As Bob Dylan said, “A man’s got to stand for something,” and the same is true for a brand: to achieve commercial success, it needs to stand for something that’s both motivating and clear in the hearts and minds of your target market. And there’s no doubt that, because the pharmaceutical market is becoming increasingly commoditised and clinical breakthroughs are not as common, branding and strong brand unity are becoming key to product success.

But in a complicated, clinical, competitive and evolving market, such as pharma, how do you achieve brand unity? ‘Brand unity’ can be described as the execution of a true global strategy and brand... now turn the page to see the 10 simple rules you can apply to any brand that will help you do just that.
1. **TAKE A PLURAL APPROACH**

A great brand is created with a mix of art and science, along with great creative and execution. You can come up with the greatest idea but unless it is executed correctly in each of your markets as you planned it to be then your brand will not be a success.

To create true brand unity and a brand that can transcend borders, you must have a plural approach when building your strategy and brand. This includes having a multi-functional (research, clinical and marketing) and multinational team and the four tips below are a great starting point:

**1. True engagement.** Involve your markets – at least do some local research or review existing research when creating your idea and strategy. Unless you have the buy-in from the country at the ‘beginning’ of the process, you will have an uphill battle the whole way.

**2. Empathise.** Make sure you really understand what the local market needs are and communicate how your idea will translate and be beneficial in it. Provide guidelines for each key market to overcome any specific issues.

**3. Strategy is not a tagline.** Provide guidance on how to implement your strategy and idea in their country. Give them clear guidance on what can be changed and what cannot. If all responsibility is taken away from them, they will not feel passionate about the brand and it will not live up to its true potential.

**4. Reward them.** Everyone wants to know what is in it for them and their market. If you just give instructions but there is no incentive to implement the idea, it will not happen.

2. **IT’S WHAT YOU KNOW… AND WHAT YOU DON’T**

To build brand unity and success you need an in-depth, quantified understanding of what drives your market, your customers, your brand and your competitors. Many brands have a fairly superficial appreciation of their market and only know the same or less than their competitors.

The best way to gain a deeper understanding is to create a ‘Growth Map’ (see above). This is a simple strategic document that pulls large amounts of information together from across your business (local and global) into one easily digestible knowledge source. Putting existing knowledge in a simple form, in a single place allows you to share and democratise market knowledge across the company.

This moves the emphasis of your team away from using their time gathering or searching for basic market information, towards a more strategic debate about how they can use knowledge to differentiate and grow.

The growth map also helps you to indentify the strategic knowledge gaps so that you can start to fill them.

One final point: you need to look forward, not just back. Most brand teams spend their time analysing what has happened – rather than looking forward at potential and possibilities. Great brands spend time thinking about the trends or changes that may define the future and what they can do to pre-empt the future. We call this foresight… and it’s an essential part of your market knowledge.

3. **A CLEAR SENSE OF DESTINATION**

You would never start a journey without defining your destination, yet many brands have a very poorly defined sense of direction. If you start with the end in mind and inspire everyone around you to share your vision, then you instantly increase your chances of success.

Creating an inspiring destination demands that you have a customer-centred view of how the world will be better because of your brand. It means asking what impact you are trying to have on your customer and what your brand will mean for their lives. Knowing how it will impact on your company is also important, but the customer view is more important.

Knowing what outcome you are trying to achieve from the outset will help you, and those around you, achieve your objectives. Your destination needs to be communicated to your internal audiences so that they can understand and buy into it.

If you do not give people a clear destination, they will be walking on a journey to anywhere; they will get lost and frustrated. This happens a lot in global marketing with the result that local markets end up having a different destination in mind and not knowing what to do, which results in different strategies, multiple executions and confusion.

Put clever people in a room, give them a clear and compelling destination, and they will definitely work out how to get there – better than you will by yourself!

4. **UNEARTH REAL INSIGHTS**

In order to succeed, you must have penetrating insights into your market and brand. Insight is different from market knowledge or facts, yet many times we see obvious facts or basic market knowledge being passed off as real insight!

What is an insight? “An insight is a deep and penetrating truth that unlocks opportunities and inspires action.”

Great insights always identify a truth about your brand or market, but they also identify a tension, problem or frustration that your brand can solve.

There are several things you can do to increase your chances of unearthing real insights:

1. **Know what you are looking for.** Everyone on the team needs to understand what a great insight looks like. After all, if you don’t know what you are looking for there’s no chance you’ll see it when it’s there.

2. **Adopt a rigorous process.** You will not get insights simply by reading reports or by having a nice meeting or two. You must have a thorough process for discovering and mining for insights; one which everyone on the team knows, understands and follows.

3. **Insight should be hypothesis driven.** Spend time thinking what the issues, unmet needs, frustrations and tensions in your
Insight comes from diverse sources.
Harness knowledge and skills from across the business and the broader world, not just from market research.

Insight also comes from being brave. Always combine tried and trusted approaches with fresh insight techniques. If you research the issue the same way as last time, you tend to come up with the same answers.

Use the insight test (see below) to challenge yourself. If you put the insight into this equation it should immediately inspire new ideas and actions. If your insight does not suggest the need for change… sorry, it’s just failed the test! In practice your insight test should go something like this:

Isn’t it interesting that…
‘insight’… some consumers drink 2 litres of water every day to keep them looking young and healthy, but sometimes the taste gets boring…
…and as a result my action is… to launch a range of flavoured waters.

5. KNOW YOUR ENEMY
Many companies gather lots of competitive information but they don’t turn it into true competitor insight or spend time thinking about what they should do as a result of this knowledge.
Gather all the information you can about them from market research, communication messages, talking to them, detail aids, product profile, clinical study publications, company information and analyst reports.

But don’t stop when you have gathered it all into a nice big pile (like many brands do). Instead invest your time thinking what this means:
1. What is their brand strategy, vision and positioning?
2. What segments do they own/are they trying to own?
3. What is the big insight behind their brand?
4. What can you steal with pride?
5. What’s biggest hope and fear?
6. What can you improve on?
7. What might they do next? and what can you do to pre-empt them?

6. METICULOUSLY CREATE YOUR BRAND POSITIONING
Without a strong brand positioning, you will never create brand unity. A brand positioning defines what you, uniquely, want your brand to be valued for in the hearts and minds of your target market. It should demonstrate a set of values, personality and benefits that appeal deeply to your core customer and it should set you apart from the competition as truly unique.

A strong positioning is very hard to develop. Here are some thoughts that may help you to create stronger positionings.

1. Get the strategy right. Make sure the brand strategy is crystal clear before you start. You won’t create great positionings if you do not have strong strategic foundations.
2. Dare to be different. Of course you need to strongly differentiate your brand, but make sure this differentiation is driven by a real insight that’s relevant and motivating to your customers. Ensure that you involve your local markets to identify those ‘true insights’ as they are the experts in their market.
3. Nurture and evolve. Positioning is an art as much as a science. No idea is right the minute it is created. You must spend time building and evolving brand positioning concepts, involving the whole team from each key market (clinical, commercial and research) and customers until they are as strong as they can be.

4. Bring it to life. For brand positioning to be really successful hundreds of people will need to understand it and be inspired by it. Therefore you need to be creative in how you share your story about the brand and its positioning.

7. SECURE POWERFUL EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT
You need to ask yourself one key question about your brand, ‘What emotional response are you trying to engender and how will you do this?’ You cannot ‘tell’ your customers how you want them to feel, or write it down and expect them to feel it.

You need to create an experience with your brand that is consistently delivered to reinforce the desired emotional connection. This means that you need to think carefully about every interaction and how to choreograph each event and every piece of communication to stimulate the right feelings and emotions.

This means using adverts, websites, PR releases, clinical study publications, detailing, even the way you answer the phone, as tools to build emotions. See the following checklist of each factor you need to consider when assessing anything that is related to your brand – does your answer create the correct emotional attachment?

Emotional checklist:
• IMAGERY
• COLOURS
• SOUNDS
• TONALITY
• WORDS

8. PURPOSEFUL CREATIVITY
Creating a strong emotional attachment with your brand internally and with your customers means you need to be creative throughout the entire brand development process.
Creativity is not a random process and rare skill or the domain of musicians and artists! Everyone is creative... just look at the range of things your colleagues get up to around the house or out and about at the weekend, yet when they walk back into the office on Monday morning the creativity stops. Why is that?

- **Permission.** In many companies people don’t know what is expected of them, or are not given time to spend on creativity
- **Creative skills.** We spend hours training people on all manner of processes, IT tools and functional skills... but we rarely invest in giving them the skills and tools they need to unleash their natural creativity. Different people work in different ways, so the creative tools that work for one mind will not work for all.
- **Lack of purpose.** Creativity is always more successful when the problem or opportunity is well defined. Then creative energy can be focused on the real issue, not randomly in pursuit of random ideas!

9. **RELENTLESS CONSISTENCY**

You may think that because you are in a clinical environment, it is harder to create brand unity and to get all markets to stick to one strategy. But the fact that it is a complicated market is even more of a reason to stay on strategy, to ensure a clear and uncomplicated message is delivered to all customers.

If you want true brand unity and a successful brand, you must strive for relentless consistency. If you let even one country or one execution go to market that is not true to the brand, you lose all brand integrity. This does not mean, however, that you need to be a control freak; you must have some faith in your individual markets. It calls for a very fine (and difficult) balance to achieve relentless consistency and it must not be at the expense of crushing local ingenuity. Here are some tips on how to go about it:

1. Create guidelines for brand elements that cannot be changed in any circumstances.
2. Carry a big hammer – don’t be afraid to say no, stop the press or smash it. Don’t let something that is not perfectly on strategy go to market because of a deadline.
3. Before launch, plan for road blocks that might interfere with your brand being consistent. Have an action plan to overcome these.
4. You should not discourage different expressions of a strategy but you need to ensure your team can evaluate whether something is on/off strategy and whether it may be detrimental to other countries. Everything a brand says and does must convey what it stands for. Ruthless, obsessive consistency is the only way to create brand unity!

10. **KEEP LEARNING**

Once you have finished your strategy and global positioning, this does not mean that the job is done! You need to constantly monitor how you are tracking against your competitors and the market. You then need a process of feeding this into your current strategy. Ask yourself what really needs to be changed. Can you just refine the brand positioning or strategy? From the feedback and learnings, debate this with the team and move forward. Be decisive and refine either your execution or strategy accordingly. Don’t change the whole strategy unless you need to but also know when to pull one that is not working.

A strategy (especially a global one) can take years to implement, so don’t be too hasty.

**CONCLUSION**

This article is designed to demonstrate how, even in a complicated and evolving market like pharma, it is possible to achieve strong brand unity, which is one of the main factors in product success.

Apply these 10 key guidelines and you should be well on the way to developing your own powerful brand unity.

**Author**

Melvin Jay is managing director of Clear Ideas UK. He can be contacted on 020 8439 8286 (direct line) or at melvin@clear-ideas.com

---

**Proven success in growing Healthcare Brands**

Clear is a top 3 strategic brand consultancy which uniquely combines insight, strategy, creativity and innovation. Clear currently has offices in Amsterdam, London and New York.

For more information please contact Rob Holdaway on robh@clear-ideas.com or +44 (0) 20 8439 8280

**UK:** The Poppy Factory
**TW10 6UW**
**NL:** Keizersgracht 203 Amsterdam 1016 DS
**US:** 1 West Street New York NY 10004

---

**A practical guide by Melvin Jay**

**10 ways to build a strong brand unity**