

## HIGH-DEFINITION NEWS

***Welcome to the second edition of High-Definition News***, e-news for our clients, colleagues and others interested in strategic marketing and in clarifying marketplace opportunities.

Our aim is to bring you brief, but thought-provoking content and nuggets of marketing wisdom from our experience and from the experience of others in an easy-to-digest format. It will be a "quick read" to stimulate your thinking.

*High-Definition News* is brought to you by High-Definition Consulting Group, a San Francisco-based marketing and business consulting firm that specializes in identifying and clarifying marketplace opportunities.

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### **SOLID GOLD BRANDING**

As Olympic hopefuls strive to become Olympic medalists in Athens, you can be sure that these athletes and their coaches and managers have already started the process of branding in order to fully exploit the potential opportunities that lay before them. They've worked all their young lives to get to this point and the success, recognition — and, for some, the pot of gold — that they have been working toward is within their grasp.

Or is it?

What does it take to fully leverage the once-in-a-lifetime opportunities these athletes stand at the threshold of realizing? Much is at stake and how each winner behaves in the heat of competition will be all-important in determining their brand at the 2004 Games.

In this issue of High-Definition News, we explore the refinement that Olympic athletes, entertainers and plain business people bring to marketing their most important product — themselves.

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# A Brand is Born

By Clark Crowdus



Whenever an Olympic athlete bows his or her head to receive the Gold Medal, a brand is born.

Some athletes are feisty, others irreverent, and others are truly the boy or girl next door. Each personality type has a market to appeal to and exploit as they continue the arc of their careers. This concept of personal branding, first articulated by management guru Tom Peters in his 1997 article in *Fast Company* entitled "The Brand Called You," has been taken to new heights not only by athletes, but by entertainers, business leaders, politicians and everyday average folk who are creating and managing careers.

Oprah and (before the fall) Martha Stewart, are prime examples of this, but you don't have to be famous or athletically inclined to follow some of the same principles of self-branding. A brand carries a promise, a value proposition, and often, deep associative value that creates an equally deep emotional connection with a very targeted audience.

Entertainers know that once that connection is made, their career is on a solid foundation. Take, for example, all the nostalgia acts we see these days in rock music. The Who, The Rolling Stones, Neil Young and many icons of the 1960s and 1970s can command premium ticket prices from an audience that is deeply connected to them emotionally. The result is that even though they are in deep middle age or even elderly, they are making more money now than they did at their artistic and creative peaks.

So, to be a branding rock star or athlete, what are some of the steps that any individual or business can apply to create that emotional connection that is "solid gold" for your brand?

**Performance** – It all starts with performance. What is your track record? You have to actually have excelled in something to be a lasting brand. At the heart of every success, after all, is hard work.

**Positioning** – There are many excellent competitors in your market. Many others who have a track record they can point to with pride and which helps promote their cause over yours in the marketplace. How can you distinguish yourself or your company from all the other high-performance competitors? You need to create a strategy and a message honing in on what makes you different. What is your, as Peters says, "feature-benefit model?" After figuring that out, you then use that to create your position in the market juxtaposed to your competitors. This is often called "the value proposition."

**Targeting** – Who is your audience? Who are those potential customers, clients, consumers or employers that will buy your brand? How can you find them, connect with them and then stay connected? If you have a certain type of personality it can resonate with "buyers" of your brand, too. Take the example of former Dallas Cowboys all-pro quarterback Roger Staubach, who parlayed his "winner" image

into a real estate firm that is now a Fortune 500 company. What people associate with Staubach can be articulated in these phrases: "top performer," "tenacious competitor," and "winner." These "feature-benefits" of the "brand" Roger Staubach appeal to the real estate market and to a sales culture of agents hungry to get ahead.

**Visibility** – You have to have a venue and an audience to brand yourself, whether you're an entertainer or an individual seeking to take your career to the next level. If you're Donald Trump, you can start by branding inanimate properties with your name, for instance, Trump Tower. Then you might be creative enough to actually product-place yourself in a program entitled "The Apprentice." If you're looking to build your career, however, find venues where you can shine. Volunteer time to a professional association; get to be known amongst the volunteers as an energetic and skillful problem-solver.

**Brand character** – This is how the brand expresses itself (or himself, or herself). Narrowly, it consists of the images, graphics, even the typefaces used to convey the brand promise. At the individual level, it is the behaviors and outcomes of these behaviors that express brand character. Bill Clinton's 900-plus-page tome, *My Life*, is literally weighty. Might one infer from the sheer weight of the book that he is a "heavyweight" on the political stage?

**Emotional connection/projection** – How does the brand make the consumer feel and what are you projecting to make the consumer, client, or business partner feel good about buying your brand? Does your message tie into a deep societal value that most people hold near and dear? Does it evoke pleasant memories? If you are thinking of yourself as a brand, can you break past the facts of your "career" and differentiate yourself from others because you made a personal, i.e., emotional connection to the client or hiring manager? Can you project yourself in a positive, yet memorable way? If you are dating someone you really like, this skill can also come in quite handy.

**Transcendence** – Lance Armstrong is a good example of an athlete who, through talent and marketing prowess, made himself into a "transcendent" brand that ultimately created appeal beyond the narrow boundaries of his original target market. This bicycling superstar has burst through the limits of his own specialized sport in so many ways it is hard to count them all. Not only is he a top performer, he is an international symbol of athletic prowess. He is admired as the survivor who overcame a deadly disease and as an icon of that singular focus that is the hallmark of greatness. These qualities can be part of your brand, particularly at mid-career when you've established a track record, and in particular, if you have demonstrated versatility in your field of endeavor.

**Setbacks and repair** – Once you've established a brand and a reputation, maintaining it is crucial. Still, if you make mistakes that damage your reputation, repair is also possible. Take Richard Nixon, for example. He was transformed by branding from a disgraced President into an elder statesman who helped open the doors to diplomacy with mainland China. Or, in the realm of athletics, Magic Johnson, who turned around his misfortune of contracting a deadly disease to emerge as a conqueror of that disease and a beacon of hope. The bottom line is: setbacks need not destroy the brand "you." I'd wager anyone that Martha Stewart

will rise from the ashes of her criminal conviction to new heights of business success.

This is a time when the individual is as much a brand as an organization and so, you have to be your own brand and know what it takes to be the CEO of "Me, Inc." If you're brand is floundering, you need to get some clarity around what makes you different and how to communicate that to those with ears to hear and eyes to see. This is true whether your brand is being born as an athlete or as a business leader.

So as the Olympics unfold, keep an eye peeled for new rising brand stars.

***Your feedback is welcomed and should be directed to Clark Crowdus, Principal, High-Definition Consulting Group at [clark@high-def.biz](mailto:clark@high-def.biz).***

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## **RESOURCES:**

The following resources are recommended by High-Definition Consulting Group:

### **All About Branding**

<http://www.allaboutbranding.com/>

### **Branding Asia**

<http://www.brandingasia.com/>

### **Corporate id**

<http://corporate-branding.com/index.htm>

### **The Beyond Branding Blog**

<http://www.beyond-branding.com/blog/blogger.html>

### **Web Marketing Info. Center**

[http://www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=mm\\_Global](http://www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=mm_Global)

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**PAY IT FORWARD - If you find any material in this or future newsletters of interest to your clients, colleagues, or friends, feel free to forward it to them with our compliments!**

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***High-Definition News*** is a publication of High-Definition Consulting Group, 33 Lupine Avenue, Ste. 300, San Francisco, CA 94118 ([www.high-def.biz](http://www.high-def.biz)).

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