

Speaker Notes.

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Ref. Trans-Warhol, Press Conference, Geneva
Date January 11, 2007

Speaker Notes

Brands meet Art.

I.
Allow me to begin with a personal note.

A while ago, in the summer of 2006, Cynthia Odier approached us with the idea of positioning brands in the context of an opera. The novelty of such an idea instantly triggered our curiosity.

We, as brand consultants, are after all becoming increasingly used to “brands” and “branding” becoming catchwords. Brands create excitement in all walks of life these days. Beyond allowing products and companies to secure a competitive edge, they have also become attractive to non-profit organizations, political institutions, cities, regions, nations and people: CEOs are advised to display charismatic brand appeal, artists aspire to become known as brands. The term brand is increasingly used ubiquitously and indiscriminately. Consequently, the term and concept “brand” is in danger of becoming watered down.

So, when I met Cynthia, I was prepared for many things, but I definitely was not ready to see brands appear in a modern opera. However, it took only minutes to realize the great potential of what Cynthia was suggesting. And – based on Cynthia’s energy, creativity and persuasiveness – it took only a few more minutes to get excited about being asked to become part of a very innovative and ambitious project, the Trans-Warhol Project.

Those of us at Interbrand Zintzmeyer & Lux who have become involved in this project have come away feeling privileged to have been able to support Cynthia and the Fluxum Foundation’s Trans-Warhol Project.

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II.
Why are we – as brand consultants – so excited and what are we so excited about when it comes to the Trans-Warhol Project?

I would like to focus your attention on three interrelated points:

First, this project will help raise the awareness that brands play a central role in social developments around the world.

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Second, this project will help further the discussion regarding to what degree brand development needs to be seen as a courageous, visionary, powerful and long-term activity for organizations.

Third, this project will help us all to revise our views about the relationship between the arts and the economy.

I would like to talk a few minutes about each of these three points, in reverse order.

III.

Improving the relationship between economic and cultural arenas lies at the heart of the Fluxum Foundation's work.

This constitutes a very courageous goal. Instinctively, we are apt to view art and economy, commerce or brands as opposites. If any sort of a relationship exists between the two, it can be described as cool, distant, neutral at best.

For most of us, artists and managers constitute irreconcilable opposites. Creative, sincere and ready to starve for their belief in great work is most likely how we would describe artists. Powerful, cynical and ready to do almost anything in the interest of higher margins is most likely how we are convinced the most successful CEOs perform.

The same dichotomy seemingly holds true when we think about the arts and economic interests. Art conjures up ideas of beauty, freedom and autonomy whereas economics seems to revolve around profit, control and narrow interests.

Contemplating objects of art can be demanding, educating, full of surprises, and sometimes even provoking. In an economic sense, the consumption of goods – which acquire even greater appeal as brands – is presumed to be simple, instantly rewarding and without surprises.

The arts are viewed with a certain amount of reflection and respect – although ultimately they may tend to be proclaimed as useless, providing us with little more than moments of distraction. The economic world, however, is usually taken very seriously. Its activities are monumental and potentially are of great consequence or even dangerous.

How then should these two disciplines find common ground? Furthermore, why should they interact or possibly even cooperate?

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The answer in its most fundamental sense is very straightforward: because one needs what the other can provide. Financial support, solid investment in, and for the finer, aesthetically appealing and artistic things in life.

This, in a few words, is pretty much where we stand today. Simple economics tells the art world that more economic shrewdness is required in order to survive fierce competition. And intelligent economics tells the world of managers that the art world can provide things that they themselves cannot produce: great expressions of emotional and aesthetic appeal. As a result, art sponsoring is “in”, product placement is *en vogue* and managerial bestsellers increasingly constitute required reading for people from the world of art.

So, it follows that members of these two worlds are beginning to look at each other more seriously, to talk to each other, and try to learn from each other. Some of the exchanges include questions such as:

- What can companies learn from symphony orchestras when it comes to organizational strategies?
- How can modern branding help attract new and younger target groups to classical music concerts?
- Can creative artists provide a role model, a blueprint for the ideal employee in today's innovative and service-oriented industries?

Cynthia's Trans-Warhol Project is certainly part of this stepped-up exchange between the world of art and economics. And, as such, this project goes well beyond what we are all used to.

IV.

Brand owners are being asked to lend more than financial support to the Trans-Warhol Project. Of course, financial support is helpful. The Trans-Warhol Project, though, is asking for more whole-hearted involvement. It is about more than sponsoring art. The project aims to turn brands from objects into subjects in an ambitious artistic production.

Why should brand owners and brand managers want to engage in an activity as unknown and complex as placing their brands in an opera. Why put brands on stage in a contemporary opera?

Behind every great brand is a great idea. Strong brands clearly present a vision of the world around them and describe their role in this world. Strong brands possess a

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convincing reason for being. And strong brands subscribe to strong values in everything they do. In other words: successful brands resemble personalities with ambitious goals which they courageously and continuously aspire to achieve in everything they do.

Brands are thus attractive to consumers. In a world where consumers are overwhelmed by choice, brands provide orientation and guidance. Consumers can trust strong brands. And, ultimately, consumers strongly identify with brands.

To achieve a privileged status, brand owners need to step forward with a clearly defined brand position – a brand platform. The brand platform in turn helps to orchestrate and highlight every activity that the brand engages in.

The opportunity to actively take a role on stage – in an opera – provides brand owners with additional challenges as well as new, rewarding opportunities:

- How can the fundamentally strategic elements of a brand, which are essentially linked to increased brand recognition, be presented in an artistic production?
- How can the more fundamental and sincere aspirations of a brand be expressed adequately when placed on stage and thus outside the more narrow role defined by mass consumption?
- What can potential customers learn about brands when they appear in a more creative environment, one that encourages both virtuosity and risk taking and offers entertainment and amusement as well?

Obviously, this touches on new ground for brand creation and brand management above and beyond the standard textbook cases of branding taught in marketing classes. This project represents a timely and rewarding challenge for brand owners and managers.

V.

Frequently, artists are more sensitive to new and fundamental social developments than managers and ivory tower academics.

Andy Warhol was an example of an innovative and visionary artist. He prominently displayed commercial brands in the world of art. His work reflected the growing importance of brands in a world increasingly becoming defined by mass production and mass consumption. As the so-called American way of life, this social, political and economic model has become dominant the world over. And strong brands have become a part of this model.

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It is in this context that we need to realize that brands have the power to change the world. Brands continuously and ubiquitously influence what individuals identify with, how organizations succeed and even shape the course of society.

Individuals grant brands more than the power limited to purchasing decisions. Brands evolve into full-fledged promises which shape the way people organize their lives. People rely on brand promises not only when handling routine decisions but, moreover, trust in them when it comes to making fundamental decisions at crossroads in their lives. In fact, people strongly identify with the values embedded in brands.

Both successful profit and non-profit organizations use the power of brands in a true entrepreneurial way to preserve a competitive edge: they create comprehensive visionary statements to guide their work, powerfully steer the leadership of the organization and work on forming lasting impressions meaningful to all stakeholders.

Brands have an anchoring effect and thus increasingly contribute to social coherence. Invariably, social developments are strongly influenced by the creative power of brands. As a result, brands have emerged as powerful social institutions and consequently play an essential role in the center of social discussions and conflicts.

It therefore is a logical consequence that brands of the future play a more central role in the world of art. Cynthia's Trans-Warhol Project is at the forefront of this development by turning brands into subjects in an opera production. We are pleased to be partners in this endeavor. We think that this represents a very exciting, innovative and challenging project. And we hope that the project will be met with enthusiasm by a large number of ambitious and courageous brand owners and managers.