

Show me the founder, I'll show you the brand



There was a terrific picture recently on the back page of *The Guardian* featuring the founders of Innocent Drinks, Adam, Richard and Jon. All three were lying on bean bags in casual clothes, smiling up at the camera.

The profile that accompanied the photograph told the famous story of how the three Cambridge graduates tested their smoothies at a stall at a music festival in 1998. Customers were asked to sample the product and then cast a vote as to whether the creators should give up their day jobs.

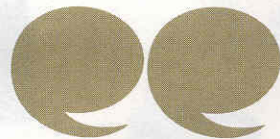
The answer was yes, and six years later Innocent is a huge success. *The Guardian* profile touched on many aspects of their story; the three friends' continued affection for one another, their naturalness, a quirky approach to business, their self-effacing sense of humour, and a conscientious commitment to recycling and the environment. Attractive characteristics for people and, more importantly, their smoothies.

The importance of founders is often ignored by marketers. We can forget that the origin of the word 'brand' has absolutely nothing to do with customers and comes instead from the mark of the creator.

In the case of Innocent the three founders are playing a smart game. If a marketing executive or brand manager had made any of the statements about Innocent that appeared in *The Guardian* profile, its readers would have dismissed the article as PR fluff strategically designed to sell more drinks. But because it is their company and their personalities, the profile was newsworthy, believable brand-building at its very best.

In symbolic terms, having a founder such as Sir Richard Branson launching a Virgin

product, or Miuccia Prada running the family business, is an invaluable brand advantage. They are the brand and their presence confers an authenticity that no other marketing tool can emulate. I tell you this with all certainty: there is no more influential brand communication



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medium than a room in which a founder is talking about his or her brand to customers.

Founders are often managerially crucial. They may not have a brand positioning statement in mind or core brand values to hand, but founders don't need such artificial replications of a brand that they or their family created and built from the very beginning. They know instinctively what to do and how to do it.

When these founders depart or die, the impact it has on their brands can be catastrophic. Marks & Spencer, Laura Ashley and Snapple all experienced the

vacuum created by the exit of a founder and the problems that followed when that vacuum was filled with generic management techniques. The fact that Martha Lane Fox has severed links to lastminute.com and that Donatella Versace has apparently gone into rehab are bigger blows for their brands than any sales dip or product crisis.

When I began to work as a consultant for LVMH two years ago, I had an unusual experience. On my first day in France I was driven to the original house of Louis Vuitton and left there on my own. I was expecting to spend the day in meetings, so was slightly bemused to spend an afternoon in Louis Vuitton's garden, workshop and living room.

I looked at the family portraits, I visited the small museum celebrating his family's craftsmanship and I sat in the chair where he fashioned many of his handmade trunks.

Only later that evening, as I sped back to London on the Eurostar, did I realise what LVMH was doing. Before you see sales data, meet managers or visit stores, get to know the man, the founder, because everything starts with him.



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30 seconds on... Innocent

- This month, Innocent put on the second **Fruitstock free music festival** in Regent's Park, London.
- The brand consistently uses a **friendly, chatty communications style** with surreal humour. One execution from its summer 2004 outdoor campaign simply reads: 'Innocent Smoothies. From the makers of trees and stuff'.

- Each Innocent smoothie meets the **daily recommended intake** of fruit, which, alongside two portions of vegetables, would meet government guidelines of five portions a day.
- Last year founder Richard Reed was named Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year. Innocent won **Business of the Year**

- in Orange's Small Is Beautiful Awards and Best Marketing Campaign for an SME in the Marketing Society Awards.
- Innocent smoothie bottles have contained **25% recycled plastic** since May 2003; it continues to strive toward a 100% recycled bottle.