

Think Different

Recently I was chatting to the planning director of one of London's leading creative agencies about the direction their client's brand (a top jeans brand) should take and at the end of the chat they said 'yeah but everyone says we should be more like Apple'.

It was as if they hadn't heard a word I'd said during our meeting, but it got me thinking about why everyone thinks that they have to follow or copy Apple's marketing. And why they really shouldn't.

Apple have been one of the most successful brands of the 21st century, of that there can be no doubt. They have gone from strength to strength across their product line and this has seen their share price rocket.

But how much of this is down to dancing silhouettes and how much of it is down to the innovative culture of Apple and its inherent marketing culture?

Apple have second guessed the market almost to perfection (certainly in the case of the iPod and iTunes music store). The kudos built around these products has had a 'halo' effect on their more traditional hardware and software products. But the real genius has been in the product design and then the hands on marketing management from above.

When Apple release a product it usually takes the majority of the world by surprise. Not for them the press previews of products or sneaky peaks to opinion formers. Instead Apple rely on the almost religious fervor of Mac fans and the blogosphere to generate a huge amount of hysteria over what Apple CEO Steve Jobs will announce next.

Once a product has been designed and is ready for market it is

announced to great fanfare and drama by Jobs. And almost as soon as it is announced the product hits the shops causing the flash mobs outside Apple stores all around the world (which are then newsworthy events in themselves).

Following the product announcement, Apple unleash a large advertising drive. And whilst the creative for the advertising usually hits the spot, it is rarely award winning in the way that Guinness ads have traditionally been or that Playstation ads have been. Yes Apple realise the power of music and iconography in their ads, but the real difference happens before the product has been launched. The manner of the product announcement, the closely guarded secrets and rarity of new products lead to generating the huge volume of noise on the web, in magazines and in the blogosphere that truly drives Apple's marketing.

Timing is also key to an Apple product launch. The iPod Nano was announced almost immediately after the Sony PSP launched in Europe - coincidence? I think not. In addition, rather than trying to lead from a technological standpoint, Apple wait for the right time to launch a product. Whilst many of their competitors have launched a portable video device, Apple are yet to release a video iPod. Not because they can't, but because they believe the market isn't yet ready for it. And why cannibalise the still growing market for the current iPods?

So if Apple have been so successful why shouldn't other companies copy this marketing?

The answer is you can't.

Not many brands have the emotional power of Apple. For years the underdog to Microsoft, Apple evangelists have formed a huge network of websites, blogs and magazines and it is these evangelists who continue

to over hype Apple products and launches.

Not many brands have the connection to the creative industries that Apple have and in the early days of the iPod it was these mavens who were the early adopters of the white ear buds and who made Apple a cool brand.

So, if you can't copy Apple what can you do? Brands can certainly learn from Apple. They can see how intrinsic marketing is to the business strategy. Arguably the only thing more important to the success of Apple than its marketing is its product development.

Brands can learn from Apple's timing. It's not about being first to market, it's about judging the market trends and delivering a product that consumers get. Not faster, not stronger just easy to use and aesthetically pleasing.

Brands need to understand the true value of the internet. The speed at which a meme, rumour or news can pass around the world wide web is phenomenal and if you can tap in to the blogosphere, podcasting or whatever the most appropriate online media there is for your brand you can get ahead of the curve.

Apple understand their target audience, they understand PR, they know their brand and they see marketing as the key to their success. All incredibly important things for a brand, but they've been done now. Don't just copy them, innovate based on your brand, your product offering and your culture. Just think different...