

Is Your Brand Strong Enough to Survive This?

December 2013 Newsletter

I think these two photos tell us a lot about what the future of retail looks like.



Notice anything missing? Like, for example, the name of the store on the left?

I took this picture on a recent trip to NYC. I've been there twice, and I still don't know what the store is called. It's not painted on the windows, placed above the brand marquees, or located in the displays. I certainly can tell what brands the store carries, but I haven't got a clue what the store is called.

Of course, you know the photo on the right: the latest version of Apple's iPhone.

If the future of retail is indeed "[omni-channel](#)," I think these photos speak volumes. Consumers want to be able to shop for the brands and products that they want, when they want it, and where they happen to be at that moment. That might be the iPhone in her pocket or the non-descript, undifferentiated store on the corner. Which makes ordinary retailers less important than the products that they carry.

Talk to younger consumers, and they'd be hard-pressed to define the differences among the types of retailers that we obsess about in our discussions of distribution channel strategies. All they want to know is, "When can I get it?" Increasingly, you won't be able to rely upon your retail partners to build your brand for you. Even more than now, it will be your responsibility to attract customers and educate them about your products. You can't rely upon the retailers to do it for you.

Of course, there will always be room for the architectural and technological temples of brand promotion like Niketown, Apple stores, or [Burberry's flagship store](#) in London. There will also be a place for the truly focused specialty retailers like [Adventure 16](#) or [Super Jock 'n Jill](#)—absolute experts in their chosen fields. But in a brutally competitive market in which they regularly wake up at 2AM with nightmares about Amazon's next move, those stores are committed to building their own brands and customer loyalty—not yours.

What are you doing to ensure that your brand will thrive when every consumer carries a retailer on his phone? What are you doing to build your brand when they can pick up your products at a no-name store with low customer service on any street corner?

Is your brand strong enough to survive this environment?

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