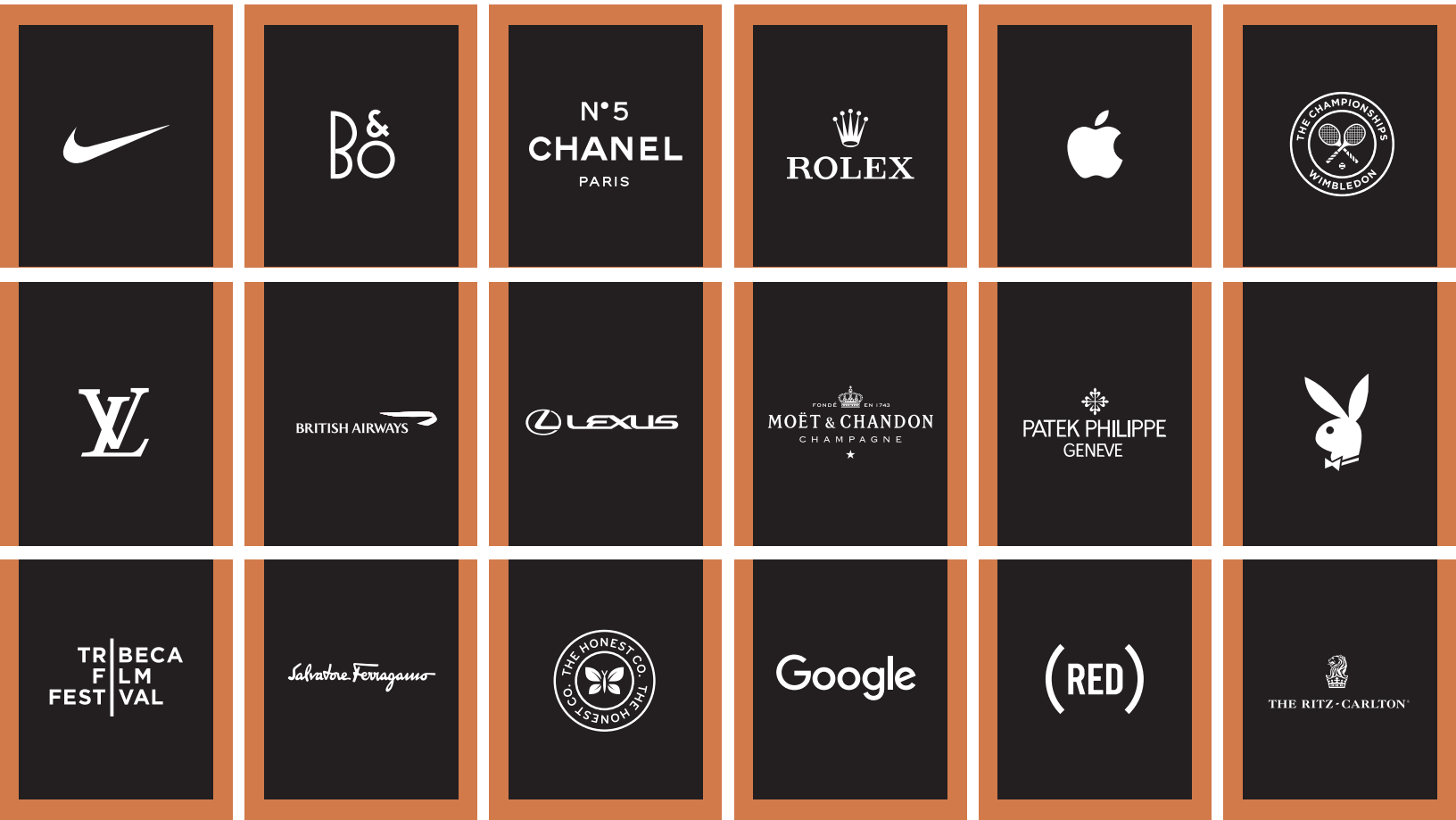


MASTERING THE LANGUAGE OF LEGACY



CREATING
MODERN
LEGACY

BY
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IN C-SUITES across the world, senior managers have begun wrestling with a new marketing challenge: how to find a strategy that will sustain the long-term strength of their brand in a world that's ever-changing.

Central to this debate is the need to reconcile the tension between honoring a brand's heritage and its ongoing innovation efforts. Some leaders believe that shoring up their brand's time-honored equities is the best way to keep it strong, while others believe that winning the future will come from innovation of almost any stripe.

So, which side is right? Anchoring a brand in its glorious history might help protect consumers'

priceless memories, but eternally rehashing the brand's halcyon days may risk making it seem out of touch with modern life. Conversely, portraying everything from the past as old-fashioned risks being shortsighted and expedient as society increasingly struggles with the uncertainty that stems from seismic change and progress.

To help reconcile the two sides of this important argument, Team One founded The Legacy Lab in 2012. The aim was to help business leaders identify the aspects of a brand's history that need to be preserved while also pinpointing when to use heritage and history as a platform for innovation. For over three

years, we've been collecting data from 900+ social media followers, 400+ survey respondents and 60+ one-on-one interviews across more than 20 countries. The Legacy Lab has now amassed an unparalleled body of knowledge that illuminates how leading brands are working to craft a modern legacy, extending their durability, influence and prominence in a fast-moving world.

We observed that there are two quite different cultural codes of brand legacy: “gifting” and “transmission.”

As marketers look to tomorrow, The Legacy Lab will continue to explore the various ways in which real-time brand builders are starting to balance the preservation of hard-won equities with innovation programs that will write a new chapter in their brand's legacies.

EXPLORATION

To shed light on this delicate balancing act, The Legacy Lab commissioned Sign Salad to conduct a groundbreaking study called Mastering the Language of Legacy. Sign Salad is a world leader in decoding the cultural significance of brands through a practice called semiotics—the study of signs and symbols.

The purpose of our study was to gain a deeper understanding of legacy building, with a specific emphasis on how luxury brands express their legacy to the world. We also examined how legacy is being used in a number of different countries in various stages of economic and social development. This paper contains an overview of our findings, which we hope will provide marketers greater fluency in the language of legacy, and stimulate ideas on how a brand's rich heritage can inspire future innovation.

DISCOVERIES

Sign Salad started by decoding the signs and symbols that brands use to communicate their legacy to consumers. We observed that there are two quite different cultural codes of brand legacy: “gifting” and “transmission.” We take a look at each of these codes in turn below.

Gifting

The first and most commonly understood cultural code of legacy is something we've called “gifting”: the passing down of artifacts, personal property, symbolic rituals, traditions, philosophies, values, mythology, inherited practices, product formulas, secret recipes, design and iconography. The sole aim of “gifting” in the modern marketing world is to protect, honor and preserve the brand's past. For example, luxury watchmaker Patek Philippe's advertising reaffirms the

timeless passing down of a watch as an heirloom from parent to child with the line “You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation.”

Legacy brands often employ “gifting” to reinforce their category leadership as well as their indelible role in culture. Perhaps the most famous example of a brand that didn't understand the importance of “gifting” was Coca-Cola's ill-fated 1985 attempt to replace its original formula with New Coke. Coke's executives famously failed to realize how fundamental the preservation of the past was to their relationship with the public. Coca-Cola's original recipe had become an intrinsic part of American popular culture, and changing it was seen as somehow obliterating a cherished cultural touchstone. Our research shows that whether it's a bottle of Chanel N°5 perfume, a can of WD-40 or Nike high-top sneakers, there are some brands that will always benefit from maintaining a link to the past in order to convey their legacy.

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“LEGACY AS GIFTING” BRAND SPOTLIGHT

The British Airways logo, featuring the words "BRITISH AIRWAYS" in a white, sans-serif font on an orange background, with a white stylized wing graphic to the right.

1 British Airways

British Airways (BA) uses references to its national iconography (e.g., British flag, heraldic crest) to reinforce BA as a brand that upholds the legacy of the British Empire—using the “gifting” narrative to position this brand as a vehicle for the legacy of British exploration, conquest, global leadership, power, prestige and national pride. BA’s crest uses a number of artifacts, such as the lion and unicorn, which mirror the heraldry of the British Royal Family’s crest and which further code BA as a ruler of the skies. Depictions of BA’s crew adhere to the legacy of traditional British service through their deference, duty, reliability and quality. Additionally, the military-style pilot uniforms and the practice of awarding BA pilots with medals connote the traditions of the British Royal Air Force, positioning BA pilots as heroic leaders, in contrast to the cabin crew who are coded as deferential and subservient. This split between the “upper class” pilots and “working class” cabin crew resonates with the legacy of the British class system. These core symbols demonstrate that British Airways is making strong use of the “gifting” narrative.

The Rolex logo, featuring a white crown symbol above the word "ROLEX" in a white, serif font on an orange background.

2 Rolex

Rolex watches feature the legendary “SWISS MADE” badging on their watch faces showing that the brand is proud of its origins and the heritage of Swiss watchmaking. This reference aligns Rolex products with the stereotypical legacy values of Swiss culture: pragmatism, neutrality, professionalism, seriousness and conservatism, and code their watches as being functional, precise and dependable. The Rolex crown symbol and uppercase serif letters signal royalty and aristocracy. With names such as Explorer, Yacht-Master and Sky-Dweller, Rolex is signaling that its watches are designed for expeditions to the summit and to the depths of the sea, connoting adventure and preserving a legacy of daring deeds performed by legendary explorers. As part of their heritage as innovators in watch engineering, the brand also refers to a number of inventions such as the first waterproof watch and the first self-winding movement. Lastly, even though Rolex’s line of watches has gradually expanded over the company’s history, their most significant product lines like the Submariner and Daytona have remained fairly consistent since they were first unveiled. This symbolizes a strong legacy of product consistency over multiple generations. Across these elements, from nationhood and heritage to innovation and craft, Rolex’s success is maintained through the dominant use of the “gifting” narrative.

Transmission

A less well-understood code of legacy is “transmission,” which refers to an artifact of a brand that’s been pulled from its past but updated to fit the present day. This code of legacy branding

acknowledges tradition and heritage but reimagines these things to be culturally relevant in a contemporary context. In other words, transmitting ideas about the brand from its past to provide a platform for future relevance and innovation.

In present-day marketing, we can find many examples where brand owners are reimagining elements from their past. For example, “transmission” can be seen in the art of sampling that pervades contemporary hip-hop music, or in the shared family prefix “i-” that is used on Apple’s products,

starting with the revolutionary iPod, and extending to the iPhone and the iPad.

With “transmission,” the key to referencing heritage in a contempo-

rary fashion is to do so in an iconic, and sometimes ironic, way. Instead of simply managing a brand’s mythology in an unchanging manner, brands that master “transmission” are finding ways to reinforce their

founding legacy, but also adding a contemporary twist, such as when Toyota maintained the fidelity to the original FJ40 Land Cruiser design in the aesthetics of today’s FJ Cruiser.

“LEGACY AS TRANSMISSION” BRAND SPOTLIGHT



1 Louis Vuitton

Louis Vuitton's Parisian heritage is conspicuously referenced on their products, in their communications, and in their store designs. “LOUIS VUITTON PARIS. Made in France” codes the brand's legacy as being connected to Paris's cultural heritage of style, continental sophistication, good living and connoisseurship. Louis Vuitton's heritage as a luggage manufacturer conveys that the brand is synonymous with a cosmopolitan lifestyle—scarves, luggage and online films signal a legacy of practicality combined with the glamour and leisure of travel in the Golden Age of the early 1900s. However, in its recent advertising, the brand has updated this legacy for a modern jet-set generation by fusing nostalgic sophistication with practical relevance for a 21st-century lifestyle. LV continues to reinvent its legacy by featuring modern celebrity ambassadors such as Bono, Madonna, Angelina Jolie and David Bowie in its brand advertising. The iconic LV monogram is composed of serif letters brought together in a floral pattern that references the fleur-de-lis symbol and monarchical initials and Roman numerals of French kings (e.g., Louis V, Louis VI, etc.). While this codes Louis Vuitton as a brand with the legacy of regal power and luxury, the brand continues to find ways to radically reimagine the use of their monogram in more playful and sometimes ironic ways. This, along with Louis Vuitton's highly public expressions of avant-garde design and architecture, establishes a modern artistic legacy that gives this luxury brand a distinctly contemporary edge. Louis Vuitton is an example of a luxury brand that has mastered the “transmission” narrative.



2 Bang & Olufsen

The Bang & Olufsen (B&O) legacy of premium sound quality is signified by the use of a Danish monochrome logo that reflects the control, simplicity, discretion, purity and creativity of Danish culture. B&O's relationship to broader Danish heritage is also seen in its references to 19th- and mid-20th-century domestic design, which continue to be updated to fit a modern luxury lifestyle. In B&O's brand communications, they reference the style of 1930s Expressionism through photography and the use of wood across a number of their products, positioning B&O as artisanal and artistic, not just technological. The brand also differentiates its products from conventional box-shaped audio-visual equipment by using curved and circular designs that are artful and eye-catching. Even though B&O has created a legacy of innovation by pushing the design boundaries in their category, they also maintain a connection to the founders' vision through consistent use of the prefix “Beo-” in product names. All of these elements demonstrate how B&O is applying the “transmission” narrative to their brand's legacy.

International Codes of Legacy

Having identified two distinct cultural codes of legacy that modern brands are using, Sign Salad also helped us explore how these codes are being used in different countries, namely in the U.K., U.S., Brazil, U.A.E. and China. We wanted to know whether there were significant regional variations in legacy codes being used across these markets. We found that the future-facing narrative of “transmission” was being widely employed by brands across almost every market we investigated, despite the fact that we looked at countries across a wide economic and social development spectrum.

We concluded that this was largely a reflection of the cultural and technological progress that now epitomizes much of modern life across the globe. Whether part of the old world or the new world, every country we explored seemed to have one thing in common: They were all striving for development, progress and renewal. Hence, the strongest brands across the world seem to be the ones that are reimagining the past and not simply just repeating it.

IMPLICATIONS

Whether for investors, employees or customers, modern brand leaders are increasingly being called upon to weave a powerful narrative for their organizations: brand stories that make sense of where their companies have come from, where they are now and what their ambitions are for the future.

The Legacy Lab’s goal in examining the cultural narratives of legacy was to understand how brands could use the signs and symbols of legacy to shape future success and accelerate innovation within their businesses.

Through our semiotics study, we found that there is still a tendency for some old-world luxury brands to focus on “gifting”—on category comparisons and on preserving their heritage, which inherently limits their ability to create enduring cultural impact.

However, we also found that a new-world concept of legacy branding is emerging based around the narrative

of “transmission”: a strategy focused on creating enduring cultural appeal for the brand which enables it to escape the gravitational pull of the past and transcend the traditional boundaries of its category. This future-facing perspective builds on our finding that mastering the language of legacy isn’t about looking backward from the present, but about looking forward from the past. What keeps many brands strong is crafting a bold ambition that enables them to achieve greater relevance today and continued significance in the future. ■

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