

# Feldwick On Fame

By Paul Feldwick



## Foreword By The B2B Institute

The marketing industry is obsessed with the future.

The obsession with the future mostly has to do with personal incentives. New ideas, new channels, and new campaigns are not only more fun to think about, but also more likely to win industry awards and accolades.

However, is the outsized industry focus on the future good for business too?

Or might studying the past be more useful than fixating on the future?

Well, one of the leading forecasters of the future, Stanford University Professor Of Forecasting, Paul Saffo, argues a key rule to forecasting is “look back twice as far as you look forward.” At the B2B Institute, we pithily put it this way: “we have too many futurists in marketing and too few historians.”

No matter how one puts it, studying the past seems obviously important to making better decisions about the future. In keeping with that belief, we are delighted to partner with Paul Feldwick, one of the Grand Historians Of Advertising. In the earlier part of his career, Paul was one of the most accomplished account planners in advertising and, in the later part of his career, he has become a keen scholar of advertising history. His two enlightening books on advertising: *Why Does The Pedlar Sing?: What Creativity Really Means in Advertising* and *The Anatomy of Humbug: How to Think Differently about Advertising* should be required reading for anyone interested in building enduring brands.

As you will see in the following stories, perhaps the key lesson from Paul’s study of history is that advertising is most useful to companies as a tool to build fame. Fame generates all sorts of wonderful benefits for companies and employees alike – more sales, more jobs, and more opportunities. We see the financial value of fame in LinkedIn data everyday: famous brands hire more talent more quickly (rejoice HR), get more meetings more quickly (rejoice Sales), and win more customers more quickly (rejoice Marketing).

Interestingly, almost no B2B marketers we speak with aspire to build fame. We’re not exactly sure why so few B2B marketers properly value fame, but we can think of no better vehicle for helping them properly re-value fame than this “Feldwick On Fame” collection and Paul’s other writings.

We will close with a line from R.G. Collingwood, Harvard University Historian, who sagely said: “We study history in order to see more clearly into the situation in which we are called upon to act.”

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## About The Author



### Paul Feldwick

Consultant and Executive Coach

In 1974 Paul Feldwick left Oxford and found a job in advertising at the acclaimed London agency Boase Massimi Pollitt (later part of DDB) where he was to work for over thirty years. He was Head of Account Planning in London, and then a Worldwide Brand Planning Director for DDB, responsible for global strategic training programmes. He was one of the first convenors of judges for the IPA Effectiveness Awards. He has Masters degrees from Bath School of Management and Ashridge (Hult) Business School. Since 2005 he has worked as a consultant, coach, and author. The Anatomy of Humbug (2015) uncovered the hidden assumptions made in organisations about how advertising works, and his new book Why Does The Pedlar Sing? looks at the links between advertising and entertainment.

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# Introduction

Anyone who works in B2B advertising probably remembers that great ad from the fifties for McGraw Hill magazines – the fearsome prospect in the bowtie saying ‘I don’t know you. I don’t know your company....etc’ – and the headline: ‘Sales start before your salesman calls, with advertising in business magazines.’

It’s a compelling argument (and I entirely agree with it) but, interestingly, it’s not what the great Claude Hopkins wrote in 1923 in his influential book, *Scientific Advertising*:

*Advertising is not to keep your name before the people. It is not to help your other salesmen.*

Hopkins thought the job of every ad was to close a sale. He wrote mainly direct response ads where this is true. But he was wrong to claim this is the only role for advertising, or even the most important one.

Advertising can create sales by giving information, persuasive facts, rational arguments. But it creates truly competitive and long-lasting brands, by doing something much simpler (though often more difficult) – by making them famous.

Jeremy Bullmore, former Creative Director and Chair of J Walter Thompson, London, wrote twenty years ago:

*... for most human beings, fame not only holds a powerful fascination but bestows an incalculable value on anything that enjoys it. We value the famous far more highly than the little known.*

The importance of fame in growing the sales of brands is increasingly recognised today by industry experts from Byron Sharp to Bob Hoffman. In my own book, *Why Does the Pedlar Sing?* I explore this theme and explain why ads that have often been despised as ‘mere entertainment’ are frequently highly effective means of creating fame (or ‘mental availability’) and, therefore, sales.

You may think this is all very well for marketing drinks, or fashion, or even mobile phones (how much more did you pay for that iPhone?). But does it apply to B2B, where decisions ought surely to be rational, dispassionate, unswayed by the glamour of a famous name?

I believe it does, every bit as much as in B2C. This is not to say that due diligence is not required, or evidence not examined, or specifications not carefully matched. But however rigorous the buying process, there are three reasons why the famous brand will always have a massive advantage over the little known one.

Firstly, because it has a much greater chance of getting on to the consideration list in the first place. Search is all very well. But at the end of the day the most important search engine is still the one in somebody's head.

Secondly, because B2B decisions, much more than B2C ones, usually involve many stakeholders and decision influencers – the boss, the board, the finance director, the end users, in some cases maybe the entire staff. And fame is a social thing – it's easier to get agreement, acceptance, and even enthusiasm for a name everyone knows.

Thirdly, however hard we try to make purely rational decisions, there are always huge unknowns. Who will deliver best on their promises of service? Which technology will actually perform in this specific situation? Is it really possible to detect significant differences between four suppliers who all promise similar things?

There is no such thing as a purely rational decision, in business or anywhere else. We all want to feel safe; we all want to feel excited; we all want to feel we have what others will admire. The famous brand is more likely to deliver all these emotional benefits, and so when other things are equal – or imponderable – it will be more likely to win the contract. It will get on to more pitch lists, it will more easily achieve consensus among the decision makers, it will more often be the one everyone feels comfortable with. There should be no shame in creating fame.







# Who's Allowed to Create Ads?

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The Interesting Case of Sunny Jim

## ‘As Well-Known As President Roosevelt’

In the summer of 1902, the United States of America was smitten with a cartoon character - an elderly gentleman in an odd eighteenth century costume who sported a walking cane and a distinctive pigtail. He wasn't the star of an animated film (those hadn't been invented yet), nor even of a comic strip - he existed only as a drawing in a series of press and poster ads for a new breakfast cereal called Force. He had been introduced in a full-page newspaper ad with the first of many rhymes:

*Jim Dumps was a most unfriendly man, Who lived his life on the hermit plan;  
In his gloomy way he'd gone through life, And made the most of woe and strife;  
Till Force one day was served to him - Since then they've called him 'Sunny Jim'.*

The adverts had been written by 23-year-old Minnie Maude Hanff, who wrote children's rhymes for newspapers in New York City. Force initially rejected her offers of advertising jingles, telling her that selling cereals was a serious business. But then one of her newspaper contacts suggested her rhymes might sell better with illustrations; he put her in touch with Dorothy Ficken, then still in high school, who created that iconic image of Sunny Jim. As a result, the owner of Force, Edward Ellsworth, eventually bought the campaign, and spent heavily behind it.

## Original Sunny Jim Campaign For Force Cereal In The US



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earnest\\_Elmo\\_Calkins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earnest_Elmo_Calkins)

And within a few months, Sunny Jim had become a national phenomenon. Soon, the public started sending in their own Sunny Jim rhymes, by the hundred. Songs and comedies were written about him, and a 'Characteristic March and Two-step' for piano named after him. A seaside cave in La Jolla, California was christened 'Sunny Jim', as its opening resembled his pigtailed silhouette. By September, the advertising trade magazine *Printers' Ink* could remark that:

*No current novel or play is so universally popular. He is as well known as President Roosevelt or J. Pierpont Morgan.*

## But Did Sunny Jim Sell Any Cereal?

Yet despite his extraordinary and indeed lasting fame, Sunny Jim was to go down in advertising history as an example of famous advertising that did not sell the product. It would be cited even generations later by advocates of the ‘hard sell’ to demonstrate that frivolity and humour are not effective, and that selling is, indeed, a serious business. In 1908, the advertising manager of the Western Clock Manufacturing Company wrote to his directors:

*I would not recommend any so-called ‘clever’ advertising or humorous copy... for instance like the Sunny Jim campaign...*

Or as G.H.E. Hawkins put it, in an influential 1914 book on newspaper advertising:

*He was a national character while he existed, but the trouble was there wasn’t enough connection between ‘Sunny Jim’ and the product.*

And at the time of Minnie Hanff’s death, in 1943, Printers’ Ink wondered:

*Couldn’t it be said that optimistic advertisers, who find their advertising getting public attention but not sales, have a ‘Sunny Jim’ on their hands?*

Even Stephen Fox, who tells the Sunny Jim story in his classic 1984 history of American advertising, *The Mirror Makers*, concurs with this verdict, reflecting sadly that ‘Great popularity, it seemed, did not necessarily translate into sales’.

Such slurs, repeated often enough, take on a life of their own. But do they stand up to scrutiny? The answer is – not very well. If we look at the actual history of Sunny Jim and Force, we will find a much more nuanced story, which also tells us a lot about how and why the advertising business has mythologised itself for its own ends throughout the twentieth century.


## What Really Happened

It's true that Force, in the USA, did not achieve a lasting success in the marketplace. There are a number of possible reasons for this, but the advertising is almost certainly not one of them. In fact, the fame of Sunny Jim in the early years of the brand was matched by a dramatic increase in sales. According to an article in *Canadian Grocer*, by 1904 the output of one mill at the start of the campaign had already increased to the output of four, together producing 360,000 packages each day. We don't know what Force retailed at, but let's guess at a conservative 5 cents a package, the price of a loaf of bread: that represents a substantial annual turnover of \$6.5 million after two or three years of trading. Certainly enough to justify an annual ad budget of, say, \$500,000, which would put it on a par with leading brands like Quaker Oats (and at this date, still well ahead of Coca-Cola).

But just about this time, things started to change. Ellsworth wanted advice on marketing another cereal brand, H-O oats, and invited the recently founded New York advertising agency of Calkins and Holden to his offices in Buffalo. On that trip Earnest Elmo Calkins, whose life had been shaped by a bout of measles at the age of six which left him profoundly deaf, and his more extroverted partner, Ralph Holden, successfully persuaded Ellsworth to give them the Force account. No doubt they argued that the campaign, for which Ellsworth had been buying his own media as well as commissioning his own creative work, now deserved the attention of real advertising professionals.

Calkins soon made major changes to the Sunny Jim campaign. Out went the amusing rhymes and Dorothy Ficken's innocent drawings. A new style of illustration reinvented Sunny Jim as a weird figure with an egg-shaped head, while solid blocks of prose lectured the reader on a mixture of nutrition and 'positive thinking', always ending with the words 'Be Sunny!'

## Ad Agency Rebrand Of Sunny Jim In The US



**"BE SUNNY"**

**I** FIND that on these cold mornings a little thought mixed with my breakfast makes it more palatable and keeps me warmer during the day.

For instance, the other morning when the mercury threatened to fall out of the bottom of the thermometer, I found my cream frozen when I sat down to the breakfast table.

Necessity has ever been the mother of invention, and I've celebrated a sort of Thanksgiving Day ever since for the discovery I made that morning.

I'm very fond of Chocolate and also of Cocoa. I like the rich flavor and at the same time I know how nutritious they are.

The discovery I made wasn't a discovery, exactly—I simply found a new combination, by using the rich, creamy Chocolate, steaming hot as it was, in place of the cream for my bowl of "FORCE."

I suppose I've eaten "FORCE" in more different ways than anybody else, and I like most of them, but I want to tell you that this combination of the crisp flakes of the world's best food, warm from a quick toasting in the oven, and hot Chocolate instead of cream, is just about the best-tasting thing that has ever passed my lips.

Better try it—to-morrow morning.

There's enough nutriment for brain and muscle in a bowl of "FORCE" and a cup of Chocolate to carry one through a much harder day than you or I are likely to have, and enough left to make us feel fresh and strong at the day's end.

This new recipe isn't in my book, "The Gentle Art of Using Force," but it contains some other good ones.

I'll send you a copy for a 2c. stamp.

Be Sunny!

Yours truly,

*Sunny Jim*

BUFFALO.

Source: <https://www.atticpaper.com/proddetail.php?prod=1904-force-cereal-ad-sunny-jim>

Calkins's revised version of Sunny Jim failed to maintain the momentum of the business - the agency was fired (Calkins later claiming that Ellsworth failed to pay them what he owed), and the campaign discontinued. All this happened just as Kellogg's was beginning to advertise Corn Flakes nationally for the first time, and C. W. Post was launching Post Toasties - both heavily advertised brands and, arguably, superior products. While Force lost market share, Ellsworth mismanaged other aspects of the business too, and his creditors, mainly banks, took control. The Force brand was then sold to the Hecker Company, and later changed owners several times.

Interestingly, though, the brand continued to flourish in the UK, where it was consistently advertised from 1903 onwards with a campaign that remained true to the original 'distinctive asset' of Sunny Jim.



### Continuation Of Original Sunny Jim Campaign In The UK



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/544231936199881884/>

The character was so famous that, in 1911, G.K. Chesterton could write of the death of a popular figure in one of his first Father Brown stories, 'It was like hearing that Sunny Jim had hanged himself; or that Mr. Pickwick had died in Hanwell'. By 1927, 250,000 Sunny Jim dolls had been sold in the UK, while sales of the cereal continued to grow. My mother vividly remembered owning a Sunny Jim doll as a little girl, and decades later could repeat the British slogan – 'High o'er the fence leaps Sunny Jim/ Force is the food that raises him...'. After a peak in sales around 1930 the brand gradually lost market share to other, more heavily supported brands, and to product innovations such as Frosties or Ricles. Yet remarkably, Force (eventually owned by Nestle) was still sold in the UK until 2013, and Sunny Jim still appeared on the pack to the very end.

## Original Sunny Jim Campaign Sustains Force Cereal In The UK Until 2013



Source: <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/breakfast-cereal-mascots-beloved-and-bizarre/>

## The Rise Of 'Professionalism' And The 'Hard Sell' In Advertising

So, who created the narrative of Sunny Jim's failure as an advertising campaign? We can partly point the finger at Calkins, for whom the experience seems to have rankled throughout his long life. He later declared he had hated the original campaign right from the start. In his many books and writings on advertising he repeatedly distanced himself from the stigma that had attached to Sunny Jim, and in the process did all he could to reinforce the myth of its ineffectiveness:

*The advertising absolutely sold Sunny Jim to the public, but it did not sell Force. Humor, you see, is a very good servant but a bad master.*

Yet Calkins himself had written successful campaigns that used humour and rhyme, including the character of 'Phoebe Snow' to advertise the Lackawanna Railroad. The real roots of his antipathy to the campaign go deeper. Calkins believed strongly that advertising should be professionalised, and thought only the best sort of Ivy League graduates should be employed as copywriters – certainly not a couple of 'girls', as Hanff and Ficken are described in the 1902 Printers' Ink article. Sunny Jim could not be allowed to succeed, because he had been created not by a professional advertising agency, but by a jobbing writer and an artist still in high school – and both women, at that.

But it was not just Calkins who needed this campaign to fail. From the outset, advertising professionals had been quick to sneer at Sunny Jim, as Printers' Ink again records:

*... there was an instant chorus of disappointment from those who 'knew' good publicity when they saw it. Many of the critics suffered pangs of real grief that money should be wasted in so wanton a way, and the advertising craft in general seemed confident that the Force folks had finally reached the utmost bounds of vapidty: 'Punk!' said some. 'Rotten!' said others. 'Good Lord!' said still others... when a firm is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars for space it would seem the plainest business sense to pay a decent salary to a man who could write good copy.*

It was about this time that the emerging 'profession' of advertising was beginning to distance itself as far as it could from the worlds of entertainment and popular culture. In 1903 John E. Kennedy defined advertising as 'salesmanship in print', and inspired Albert Lasker to make his agency the home of 'reason why' advertising – a model of advertising as rational persuasion that has dominated the professional discourse to the present day. Kennedy's successor at Lasker's agency, Claude Hopkins, asserted that no frivolity should be allowed in advertising because 'people do not patronise a clown' – decades later, his disciple David Ogilvy would repeat that 'selling is a serious business'. The dominant professional model of advertising since 1900 has been that advertising influences people through communicating facts and benefits, not by entertaining. The myth of Sunny Jim's failure has been endlessly repeated because it supports this belief system.

Yet just as Sunny Jim's sales effectiveness has been misrepresented, so the narrative of advertising as rational persuasion misrepresents the reality of how advertising works to build brands. Byron Sharp and his colleagues at the Ehrenberg-Bass institute have now argued cogently for decades that advertising principally works by creating 'mental availability' – distinctive memory connections that make a brand more easily recalled in more situations, and so more likely to be preferred. An important part of this process is the creation and nurturing of distinctive brand assets, which may include visual images such as logos or symbols, verbal forms like slogans, musical forms like jingles – and brand characters like Sunny Jim. As Professor Jenni Romaniuk shows in her important book on brand assets, characters are not only highly distinctive but evoke an emotional response that helps lodge them in the memory. Today we not only know that Sunny Jim was an effective campaign, but we also understand why it was.

The false narrative that accrued around Sunny Jim was an opening salvo in the ad industry's ongoing attempt to present itself as a 'respectable' profession. Throughout the twentieth century it would reject and deny its true antecedents in P.T. Barnum and the travelling medicine shows; it would do all it could to distance itself from the vulgar world of popular entertainment, and it would consistently define the task of advertising as a process of rational persuasion in which humour and 'frivolity' had no place.

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This narrative also served to protect the sacred turf of advertising production from incursions by other 'creative' groups. If it were to be admitted that successful advertising often depended on characters, songs, or humour, smart clients might at some point decide it made more sense to hire professional entertainers to create their campaigns rather than ad agencies. And where might that end?

## References

- I am hugely indebted to Eileen Margerum's paper for the full story of Sunny Jim. Other references in my text are from Fox, and from the obituary in the Greenville Record-Argus, to be found at <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/23413230/the-record-angus-greenville-pa-30-dec/>.
- For the theory of advertising as 'creative publicity', the essential texts are Sharp and Romaniuk.
- The self-image of the advertising industry throughout the twentieth century has been explored in brilliant detail by Lears and Rutherford.
- I have written much more about theories of how advertising works and the role of entertainment in advertising in my two recent books, *The Anatomy of Humbug* and *Why Does the Pedlar Sing?*

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**WARC**  
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# Four Facets of Fame

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Originally Published by WARC<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.warc.com/content/paywall/article/warc-exclusive/four-facets-of-fame/en-GB/136371>

## Summary

### As marketers look for ways to make creativity more effective, they should look for ways to build ‘fame’.

- Fame is a way of thinking about ‘mental availability’ – it is not a simple concept, and making something famous is far from easy or straightforward.
- Fame emerges from the interactions between people, and between people and media – we can create the conditions for fame, but we can never entirely control or predict it.
- There are at least four conditions for building fame: intrinsic appeal, mass audiences, distinctiveness and social diffusion.

## Why it matters

Fame is widely recognised as an important aspect of brand-building, but what fame is, and how to generate it, is not widely understood or analysed by marketers.

## Takeaways

There are four facets of fame for brands to consider:

1. The intrinsic appeal, attraction, or ‘stickiness’ of the product or performance, as experienced by the public
2. The ability to reach mass audiences, and be seen to reach mass audiences
3. Distinctiveness that uniquely identifies the famous object
4. Social diffusion, or the active involvement of the public in sharing and otherwise engaging with the famous thing.

When Andrew Ehrenberg and his colleagues first proposed the idea that most advertising is ‘mere publicity’ back in the 1990s, the marketing and advertising worlds mostly ignored them. It wasn’t just that Ehrenberg explicitly denied so much of the received wisdom which the industry held as articles of faith – that advertising depended on transmitting rational arguments, product benefits, selling propositions, or at least by communicating unique ‘positionings’ or ‘essences’ which created meaningful differentiation between brands. It was also that ad agencies and their clients just didn’t know what to do with the new theory. It looked far too simple: as I myself wrote, some years ago, about the ‘mere publicity’ model, it doesn’t make anyone look particularly clever – not the client, certainly not the planners, and not even the creative department – so nobody usually wants to do it.

But if this was what we all thought (and I include myself), we were quite wrong. I used to describe this model of advertising, which is now more precisely founded in the concept of ‘mental availability’ (Sharp 2012) as ‘simple fame’. But fame is anything but simple, and making something famous is far from easy or straightforward.



I still think we can, and should, make the verbal leap from dry, precise ‘mental availability’ to lively, colloquial ‘fame’. After all, nobody ever wrote a hit musical called ‘Mental Availability’. And besides, mental availability – the likelihood that a brand will come to an individual’s mind fluently in as many situations as possible – is a psychological construct, but fame is a social construct. Fame emerges from the interactions between people, and between people and media; mental availability is an outcome of it. And because it is emergent, we can create the conditions for fame, but we can never entirely control or predict it.

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*‘The only thing all successful brands have in common is a kind of fame.’*

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More marketers and agencies today are getting used to the idea that one of their key tasks is the creation of mental availability. But to achieve this, they need to think about creating fame – and ‘fame’ is still a word that seems to sit uncomfortably in the marketing lexicon. True, it’s twenty years since Jeremy Bullmore perceptively wrote that ‘the only thing all successful brands have in common is a kind of fame’, and I’m told Nigel Bogle used to describe his agency as a ‘fame factory’. More recently, Binet and Field have shown that campaigns creating fame, in the sense of social diffusion, are the most effective, while System1 Research test ads for their ability to create ‘Fame, Feeling, and Fluency’. But the word still doesn’t appear in the index of any of my advertising textbooks, nor does it feature much in published case studies or creative briefs.

Why don’t we talk more about fame when we make advertising? Perhaps it’s because fame appears not just alarmingly capricious, but too frivolous, too much like showbusiness for an advertising industry that has been taught that ‘selling is a serious business’. Yet it is precisely these carnival connotations of fame that we need to embrace and respect. Making a brand famous is not so very different from making a celebrity famous, or a pop record, or a film franchise. And this has been true since the earliest consumer brands, like Quaker Oats, Coca-Cola or Sunlight Soap, adopted the techniques of Phineas T. Barnum and the travelling medicine shows.

So I believe the creation of fame is a topic that deserves the serious attention of advertising and marketing professionals. But how are we to go about doing it? Perhaps surprisingly, I knew of no existing framework or theoretical basis in the advertising and marketing literature for creating ‘fame’. So I have tried to make one up. I offer it tentatively, as a work in progress, and if it turns out I have been reinventing someone else’s wheel I should be glad to hear about it. Meanwhile, this framework still feels to me robust and, more importantly, useful.

My suggestion is that the attempt to create fame requires us to pay attention to four conditions if we are to maximise our chances of success. The four conditions all interact with each other, so are closely linked in practice. That's why I also refer to them as the Four Facets of Fame. They are as follows:

1. The **intrinsic appeal**, attraction, or 'stickiness' of the product or performance, as experienced by the public
2. The ability to reach **mass audiences**, and be seen to reach mass audiences
3. **Distinctiveness** that uniquely identifies the famous object
4. **Social diffusion**, or the active involvement of the public in sharing and otherwise engaging with the famous thing.

The word 'stickiness' is borrowed from Malcolm Gladwell, whose 2000 book *The Tipping Point* is one of my sources of inspiration, as is Derek Thompson's, *Hit Makers: How Things Become Popular* (2017). Both authors draw parallels between fame and epidemiology, though they interpret this in different ways: Gladwell stresses one-to-one propagation ('the way viruses do'), while Thompson emphasises common-source transmission (the way cholera can be transmitted through a contaminated water source). I believe that in 'social contagion' both matter; that few things become truly famous today without some mass broadcast events, though they equally need to be amplified through social engagement and exchange.

Both authors also agree that some things are intrinsically more infectious – or 'sticky' – than others, just as the intrinsic properties of an organism make it more or less infectious (a topic we're all too familiar with in recent months). Trying to define what qualities make a song, an ad, a film, or a celebrity more appealing is ultimately an impossible task – but that doesn't mean we can't make some general observations. Thompson points to the balance between familiarity and novelty as one factor, an important principle in an ad business that has come to over-value 'originality' or 'disruption' for its own sake. Patterns of rhyme, rhythm or assonance that likewise marry regularity with just enough unexpectedness are also common to pop songs and political or advertising slogans. But apart from this there is also a less definable quality, which, nevertheless, can generally be improved by sympathetic research – simply finding out what gives people the most satisfaction or pleasure.

So there's much that can be done to create something potentially famous. But there is nothing inevitable or automatic about anything becoming a hit, no matter how good it is. To turn that potential into reality, the other three facets need to kick in.

First of all, it has to reach a big enough audience. Things do not, with vanishingly rare exceptions, really 'go viral'; even when they appear to, they actually depend on 'mass contamination events'. In Thompson's words, 'to go big, you need that broadcast'.

Secondly – and this is especially important in the case of brands – the public have to remember who you are, and not confuse you with anyone else. The key factor in achieving this is the nurturing of distinctive assets, which may include logos, characters, colours, slogans, jingles, typefaces and other things.

Finally, although broadcasting matters, fame at scale can only be said to occur when the public are not merely passive recipients, but active participants in its creation – when they choose to talk about something, wear it, share it, argue about it, and follow it in the media.

Of the four facets, we could say that two are intrinsic – the performance and the distinctive assets are tangible, specific things created by the brand (or celebrity), which both contribute to the likelihood that it will become famous. These are like the intrinsic qualities of a virus or bacterium that make it more transmissible. The other two facets are contextual, to do with the way things are diffused through a population. By analogy with epidemics, we could call these common source transmission (broadcast) and propagation (social diffusion). To be sure of being famous, you need to achieve both.

The four facets are intimately connected and each affects all the others, which is why it is important to address all four. People will be more inclined to share something they like, and, just as much, more inclined to like something they perceive as popular. They can only interact with something that is distinctive, and by interacting with it they multiply the effects of its distinctive assets (the Nike tee-shirt, the Apple on the laptop). Distinctive assets that create pleasure and emotional involvement, such as characters, are more memorable... and so on.

Perhaps this all sounds rather obvious or banal. But even if so, it needs saying because today it is all too often ignored. Advertisers and agencies are too eager to believe that something clever will ‘go viral’ of its own accord, and so neglect to reach mass audiences. Today’s advertising, as Orlando Wood has shown, is shockingly weak in its use of distinctive assets – ironically, just as we probably understand better than ever the reasons for their importance. Agencies seem too little interested in producing work for brands that is popular and enjoyable, preferring to make things that are too clever, obscure, and only appealing to their peers. As a result, the public today is much more likely to be actively involved in *Strictly Come Dancing*, Marvel Comics movies, or TikTok, than with brands or advertising. My ‘Four Facets of Fame’ can perhaps be improved or elaborated. But I do not think we can afford to ignore them.

*The Four Facets of Fame, and much else, are covered in greater depth in Paul Feldwick’s new book *Why Does the Pedlar Sing? What creativity really means in advertising*. Available as paperback, eBook, or audiobook (read by the author) from <https://www.troubador.co.uk/bookshop/business/why-does-the-pedlar-sing/> or through any retailer.*



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# Brand = Image

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Originally Published in Admap Magazine by  
WARC

In 1971 Carolyn Davidson was a young graphic design student at Portland State University. She was happy enough to earn some extra money when a member of faculty asked her to do some design work for his company, Blue Ribbon Sports, and agreed a fee of \$2 an hour. He wanted a stripe for a new running shoe, asking for 'something that suggests speed'. When, after many hours of work, she presented him and his colleagues with a logo, they were unimpressed and asked 'What else you got?' But after a few minutes her client, realising he needed something urgently for a presentation to the Japanese, grudgingly accepted it. 'I don't love it', he said, 'but maybe it will grow on me.' He paid Carolyn's bill of \$35.

In case you haven't twigged yet, the client was Phil Knight, the product he needed a logo for was a new model of sports shoe which he called the 'Nike' after the Greek goddess of victory, and the logo was the original but already very recognisable version of what we now know as the Swoosh. (Ten years later, as the company was growing, Knight presented Davidson with a Swoosh shaped ring and \$150 worth of Nike stock - today worth \$650,000 or so.)

Who can say how the history of Nike might have been different but for that chance encounter? We could assume that Knight's energy and flair would have built a successful business anyway. But at best, it would have been different from the brand we know now, and just possibly, in the unpredictable world of fashion and style, it would just have never taken off as it did. Around the Swoosh, many other elements of Nike success would later accrue - 'Just Do It', the adventurous designs, the celebrity endorsements, the bold and irreverent advertising. But it's conceivable that, without that original element to set the tone, none of that would have happened.

Most theory about brand building assumes that the correct procedure is to start with a definition of the 'brand essence' - maybe at the heart of a 'brand key' or 'brand onion' - and that the creative task is then to communicate this through images or behaviour. But history shows us that the actual sequence of events is often the other way round - many brands start with a visual image, and the meaning - or meanings - of the image are created by the brand's various stakeholders. In fact, I want to suggest that this sequence is probably much more common, and may be a more helpful one for us to have in mind, than the received wisdom about brand essence coming first.

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*So maybe the powerful visual symbols of successful brands are not always chosen as neat expressions of a previously selected abstract idea; they are, rather, selected by a combination of intuition and chance, and the power of the image itself, a power which cannot ultimately be reduced to words, then plays an important part in developing the meaning that the brand has for all its stakeholders*

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Because Nike is one of the great brand success stories, I've heard many people over the years attempt to use it as an example of a brand with 'strong values' or a 'strong essence'. I've heard it claimed that Nike is all about 'winning' or about 'endurance' or some other, more or less banal, verbal construct. I've also heard, from people who've worked with or for Nike, that the organisation has never had a written statement of its 'values' or 'essence'. Whether that's literally true or not, I'm much more inclined to believe that Nike's success emerged not from abstract thinking, but from a combination of the passion and energy of its people and the imaginative power of what it actually did visually – the designs, the advertising, and not least that original image.

Like a lot of powerful images that have helped build brands, there's a definite element of happenstance about the Swoosh. Both the Dulux dog and the Andrex puppy (UK brand icons) were reportedly last minute additions to one off TV Commercials – the Old English Sheepdog as a decorative prop for an otherwise unmemorable Dulux ad, the puppy as an inspired substitute when copy clearance unexpectedly refused to allow the little boy in the original script to unroll the toilet paper down the garden. And I have read (though I can't now find the reference) that the American Express 'Centurion's Head' came from a random trawl through a box of printer's blocks. As for Steve Jobs driving past the apple orchard... we'll come to that later.

So maybe the powerful visual symbols of successful brands are not always chosen as neat expressions of a previously selected abstract idea; they are, rather, selected by a combination of intuition and chance, and the power of the image itself, a power which cannot ultimately be reduced to words, then plays an important part in developing the meaning that the brand has for all its stakeholders. If it's hard to imagine Nike without the Swoosh, how might the history of Venice have been different without its winged lion? Venice today is a beautiful crumbling backwater, but for over a thousand years it was the centre of one of the world's most powerful trading empires, with dockyards that could build and fit out a warship in a day. The winged lion, which appears not just all over Venice but throughout the eastern Mediterranean, symbolises its dominance in a particular and unique way – it's not just a lion, with its connotations of strength and right to rule, but a lion with wings, a lion that could cross the sea at a moment's notice to wreak vengeance if necessary. The winged lion, like all the best symbols, is an image with many meanings, suggesting for example both peaceful rule and warlike anger, both beauty and strength, yet the power of the image itself immediately transcends any words that we attempt to reduce it to. I think it likely that over the centuries, this symbol must have played an important role in creating the shared identity of the Venetians themselves, and in enabling them to project their power over others.

It would be fun to think that such a powerful symbol must have been created by a Venetian committee of PR and branding experts, who sat down in the eighth century and drew up a brand onion around words like 'strength', 'fierceness', and 'empire'. Yet the circumstances that led to this image were quite fortuitous: the winged lion just happened to be the conventional symbol for St Mark the Evangelist, whom the Venetians adopted in the ninth century as their patron saint. After a while the saint's symbol began to appear on the city's war banners, and the rest is history.

It seems somehow appropriate that today the 'Lion of St Mark' is also one of the most prestigious creative awards in advertising. It might also be regarded as the ancestor of so many furry animals that have acted as brand symbols ever since: the PG Chimps and their successor 'Monkey', the Cresta and Hofmeister Bears, Tony the Tiger, the Honey Monster, the Dulux sheepdog, the Andrex puppy, and most recently those Meerkats. Like the lion of St Mark, none of these brand symbols was developed as an expression of an abstract set of brand values; they were all adopted because they were memorable, or entertaining, or for other reasons that are no longer relevant. When John Webster first presented the Cresta Bear, the client is reported to have asked in bewilderment – 'Why a polar bear?' To which John replied: 'Why not?' (Presumably the same lack of logic led to Coca Cola, years later, developing a highly successful commercial full of polar bears which have also become recognisable brand properties.)

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To be clear, I'm not just asserting the rather obvious point that visual symbols play an important role in building brands, but that the visual symbol itself is often where the brand begins, and where it starts to derive its uniqueness and its meaning from. I think this may be as true today, in the digital age, as it was in the middle ages. So, as a final example, it may not be coincidence that the most powerful (as indicated by premium price, margin, and market cap) and resilient brand in the field of digital technology remains Apple, which right from its inception was a powerfully visual brand. Compare the fortunes of Apple with those of Dell, which for a while dominated the PC category through its low cost advantage, but never built a brand that could have helped it survive changing conditions or support innovation. Apple, of course, has outlasted Dell – and even outperformed Microsoft – most obviously because of its success at innovation. But I contend that it is also the power of the Apple brand that made this possible, both through its influence on the internal culture of the organisation and in enabling swift take up of its best innovations at a high margin. While Michael Dell was content to name his company after himself, and paid no attention whatever to its visual presentation, Steve Jobs right back in 1976 decided to call his startup Apple, because he had just driven past an apple farm and thought the name was 'fun, spirited, and not intimidating'. The original rainbow apple was designed that year by Rob Janoff, with a bite out of the side solely to indicate this was an apple not a cherry. It's hard to imagine quite what a bold and imaginative gesture this was in the computing world of 1976 - and even more than the Nike Swoosh, I can't help feeling that this initial, radical choice of image made everything else possible, or at least a lot more possible than it would have been at 'Jobs-Wozniak Computing Inc'. It presaged the '1984' launch of the Macintosh, and the subsequent growing emphasis on visual design in both devices and



interfaces, down to crucial details like the white earphones on the iPod. And as with Nike, I strongly suspect that this visual symbol and all those that followed it transformed the relationships between brand and employees, and brand and customers. I do not know whether Apple, any more than Nike, ever had their version of a brand onion: in my view, they never needed one, because that original image said it all, more richly, more eloquently, and more precisely than any words on a Powerpoint slide could ever do.

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*And unlike words, a visual symbol can absorb changes in meaning too, so that the Apple logo can now evoke entertainment as easily as it once evoked computing.*

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I'm arguing that visual images are not so much representations of (a single) meaning as they are generators of (multiple) meanings. But we could see these visual images as accumulators of meaning too. As time passes, multiple experiences of the brand become associated with the image, and as a result the image grows in power, rather than diminishing. You look at the Apple logo now, or the Nike Swoosh, and its meaning for you may include your new iPhone, the legend of Steve Jobs, your most enjoyable run, memories of ads and a million other things. Hence a monkey can evoke a powerful urge for a cup of tea, and the winged lion struck fear into people's hearts along the Dalmatian coast. That is why visual consistency over time is important. And unlike words, a visual symbol can absorb changes in meaning too, so that the Apple logo can now evoke entertainment as easily as it once evoked computing.

Images have been described as 'polyvalent' – they can carry a multitude of meanings. That is part of their strength – it is also, perhaps, why organisations often fear them and distrust them. Perhaps companies have become frightened by the power of the visual image, the fact that they cannot ultimately define it or put it into words or control it. But they may do better if they have the courage to ride that tiger – and not, as Exxon/Esso appears to have done, to reject it. Paradoxically, while the digital world is saturated with visual images, moving or static, from YouTube to Instagram, many digital brands seem quite unvisual – check out Amazon, eBay, Yahoo. It may be that while any of these is strong enough for other reasons (as Dell used to be) this doesn't matter. But the case of Apple suggests that in the long term, this may not just be a missed opportunity, but a fatal weakness.



# Inside the Lauderette

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Originally Published on LinkedIn<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/inside-lauderette-paul-feldwick/>

*Note: The Levi's commercial 'Launderette' from 1985 is one of the most celebrated in the UK within the ad business, and still widely remembered by the public. And it worked: it led to a renaissance in the sales of Levi's jeans, and won an IPA Effectiveness Award in 1988. It also launched the career of model Nick Kamen, who later became a singer. I wrote this piece in May 2021 after hearing the sad news of Nick Kamen's death.*

### 'Launderette' Featuring Nick Kamen For Levi's In 1985



Source: <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/madonna-prot%C3%A9g%C3%A9-and-levis-model-nick-kamen-passes-away-at-59/ar-BB1gnOED>

It was sad to read of the untimely death of Nick Kamen, at the age of 59, from cancer. But it set me thinking about that 1985 [Levi's commercial](#), still widely remembered today and still celebrated in the advertising world. At the time he made that ad, Kamen was best known as a model; the following year he fulfilled his ambition to become a singer. So that commercial may have done as much for Kamen's own career as it did for the sales of Levi's 501s, and that is saying a great deal: as its IPA award-winning [case study](#) shows, this film increased sales of the jeans by 600% within a few months, allowed them to up their price, and marked the long term transformation of the brand's previously flagging fortunes.

But just what is it that made this such a successful and famous piece of advertising? And what lessons can we learn from it?

Much conventional wisdom stresses certain factors as being essential to great advertising. There must be a brilliant and insightful creative brief. There must be a focus on the qualities or benefits of the product. The work must be original, ground-breaking, disruptive.

Yet none of these things is true of 'Launderette'.

## The Brief.

The original brief, reproduced in the 1988 volume of IPA award winners is, at least, brief. It specifies a target audience of 15-19 year old male jeans wearers 'who care about the way they look'. The core of the brief, 'What must the advertising say?', underlined for emphasis, reads:

50ls from Levi's are the right look, and the only label.

You may have your own opinions on this. More importantly, Sir John Hegarty – who created the ad – has recorded what he thought about it:

When I read that my heart sank. I thought that says everything and nothing. I knew it was now down to the magic department.

To be fair to the brief, it also contains, almost as an afterthought, one phrase that appears to point towards where the ad ended up – '[50ls] are the original jean, indelibly associated with the birth of teenage culture in the 50s...' Not that profound or unexpected, perhaps, but something to go on? We'll come back to that.

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*Much conventional wisdom stresses certain factors as being essential to great advertising. There must be a brilliant and insightful creative brief. There must be a focus on the qualities or benefits of the product. The work must be original, ground-breaking, disruptive.*

*Yet none of these things is true of 'Launderette'.*

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## The Product.

The brief had also contained an instruction under ‘Practical Considerations’ – ‘The 501 ‘look’ must be conveyed (product focus).’ Indeed, the 501 look, with its wide legs and bunched crotch, was spectacularly retro in the mid eighties, so far out that it could only go back in (as it did). Yet it’s striking that in the commercial we see very little of the jeans, only a couple of fleeting shots of the button fly and the belt – the overall shape is never actually shown.

There’s also another product quality mentioned in the ad, though most viewers miss it and few remember it: the fact that the jeans are stonewashed. ( If you’re observant, you will see Kamen put stones into the machine ahead of the jeans, just before he’s eyeballed by the two creepy kids.) Whether this was meant to be important or not, I’m not sure – it’s not mentioned in the creative brief – though Hegarty does say it was the start point for his creation of the launderette scenario.

## Originality.

By definition, any successful work is ‘original’ in the sense that it is unique and hasn’t been done before. But as Mark Earls shows elegantly in his book *Copy Copy Copy*, just about any successful work relies much more on recycling existing elements than on breaking conventions. ‘Launderette’ is no exception. It uses a familiar pop song (no matter that it’s anachronistic – though the ad is apparently set in the fifties, ‘Grapevine’ wasn’t written until 1966). The ad as a whole follows a format increasingly familiar by the mid-eighties through the rise of MTV, that of the pop video, where the music track replaces any dialogue or ambient sound. Even the trope of evoking the fifties in an ad was hardly new – I myself worked on a [Pepsi commercial](#) ten years previous to this which did the same, in the wake of the original stage musical *Grease* and the TV series *Happy Days*.

Most remarkably, there are unmistakable echoes of a 1968 [Hamlet commercial](#) created by CDP, in which a young man dressed as a city gent goes into a launderette and removes his clothes, to the consternation of the all-female clientele, before lighting up a cigar. The similarities in the two films between the young women’s hairstyles and expressions are especially striking. Whether this was a purely unconscious bit of plagiarism or a deliberate, knowing homage is impossible to say, and doesn’t much matter.

In any case, none of these observations detracts from the quality or demonstrable effectiveness of the finished ad. I am just saying we could be more critical of some of the common assumptions we might make about what makes a good ad, or how you make one. But then what does make this a great ad, and how was it created? What could we usefully learn from what we know about ‘Launderette’?

There is always going to be an element of what Sir John Hegarty calls ‘the magic department’, but I am reluctant to fall back on that sort of talk too quickly because it tends to close down discussion rather than open it up. I think we can assemble a few more specific clues about how this ad came into being. And, after all, we can always look more intently at the ad itself, at what is there in front of us, and draw our own conclusions.

When BBH first pitched the Levi's business in 1982 (it was only their third account win) they refused to produce scripts, but instead – in Hegarty's words – 'concentrated on making Levi Strauss fall in love again with who they were... where they had come from and what they stood for.' As I've argued in [Why Does the Pedlar Sing?](#) I don't believe brands have unchangeable 'essences' or even 'personalities', but they do unescapably have histories, and they ignore them at their peril. Giving the client the courage to re-engage with the brand's unique history was perhaps the beginning of this ad's success.

However, it didn't happen at once. As Douglas Holt and Douglas Cameron tell in their book *Cultural Branding*, Levi's US management at first insisted on BBH making ads about tangible product qualities, [rivets](#) and stitching, and although these were executed with great taste and style, they hardly moved the sales dial a bit. It was only once Levi's new European boss Bob Rockey decided to give the agency their head that they found what proved to be the right track. Consumer research showed that, for the target group of young men, contemporary America was a turn-off – but a fantasy version of America's past, set sometime in the fifties and peopled with the likes of James Dean and Marlon Brando, was still aspirational and sexy. Around the germ of this retro-style, a small team including Hegarty, designer Ray Petri and film director Roger Lyons built the specific details of a commercial with close attention to detail, arguing over the choice of music track and studying films and photographs of the period. This was no longer an abstract, strategic process, but an embodied and aesthetic one.

However, one of the key visual elements of the commercial was unplanned and fortuitous. The original plan was always for Kamen to wear Y-fronts, but the ITV copy clearance committee considered that too revealing. In the end they decreed that he would have to wear boxer shorts, at that time very out of fashion. As a result of 'Launderette's success they would not stay out of fashion for long. (Yet in a weird coincidence, the city gent in the 1968 Hamlet film is also wearing boxer shorts... I can't quite explain that one.)

What we have in the 'Launderette' commercial then is not a great example of clever briefing, or of telling product truths, or of radical disruption. What we do have is a beautifully crafted piece of film which cleverly unites several threads of popular culture – a mythic fifties America, a beautiful celebrity, a cool classic track, the format of an MTV pop video, and a subtle and witty eroticism. Within forty seconds it creates place, character, and incident. The success of this film lies much more in its tangible, evocative details, than in any abstract idea that can be supposed to lie behind it or shape it. As so often, the work that really mattered in its creation was detailed, specific, aesthetic, and with an element of the completely unplanned as well. I do not think any of this is unusual – in all these respects there are close parallels with the story of the Rowan Atkinson [Barclaycard campaign](#), which I tell at length in *Why Does the Pedlar Sing?* Like those ads and so many others, 'Launderette' is above all a successful piece of popular entertainment, which the public enjoyed and remembered. And that was all it really took to create fame and fortune for the late Nick Kamen, for boxer shorts, and of course, for Levi's.

## Postscript. 11/5/21

Since writing this piece a few days ago there's been a lot more comment about this film on social media, some in response to my article and much elsewhere. Two things stand out for me that I want to mention.

First, an anecdote I have no reason to doubt. The harrassed looking mother with the twins was a member of the production team who suggested her twins would love to be in the film, so they were written in more or less on the set. It now seems such an integral part of the action (and the exchange of glances between her and Kamen as she leaves suggests so much!) that it's hard to believe it was improvised on the day. Yet I know from my own experience and other stories how often commercials went from good to great because the agency team and the client were prepared to allow for the unexpected, like the moment the Martian falls over at the end of the Smash commercial.

Second, and importantly, several people have stressed that, despite the written accounts in Hegarty on Advertising and elsewhere which I was using as my source, this ad was principally conceived and created by Barbara Nokes, a founding partner of BBH who worked for many years as John Hegarty's creative partner. Some relate that Nokes remembered once seeing a man come into a launderette and strip to his underpants in order to wash the rest of his clothes; others cite the importance of the 'female gaze' in this film (the reversal of gender roles, which Holt and Cameron also emphasise) as evidence for this.

I don't have any reason to argue with these claims, and I am quite prepared to believe that this is one of many examples of how women's contributions to famous advertising have been airbrushed out of history - indeed I have quite a lot to say about that subject in my book. But beyond that it would be impertinent of me to try to adjudicate further as to exactly who deserves what share of the credit for this marvellous film, especially as Hegarty, Nokes, and many others who were actually there are still alive and able to speak for themselves if they choose to.

Because it also seems important to acknowledge that just about any great commercial emerges from the combined efforts of a great many people. The original 'Martians' script was conceived and mostly written by Chris Wilkins and Roger Shipley in the pub, but it was John Webster who drew the Martians and imagined their robotic laughter, and it was Bob Brooks who directed the film. It was Rita Selden who saw a rough ad pinned on Julian Koenig's wall and told him the word 'Lemon', buried in the body copy, ought to be the headline. Great ads are not just 'ideas' that spring fully formed from an individual's brain, but artefacts that emerge through a complex process of collaboration and improvisation, skills that are not usually celebrated enough in our discussions of creative work.

As so often, Jeremy Bullmore made the point first, in one of his Campaign columns: 'If five different people lay claim to a great idea, they're all probably telling the truth. When a group works well, nobody should be certain who did what.'



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First Published in May 2022 by The B2B Institute at LinkedIn

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