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# BRAND FORUM

## Consilience and Narrative Branding®

“Still, I think that metaphor really is a key to explaining thought and language.”

—Psychology Professor Steven Pinker, from *The Stuff of Thought*

### *Consilience in Branding*

Would you go to a doctor who practices medicine today the same way he did in 1970? How would you feel knowing that he was using the same equipment, the same drugs, the theories of how our bodies and brains work? No MRI, no laser eye surgery – not even Prozac.

The practice of branding is much like that doctor who is stuck in 1970. For over 30 years, marketing has been following the same positioning theory of branding. The underlying assumptions of how consumers learn, understand and connect to brands have never been questioned. As Professor Gerald Zaltman of Harvard Business School observes, “While neuroscience and

psychology have taken a new, closer look at consumers, marketing has not.”

Branding has been trapped in the same specialization and compartmentalization found in many disciplines. Applying consilience to branding requires opening up to new ideas. It means searching for unifying principles in the sciences and arts and cross-fertilizing them with branding theories.

Many of the medical discoveries over the past 30+ years actually have a profound relevance to branding. We researched neuroscience, psychology and artificial intelligence. There we found a profoundly new understanding of how people learn and how memories are formed.

- We discovered the importance of metaphor in communicating and forming memories.
- We learned about the role of storytelling in defining our sense of self as well as understanding others.
- And we found that as much as 95 percent of all cognition occurs below the level of conscious awareness.

In the true spirit of consilience, we also reached into theater and movies to discover the underlying storytelling principles that can apply to branding.

Combining these ideas results in a breakthrough branding method. We call it Narrative Branding®. It is a strategic process for branding that systematically incorporates brand stories and strong metaphors.

Brand stories work because of the way our minds work. When we hear a story, we bring to it our own memories and experiences. We interpret it through our cultural backgrounds. More than just words, a story includes the full range of expression including visual imagery, design, sound, motion, and metaphorical language. That is why we can remember the tale of the tortoise and the hare and other Aesop's Fables we heard as small children. Yet we often forget facts we heard just days or even hours ago.

Furthermore, psychologists report that most communication is non-verbal, per-

haps as much as 80%. For that reason, Narrative Branding® is designed around all senses: sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. It is a model for engaging people through metaphors and a compelling narrative arc. In short, it is an approach to branding that is designed around the breakthroughs in neuroscience.

At this point, Narrative Branding® has now been used by dozens of multinational companies including Marriott International, Samsung Corporation, NXP Semiconductors, LexisNexis, and Coldwell Banker.

### *Deductive vs. Inductive*

The deductive method looks at the world as it exists and develops a theory from that.

Consilience is an inductive method. It hypothesizes not only how things exist now but also how they might exist in the future.

In essence, positioning is deductive. Market research is used to find the attributes people rate as most important. It measures the world as it currently exists in the minds of consumers. The key attributes selected are further distilled down to a brief phrase, a line, sometimes just a word -- the "positioning statement."

In a peculiar twist, the positioning statement is never meant to show itself in public. It is like a poltergeist, a ghost.

Instead, creative teams need to re-interpret the positioning statement. From the kernel of a word or phrase they have to piece together creative expressions that represent the brand: a name, a logo, advertising, an online experience. (Figure 1)

In its essence, Narrative Branding® is an inductive method. It requires the imaginative power to create a rich and robust new brand story that does not yet exist. It starts with the creative process, beginning with the brand story and key metaphors. Express the story with compelling imagery and language that can be used in the marketplace. Then validate the brand story through market research.

Verse Group recently developed a captivating new brand for the former semiconductor division of Philips Electronics. Before research, we created several brand stories, each with a clear metaphor, role for the brand, insight into the customers and distinctive persona. These brand stories were staged with evocative language and

imagery. The stories were assessed in co-creation research conducted around the world.

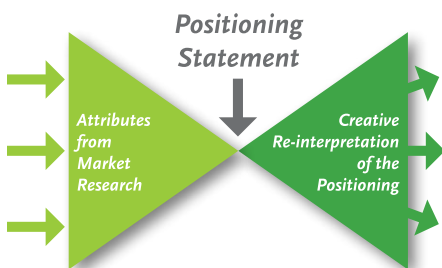
Customers strongly gravitated to the brand story about Vibrant Media Technologies, with its rich, saturated imagery and provocative language. This engaging brand story ignited their imagination. From the moment a customer first sees the NXP brand, they know to expect something extraordinary. (Figure 2)

### *Five Principles of Narrative Branding®*

The Advertising Research Foundation reports “Even though the new insights into the human mind are available, there are few techniques widely used today that take advantage of this knowledge to the benefit of companies.”

Narrative Branding® is the first strategic process for creating brands that is founded in the new insights. Following are five principles of Narrative Branding®.

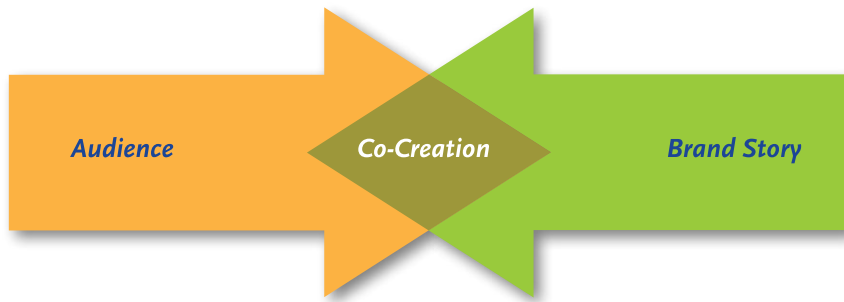
(Figure 1) The Positioning Model



(Figure 2)



(Figure 3)



*Principle 1: Successful brands engage consumers through co-creation*

Great brand stories resonate with the associations and memories of the audience.

The brand does not live in a vacuum. It does not inject meaning into a person’s mind. People bring their past, their cultural reference-points and their individual experiences when they engage with a brand story. It is at this moment of engagement that meaning is co-created. (Figure 3)

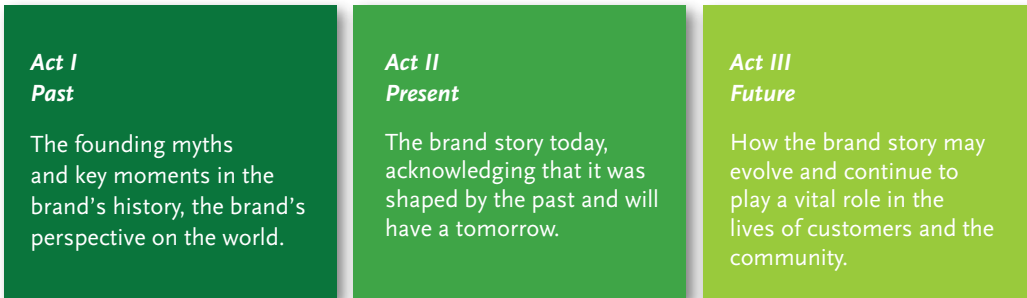
*Principle 2: Successful brands have four elements*

Theater was called the most powerful of the arts by Aristotle. So we have combined the core aspects of theater with the insights we have gained from our personal experience with over 100 branding projects. From that, we have developed a brand story framework with four elements: setting, cast, narrative arc and language. (Table 1)

(Table 1)

<i>Brand Story Framework</i>	
<b>Setting:</b>	The time, place and context.
<b>Cast:</b>	The brand as a character, including its role in the life of the audience, its relationships and responsibilities, and its history or creation myth.
<b>Narrative Arc:</b>	How the narrative logic unfolds over time, including actions, desired experiences, defining events, and the moment of epiphany.
<b>Language:</b>	The authenticating voice, metaphors, symbols, themes and leitmotifs of the brand.

(Figure 4)



*Principle 3: Successful brand relationships exist across time*

One of the unique aspects of Narrative Branding® is that it does not try to ignore the past. Rather, this approach embraces the past as prologue to the future, to paraphrase William Shakespeare. (Figure 4)

Your company doesn't stand still in today's dynamic marketplace. Neither should your brand.

*Principle 4: Successful brands engage at every point of the customer journey*

In traditional positioning approaches, a single idea is driven through all of the places where consumers come into contact with

the brand. The same message is repeated everywhere, every time, over and over again. It is like seeing the exact same road sign at the beginning, middle and end of your trip.

The customer journey represents a true departure from positioning's road sign. Narrative Branding® looks at the way people actually experience the brand in their lives, at each step of the way. This makes it possible to unfold the brand's story along the path that consumers actually follow, so that it is relevant along their journey. (Figure 5) It is like the difference between experiencing a Broadway musical vs. reading a road sign. Mapping the customer journey is the first tool that looks across time, across different media and across locations.

(Figure 5)



*Principle 5: Successful brands engage all senses*

Narrative Branding® starts with the proposition that it must engage all senses. That means going beyond words to sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. (Figure 6)

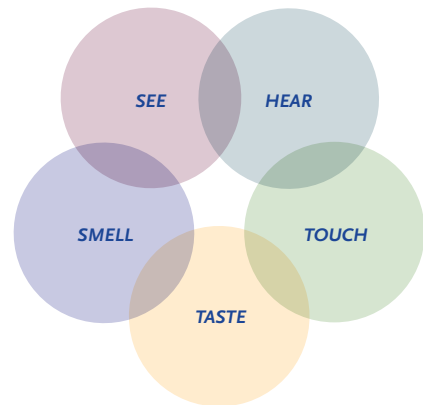
Narrative Branding® drops one-way telling and becomes Living Theater. The “fourth wall” between the brand and the audience dissolves. Audiences participate in the unfolding narrative: they co-create it. The audiences are fully engaged with successful brands – emotionally and intellectually.

Narrative Branding® includes experiential elements from the start. In defining the brand’s experience, strategy and creative execution are inseparable. The brand experience can range from the mouth feel of toothpaste (texture, taste, the amount of foam) to the sophisticated customer service and environments of The Ritz-Carlton.

**Summary**

Narrative Branding® is an example of how consilience can re-energize branding by bringing in new insights from neurosci-

(Figure 6)



ence and psychology. Many of the insights that have dramatically changed medicine since the 1970 are now being applied to branding.

It is through stories with strong metaphors that people learn about brands, understand them and form strong emotional connections with them. Companies with strong brand stories will be more successful.

Simply stated, great brands are great stories.

So we leave you with a final thought, from the American poet Robert Frost, “Unless you are educated in metaphor, you are not safe to be let loose in the world.”