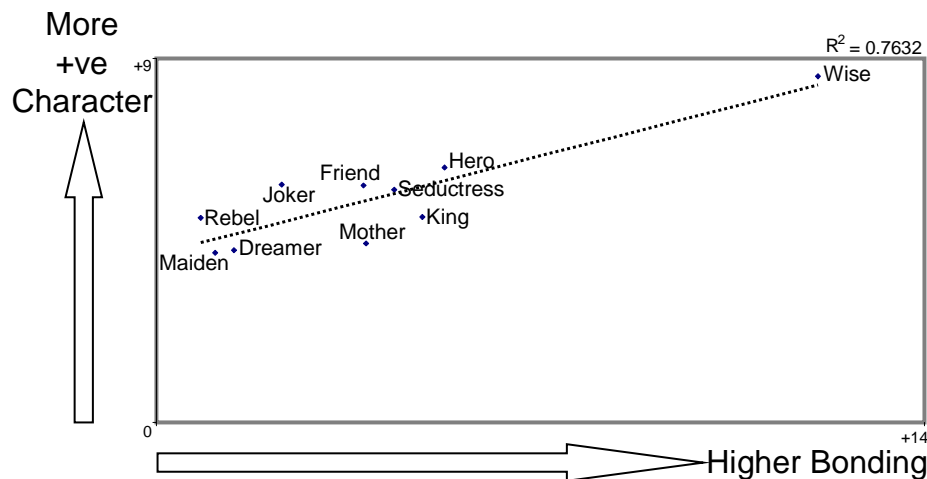
Beck's Bier in Germany scores most positively so far in our database. It is an Olympic brand in its home country and is characterised as a *Hero*.

Olympic brands, as might be expected have the most positive character, followed by the next strongest typology, the Classic brands. Specialists attract high positives but also some of the most negative (because they are by definition not for everyone and can be seen as 'arrogant' by their detractors).

Of countries with sufficient numbers of brands measured to date, the USA tends to score more positively, European countries closer to the average and Asian countries lowest.

Positive Character brands have greater Bonding with consumers

There is a strong correlation between Bonding and a more positive Character. The *Wise* in particular are much more strongly Bonded as well as being the most positive characters.



Nearly half of all Olympic brands (the strongest) are *Wise*, a much greater proportion than for any other typology.

But is this chicken or egg? Which comes first?

In fact those brands that outperform their peers in delivering a good experience (they have a higher Performance Signature) actually have a more negative character! They are less *caring, friendly, innocent, straightforward, fun, and playful*. It is as if they have hardened up as they have become more successful. So experience does not necessarily lead to a more positive character.

Character is not just the domain of the big and established brands – the challengers, the upstarts and those with something to prove can deploy character as one of their potent weapons in making a name for themselves.

Ten pillars of Character

There are ten very different but distinct pillars on which to build your brand character:

'Male'

Guidance (*Wise*)
Justice (*King*)
Success (*Hero*)
Innovation (*Rebel*)
Impulse (*Joker*)

'Female'

Love (*Mother*)
Reliability (*Friend*)
Innocence (*Maiden*)
Desire (*Seductress*)
Imagination (*Dreamer*)

Make sure your brand tells its 'story' to best advantage by building its character.

(CharacterZ™ analysis is available on the BRANDZ™ site for WPP users.)

BRANDZ™ is the WPP global brand equity study available to clients and potential clients via WPP owned companies. It is validated against sales and quantifies and diagnoses the strengths and weaknesses of brands.

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