

BRAND SABBATHS

The necessity of taking the time to pause and reflect on your branding initiatives

By: Andrea Syverson

Unlike the infamous Energizer Bunny who has unstoppable energy, most brand leaders simply don't. Even the most enterprising leaders must manage their company's limited resources of passion, dollars and time. In today's frenzied pace, this is a practice that rarely gets intentional and quality "thinkabout" time. We think our energy pie is limitless, that true grit will somehow always carry our goals, that we'll find budget money somewhere and that we can do it all. It's a breathless pattern for brands these days. Our "just do it" impulsivity sometimes tricks us into thinking we are making progress but in fact we may very well be *regressing*. Many companies actually unintentionally add to their customers' brand confusion by all these activities.

We need to pause. We need to consider giving ourselves a bit of a brand sabbath. Yes, that ancient spiritual practice of rest and reflection. A time out for refreshment for our brand souls. A time to reflect on just exactly where we are spending our energy and just how we are living our brand days. The busier we are, the more this time of brand spaciousness is critically required.



The Type A Energizer Bunny in all of us balks at this. We resist it fervently as we jump into execution, execution, execution. We get charged up by ticking things off our brand to do lists. I can hear the backlash chatter already: "But I can't take the time right now. It's impossible to stop. Who will do it all? This is important. Very important. This is urgent. Very urgent. This is for The Board. This is going to

have high visibility. This is a make or break. If we don't do it now, our competitors will." And on and on and on. Living in crisis mode, we tend to specialize in resistance.

Steven Pressfield writes quite convincingly about Resistance in his book, *The War of Art*. For him, it is such a force that it earns a capital R. He believes that "most of us have two lives: the life we live and the un-lived life within us. Between the two stands Resistance." Pressfield is certain that resistance is a force that must be dealt with. "We can never eliminate resistance. It will never go away. But we can outsmart it," he says. I recommend Pressfield's work because I think most brand leaders resist the practice of thinkabout time. It is hard work to ask ourselves about the brand we are creating by default and the un-lived brand we *want* to be creating. It is hard work to stop doing and start reflecting. It is hard work to turn off the distractions. It is hard work to simplify. To focus. To step out of the frenzy. To take a brand sabbath.

Energy management may just be one of the brand leader's most important jobs. Marshaling our brand energy wisely is a strategic long term investment that will pay dividends in ways both obvious and unexpected.

So, why not schedule your own brand sabbath to reflect on these kinds of energy management questions:

THE PASSION PIECE OF THE ENERGY PIE

- Do we have the right people on the right projects?
- Are they truly living the brand or simply going through the motions?
- Are we building diverse teams that have bench strength for our future?
- Might we be working around a few "superstars"?
- Are we developing strong "Number Twos" in each key division?
- Who is bored and needs a new challenge?
- What initiatives are being backburned because of human resource limitations? Why?
- What brand batteries need recharging internally so we can remain competitive externally?

THE DOLLARS PIECE OF THE ENERGY PIE

- How can we leverage the investments in our brand touchpoints more thoroughly?
- Are we planning our projects prudently and intentionally putting our customer at the heart of all we do?
- Do we know what our specific competitive edge is and are we confidently telling (and showing!) our customers in every transaction how and why we are different?
- What can we repurpose? Reengineer?
- Do we throw money at projects first or have we kept a common sense bootstrap mentality to problem solving and spending? Do we understand how our customers' wallets may have changed in these recessionary times?

THE TIME PIECE OF THE ENERGY PIE

- Does everyone understand our brand's top 3 priorities for the next 6-12 months?
- How do all our activities line up in relation to those priorities?
- What is taking us off task?

- What brand activities can be simplified? Eliminated? Or, possibly combined in new ways to be more effective?
- When is the last time we celebrated a small win?
- When is the last time we reviewed how we could make a particular brand activity better for the future?
- Are we embracing the power of checklists to streamline processes?
- When is the last time brand leaders walked a mile in the customers' shoes and discussed their findings?

Sabbaths are good for the soul of your brand. Fight the Resistance. Just do it. Then smile as you check it off your list!

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