



## Breakthrough and Innovate Your Brand

By Laurence Knight

From a growth perspective, one should never view the U.S. market as mature. As the most developed market in the world the battle for breakthrough innovation never ends, even in an economic downturn.

During a down cycle, companies are at risk of over-relying on cheap short-term ideas that at best deliver lackluster brand extensions and at worst cannibalize existing business. If they want to be out-front at the upturn, marketers need to keep pushing for, real, incremental growth. You need to focus on inspiring and implementing truly innovative ideas.

Here's five approaches to get your innovative juices flowing.

### **Develop insight platforms.**

A platform is broader than a single idea, and therefore has great business potential across an addressable market. They can inspire the organization to multiple ideas over a period of time, beyond the one-shot deal. The platforms should lead with emotional, functional benefits or sensory-based (attribute or design) insights, and they should be holistic in the way they capture consumer insight and business opportunity.

### **Create a new breakthrough brand.**

Innovation is often viewed through the lens of an existing brand. But sometimes, the way to really go after new business is to let an idea be unrestrained by existing equities. Companies often secede this space to the entrepreneur, and shy away from investing in a new brand. Or, they might try to launch a new brand in a one-off, ad hoc manner rather than creating a consistent and continuous effort.

A good example is the gum Orbit from Wrigley. This was a clear case of breakthrough brand positioning; the launch was backed successfully from a very senior level over a long period of time. But even if you don't actually launch under a new brand this can really inform your innovation strategy. In recent launch work for a new mini yogurt drink, we developed ideas under new and existing brands. Not only did this enrich the ideas that were finally launched under portfolio brands, but it allowed the company to understand the competitive threat and the current brand advantage before making an investment.

### **Brand up.**

Determine how you're positioning an existing brand to drive price and quality to add value to a category – for both the brand and the retailer. Central to this approach is defining the distinct target around which you can focus the brand. Hardees Burgers is a great example of a brand that achieved this by focusing on "young hungry guys."

### **Cross-pollinate categories.**

This is a rich fertile space for insights and ideas, and can allow you to absorb highly relevant secondary benefits into your category. It can also allow you to cross-pollinate categories—the Swiffer is an example of this. The best example we know is a foods company looking to expand into beauty plus benefits, into the world of 'beautiful food.'

### **Breakthrough solutions.**

This is one of the hardest areas to handle because so often innovations lead with a new technology that requires a behavior shift from the consumer. Organizations get very excited without understanding the true consumer translation of the new opportunity or how capable they are of creating new solutions. Ideas need to develop and be positioned for leading edge consumers, and then softened for the broader market opportunity.

---

*Laurence Knight is principal of Fletcher Knight, a marketing consultancy based in Stamford, CT.*