

ICONICITY: FINDING YOUR VOICE IN A CHANGING WORLD

We live in a world of 24-hour news, unfettered access to others, and others to us through an array of ever-expanding wireless devices. Email creates 24/7 access all continuing the blur between what is defined as "their time" and "my time" with messages and images vying for our attention.

Media, whether print, electronic or broadcast, is becoming increasingly fragmented with less of the public relying on traditional networks, preferring to receive their information from a never-ending medley of blogs that stream to us on a daily basis. Retail is a channel addressing that need where the consumer is looking to learn, be entertained and be delighted, all while making a social connection at the same time.

Focus on Iconicity

Creating a retail identity amongst this clutter requires iconicity. Iconicity is that element or combination of elements that creates a personality so distinctive, its set of visual cues and codes and/or voice becomes proprietary to the brand. With its role as alternative media, iconicity taps into the deeper emotional needs of consumers through a set of experiential, implicit signals and transcends the more rational elements of price and convenience. It is that same set of code signals that creates the bond between retailer and consumer that says, "I get you" and "you understand me."

In the next five years, the Indian retail market should grow by more than 40%, with an average increase of almost 7% per year. Iconicity and finding an iconic identity and experience for retail brands will become increasingly important. This will be equally critical in addressing consumer segments from the world traveler/cosmopolitan shopper to the growing middle class. One group is invited to shift beyond traditional brand loyalties; the other to discover and build future brand affiliations.

Iconicity both captures and maintains the consumer's interest through its texturing and complexity to help stand out from the thousands of impressions we receive daily. With the diversity of languages spoken in the market (albeit with English a common commercial language), the concepts of "languages" span much beyond just the spoken language. This expansion includes shared "languages" of youth culture, the

traditionalists and the influences of geography, religion, and social status. They all influence what we "hear" and "see" with the power of iconicity to be more universally understood as a common language.

Our business, shopping, entertainment and dining are multitasking efforts of being productive, gaining pleasure, learning and sharing on an integrated basis. It requires more connection with consumers over time, addressing their wants most particularly, without neglecting to address their needs.

To fulfill their "wants," shoppers look for a mosaic nature of suppliers who understand them through "bricks and clicks." They live their lives in ways that are unique to the retailer and create a personality and experience reflective of the consumer. Today's consumers increasingly feel that they define the retailer, rather than the retailer defining them (other



*Kenneth Nisch
Chairman, JGA, INC.*



Godiva Chocolatier
Iconicity is Simplicity
What type of first impression does the environment make?



Jaguar
Iconicity is Ingenuity
Does the environment exude personal expression and originality?



Hershey's Chicago
Iconicity is Originality
Is the character of the space authentic to the brand?



The North Face
Iconicity is Clarity
Is the brand in focus?

than in pure status product). Customers are looking to hold up a retailer mirror and see themselves reflected in that mirror. This is great news for retailers who see the store as a form of their own self-expression, a way to support their lifestyle and interest and as a way of having a place in their community, whether the neighborhood consists of physical or attitudinal parameters.

Creating a Unique Identity

Iconicity finds its root in images and experience. It captures all forms of communication: print and collateral, product selection, the retail environment, policies and procedures, personnel, and real estate - so that all components passing through the brand's personality communicate with one voice. No gesture is too small to become iconic: from the customized version of the visitor greeting and the thank you, to how goods are presented upon purchase, and even the language on the receipt. Finding the magic to bring together all of these components with a twist of personality is iconic, proprietary and actionable.

In this high-tech, high-touch world, designers are in a unique position to create iconicity. They can distinctively develop the character and texture of the environment that inherently captures and connects with the consumer. In many cases, big companies and big chains have failed to create such an atmosphere.



Parisian
Iconicity is Community
Do touchpoints convey a welcoming attitude toward the consumer?

Granted, mainly status and designer brands and a handful of other retailers have found a template and a language that at least on the surface create that environment, in essence, a third place. The most successful are effectively becoming an "environmental blog" where the consumer as well as retailer "post" their thoughts of the day in the form of product, communication and experience. The biggest potential commercial opportunity is with middle-market retailers whose consumers are increasingly sensitized by more upscale and aspirational retailers. These consumers expect, and possibly even demand, that retailers who fit within their economic realities also become iconic and create not just points of distribution, but experiences as well.

Creating a retail identity among this clutter is challenging. A recent study indicated that while in the past we thought we retained between two-to-ten percent of what we were exposed to, it now shows us that we actually only recall a micro-fraction of that amount. However, what we do retain is mostly visual, indicating that a visually focused experience is key to being memorable.

As each of us is exposed to thousands and thousands of impressions per day, will the consumer's sense of your brand and brand environment be iconic enough to be



Springfield
Iconicity is Personality
Does your point of view and vision communicate a distinctive position?



Brookstone
Iconicity is Unity
Is the environment characteristic of the brand's multi-channel situation?

memorable, or one that fails to register or is quickly discarded? Are you iconic?

Kenneth Nisch is an architect and chairman of JGA, Inc., a retail design, architecture and brand strategy firm in Southfield, Michigan. Named one of the industry's "Most Influential," Nisch applies his knowledge and entrepreneurial insight into consumer markets to create concept and prototype development, brand image positioning and architectural direction. JGA's clients include Godiva Chocolatier, Brookstone, Verizon Wireless, Springfield, Hershey's, American Museum of Natural History, Hickey Freeman, Jaguar and The North Face. Ken may be reached at 1.248.355.0890, www.jga.com or info@jga.com.