

# Why do we feel better about some products than we do about others?

By Patrick Hanlon, author of Primal Branding

Ever notice how you feel better about some products than you do about others?

Whether you're shopping for blue jeans, a new iPhone, Nikes, or a Coke, it's not just about having a phone, shoes or something to drink—and it hasn't been for a long time. Jeans, athletic shoes, television sets, MP3 players, even automobiles today are functionally are all pretty much the same. They work and they're easy to come by.

Products today are differentiated by something else—an ability to create desire thanks to a constellation of points that make you feel you're a part of that brand community. When you feel you're part of the community of people who wear Ecko or North Face or Jimmy Choo, for example, you prefer those brands above all others.

That feeling of community is created by something called the primal code. This code is a pattern as simple as binary code, and just as powerful.

There are seven pieces of primal code that, when together, form an almost irresistible belief system and consumer bond.

It starts with the creation story of how the product or company started. Apple Computer started in a garage, Abercrombie & Fitch began as a sporting outfitter, Burberry started in WW1 trenches, U2 is from Dublin. Burt's Bees started in a chicken shack.

The second piece of code is the creed. What is the product about? BMW is the ultimate driving machine. Apple thinks different. Nike tells us to "Just do it."

Icons are the third piece: succinct concentrations of meaning we recognize as belonging to that brand. The Nike swoosh. The Chanel C. The Levi's back pocket. Michael Jackson's glove. Scent and taste are also icons. In fact, icons can inform any of the senses.

Rituals are also code. iPods reinvented the way we listen to music. Starbucks transported the rite of morning coffee from home to their "third place". At colleges, Red Bull has replaced the morning coffee rite. Netflix replaced the ritual of how we rent movies, moving it from Blockbuster to Netflix (downloading movies on the Internet is now replacing both Blockbuster and Netflix).

Communities also have their own vocabulary or sacred words. Think iPod. Think iced grande skinny decaf latte. Think lol, rofl, mechanical turks and TLA.

Primal communities also have identified nonbelievers who do not want to become members of their community. These contrasting polar opposites (doves/hawks, Democrats/Republicans, Coke/Pepsi, Starbucks/Dunkin' Donuts) not only help solidify our own beliefs, they (of course) have their own resonant communities.

Finally, all primal communities have a leader. An individual who set out—usually against all odds and the world at large—to recreate the world according to their own point of view. These are the Steve Jobs, Oprahs, Bono, Richard Branson, Phil Knight and others at the macro “magazine front cover” level. At the micro level, they are store managers, supervisors, directors, division heads and others who are responsible for maintaining a relevant, resonant brand.

When all seven pieces of primal code are attached to a product, they create a belief system that attracts people who want to share those same beliefs. And people who believe, belong.

Power brands like Starbucks, Nike, Apple, and Oprah seize imaginations with incredible emotional power. People want to belong to these brands, are excited by them and prefer them above other choices.

They also enhance your entire experience. Think about it. You don't just say you're getting Tide, you say you're going to Target. You don't just go buy furniture, you go to Ikea. You don't listen to music, you listen to your iPod.

These brands have delivered on all seven pieces of Primal Code through terrific gut instinct, by hiring smart partners, great advertising copywriters, and heavy doses of incredible timing and luck. They radiate with Primal Code and are followed by millions of people who share not just their products, but their beliefs. They belong to us, and we belong to them. We become part of a great (and often global) community. We smile when we see others carrying a white Starbucks cup, honk at fellow Mini Cooper drivers, grin at others playing with their iPhone. We feel some form of rapture standing with other believers at a Harley Davidson rally in Sturgis, or in the thrall of a Dave Matthews concert. (Some of us may even feel collective joy recycling.) We are all members of the same tribe.

So, the next time you're wandering through the mall, think about the stores you find yourself drifting towards. They probably have some or all seven pieces of Primal Code. Better get out your wallet.

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