



AMAZING BRANDS:

What they do and how they do it!

By Carol Chapman, Principal & Co-founder, The Brand Ascension Group

Every business has a brand! Why? *Because your brand is your business™!*

And, every brand has the opportunity to be good, bad or indifferent; or great. For many brands, being good is just fine, but for those few that really push the envelope they prefer to be great or better yet, AMAZING. This paper focuses on brands that have reach the ‘amazing level’. And the question is what does it take to be amazing?

CHARACTERISTICS OF AMAZING BRANDS

Brands become amazing because they know what they stand for, stay true to it and it’s expressed in every thought, every action, every reaction, every interaction, every standard and every process, every decision and every cause they associate themselves with. What is it that amazing brands share in common? They:

- Establish and live up to a set of guiding principles (core values) in everything they do.
- Cultivate distinct branded cultures of inspired and engaged employees.
- Continuously delight their customers knowing that top-line and bottom-line results will follow.
- Establish standards of performance excellence and deliver on them consistently.
- Are innovative and continue to evolve with the times.
- Build community so that others want to be associated with them.
- Evoke and reinforce positive emotions that make people feel good.
- Create enormous employee and customer loyalty through positive, memorable experiences.
- Have a strong point of view that is expressed in creative and authentic ways that makes the world a better place—through even the smallest of gestures.
- Inspire and influence others towards right action.
- Give back to their communities and assist those less fortunate in the world because they care.

Great brands don’t become amazing without working at becoming that way every day. They understand that building and elevating their brand is a conscious, strategic and deliberate process that spans the life of their brand. It’s not a one-time event, haphazard series of actions or a clever advertising message! They put it all on the line with an all out focused effort every day—one employee and one customer at a time.



SOME AMAZING BRANDS



Tony Hsieh, CEO of **ZAPPOS.COM** said in one of his recent blog postings, **“We’re starting a Movement”**. He talks about Zappos.com “changing the world by inspiring and helping other companies to and purpose—all without losing sight of financial goals”. In 2010, Zappos moved up to the #15 spot on Fortune’s

Best Companies to Work For list. Happiness is a guiding principle in their company. By making employees happy, they make customers happy. It’s not surprising to find that 75% of purchases come from repeat customers and they are generating more sustainable profits and long-term financial performance. In 2009, they hit \$1.2B in revenues. In their eleven years in business, they weren’t always as profitable as they are now, but they stayed true to what has meaning and heart for them as a brand, and it’s paying off more than just financially because they care about their employees and their customers.

Zappos Culture is what truly sets them apart. They have a “work hard, play hard” mentality. Their 10 core values are the foundation of their culture and drive the internal and external experience they create for the brand—how they interact and treat customers, reps and one another. For example, *Create Fun and a Little Weirdness* is one of their core values. They express it in creative ways through random acts of kindness on a weekly basis for other employees. It’s refreshing to see a brand that lives and breathes its core values through every aspect of its operations, so much that they open their culture up to other companies and individuals to visit, learn and share with them. And living their values certainly extends beyond the walls of the company as every employee is committed to delivering “Wow” through service to their customers. I’ve personally experienced their wow service and what an amazing brand they are!

RITZ CARLTON has taken luxury to a new art and been known for continuously raising the bar on the quality of its operations and service. Their motto, *“We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen”* and *Gold Standards of Service* are the foundation of the brand. They deliver on these daily. It’s no wonder they continue to sustain one of the highest levels of customer satisfaction in their industry. Through their relentless commitment to and employee passion for what they stand for and a rigorous focus on total quality management they have raised the bar and been awarded the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award not just once but twice—the only company to do so in the service category. That’s pretty amazing!



And, Ritz Carlton Hotels continually lets the competition know they’re a force to compete with and learn from by serving as a role model and leader in their industry. By constantly evaluating itself, the brand continues to elevate its luxury hotel service into an amazing brand experience generating highly inspired, engaged and empowered employees and customer brand champions who receive unparalleled excellence in service.



STARBUCKS continues to overcome the odds of turning a commodity experience into an inspiring brand experience where consumers will pay \$4 for a cup of coffee. Author Joseph Michelli of *The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary*, says Starbucks “took an ordinary product like coffee and significantly added value by staging it in an environment of affordable luxury”. Indeed Starbucks has put a lot of effort into creating an experience that is reaffirmed daily through its business

practices. Let’s not forget their ability to use imagination in expanding and their unique line of coffee offerings. Someone once told me that there are 30,000 ways for Starbucks to serve coffee. That’s pretty amazing.

Their mission is to *inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time*. Starbucks has focused on creating and living up to what they stand for by investing in their internal infrastructure (e.g., their people and culture, systems and processes, and leadership). They are truly an amazing brand as they continue to create new ways to delight their customers—one cup at a time. Talk about caring about their people, they introduced benefits for part time employees, and added a ‘bean stock’ program making all employees partners in the business at a time in the 1990’s when companies were looking at all sorts of ways to cut-back, not increase employee costs. They have always viewed their employees as an investment because they bring the brand to life one cup at a time.

Starbucks demonstrates a strong point of view in wanting to make the world a better place through their social responsibility initiatives and 2015 global responsibility goals. They’re committed to the communities they serve to help create positive change, and finding ways to reduce their environmental impact and build greener stores, while inspiring others to take similar actions. And their commitment to ethical sourcing of coffee continues to contribute to building a better future for farmers they do business with. It doesn’t stop there. They’re also concerned about the wellness of others with a focus on creating healthier and balanced beverage options for their customers. As an amazing brand, they’re taking social responsibility to heart and to a new level because they care, not just because it’s the right thing to do.

These are just a few examples of amazing brands. You’re probably already thinking of some of your favorite ones and as you know amazing brands are not built in a day; they have taken years in the making, one step at a time, one customer at a time, one employee at a time, one passion, inspiration or cause at a time. I wish more businesses would think about what they stand for and bring good deeds to others to make the world better and more amazing for others.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO BECOME AN AMAZING BRAND?

Start with getting crystal clear on what your brand stands for. If you really think about it, what you really stand for is deeply expressed through your brand's core values, distinct personality, the standards you establish and the promise you make and deliver to your employees and customers—consistently.

You can kick-start your way to defining and clarifying your brand values, standards, differentiators, personality and promise, and much more with *Brand DNA: Uncover Your Organization's Genetic Code for Competitive Advantage*. For more information, go to www.branddnabook.com. It's a step-by-step process that will enable you to catapult your way to building the foundation for an amazing and authentic brand.

Study the practices of some of your favorite, amazing brands. You can learn from them but obviously you don't want to imitate them. Take the opportunity to involve, empower and engage your employees in defining and building your amazing brand. Leverage the power of their collective ideas and you'll be amazed at the results.



About the Author -- *Carol is committed to organizations who want to achieve transformational and sustainable brand success through **strategic, internal branding** practices. As co-developer of The Brand DNA JourneySM methodology, she has helped numerous clients create consistent, relevant and distinctive experiences that inspire, motivate and engage employees to deliver memorable customer experiences.*

For 30 years, Carol has cultivated extensive global experience and proven success in leading businesses through significant challenges. Her experience spans a variety of industries including hospitality/hotels and other service related, cable, media, government contractors, government—local, state and municipal, high technology, professional services, financial services—banking and insurance and healthcare.

Carol has a passion for branding, where she believes everyone in an organization is responsible for understanding and delivering “on-brand” experiences. Having held several executive management and strategic HR roles, including Vice President of Human Resources—Asia Pacific for the largest hotel company in the world – Six Continents Hotels (currently Inter-Continental Hotels Group), she has learned that the most successful and sustainable brand organizations harness the energies of their people to bring their brands to life through the power of this most critical asset.

As a captivating international speaker and consultant, she has presented at major conferences and events in London, Singapore, Bali and the U.S. She regularly trains and presents webinars on brand culture and employee engagement, brand definition, brand strategy and management for businesses and is author of numerous articles.

*Carol is co-author of *Brand DNA: Uncover Your Organization's Genetic Code for Competitive Advantage* coming in May 2010. Find out more at www.BrandDNABook.com. Accepting pre-orders.*

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