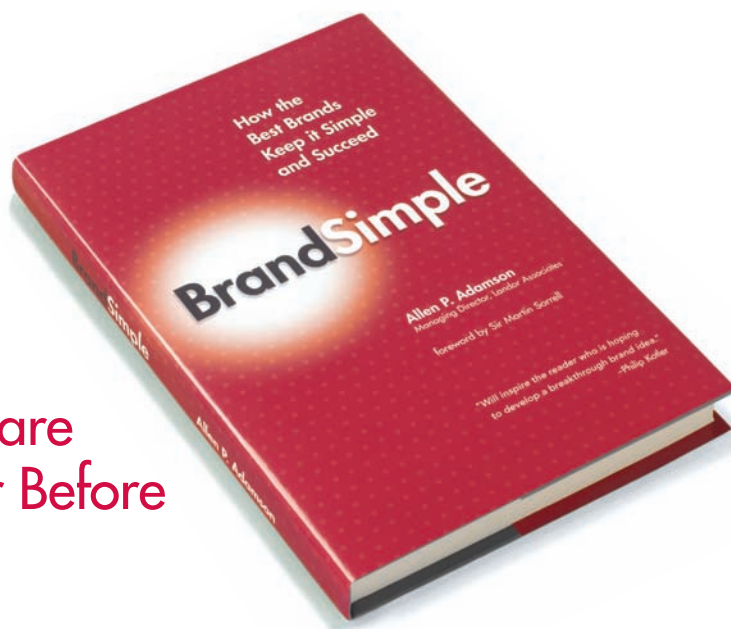


In a Complicated World, a Book that Demonstrates Why Simple Brand Ideas are More Important than Ever Before



With all the books on brands and branding, why another?

Allen Adamson, Managing Director of Landor, explains that the answer is simple. His book, *BrandSimple; How the Best Brands Keep it Simple and Succeed*, demonstrates in clear, engaging terms how, in a market inundated with brands and complicated branding theories, the most powerful brands succeed because they're based on ideas that are simple for people to understand. Filled with dozens of compelling examples, *BrandSimple* proves that when a brand is based on a simple idea it makes it easier for consumers to determine what makes the brand better and different and relevant to them. The brand name becomes a mental shortcut to a purchase decision. Equally important, Adamson shows it's much easier to engage a brand organization in an idea that's simple to grasp. With branding now an organization-wide responsibility, it's essential that everyone understands what the brand is about, enabling each person to intuitively create on-brand branding experiences.

The following excerpt from *BrandSimple* is taken from the chapter that reveals a number of interesting exercises the reader can use to establish a brand idea that is both different and relevant, and simple to understand. In this case, it's about how HBO "defined its brand enemy" to take on a leadership position.

To astute TV viewers, HBO is the brand of television network that provides programming you can't see anywhere else.

As Larry David, star and creator of the popular HBO show, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, might say, "It's pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty unique." And that was exactly the point Eric Kessler, president of sales and marketing at HBO, wanted to get across in taking on both regular and cable television networks as the enemies. He knew exactly what he did and didn't want HBO to represent in the market. I met Eric when we worked together at Lever and was interested in getting his insight on the HBO brand.

HBO was unique starting out of the gate. Regular network TV was free, and cable channels came packaged together. HBO was the only individual brand of TV network you paid for. It's currently in 90% of all cable packages. The challenge Eric and HBO faced, as home-based entertainment choices began to proliferate, was convincing consumers that HBO was still different and better, and worth paying for every month. In the age of satellite dishes and video downloads, the business strategy faced a pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty big challenge.

"If it was the type of program you could see on a regular TV network, we wouldn't do it. Basic cable? Let's do it differently," Eric told me. "We needed to take a position that was different and we needed to be able to deliver on it. We needed to prove that HBO was worth the price of admission every month."

HBO found its brand idea by going through a positioning exercise that included determining what it

didn't want to be. The enemy was the ordinary fare found on other networks. HBO captured the position in a simple message: "It's not TV, it's HBO." A simple statement like this that captures the essence of a brand idea is something we at Landor call brand driver, which I'll explain in complete detail in chapter five. (Note that in most cases, a brand driver is not the brand's advertising tagline. In HBO's case, however, it happened to work beautifully.)

HBO's brand driver encapsulated its position and in doing so gave the organization something that became the driving force behind all of its branding signals. HBO succeeds not merely as a result of having a meaningfully different idea that is simple to grasp, but because its business strategy is in alignment with its idea. What HBO sells is innovative programming unlike any other programming found on television. It spends its creative energy and its money generating this type of programming to guarantee that its viewers perceive it as something worth buying.

Like all the best brand drivers, HBO's became a self-fulfilling prophecy. "Hey, if we make a claim like that, we've got to develop programming that supports it. We need to transcend the category," Eric explained. "Getting to a simple idea was the hardest part. Once we got the simple idea, the programming actually took on a life of its own."

In the case of HBO, the programming is actually its most powerful branding signal, along with the cast members of these outstanding programs. As a result, HBO knows it should commit the bulk of its branding dollars to programming. Knowing what consumers expect from you and where to make investments that allow you to meet these expectations is essential to effective branding.

Carrie Bradshaw and *Sex and the City*, Tony Soprano and his band of merry men and not-so-merry women, *Six Feet Under*, the fellows on *Entourage*, and Larry David of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* came about as a result of the driving force behind the line, "It's not TV, it's HBO."

The creative minds at the network use it as a touchstone for developing programming. Eric told me people at the network have an intuitive feel for what will work and what won't. They know what being HBO means and what it doesn't mean.

HBO's advertising and marketing teams picked up on the idea and ran with it. Michael Patti, an executive creative director who worked with Eric on the brand positioning exercise told me, "There's HBO and there's everything else. You intuitively couldn't

do a TV promotional spot like anything else any more than you'd do ordinary programming. We weren't TV, we were HBO. We needed to live up to the brand and live up to the bargain."

The photography in HBO's advertising is shot by Annie Liebovitz, whose work has appeared in several contemporary art museums worldwide. Her photographs for HBO programs, most notably, *The Sopranos*, take advertising to levels above even Hollywood's high standards for its film advertising. It's bold, provocative, and intriguing. HBO's advertising is a branding signal that no ordinary television network could use. Like the programming, the advertising is groundbreaking. HBO is a perfect example of how not to do what everyone else is doing. It's not TV, it's HBO. ■

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Read more of Allen's thinking at BrandSimple.com. *BrandSimple* is available at bookstores and amazon.com.