

the¹brandgym

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BRANDGYM
RESEARCH PAPER 3

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What makes a brilliant
Brand Leader?



What makes a brilliant brand leader?

About the research

We asked “What makes a brand leader?” to over 100 marketing people from top companies in July 2010. The sample covered sectors from breakfast cereal to banking, and regions including Europe, Africa, Asia, the USA and Latin America.

We have brought to life the findings with examples of what we consider to be inspirational brand leadership, from our work on brandgym projects, and through our network of contacts via our blogging and writing.



The brandgym partners

Introduction

A key finding from the work on our latest book, the updated version of *the brandgym*, was the crucial role played by leadership in the stories of success. This prompted us to explore further what makes a true brand leader.

We wanted to learn about the role of the marketing directors and Chief Marketing Officers versus the CEO. We were also interested in the most important behaviours and qualities of true brand leaders. Finally, we asked if the “revolving door” syndrome of marketing directors frequently changing jobs was an issue in leading brand growth.

In this paper we look at the following areas:

- Who's in the lead?: the importance of marketing directors vs. CEOs
- What makes a brand leader?: the most important human qualities
- Sticking with it: the importance of being on a brand long enough to make an impact

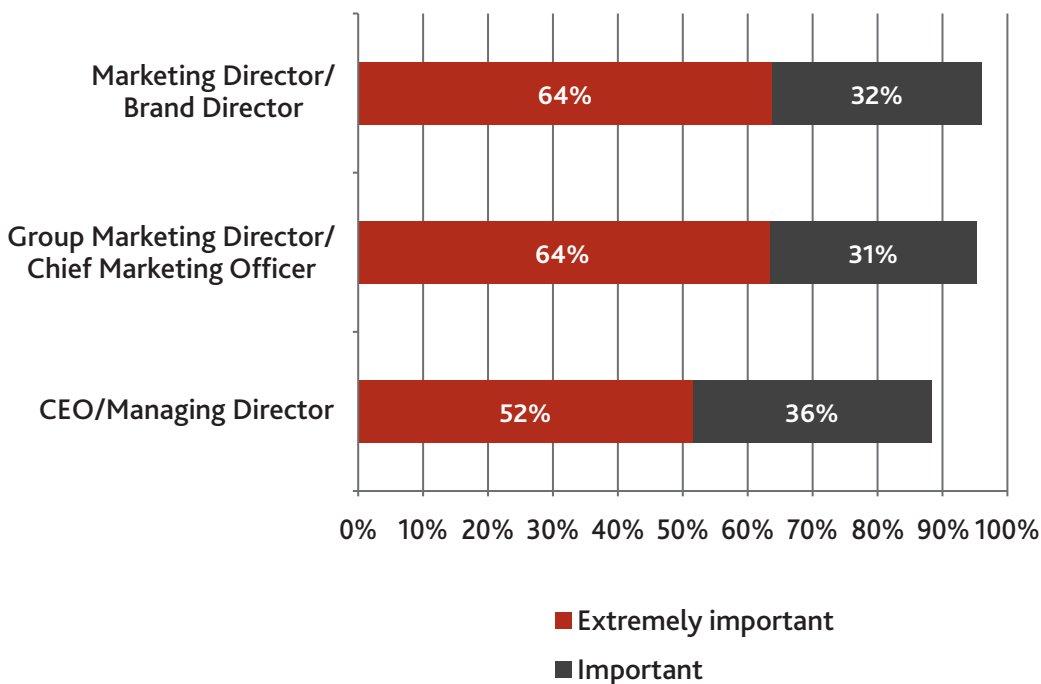


Part 1: Who's in the lead?

Our research confirms that as expected Marketing/Brand Directors have the critical role in leading brand and business growth, with 64% rating their role as being extremely important. It is interesting to note that the role of Chief Marketing Officers/Group Marketing Directors is seen as equally important. We believe this reflects the CMO role moving beyond one of co-ordinating and sharing best practice into a more hands-on job of driving brand vision to action. A good example of this sort of CMO is Phil Chapman at Kerry Foods, who is playing a hands-on role in leading rejuvenation of the brand portfolio including Walls, Cheesestrings and Denny.

The research also highlights the crucial role played by the CEO/MD in brand leadership, with over half the panel saying their role was extremely important. This confirms the need to get top management engagement and alignment to any brand vision to action work.

Importance in brand leadership





Part 2: What makes a leader?

The research has helped us refine our model of brand leadership that we wrote about in the latest edition of our book, *the brandgym*. Three key themes emerged from the research:

Inspiration: creating an inspiring vision had been confirmed as the most important brand leadership behaviour. In particular, the marketing team and creative agencies were highlighted as the key people to inspire.

Passion: having a passion for your brand and consumer came out as a key brand leadership trait for success. We believe this passion is part of what allows a leader to inspire others.

"Follow the money": linking marketing to the drivers of growth was the 3rd important area, and more so than just being practical per se. This helps brand leaders to sell ideas to the board, another important leadership trait, by "showing them the money".

Inspiration



Passion

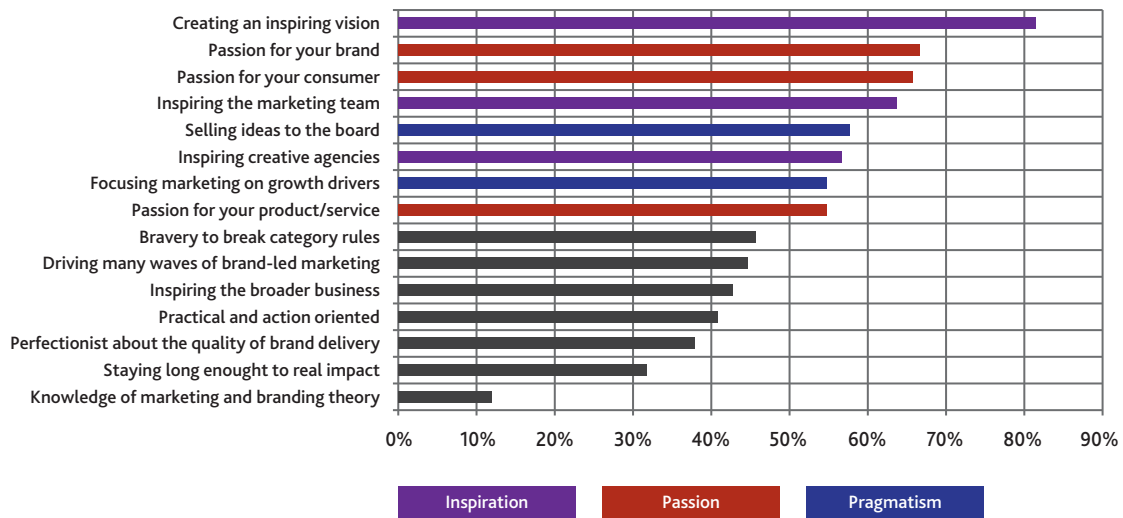


Pragmatism



It was also interesting to highlight factors rated as less important. As campaigners against the bull**** and buzzwords of branding we were delighted to see "knowledge of brand theory" bombing out. And it seems the key to leadership is driving revenue, with "cost cutting" ranking much lower. Finally, "breaking category codes" scored relatively low, reflecting the fact that growth often needs brand refreshment and rejuvenation rather than challenging the category norms altogether.

Importance of leadership behaviours in driving growth (% extremely important)



We'll now look in more detail at each of the three key brand leadership behaviours.



1 Inspiration

The most important brand leadership quality is “Creating an inspiring vision”, rated as extremely important by over 80% of our panel. In term of who to inspire, the marketing team were the key people. It was also interesting to note the high ranking for creative agencies. As our head of 360 brand communication, Anne Charbonneau comments: “In today’s multi-channel world, with a network of different agencies, getting the right resources and focus from your creative partners is a real challenge.”

We’ve seen first-hand how a clear and inspiring vision aligns and energizes a team. For example, on Jordans Cereals the big brand idea of “You can taste we care” inspired a re-launch marketing mix including product, packaging, website, TV comms and activation that got the brand growing again.

Vision to action on Jordans Cereals



Packaging



Website



TV Comms



Activation



2 Passion

Inspiring a team to deliver against a vision is much easier and more likely to work if you have passion, as shown by this being the second key brand leadership theme in the research. In particular, passion for the brand you work on and your consumer scored strongest, followed by product passion. Examples of brand passion include Pret's CEO Julian Metcalfe acting on consumer feedback about his company's soups, then writing a personal message on the cartons to thank the lady who complained. And check out the CEO of Harley Davidson below: clearly a biker and brand fan.



Pret's personal message from
CEO Julian Metcalfe



James Ziemer,
CEO Harley Davidson



3 Pragmatism

The final leadership attribute from the survey was "ensuring that marketing focuses on drivers of growth". This can be summed up with our favourite rallying call "follow the money". This ability is also a key enabler of being able to sell ideas to the board, which was also seen as important.

A good example of following the money is Steve Langan at Hiscox insurance. He led the creation of a highly impactful marketing campaign based on the simple but powerful idea of "Extraordinary Cover", dramatizing a premium but superior product and executed with a distinctive black and red identity. This enabled Hiscox to drive a sustained period of policy growth whilst also driving down cost per contact.

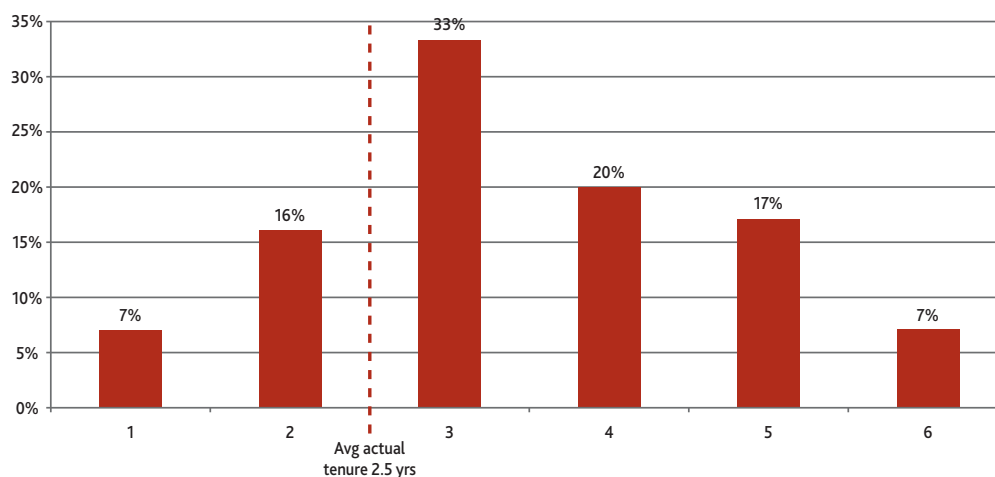




Part 3: Sticking with it

The research confirms our belief that leaders need staying power to make a lasting impact on a brand and business. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of our panel said that 3 years or more was needed to have a true impact, with an average of 3.5 years. This is over a year longer than the average 2.5 year tenure of Marketing Directors according to research by Spencer Stuart. This backs up our own experience with companies, which shows that the brand leaders who make real impact, such as Silvia Lagnado on Dove, were in their role for 4-5 years.

Years for Marketing Director to make a lasting impression



Conclusions

This research has confirmed the key role played by marketing directors in leading brand growth, but also the need to actively involve the CEO.

They key leadership qualities to work on are:

- **Passion:** for the brand and product you work on. If you don't have this passion, perhaps you're on the wrong brand!
- **Inspiration:** creating and communicating an inspiring vision to the marketing team, creative agencies and wider business
- **Pragmatism:** - ensuring that you follow the money by focusing marketing on influencing the levers of growth

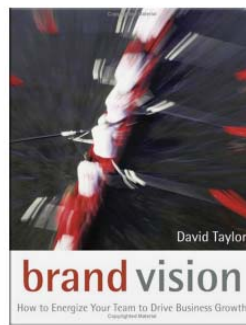
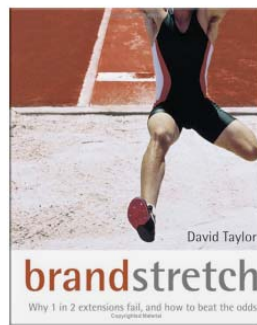
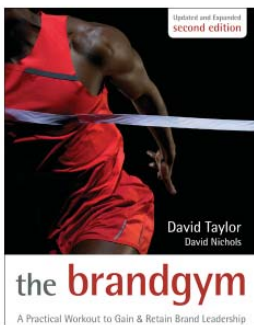
And finally, making a real impact, and so getting real personal fulfillment from leaving a legacy, means staying on a brand for 3- 5 years.

the brandgym

Brand Leadership Coaching



- We are a network of **8 senior brand coaches** helping companies gain and retain brand leadership. Our most popular brand leadership projects are:
 - Brand vision to action
 - Brand-led innovation
 - Turbo-charged marketing plans
- We have published **6 books on brand leadership** including the updated version of *the brandgym*, Amazon's best-selling management book



- We have a **track record with leading companies** including SAB Miller, Unilever, Tesco and Philips



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