

A LITTLE HUMAN TOUCH

Don't let your brand personality get upstaged by its tech-savviness

By Andrea Syverson

Premium ice cream manufacturer, Ben & Jerry's, places a major premium on people. Here's one of its stated "progressive values": "We strive to show a deep respect for human beings inside and outside our company and for the communities in which they live."

How does your brand show respect for all the human beings inside (employees) and outside your company (customers)? Just how *human* is your brand?

Many years ago, futurist John Naisbitt wrote about the megatrend of "high-tech/high touch." In my consulting work, I've found that companies spend quite a bit of time on the techy-ness of their brands but not-so-much on the high touch-ness of their offerings. How much human touch – real live human touch – is part of your current brand experience? I believe this is one of the most overlooked aspects of branding and yet one of the best ways to set your brand apart from your competitors.

What are some ways you can express your brand personality this year? Let's look at a few ways some companies are creatively leveraging their human touch:

CONCIERGE SERVICES

A variety of industries are borrowing a bit of hospitality gleaned from the travel sector. The idea of offering "concierge service" is taking customer service to all new levels. Medical professionals (ranging from those working in centers such as the Mayo Clinic to individual doctors in private practice) are working intentionally to enhance the personal aspects of their patient relationships. According to their website, the Mayo Clinic Medallion Program in Arizona includes:

- A highly personalized health assessment and ongoing health management program with immediate and continuous access to a personal doctor
- Availability of your personal doctor or a Medallion colleague on a 24/7 basis, 365 days a year
- Convenient, personalized coordination of appointments
- Dedicated time with your personal doctor
- Access to your doctor by phone or email to discuss your concerns
- Private care in a serene, unhurried atmosphere

Dr. Michelle Eads, a family medicine practitioner in the Rocky Mountains, always wanted to spend more time with her patients on wellness and prevention. Her boutique, concierge-driven approach allows her to do just that. Eads says, "The model for Pinnacle Family Medicine was designed to accomplish several

things: personalized care, efficiency, accessibility, whole-person care, and low overhead. I have been thrilled with this [concept of a] 'Norman Rockwell practice using 21st century technology' as the original physician who started this model describes it.”

Consider investment firm Charles Schwab’s copy for one of its signature thought-bubble ads: “Some places give you a welcome packet. We give you a *welcome person*. Schwab’s New Client Concierge makes you feel at home in no time.

Brand leaders from medical professionals to those running banking firms are changing their business models to find ways to treat their customers uniquely and building more intimate relationships with their patients and clients. These Norman Rockwell-esque high touch methods have relevant lessons for all brands.

PERSONALITY PLUS

The Food Network has done a brilliant job of allowing its repertoire of chefs to truly be themselves by highlighting their various personality quirks through shows, cookbooks, blogs, magazines and branded product lines. Viewers are given front row seats to the inner lives and cooking techniques of these star chefs. They meet their mates and their children; they visit their favorite shopping haunts; they learn personal tidbits about what makes them tick. From the Barefoot Contessa to Giada to Guy Fieri to Alton Brown, this eclectic collection of cooking experts provides culinary entertainment and education to audiences hungry for these particular chefs’ views on all things food-related, and sometimes life-related.

AMERICAN
Passion
IS ALIVE AND WELL

My American Handmade Vodka beats the giant "Imports" every day. That's because I distill it six times in old-fashioned pot stills I built myself and taste test every batch to make sure you get only the best. Try American! *Tito*

Wine Enthusiast RATINGS	
SCORE OUT OF 100 POINTS	
TITO'S HANDMADE VODKA USA	95 PTS
Ketel One [®] HOLLAND	89 PTS
Grey Goose [®] FRANCE	84 PTS
Belvedere [®] POLAND	84 PTS
Absolut [®] SWEDEN	84 PTS

Unanimous Double Gold Winner!!!
World Spirits Competition

"America's first craft sippin' vodka"
Wall Street Journal

★★★★
Spirit Journal

"Smooth, I mean really smooth!"
CNN

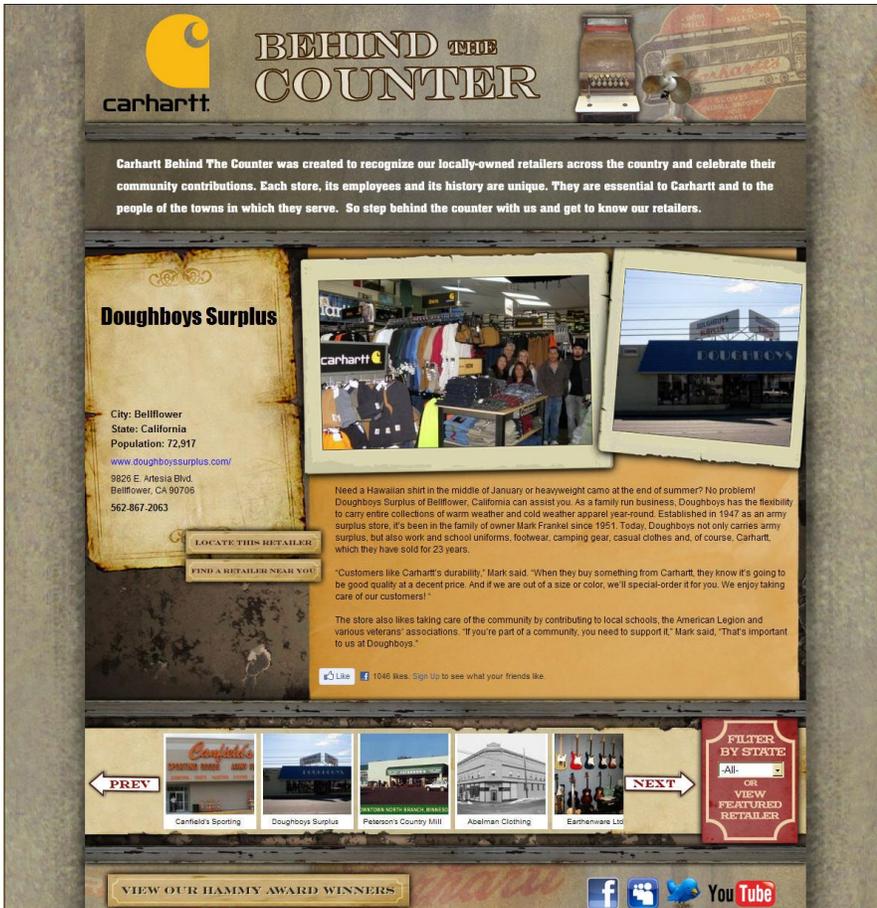
TitosVodka.com Handcrafted to be savored responsibly.

As a distilled spirit, Tito's is GLUTEN-FREE. Distilled and bottled by Fifth Generation, Inc. Austin, Texas. 40% alcohol by volume. ©2010 Tito's Handmade Vodka.

In a similar vein, Tito Beveridge set the liquor world in a flurry with his Tito’s Handmade Vodka. In his ad, he reminds customers that he himself is very involved in the creation process. He rightfully brags: “My American Handmade Vodka beats the giant “imports” every day. That’s because I distill it six times in old-fashioned pot stills I built myself and taste test every batch to make sure you get only the best.” Tito let’s his personality shine through his products, his messaging and his continual tinkering in the brand.

Customers passionate about the brands they love crave learning more. How can you share more meaningful insights about your brand personality with your customers? What “behind the scenes” glimpses can you reveal?

Many brands rely on retailers or brokers or agents or dealers of some sort to be their front line ambassadors with their direct customers. These vital “friends of the brand” are responsible for co-creating positive brand experiences. Not all brands value or leverage this important role. Premium work wear manufacturer Carhartt is one that does.



It’s “Behind the Counter” program lets customers know how valuable these shops are to the company. The brand leaders at Carhartt created it “to recognize their locally-owned retailers across the country and celebrate their community contributions. Each store, its employees and its history are unique. They are essential to Carhartt and to the people of the towns in which they serve. They want their customers “to step behind the counter” and learn about their retailers.

company and for the communities in which they live.” They recognize and celebrate the value of this wide “circle of friends.”

Who are your brand’s “circle of friends”? How can your brand introduce key players to your customers (perhaps vendors, partners, etc)? How can you show your appreciation to these ambassadors in meaningful ways?

This year why not place as much value on the high touch aspects of your brand experience as your high tech ones? Challenge your brand to express its humanness in ways that are exclusive to your personality. As Bruce Springsteen sings, “share a little of that human touch.”

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 is the author of two books *ThinkAbout: 77 Creative Prompts for Innovators* and *BrandAbout: A Seriously Playful Approach for Passionate Brand-Builders and Merchants*.

Like Ben & Jerry’s, Carhartt shows “a deep respect for human beings inside and outside their