

## DOES YOUR BRAND HAVE SPOKESPRODUCTS?

By: Andrea Syverson

Lately I find myself challenging my clients to examine their brand stories more deeply – especially the stories tucked away within their product lines. I see this as an area of neglect for many companies. It isn't that these companies don't have vibrant brand stories or even that they are not using their brand stories across all their channels. No, the problem I see is that their innovative product lines are rich with meaningful opportunities that are left underleveraged. This, however, is a good problem. It's fixable.

Why go through all the hard work and expense to create crave-worthy, competition-envying products for your customers and then not let them do double-duty for your company as brand *spokesproducts*?

Let's take a BrandAbout™ look at a few examples in our industry of those who do this well:

### MAKE A METAPHOR

As an engaging customer-centric brand, **Spanx** deserves kudos on many levels. Entrepreneur Sara Blakely has done an incredible job of reinventing an entire industry (shapewear) and making women (and now men!) look better in all their clothes. No small task. Their on-brand product names are cheeky (from the Bra-llelujah! to the new Skinny Britches) and add a lot of fun to the functionality. But what I liked most was the way the smart marketers and merchants at Spanx positioned the rollout of Haute Contour, their new upscale line of undergarments, as “The Dessert of Shapewear.” This simple but powerful and memorable metaphor helps to clearly position this product line apart from their everyday lines and gives their busy female buyers a quick way to justify the luxurious price tag and a subtle encouragement to treat themselves to dessert.



**Can your brand leverage a metaphor to create a unique selling proposition for one of its categories?**

## REMIND ME AGAIN!

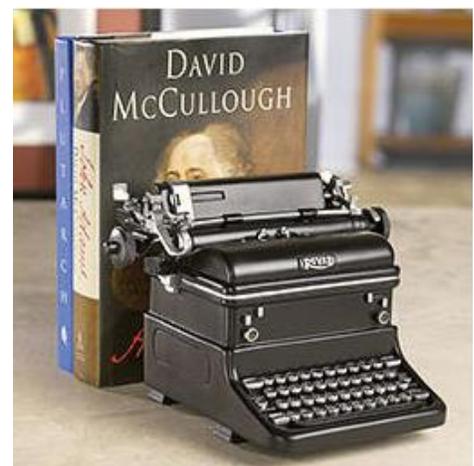
Great brands continually reinforce their competitive positioning. In celebration of their 90<sup>th</sup> year, **Eddie Bauer** has done a brilliant job of reminding their customers that they are “The Original Outdoor Outfitter.” On the website, an interactive company timeline reinforces this message by starting with the man behind the brand, Eddie Bauer, and his first product innovations. The front cover of the catalog brags about the new Adventure Ecuador Spring Collection, a product line inspired by one of Bauer’s first expeditions. The team returned to Ecuador for product inspiration and photo opportunities. According to the company, “The women of Zuleta, Ecuador, have become famous for their intricate embroidery and success of their community workshop. We drew inspiration from their ‘Zuleteno’ style in creating one of our favorite Spring tunics.” Adventure-seeking customers will also love reading the selections submitted by other like-minded customers under the tab “Amazing People. Amazing Stories” (read about how an Eddie Bauer coat saved a life). This intentional experiential positioning helps create an emotional bond for Eddie Bauer products.



**Does your brand share its behind-the-scenes product inspiration with your customers? How can you continue to remind your customers about the deep knowledge and passion that undergirds all of your products?**

## NEVER FAIL TO SURPRISE

**Levenger** is one of those brands that never take shortcuts. When I peruse their brand, I expect to find thoughtfully created “tools for serious readers.” I am never disappointed. But what brings me branding joy is to find that the merchants at Levenger continue to find unique ways to gratify their customers’ literary interests. I could point to several spokesproducts in their line, but a product that goes the extra brand-building mile is the David McCullough’s Typewriter Bookends. If you’re a history buff, then you know that David McCullough is a two-time Pulitzer-Prize winning author. But you might not have known that all his books were created on this very typewriter. According to Levenger: “Our sturdy replica is faithful to the real one, down to the smudged SHIFT LOCK key.” Along with it, you’ll receive an original work by the author, his



short but sweet ode to his typewriter. A portion of it is reproduced on the bottom of the sculpture.” When has a pair of bookends ever had such a layered delight factor? Here’s a product that not only tells a story-within-a-story but magnificently reinforces Levenger’s core mission.

**Does your brand have products that have stories-within-stories potential? In what ways are you positioning them as spokeproducts?**

### **PLAY TO YOUR CUSTOMERS’ FAVORITES**

Most brands captivate their customers with what’s new and often that’s an excellent place to start. **Cabela’s** did indeed start there in a recent catalog mailing (pages 4 & 5) but quickly moved to an even stronger customer-centric strategy on pages 6 & 7 where they showcased an entire spread of Customer Top-Rated camping gear. The subhead reads: “Tested by customers just like you, these items earned our highest scores for quality, reliability and convenience.” If you’ve ever been camping with faulty gear, you know that the right equipment matters and can turn even a rain-soaked experience into a positive life memory. Brands often forget to let their customers tell their own stories about the products they are passionate about. Cabela’s smartly lets customers (in Tweet-sized sound bytes) tell one another why their products outperform their competitors.

**No doubt, you probably are already collecting product reviews, but why not brainstorm more ways to leverage these mini-advertisements from your customers? Put the bragging rights back into the hands of customers and see what kind of spokesproducts they’ll help you uncover!**

So, what’s your story about your spokeproducts? Are you content with how your brand is leveraging all its product content? If not, take time to fully explore the pages between your product creations...the preface to those products, the meaty chapters and the customer conclusions about those products. I’m quite certain you’ll discover rich layers of meaningful content that will lead to a happy ending!

Andrea Syverson is the founder and president of IER Partners, which has guided and strengthened brands of all sizes with savvy best practices for creating customers for life. Combining her passion of adventurous listening and working across diverse industries, her “outsider-insider” creative branding and merchandising expertise and objectivity has been valued by companies as diverse as Ben & Jerry’s, Celestial Seasonings, CHEFS, Boston Proper, SmartPak, Spanx and World Vision. She holds an MBA and has dedicated more than 20 years to providing clients both domestic and international with innovative approaches to branding, product development and creative messaging. She is the author of two books in which she shares her hands-on approach for both brand building and creating customer-centric products that enhance brands: *ThinkAbout: 77 Creative Prompts for Innovators*, and *BrandAbout: A Seriously Playful Approach for Passionate Brand-Builders and Merchants*.