

More often than you realize, you aren't just buying a product. You're buying the emotions, connotations, values, and priorities of the brand. Brands give us a shorthand. In a distracted and confusing world, these shortcuts help consumers make sense of all the options. And if you're trying to stand out, finding shortcuts is critical.

For instance, I'll describe a man to you. I won't tell you how old he is, what he does for a living, or what kind of personality he has. Instead, I'll just describe the brands he buys. What do you envision with the following examples?

1. He's wearing a Tommy Bahama shirt, driving a Jeep.
2. He's wearing a Tommy Hilfinger shirt, driving a Volvo.
3. He's wearing Diesel jeans and driving a BMW coupe.
4. He's wearing an oversized Tag Heuer watch and driving a Hummer.

You probably have different mental images for each of these men, based on the brands they choose.

Just as a Tommy Bahama shirt sends a message that the wearer is laid back, the dark-brown liquid of Jägermeister sends a message as well. When you order a Jäger, you're telling anyone who witnesses it that you're willing to stick your toe over the line, if not hurl your body across it. You refuse to drink from the mainstream. The shot is not *better* than other spirits, but it is decidedly *different*.*

When people buy a shot of Jäger, they aren't buying a *drink*. They're buying an *experience*. By holding the shot glass, they're announcing that they have officially turned up the volume on the evening ahead. This explains why Jäger is so popular among groups at bars. It's a team-building exercise. Can you imagine someone at

home alone on a Tuesday, pouring a Jäger bomb? It makes about as much sense as sitting on your own lap. Even the logo has become a shorthand for stepping it up a notch. Once someone suggests a round of Jäger, mental bells start ringing inside the minds of the group, signaling that it's one of "those nights."

That's a very specific brand promise, one that's unlikely to be confused with that of any chardonnay.

All this doesn't make sense, of course, on a rational level. It doesn't have to. The brand is not selling a rational benefit (such as better gas mileage or longer-lasting paint), but an emotional experience. When you see the hidden patterns in how fascination casts a spell on people, seemingly irrational behaviors become clear.

The good news is that, without even realizing it, you already have intensely fascinating qualities built right into your brand. And once you build your communication around those qualities, you can compete against bigger companies, bigger marketing budgets, and even better products. I call these qualities your "orange tickets."

Do You Want the Orange Ticket, or the Green?

Let's go on a ride.

The Mission Space ride at the Epcot theme park in Orlando, Florida, is based on the conceit that the rider is training to be an astronaut, practicing to save planet Earth while hurtling through the atmosphere inside a capsule. When you enter this ride, you get a choice: Do you want the orange ticket, or the green ticket? I was curious. Why two tickets? What's the difference? Which should I choose?

I looked back and forth, from the orange-ticket line to the green-ticket line and back again. They had separate entrances. The orange-ticket line was long, with a forty-five-minute wait. The line for the less intense green-ticket ride, on the other hand, was short. Which ride would you choose? A less intense ride, with

*As one bartender described it, "There's drunk . . . and then there's Jägermeister drunk."