
Mostly the good bits on advertising & branding.

You are here: [Home](#) / [Advertising](#) / The long and short of brand properties

The long and short of brand properties

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We are only half way through 2009 but we've already witnessed the death of several brands, some decades-old. [Business Pundit outlined 20 of them](#), though not all of them are 'dead' technically. Some like Hummer, changed hands. Max Factor was closed in a particular geography and so on. The Business Pundit article set me thinking about one other aspect of business that has seen several 'deaths', viz. brand properties. Brand properties could be anything that helps instant, *identifiable* recall that is unique to a brand – a mascot, a musical refrain or even a tagline. The history of advertising is replete with brand mascots that have played a key role in a brand's success. The Michelin man, Pillsbury Doughboy, Fido Dido, M&M's, Ronald McDonald to name just a few. Check out the [Advertising Icon Museum](#) for more. Going beyond mascots there is the Walking Hands of Yellow Pages, the 'it's a Sony' audio burr of Sony ads and countless others.

In India too, clients and advertising agencies have consciously or otherwise built several unique brand properties:

Air India Maharaja: Bobby Kooka, the man who conceived the Maharaja said, 'He may look like royalty, but he isn't royal'. The figure first made it's appearance in 1946 and was later consistently used across [brochures and some legendary campaigns](#). Today the Maharaja is tucked away in the corner of the [Air India website](#) and perhaps used in a few hoardings. The endearing effect of the mascot is all but gone. I don't think the mascot would evoke the same feeling it did some 20 years ago. A pity really.



Amul girl: the same cannot be said about the Amul girl. She is as endearing today as she was in the 70s. Credit goes to the client and the agency for not attempting to give up the brand property or tinker it in any way. They have not even attempted to make her 'contemporary'. [Her witticisms](#) have remained contemporary.

Asian Paints' 'Gattu': created by R K Laxman in 1954, was once synonymous with the paint brand. Speaking about the project, [Laxman says](#), '*The representatives of an advertising agency asked me if I would create a symbol...they were not clear about exactly what they wanted, and all that they could say was that the trademark should be dynamic, noticeable, attractive, adaptable, unique, and so on*'. Ho hum. The property was dropped to keep pace with the changing times. Perhaps a wise decision, given the dynamics of the category today. As an aside, I came across this [wonderful case study of how in the light of a brand's new positioning the brand mascot was tweaked](#). It was for the Maytag repairman who became irrelevant when the brand's positioning changed from 'dependable' to 'innovative'.

Britannia audio mnemonic: a refrain that is unmistakably Britannia. The 'Intel inside' equivalent.

The music refrains of Titan and Airtel: first created as refrains for their TV commercials these have become excellent reminders for the brands. Amazing how the Titan tune has been woven in different TV commercials in various tunes – from Western classical to hip-hop.

Only Vimal: a memorable campaign from the '80s for the suitings brand. When the market moved to readymades, perhaps Vimal did not catch up and they lost some relevance. The attempt to bring back the line now has not created much impact.

Onida Devil: a great property to convey envy, this is perhaps a case of not knowing what to do with it. The brand also changed hands in terms of agency and it was promptly dropped. Half-hearted attempts to bring it back haven't created a similar buzz.

Other examples abound – the Kelvinator penguin and its tag line 'the coolest one', the Rasna girl and so on. While some have been nurtured and built over the years, others have simply fallen by

it's light humour made the brand endearing. The Maharaja is a pale shadow of his former self. I don't think a 15-year old today would even associate the Maharaja with Air-India.

I guess all this is a function of fatigue setting in the client or agencies' minds about brand properties. They may feel that because they have lived with it for so long, it must be boring. The second reason could be the 'not-invented=here' syndrome. When a new agency is called in they think it's mandatory to junk whatever was created before them. With short tenures of brand & advertising managers being the norm, the urge to 'create something new' rather than build on something is huge. One has to take a leaf from the comic books on how properties can be nurtured and built over the years. And in advertising, whether it is the lovable pug or the ZooZooos, brand properties are a simple way to remember the brand. It is said that 'a brand is what people say about you when you are not there'. Why not make it easy for them?

Any good examples of brand properties that have been built over time? Any property that you felt had potential but not nurtured enough? Do tell.

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