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## Experiential Makeover, BrandAnimation Edition: Part 1

By Erik Hauser



Did you ever have one of those days when everything reminds you of your past? You see an old Subaru you used to drive and remember the day you got-- and subsequently wrecked-- it. Or you see a stranger who looks just like someone you used to know. Well, I was having one of those days last week. I swear I saw my buddy Matt from [UConn](#) in front of the [Gap](#) on Market Street. I knew it wasn't him, but I followed the guy into the store just to be sure. Then I was hit with another flashback: my first job.

When I was in high school, I worked at a Gap, which was a pretty cool job for a teenager. Mind you, this was back when you could still buy your tapered, acid-washed pair of [Levi's](#) there, before it sold its own label exclusively. My, how things have changed! This got me thinking. In my first few columns ("[BrandAnimation: Are You Experiential?](#)"; ("[BrandAnimation: Reaching an Audience Doesn't Mean Anywhere and Everywhere](#)"), I talked a bit about theories and methodologies. Maybe a little boring for some, so for the next two columns, I'm going to mix things up a bit and put these theories and methodologies to practice. Since they haven't expanded this column to Tom Clancy-novel-length yet, consider the following the [Cliffs Notes](#) version of BrandAnimation in action, this being part one of two.

In the world of marketing, brands need to continually update themselves to maintain their relevancy. Failure to adjust leads to brand gangrene. In other words, complacency usually equals a slow, painful brand death. Now the purpose of this column isn't to bash brands or brand strategies, but I think it's widely acknowledged on both Madison Avenue and Wall Street that Gap is in trouble. Let's ignore Wall Street for a second (it's okay to do this, but only for a few moments or [Jim Cramer](#) will start yelling), and address Gap's troubles from a marketing angle.

For years Gap enjoyed a lock on the 12- to 34-year-old demographic. Everybody wore Gap jeans. Everybody wore Gap khakis. Everybody had a Gap sweater. Gap clothes were the foundation for wardrobes around the country. I've spent a lot of money over the years at Gap

stores, so I consider myself a fairly loyal customer--but not recently. They lost me.

So what happened? For starters, its merchandise and stores are outdated. The store experience lacks any kind of emotional connection or visceral reaction to the brand. It's too formulaic. Plus, at a time when customization and personalization are all the rage, especially among young adults, Gap's clothing is equated with plain and boring. Gone are days when everyone at the party wore khakis. The solution is not a wild fashion goose chase, which will eventually lead to tired legs and lost customers. This is about animating the brand and making it stand for something meaningful again.

One a random side note, I was in a local Gap last year looking for a long-sleeve T-shirt. I was told it wasn't part of the summer collection for the store. Now, Gap is headquartered here in San Francisco, and you'd think it might have noticed that our summers are often the COLDEST TIME OF YEAR. I'm still baffled by that one.

Another issue, one that I've always been critical of, is its advertising. Gap has spent a lot of money attaching itself to celebrities who don't come across as typical Gap clientele. To me, this escalates its relevancy problem because you lose any credibility by not coming across as authentic and genuine to your audience. Anchoring your brand around celebrities who don't fit is not going to help you reach today's younger generation. They are too savvy for that old trick.

There is also the much talked about issue regarding sister brands [Old Navy](#) and [Banana Republic](#). On both ends of its product line, the parent company has cannibalized its brand, narrowing the Gap label's market share, and ultimately punishing the anchor of the company.

I know there are a lot of other issues with Gap Inc., and certainly I don't pretend to know every nuance of the business, but some of its missteps are obvious even to me. So what's the solution to some of these problems? Stay tuned for the shocking conclusion of Experiential Makeover, BrandAnimation Edition, Part 2. I'll put together a list of experiential remedies that could help get this great San Francisco-based company back on track.

And if anyone else has any insights or general thoughts about Gap you'd like to share, please send along ([erik@swivelmedia.com](mailto:erik@swivelmedia.com)) and I'll try to incorporate them into the column.

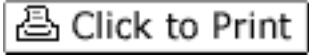
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