

Trust me, I'm a bank manager



There was a time when the bank was one of the pillars of the establishment. Together with the church, the military, the civil service and, at least in the UK, the royal family and even (for much of the 20th century) the BBC. The bank was a dependable institution and the bank manager was as safe as houses - now he is about as safe as house prices!

Whatever happened? Is it any wonder that our society has become so disoriented and lacking confidence when its very foundations have been undermined?

We have, in short, been let down by those we used to trust. Trust is a precious commodity because there is a personal cost involved - we make ourselves vulnerable by depending on someone or something else. Any breach of trust, therefore, can leave us feeling angry, betrayed and disillusioned.

But we humans, however we dislike the idea, remain as dependent as ever on surrounding ourselves with things in which we can place our trust. As Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' demonstrates, we need to feel a sense of security and wellbeing and crave things that can be depended upon to live up to their promise. These used to be the pillars of the establishment, now these have been replaced by what we might popularly call 'brands'.

From Apple to Omega, Manchester United to Virgin Atlantic, Swatch to BMW, Hermés to Tumi, our lives are not only dependent on trusted brands, but often defined by them. They advertise our values, even our beliefs. They are our personally-chosen pillars of our own individual establishment. If they let us down, we have the power to dump them, if they make us feel good we wear them and share them (we can 'wear' a BMW or a Mac simply by being consciously seen with them in public!).

Look at it this way, if you were a committed Mac aficionado and Apple did banking, wouldn't you open an account? I bet you can already imagine what to expect when you walk through the door? The values, the attitude the service, the white space, the Financial Genius Bar and a gloriously tactile satin aluminium credit card? And how much you would (secretly) love to be seen using that card...

If, for any reason, Apple doesn't happen to float your metaphorical boat, substitute a brand that does and rewind to the beginning of the paragraph. I think you get the picture; we're living in an individualised new world in which we are personally empowered to choose and maintain our own micro pillars, ones on which we can depend and which reflect our own lifestyle, values, vision and outlook.

The point here is not to lure popular brands into banking, rather to encourage banking brands to become popular brands. They ought to be working harder than ever to project the values that will generate trust and earn our critically-needed customer commitment and advocacy; instead, most of them still seem to be behaving like self-obsessed nincompoops. Balance the column inches on controversial bonus payments, payoffs and management incompetence against those on innovation, new initiatives or customer service strategies.

I'm guessing that if Apple did banking, the words: "trust me, I'm a bank manager" could, before long, take on an altogether more compelling tone!

