

THE BIRTH OF BRANDING – A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE FIRST BRANDS

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Which was the first brand? This is a question that marketing professionals and ordinary people interested in brands may ask. And by the way, when did brands appear in our life? Well, these questions are not easy to answer.

Some people trace brands back to the industrial revolution. Others say that their origin can be found in medieval guilds, the church, or the Roman Empire. And there are people who claim that evidences of branding can be found as early as in the first cave paintings.

There is also a variety of possible results of our quest for the first product categories which included brands. The categories that have included most examples are alcoholic beverages, cosmetic and cleaning products, kitchenware, medicines and pharmaceutical preparations.

This study summarizes our knowledge of the topic, and concludes by presenting how the tools used by the first brands can be applied for today's modern brands.

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The historical beginnings

We must go centuries or even thousands of years back in time to find the roots of branding.

Some people trace branding back to the famous Lascaux cave paintings, saying that they were no other than a certain kind of signature, or brand building by local cavemen.

According to Neumeier, the author of *Brand Gap*, the idea of brands has been around for 5,000 years (Neumeier 2006, p. 8.)

Martinkó (2010, p. 94.) mentions a similar period of time, although he uses it in connection with logos, not brands: „Maybe it would be an exaggeration to state that the creation of seals and logos was the second oldest profession in the world, but we do know that imperial identification marks were inscribed into clay tablets in the ancient city of Uruk 5,500 years ago. The use of logos for commercial purposes probably began around 600 BC, when the use of coins spread in the Anatolian kingdom of Lydia. The mints of the kingdom used unique graphical symbols in order to identify and prove the authenticity of coins.”

Others mention the ancient Egyptians, Romans and Greek as examples. For instance, „advertisements” referring to wine (and sexuality) were found under the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum. One of the tablets that was lit by oil lamps in evenings (thus functioning similarly to today's citylights) included the inscription

”Traveller
Going from here to the Twelfth Tower
There Sarinus keeps a tavern
This is to request you to enter
Farewell”

Another tablet mentioned the beneficial effects and consumer benefits of wine: „The excellent wine consumed here makes love hotter.” (Hoffmann - Buzási 2000, p. 15.)

The first specific brand name and logo are usually associated with the Romans. SPQR is an abbreviation for Senatus Populusque Romanus (The Roman Senate and People), referring to the power exercised jointly by the senate and the Roman people. The coat of arms of the City of Rome still features this abbreviation, and it can be also found on the walls of public buildings, and in the inscriptions of Roman drain covers, columns and monuments.

Of course it is also important to define what we mean by the word *brand*. Matthew Healey, the author of *What is branding?* thinks that the first religious movements were the first to incorporate the use of signs and symbols in their communication, and in the course of time religious leaders also noticed that they can acquire several faithful followers with clear messages. (Healey 2009, p. 150.)

Oliviero Toscani, the creator and photographer of Benetton's world famous advertising campaign, goes as far as to say that (Toscani 1999, p. 123.) the greatest advertising campaign of human history was that of Jesus Christ. His world famous slogan was 'Love your neighbours.' And his logo was the cross. (...) Jesus, and his agency, the twelve apostles implemented the best communications campaign of all times.

Having mentioned Christianity, the first slogan, 'In hoc signo vinces' (In this sign you will conquer) is also associated with it. The slogan accompanied the cross symbol painted on the flags of Emperor Constantine's armies.

Propaganda is another church-related expression often connected with brands, usually mentioned in a negative tone in Eastern Europe. However though, the original meaning of the word is not negative: it means "to spread, to plant" (religion) as Pope Gregory XV used the word, when he established Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) in 1622.

Others see the trade guilds and not the church as the creators of brands, because guilds used sizeable coats of arms to represent their profession. One of the most famous examples is London's Goldsmiths' Hall, the building serving as the headquarters of London's goldsmith guild formed in the fourteenth century. Its unique mark was printed on its products, indicating their quality and authenticity. The successor of the brand and the mark lives to the present day: it is Hallmark, mostly famous for its greeting cards. (Morris, 2004, p. 4., p. 131.)

Others suggest that it is possible to define a specific date as the beginning of brand history: they say that the bottles of Stella Artois beer feature the year 1366, so this could be the first brand. However, they are wrong – a brewery was established that year, and Stella Artois can be traced back to that brewery with certain turns, but the original beer was not called Stella Artois, but Den Hoorn. (Healey 2009, pp. 30-31.)

And there are people who mention 1618 and England as an example, saying that the first use of a trademark occurred there that year. In the United States, the first legislation regarding trademarks was passed in 1842. (See Rivkin - Sutherland 2004, p. 181.)

Regarding Hungary, authors usually mention an advertisement published in 1782, promoting Esperit de Savon de Saxe de France, a balmy soap spirits product. Although the language of the advertisement might make us smile, its argument was certainly effective – it presented the purpose of the product, its use for the readers, and highlighted its place of origin, France (quoted by Józsa 2000, p. 15).

The first real brands

So which was the first brand? As Seth Godin writes in his book *Meatball Sundaes: Is Your Marketing out of Sync?* (Godin 2008, p. 61.), Wedgwood had perhaps the first important brand name in the history of commerce.

Josiah Wedgwood, born in 1730, apprenticed to be a potter, and several good decisions led him to become the most successful potter of all time. Andy why? Godin (2008) points out the following aspects:

- First, he included quality as a primary focus. He was famous for smashing irregular plates with his walking stick saying that they are unworthy of the name Josiah Wedgwood.
- Second, he increased the productivity of manufacturing: all workers took part only in a particular stage of production.
- Third, he used innovative design; his cauliflower teapot became a sensation.
- Fourth, he saw that his product was more than just a useful object; it was part of a continuum of output, something that could carry his name to a large number of potential new customers. (Godin 2008, p. 61.) This was an extremely important step, because no other blacksmiths, potters, or carpenters would act like that at the time.
- Fifth, he defined his target customers precisely: he focussed on newly monied classes.
- Sixth, he provided product samples, that is, he used "sampling": he sent samples of his pottery to 1000 wealthy Germans without asking first. More than 500 people responded, and ordered more of his pottery. Once he gave Queen Charlotte (the wife of George III) a breakfast set. A few years later, the Queen ordered a full tea service, which Wedgwood turned into the Queensware™ product family, also sold to the masses.
- Seventh, he launched showrooms, which attracted hordes of customers.
- Eighth, he employed his sales workforce on commission, therefore all of them made their best efforts.

And the result? Wedgwood's pottery sold for four times as much as that made by smaller potters in the same region of England – because he made it and marketed it differently. ... This virtuous cycle enabled him to die with \$44 million in his estate. (Godin 2008, p. 65.)

At the same time, if you consider these things, it is no wonder that other authors argue that Wedgwood was the first – his appearance as a brand name is dated to 1759, while Moët&Chandon champagne was available from 1743 onwards, and Rémy Martin cognac was sold from 1724 onwards. (Ries-Ries 2004a, p. 224.)

Speaking of alcohol: if we want to define an industry with the first brands, it is probably the industry of alcoholic beverages. Wine has always been important, and several bottles were transported between different countries. For example, King Louis XIV, the Sun King (1643-1715) once referred to a bottle of Hungarian Tokaji wine as „Wine of Kings, King of Wines” (Vinum Regum, Rex Vinorum).

While the mass production of wine was not possible as the weather of the specific year played (and still plays) an important role in winemaking, mass production was possible in the case of beer. In the case of the latter, breweries could produce uniform quality and market their products in large quantities. Bass Brewery is usually mentioned as the owner of the first registered trademark with a characteristic triangular logo (Healey 2009). It is an interesting fact that they were the first to use product placement, a tool later

well-known from Hollywood movies, with brands appearing directly in the work, and not an advertising spot. It is also true that they did not feature Bass in a movie as there were no movies at the time. The brand appeared in a tableau by Édouard Manet, titled *Bar at the Folies-Bergère (Un bar aux Folies-Bergère)*. (Lehu, 2009).

According to another expert, Adamson (2006, p. 29.), one of the first brands was Old Smuggler, using the slogan „Old Smuggler. Scotch with a History.” at the time.

The power of alcohol brands is also justified by several stories. When someone charged General Grant with being drunk during military movements in the American Civil War of 1861-1865, Abraham Lincoln only said that if he could find out what brand of whisky Grant drank, he would send a barrel of it to all the other commanders. (Post 2005, p. 1.)

The industrial revolution and the revolution of brands

In addition to alcohol industry, there was another important industrial sector with a great number of brands in the 19th century, thus also becoming a pioneer of branding: it was the world of medicines and pharmaceutical preparations.

The producers of patented medicines were the first American businessmen who recognized the power of eye-catching advertising messages, identifiable logos and trademarks, advertising with well-known and popular personalities, references to social ranks, and the necessity of 'non-stop influencing'. They necessarily became the first people to sell an image instead of a product. - writes Wally Olins in his book *On B&and*. (2004, p. 54.)

And which was one of the earliest, loudest and most unscrupulous brands? Of course it was Coca-Cola. The first Coca-Cola advertisement of the world said, „Coca-Cola Syrup and Extract: For Soda Water and other Carbonated Beverages. This Intellectual Beverage and Temperance Drink contains the valuable Tonic and Nerve Stimulant properties of the Coca plant and cola (or Kola) nuts, and makes not only a delicious, exhilarating, refreshing and invigorating Beverage (dispensed from the soda water fountain or in other carbonated beverages), but a valuable Brain Tonic and cure for all nerve affections - Sick Head-Ache, Neuralgia, Hysteria, Melancholy, etc. The peculiar flavor of Coca-Cola delights every palate.” (quoted by Olins 2004, p. 54.)

At the beginning of the 1890s, the expression „cure headaches” disappeared from their advertisements and the simple ”delicious and refreshing” argument remained. Coca-Cola became the most advertised product of the whole United States. „By 1911 its advertising budget was 1 million US dollars per year, a staggering amount for that time”. (Olins 2004, p. 55.)

Its greatest rival, Pepsi was also launched as a pharmaceutical preparation in 1898, twelve years after Coca-Cola. It was invented by a pharmacist just like Coca-Cola. In the case of Pepsi, the inventor was Caleb D. Bradham from New Bern, North Carolina, therefore the original brand name was Brad's Drink.

However, they later realized that it might be better to refer to the qualities or the use of their product. Pepsi was believed to stave off dyspepsia, but that name would have been a little too long. Therefore the new name began with „pep”, which also refers to energy, momentum, and being pepped up. That is how Brad's Drink was renamed Pepsi with its unique trademark by 1903. (Morris, 2004, p. 67.)

Besides alcohol and medicines there is a third industry that should be mentioned when discussing the beginnings of branding. This is the industry of cosmetic and cleaning products.

During the American Civil War (1861-1865), the company of candlemaker William Procter and soapmaker James Gamble supplied the Union Army with everyday products such as soap. Therefore soldiers were unwillingly introduced to Procter & Gamble's products, and purchased them as they returned home after the war.

However, their (laundry) soap became widespread by lucky chance. In 1879, a soap factory worker accidentally left a mixer switched on all night, so too much air was mixed in the soap. As it turned out, the amount of air that was previously considered too much by the company was a great advantage for the consumers. The soap full of air did not sink in water, therefore it was easier to find in the river.

And what was the brand name of laundry soap at the time? X. One of the reasons for the name was that it was easy to write on boxes, and loaders could not read, so they put one X on the boxes to be unloaded in the city of Moline, three Xs if they were delivered to Vicksburg, and so on. (Garrison 2006, pp. 119-120.)

As a result of the large number of illiterates, similar visual symbols were also used by other brands. Many people asked for the "the rum of the bat" as Bacardi barrels and bottles carried a big bat image. (By the way, the bat became the logo of the distillery because a colony of fruit bats nested in the eaves of distillery.) The brand name of Life Savers candy refers to its shape, that is, a life preserver with a hole in the middle. The Arm&Hammer logo included a hand holding a hammer, therefore illiterate people could ask for it as "arm & hammer".

Conclusion, lessons to be learned, and advice for brand builders

All in all, even if we can trace the beginnings of brand history back thousands of years, we can say that real brands were actually born in the second half of the 19th century. This has several reasons:

- 1) The industrial revolution and mass production – as it became possible to mass-produce goods and they were not unique and individually produced any more, they had to be branded.
- 2) The development of transport – especially that of railways, which allowed the transportation of the abovementioned mass products to great distances.
- 3) The spread of mass media – the revolution started by Gutenberg in the 15th century matured in this era as the circulation of newspapers increased steadily.
- 4) The development of literacy – last, but not least, this became necessary, as only literate people could identify brands (apart from the examples mentioned above).

Although the real beginning of brand history can therefore be dated to the 19th century, the big boom came in the 20th century. An now we live in the 21st century surrounded by brands that have become a part of our everyday lives.

But can we learn anything from the world's first brands? If we examine them carefully, the following common attributes can be recognized, which may also point the way today, in the 21st century:

- They satisfy consumer demands (even if they were latent at the time, that is, consumers did not indicate their needs beforehand).

- The emphasis is on quality and quality assurance.
- Innovation and product development are important.
- They possess strong visual symbolism (logos).
- Advertising and marketing communications play an important role in brand promotion.

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