

VISUAL HAMMER LAURA RIES



VISUAL HAMMER

Nail your brand into the mind
with the emotional power
of a visual hammer.

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The Immutable Laws of Branding

The Immutable Laws of Internet Branding

The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR

The Origin of Brands

War in the Boardroom

(above books co-authored with Al Ries)

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CHAPTER 1

HAMMER

ITS ASTONISHING POWER.

In the business world today, the printed word reigns supreme. Tweets, status updates, text messages, PowerPoint slides, emails, even old-fashioned letters.

Ideas, projects and marketing programs are all spelled out in a blizzard of words.

When it comes to executing a marketing program, no wonder business executives focus on

the words alone.

Words are what they use the most and are most familiar with. Yet there is a lot of evidence that visuals play a far more important role in marketing than do words.

In 1982, Nancy Brinker started a foundation to fight breast cancer in memory of her sister, Susan G. Komen, who had died from the disease two years earlier.

Back then, Brinker says, her only assets were \$200 in cash and a list of names of potential donors.

Since then, Susan G. Komen for the Cure has raised more than \$1.5 billion. Today it's the world's-largest non-profit source of money to combat breast cancer.



A recent Harris poll of non-profit charitable brands rated Komen for the Cure as the charity that consumers were "Most likely to donate to."

Ahead of such organizations as the American Cancer Society, St. Jude's Research Hospital, Goodwill Industries and the Salvation Army.

What accounts for the amazing success of a non-profit organization with the longest and strangest name in the field?

It's the pink ribbon which has become a well-

known symbol in the fight against breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society was founded in 1913, yet most people have no idea what visual symbol the society uses. That's the real difference between designing a trademark and designing a visual hammer. Almost every brand has a trademark, but very few have visual hammers.



For his foundation to raise money for cancer research, Lance Armstrong did something similar to Susan G. Komen's pink ribbon.

His yellow silicone-gel "Livestrong" bracelet was launched in May 2004 as a fund-raising device.



Sold for \$1 each, more than 70-million Livestrong bracelets have been bought to date.

The bracelet is part of a "Wear yellow live strong" educational program. Yellow was chosen for its importance in professional cycling. It's the color of the jersey worn by the leader of the Tour de France, which Armstrong has won seven consecutive times.

Pink ribbons, yellow bracelets and other visual devices are transforming the non-profit world. But

their successes are based on techniques borrowed from the business world.

In 2010, Coca-Cola spent \$267 million in the U.S. advertising its Coca-Cola brand. What was Coke's slogan? Was it "Always" or "Enjoy?"



Or maybe it was "Coke is it?" Most people can't remember.

What do most people remember? What does 99 percent of the American public remember about Coca-Cola advertising?

Not the words.

Most people remember the "contour" bottle.

The Coca-Cola bottle is not just a bottle. It is a visual hammer that hammers in the idea that Coke is the original cola, the authentic cola, the real thing.

In a Coca-Cola commercial, the visual speaks louder than the words. That's the function of a visual hammer.

If you've noticed Coca-Cola advertising in the past few years, you've probably noticed a much greater use of its iconic Coke bottle. In print and television advertising, on the cans, on the packaging and on the billboards.

Even on letterheads and calling cards.

The company's visual hammer is one reason

why Coca-Cola is the world's most-valuable brand, worth \$70.5 billion, according to Interbrand, a global branding consultancy.

In today's global economy, a strong visual hammer is a particularly valuable asset. Coca-Cola is sold in 206 countries and 74 percent of the company's revenues come from outside the United States.



In many categories, global brands dominate local brands. In household and consumer products, global brands have 70 percent of the market in Brazil, 75 percent in China and 90 percent in Russia.

Unlike a verbal idea, a visual hammer can cross International borders with no translations necessary.

What is surprising about Coca-Cola's 6.5-oz. "contour" glass bottle is how few of them are actually bought.

No matter. The Coke contour bottle is a powerful visual hammer. A Coke can, on the other



hand, is just another can of cola. That's why it was so brilliant to print the contour bottle on the can and even on plastic cups.

One place where the contour bottle is used quite extensively is in high-end restaurants, a fact that speaks to the visual impact the Coke bottle has with consumers.

While Coca-Cola has consistently used the same visual hammer, its verbal nails have been repeatedly changed. In the last 107 years, Coke has used 57 different advertising slogans. Most of these are totally forgettable like the 1941 slogan, “Coca-Cola is Coke!”

But four of these advertising slogans could have become long-lasting verbal nails for the brand if they had been used continuously.

“The real thing,” in particular, is a strong verbal nail because it ties in well with the visual hammer.

The contour bottle symbolizes the authenticity of the brand and “the real thing” verbalizes that authenticity.

None of the other three slogans, as good as they are, strongly connect to the brand’s visual hammer.

Today, “The real thing” lives on in newspapers, magazines, books and television



shows in spite of the fact that Coca-Cola used the slogan only once, for just two years, more than 40 years ago.

That demonstrates the verbal potency of the idea. It also demonstrates the fact that verbal ideas can get stronger as the years roll by, a reason for keeping a slogan alive for decades.

Yet, why do most American companies do the opposite? It's the unintended consequences of the annual slew of advertising "creativity" awards.

You can't be a successful advertising agency today unless you can win your share of awards. And you can't win an advertising award if you use last year's ad slogan. It's not "creative." That is, it's not new and different.

So ad agencies face a difficult choice. Win awards or perish. You can't blame them for choosing the former.

Coca-Cola's exceptionally-strong visual hammer puts its major competitor in a difficult position. What should Pepsi-Cola do?

The management at PepsiCo, like many other executives, seems to think that a visual hammer is



nothing but a glorified name for a trademark. That's why they tend to spend a lot of time and money perfecting their trademarks rather than

searching for visual hammers.

Back in 2008, PepsiCo said it would invest more than \$1.2 billion over the next three years revamping, according to chief executive Indra Nooyi, "every aspect of the brand proposition for our key brands. How they look, how they're packaged, how they will be merchandised on the shelves and how they connect with consumers."

As part of that revamping, Pepsi-Cola has a new trademark and a new advertising campaign which in 2010 the company spent \$154 million promoting.

So today how many consumers know what Pepsi's new slogan is?

Not very many.

Generally speaking, a trademark is not a visual hammer. If the "contour" bottle says "the original, the authentic cola," what does Pepsi's new "smiley-face" trademark say?

Pepsi's new "smiley-face" trademark says "Pepsi."



In essence, it's a rebus, a visual symbol that is a substitute for a brand name.

Almost all trademarks are rebuses. After years of constant use (and millions of advertising dollars), they are recognized as symbols that stand

for brand names.

But they generally don't communicate much more than that.

And many brand trademarks don't even do that. Do you recognize these two? Reebok and Adidas.



Does your brand have a visual hammer? Or does it have a meaningless, rebus trademark? Or perhaps it has no visual at all.

Not all trademarks are meaningless. Nike has the Swoosh, a powerful visual hammer. What's the difference between the Adidas and Reebok logos and the Swoosh?

The Swoosh doesn't just say "Nike." The Swoosh says "leadership."

The trademark on Tiger's cap hammers Nike's leadership position into consumers' mind.



And it's not because the Swoosh is in any way special. Nike could have taken any simple and unique visual and over time its visual could have become a powerful hammer.

What gave Nike the ability to create a visual hammer out of a rather ordinary symbol? (A checkmark that has been streamlined.)

Because Nike was first in a new category.

Nike was the first serious athletic-shoe brand. And today, Nike dominates the category.

A visual hammer doesn't just repeat your brand name; it hammers a specific word into the mind.

For brands that can create and dominate a new category, that word is "leadership."

Like the Nike mark, simplicity is the key when creating a visual hammer. Too many trademark designers think they are designing a coat of arms for some mythical 15th century warrior rather than a symbol for a 21st century company.

Simplicity combined with uniqueness allows a visual hammer to be instantly recognizable at a distance.

The original Mercedes-Benz trademark had a lot of pomp but very little power.

Trademarks shouldn't be thought of as mere decorations. For market leaders, trademarks are potential visual hammers.

The new Mercedes trademark represents the ultimate in simplicity. Today, the Tri-Star symbol is one of the strongest visual hammers in the world.



As the original "prestige" automobile, the Tri-

Star hammers "prestige" into the automobile buyer's mind.

Brands that create new categories have a singular opportunity to create a visual hammer that represents leadership and authenticity.

But not every brand gets it right. Take Red Bull, for example. The company created the energy-drink category



which it dominates with annual worldwide sales of over \$5.1 billion.

Despite its success, Red Bull doesn't own a visual hammer. It had the opportunity, but the visual it chose is much too complicated for a small energy-drink can.

"Two bulls and a sun" make a weak hammer. It doesn't measure up to the power of the Tri-Star, the Swoosh or the Coke bottle.

If the leader lacks a potent visual hammer, it gives the No. 2 brand a golden opportunity.

Monster entered the energy-drink market by positioning itself as the opposite of Red Bull.

Monster was launched with a 16-oz. can as compared with Red Bull's 8.3-oz. can. The large can and the Monster name link well in consumers' minds.

Monster also made a good visual choice. Claw

marks in the shape of an “M” send a subtle message of "strength" and "danger" in a simple and effective way. As a result, you remember the Monster visual hammer.



Today, Monster is a strong No. 2 brand in the energy-drink market, in part because of its use of its visual hammer at concerts and sporting events.

In spite of these and many other examples, why are many marketing people working exclusively with words, when the real power is with the visual?

Well, words are also important.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR **LAURA RIES**



Laura Ries is a leading brand strategist, bestselling author, sought-after-speaker and television personality.

Laura is President of Ries & Ries based in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been working for 18 years with her father and partner Al Ries, the legendary Positioning pioneer.

Together they consult with companies around the world on brand strategies.

They have traveled to over 60 countries from Austria to Australia and Chile to China teaching the fundamental principles of branding.

Laura and Al have written five books together: *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding* (1998), *The 11 Immutable Laws of Internet Branding* (2000), *The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR* (2002), *The Origin of Brands* (2004), and *War in the Boardroom* (2009). *Visual Hammer* (2011) is her first book on her own.

Laura is a frequent branding analyst on major news programs from the O'Reilly Factor to Squawk Box. She regularly appears on Fox News, Fox Business, CNBC, CNN, HLN. In addition, Laura writes her own popular blog RiesPieces.com.



In 2008, the Atlanta Business Chronicle named Laura a top 40 under 40. In 2009, Advertising Age asked its readers “What’s the best book you’ve ever read on marketing?” Laura’s book “*The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*” was voted number three. (The number one book was *Positioning* written by her father.) In 2002, Business 2.0 magazine named



Laura a “management guru” and issued trading cards with her picture and statistics on them.

Visit Ries.com to find out how to schedule a consulting assignment or to book Laura as a speaker at your next event.



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