

## Why Spock Needs Kirk

**In a troubled economy, marketers must find balance for their branding**

**M**ANY in the mainstream media have heralded the end, or at least the indefinite suspension of, emotional branding. The right brain is out. The left brain is in. Kirk has lost. Spock has won.

True, consumers, are clamping down on discretionary spending. And in turn, marketers are abandoning messages that have any hint of conspicuous consumption, evolving from aspirational imagery to product assets. But does this really mean that emotional marketing is dead? Some bloggers and industry opinion leaders seem to think so.

Like René Descartes or Myers-Briggs, these pundits posit that rational thoughts and emotional feelings are mutually exclusive, sitting on opposite ends of a spectrum. This thinking is superficial. The reality is not so black and white.

First, what many view as a shift away from emotional branding would be better described as a shift in consumers' emotional drivers from indulgence to assurance. Consumers are trying to survive in a topsy-turvy world, and the adjustment has been deeply emotional. Keeping the house. Feeding the family. Maintaining normalcy on a fraction of their former incomes. The re-examination of values creates new emotional filters through which all purchases now must pass.

The posterchild of this shift might well be the ubiquitous Honda Accord. Last year's "Hold on Tight to Your Dreams" campaign, which focused on the road of life, is now this year's "light at the end of the tunnel" campaign touting Accord's reliability for "times like these." Rational? Yes, but hardly devoid of emotion; the spot reminds us that, scary as this time is, we'll come out of it soon. More important, a new reality has set in, and nothing feels more assuring than dependability.

Second, consumers' brains are more integrated than we give them credit for. They can evaluate rationally and emotionally at the same time. So the argument that emotional branding has yielded to rational branding ignores this necessary bond

Take appliances, for example. Do you think super-premium appliances -- the ones that confer success, prestige and gourmet prowess -- are emotionally driven purchases, whereas mass-market brands are rationally driven? Wrong. Sort of.

Research show that, while the decision to have showcase appliances is emotional, the actual brand selection is

rational. After all, to spend eight grand to boil water, you had better have some really good, sensible reasons. On the other hand, the category drivers of basic appliances are rationally rooted, but which brand can be highly emotional. Of these that I can afford, which do I feel best about? In other words, consumers rationalize emotionally defined options and emotionalize their rationally defined options. Spock needs Kirk. Kirk needs Spock. Still believe emotional branding is dead?

From strategists like Marc Gobé to neuroscientists like António Damásio, the understanding that emotions drive decisions more than logic, even when we think we are being "rational," is well established. Why would a recession call that into question? Were their theories only for prosperous times?

The new Las Vegas campaign gets it right. The old, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" had been a dangerously attractive call to action. But hedonism isn't on people's minds these days. So Vegas switched to an equally

emotional place: You're hard working. You need a break. You'll enjoy yourself here, and you'll be glad you came. The new campaign showcases a group of small-town Texans who go to Vegas and have the time of their lives. No glitz and glamour. No waking up in strange beds. Just personal, relatable stories of pure, unadulterated fun.

It's a campaign that appeals to both sides of the brain, and that's the point.

Whipsawing from one extreme to the other devalues a brand, makes people wonder what it stands for and sets it up for failure when the market comes back.

Conversely, embracing a realistic balance pulls brands from the fringes to a more resonant place, where consumers see them as addressing both emotional and rational needs.

Some brands have found a better balance and sharpened their appeal without forsaking their essence. Look at the two retail rivals, Wal-Mart and Target. Each has moved from its end of the emotional/rational spectrum to the middle. Wal-Mart's "Save Money. Live Better." turns from store-centered "everyday low prices" to person-centered solutions. They have humanized value. Similarly, Target, the energetic icon for democratization of design, has embraced its rational side without losing its touch by emphasizing the "pay less" half of its mantra. Target has made frugality cool.

In this economy, while consumers need to balance their thoughts and emotions to make clear decisions, the marketers that embrace their own Kirk and Spock are the ones that win.

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