

Once upon a time there was a brand...



A recent advertising campaign for a certain low-cost supermarket made me smile. It used a tried and tested formula involving a taste test between two similar looking products, one a known and trusted, premium Swiss chocolate brand, the other their own-brand alternative. Discerning chocophiles, after declaring their devotion to the Swiss brand and confidently asserting their ability always to recognise it, are flabbergasted to discover they actually prefer the taste of the supermarket product. It makes me smile not because of its novelty or insight but because it succinctly illustrates two of the key factors of successful brand management.

Promise: make a clear and compelling brand promise to attract the right audience.

Delivery: consistently deliver against that promise to maintain enthusiasm and build loyalty.

No matter what the brand or sector, if the promise is insufficiently relevant and differentiated in the target audiences' minds they can hardly be expected to maintain a preference for it, particular if a competitor comes along with what appears to be a brighter, shinier proposition. Similarly, however compelling the promise, if your brand fails to deliver against it, they will not stay fooled for long.

The image of lipstick on a gorilla, as an analogy for a brand pretending to be something it isn't, often seems to strike a chord (visit our website and you'll see what I mean). Perhaps we might extend the analogy by imagining the customer as a fairytale prince (which should, in itself, prove cathartic) and that the brand is the princess of his dreams with whom he wants to live happily ever after (brand loyalty personified).

"...begin by imagining the customer as a fairytale prince (which should, in itself, prove cathartic)."

We can then think of the brand in the guise of one of the following caricatures:

1. A princess

A compelling promise, perfectly delivered

The ingredients for a long-term relationship. But remember, there are other princesses being preened to distract the prince, so keep an eye on them and give him no reason to look elsewhere.

2. A gorilla dressed-up as a princess

A compelling promise, hideously delivered

All that pretence will be worth nothing when the prince finds out the truth. She needs a fundamental transformation. Fast. Otherwise she'll get dumped and, when word gets out, her reputation will be ruined.

3. A princess in a gorilla suit

An unappealing promise whose delivery might exceed expectations.

There is little point in exceeding expectations if those expectations are so low you that you don't get invited to the ball (er, shortlist). With so many tempting alternatives on offer what self-respecting (and a little image-conscious) prince will take the risk? She needs nothing less than a total makeover, a fresh aroma, sparkling conversation and a confident smile.

4. A gorilla

An unappealing promise, hideously delivered.

Best not to waste any more time or money on this one. She belongs in the zoo, not the ball.

	Promise	Delivery	Analogy	Remedy
1	●	●	Princess	Keep those over-dressed rivals in check
2	●	◎	Gorilla dressed-up as a princess	Change fast (ideally before they find out)
3	◎	●	Princess in a gorilla suit	New outfit, make-up, scent (and mouthwash?)
4	◎	◎	Gorilla	Return the gorilla to the zoo. Start again

Of course, such caricatures exaggerate to make a point. But perhaps you will recognise some aspects of them in your own brand? The second and third analogies are particularly apposite for most brands. For example:

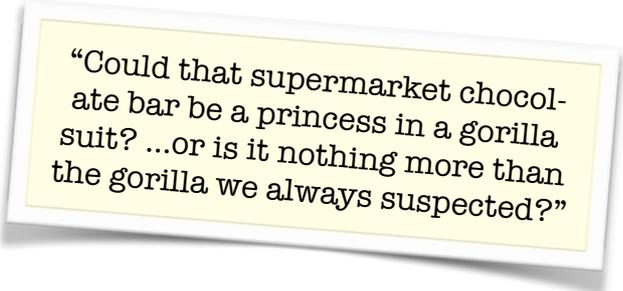
Your brand might lean towards being a gorilla dressed-up as a princess if:

- ▶ Trial is high, but loyalty is low (delivery fails to live up to expectations)
- ▶ The experience surrounding the brand is underwhelming or inconsistent with it
- ▶ The brand promise erodes or shifts from the one that originally attracted them

Your brand, similarly, be something of a princess in a gorilla suit if:

- ▶ It has relatively few customers but the ones it has are happy and loyal
- ▶ Potential customers are reluctant to take a risk and give it a try
- ▶ It is hard to win distribution even though it is arguably better than its rivals

So, could that supermarket chocolate bar be likened to a princess in a gorilla suit? Well, if what she offers really is as satisfying as the glamorous rival she is 'aping', then yes. If, on the other hand, we are being conned with a false promise, she really could be nothing more than the gorilla we always suspected. You're the prince. You decide!



“Could that supermarket chocolate bar be a princess in a gorilla suit? ...or is it nothing more than the gorilla we always suspected?”

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Founder and Managing Director of Lucasbrand, a UK-based strategic brand consultancy with a diverse international client base. Lucasbrand typically connects at a senior level with firms looking for a fresh perspective on reputation, corporate personality or brand strategy. Its professional expertise and proprietary skills have added significant value to the businesses of many clients.

Lucasbrand has created, developed and repositioned brands across many sectors including broadcast, publishing, airlines, airports, luxury goods, perfumery, telecoms, cars, energy, consumer electronics, professional services and banking.

Brands with which Keith Lucas has personally been engaged include: BBC, Rolex, BAA, Discovery Channel, Firmenich, Farrer & Company, Reed Elsevier, BT Global Services, Ford, Jaguar, Citroën, BP, McKinsey & Company, Goldman Sachs, Towers Watson, Hitachi, Samsung and Motorola.

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