

# REINVENTION

The aim of big brands is to make big money. A significant part of the strategy is the story they tell and the way they re-tell old stories and re-invent their own narrative. It would be easy to think that big brands have to re-invent all of the time to keep at the top but often they do the same thing with some small twists and some clever marketing. An excellent example of this is a brand known the world over – Coca-Cola.

Coca-Cola is the most famous soft drink in the world. It has been the exact same product for 128 years and there are more than 1 billion US dollars in retail sales annually across 207 countries. In fact, that's all but two countries in the world. Yet they continue to try and innovate and drive business forward across continents, markets and different generations. They call this approach 'constant reinvention'.

Many a company wish they could bottle the Coca-Cola formula, and although what is inside the bottle is a top-secret formula, their marketing executives do speak about the marketing ingredients that goes into keeping the brand great.

They believe in understanding people. That is harder to do the more countries you work in due to the different worldwide populations but connection with your audience is key. Coca-Cola work hard to capture consumer insights and to have a direct connection to customers, easier now with all the technology available. They believe in co-creation and innovate through communication with customers.

The second thing Coca-Cola does is keep a differentiated offer. They keep having to re-invent to remind people of their relevance in the current time. Their story has changed slightly over time even though their drink hasn't. The big selling point of Coca-Cola is that it brings refreshment. Many of us remember the advert around having a 'diet coke break' which ran from 1994 to 2013. They aim to express optimism and link their brand to good times. In the 1930s they marketed Coke as a way to get through the difficult economic times. After World War 2, it was a symbol of happy times and in 1960s, when some tensions existed in society, it was the soft drink that brought people together.

In 1995, as well as having 'diet coke break' ads regularly on our screens, the Christmas 'Holidays are coming' lorry drove on to our screens. By 1999, we were watching the 'journey' version of the advert with a long line of holiday Coca-Cola lorries driving across a snowy landscape with a winking Santa on the back. This slight tweak in marketing made a massive impact then, and still now. According to a recent study conducted on behalf of Coke, over half of brits admit that the Coke Christmas advert has the power to change their mood. 30% feel nostalgic watching it and 67% find the famous 'holidays are coming' jingle gets stuck in their heads!

To keep this massively popular message alive, the trucks became real and started a tour of the US in 2001. It took until 2010 for the trucks to make an appearance in the UK but, I can testify having queued up myself to have a picture taken, it was like One Direction had just rocked up. When Coke eventually pulled the advert, they had hundreds of calls to their customer service hotline asking for it to come back – some said Christmas didn't start for them until that advert played. All of this keeps the message alive.

The third thing Coke do is push the boundaries to deliver the message. Apparently only 10% of the buzz on social media is generated by Coke, the rest is consumers. For example, their advert series called 'Security Cameras' which are made up of actual footage highlighting those small, heart-warming good deeds that take place around the world which is in keeping with the positive and life affirming message Coke want to portray. The advert didn't cost a lot of money but had a lot of impact worldwide.

The final ingredient Coke have is to scale fast. The challenge is not always having the idea, it is getting it out to the masses first. Coca-Cola's motto is 'remain constructively discontent' and that is what pushes them

forward. This motto led to their PlantBottle and the 'share a Coke' customise and personalise campaign so you could share a virtual Coke with a loved one far away.

After a 128 years, the fizz around Coca-Cola still hasn't gone flat.

## APPLICATION

For most of us in education, marketing is another area we can add to the list of 'things we weren't trained in'. And perhaps you think we don't need to be but at its heart, marketing is around story telling and we do need to do that. Much like Coca-Cola, we have been serving the same ingredients for years; the purpose of schools probably hasn't changed that much in 128 years either. What is required though is different ways of telling our story. Much like Coca-Cola had to shift the message to match the time in which they found itself, we might have to do the same. We have to control the message. We have to have a compelling narrative. We know Coca-Cola advise we understand people, differentiate the offer, push boundaries and scale fast but what if we are struggling with the story line itself?

Donald Miller, the New York Times Best Selling author spells out how we create that story. He says every story you hear or see has the same ingredients. A character who wants something encounters a problem before they can get it. At the peak of their despair, a guide steps into their lives, gives them a plan, and calls them to action. That helps them avoid failure and ends in a success. Whether it is *The Hunger Games*, *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter*, all of these stories follow the same basic ingredients. He calls it the Story Brand 7 or SB7.

**Miller argues that if we want to tell the story of our company or school really clearly, then we need to ask these questions about our organisation:**

***Who is the hero?*** (and it should never be us!)

***What does the hero want?***

In our setting, the hero is the child and their parents. What is it they want from our school? Is it a feeling of safety, great friendships, to develop as a person, to leave with great results? Do we know? Do we ever ask?

***Who or what is opposing the hero getting what they want?***

What is getting in the way? It may be money or circumstances, it may be opportunity, it may be a need that has not been given the right support yet, perhaps they are getting in their own way but are they aware of this?

***What will the hero's life look like if they do (or do not) get what they want?***

What does the future look like? Do we know what our young people want or what their parents want for them? What are their aspirations and are they too low because they have not seen what else could be possible? If they leave our schools with qualifications, friends, a good character and knowledge and skills, what may they be able to do then?

When we are talking to anyone about what we do, these things should be almost immediately obvious.

But the hero on the receiving end of our communication also has questions they need answering. Miller says that our audience must be able to answer these 3 questions:

- 1) What do you offer?
- 2) How will it make my life better?

3) What do I need to do to buy it or engage in it?

We need to have a compelling narrative about why we do what we do and WHAT we actually do. If we are not clear, it is very hard for anyone else to be.

## QUESTIONS

Although marketing may not be our thing, telling compelling stories should be. As educators we tell stories all the time, but is it a good one? As we think about the people we serve, let's think about Miller's 3 questions:

- 1) What do you offer? It is a good question. Why should anyone choose to come to your school? What sets you apart and what are you proud of?
- 2) How will it make my life better? If a young person, or their carer, asked you that, what would you honestly say? If we are not trying to make people's lives better, what are we trying to do? What are you doing that you know will enhance the lives of your young people and are you shouting enough about this?
- 3) What do I need to do to buy it or engage in it? Clearly, in the state sector parents don't have to buy a place at your school. The better question is probably, 'what do I need to do to engage in your school?' – is that clear? How do we engage with them and how do they engage with us? What are we promising and do we keep those promises?

Customers generally don't care about your story, they care about their own. We all do, we are the heroes of our own stories after all. We may all benefit from some re-imagining, looking at what we do with fresh eyes, and make deliberate attempts to re-engage the heroes of our stories with why being in our school is the best choice for them.



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