

# “What’s your ‘brand personality’?”

A conversation with Dieter Georg Herbst\*

## *Everyone talks about brands. What makes a brand a brand?*

A brand differs from a product in that it has a personality. The analogy to human beings has been chosen quite deliberately here, since a brand is characterised by features that distinguish it from other brands, features that communicate with the customer or viewer, features that make it likeable and in the end make people prefer one brand over another.

## *What makes a brand strong?*

In the first place, a brand has a well-defined and well-communicated core that appeals to and is accepted by the customers or viewers. For this purpose, all characteristics of the brand must produce a coherent overall experience that is then consistently maintained through the various contact points, that is, for example, on the Internet, in print, but also in licence offers. Strong brands then develop over a longer period of time as a result of reliability, and a strong brand is not least of all unique.

## *In your consultations you also carry out brand core analyses. How is this done?*

The analyses focus on 2 areas: first on the self-image that the employees of a programme or a television station have of their own personality. One would therefore ask all participants: what characterises us? What distinguishes us from others? What makes us particularly attractive to the target groups? Then one has to examine whether this self-image of one’s own personality is consistent and whether everyone is able to for-

mulate it quickly, clearly and lucidly. The second area focuses on the target groups and their image of the brand. One important dimension here is the vividness, clarity, and liveliness underlying the notion of a programme’s or a television station’s personality. And in this case, there are very clear research findings that tell us: the clearer and more lucid this notion is, the quicker and more deliberately a viewer, for example, is able to act.

## *Why is an unambiguous brand core important?*

A person – a customer, a viewer – usually has a choice between different alternatives and in order to make this choice it is simply important that he or she is aware of what each element stands for precisely and how it differs from the others. If all the elements one can choose from are the same, then it either makes no difference what the person decides on or he or she needs much, much longer to determine which product or which programme to choose. But turn-on impulses, for example, rather function in such a way that I choose the programme for which I know precisely what it represents, how it is distinguished from others, and why I am so crazy about it. For those reasons I am able to prefer that programme to the others.

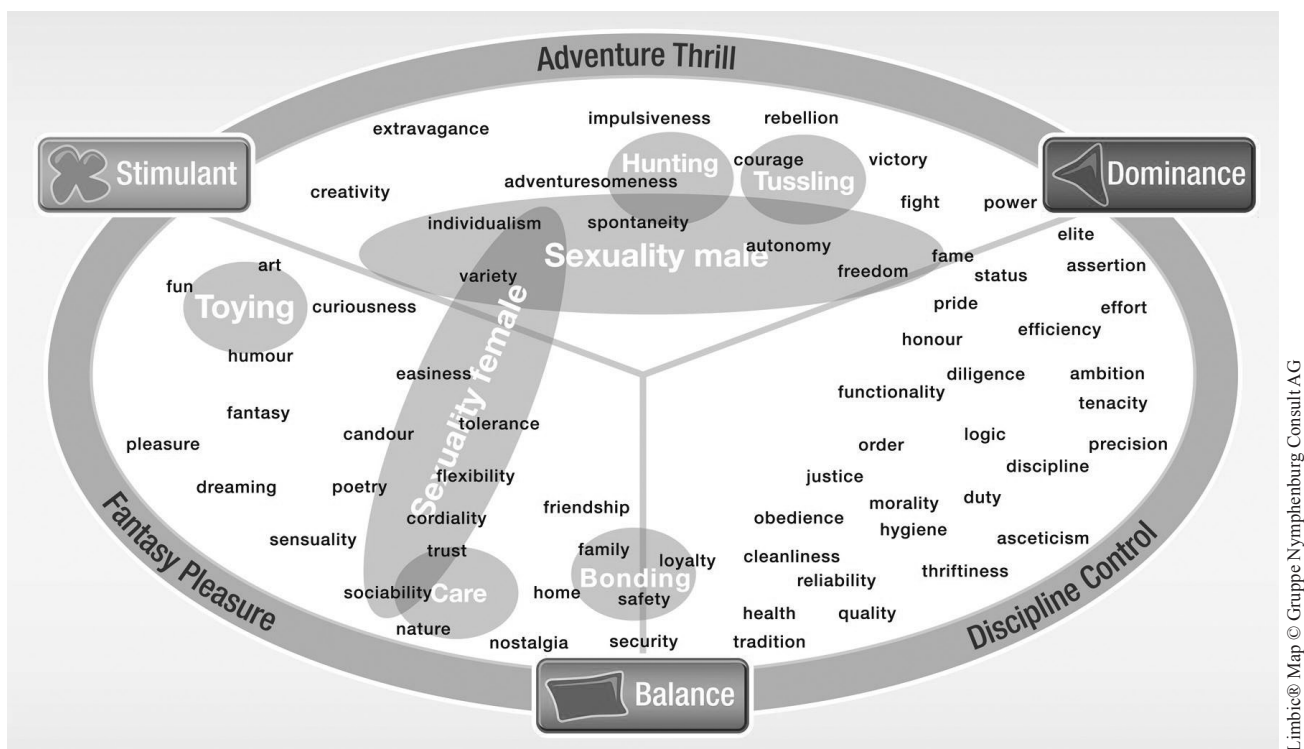
## *What is the principal driver in this decision-making process?*

Recent research impressively shows that feelings have a significantly greater effect on decisions than previously thought. Nature, if one dares put it so crudely, has laid out our system of emotions along 2 coordinates. The

first coordinate consists of negative feelings, in other words, anything that arouses reluctance, frustration, and discomfort in us. We want to avoid that. The second is a reward system, that is what we are looking for in life, what we experience as agreeable. For the purpose of visualisation, I like to work with a map of motives, which provides, as it were, a coordinate system for determining which emotions are important for human beings in general (see ill. 1). Interestingly enough, research shows that worldwide the same feelings arouse discomfort in all human beings, just as the same feelings arouse a sense of well-being.

## *What kind of emotions drive people worldwide alike?*

Essentially there are 3 big instructions that guide human beings through life. The first is balance, the need for safety, for security, for bonding and care, for feelings of community – this is the most important and the strongest system at work in human beings. What we want to avoid here are insecurity and anxiety. The second big area is called stimulant. This consists of positive feelings: I can discover something, I experience new stimuli; it is a matter of creativity, of toying, of having fun. What we wish to avoid in this area is boredom. The third big area is called dominance. What is involved here is asserting ourselves in relation to others, being stronger, being superior. What we want to avoid in this area is inferiority and rage. Rage arises, for example, because we are unable to assert ourselves against someone.



Limbic® Map © Gruppe Nymphenburg Consult AG

Ill. 1: The Limbic® Map establishes a graphical connection between the range of human emotions and the decision-making motives. It offers the possibility to locate the emotional world of brands and derive implications for successful brand management

### *What helps us to determine the brand core?*

Against this background, one can classify the type of personality the programme or television station has. How strongly is our need for balance, for stimulant, for dominance being satisfied, and to what extent do we succeed in avoiding the negative elements contained therein, such as boredom or insecurity, that is, precisely these negative poles. In determining a brand core, one would examine where the programme lies on the map of motives. Then one would examine where it should actually be in order to appeal to the intended target group.

### *In quite concrete terms: I have a preschool programme that is designed to arouse security, cosiness, and well-being. What do I need to avoid?*

You should not arouse insecurity and anxiety; for example, if the programme were to dramatise problems, if it were to emphasise, for instance, that there are so many possibilities

out there, that the world is so varied. The programme should always try to bring security, order, orientation, well-being, and the feeling of community into the world.

This does not mean that it has to be boring – at the end of the programme or the contribution, however, the prevailing feeling for the viewer should be one of security.

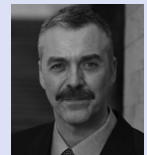
### *To what extent can separate emotions be combined?*

Combination is always possible. Every programme offers a bit of each area. The question remains, however, how well pronounced this is. The analysis therefore determines how pronounced each area is and how these various degrees of emphasis could and should be shifted. The analysis determines, for instance, that balance is strongly pronounced and that stimulant could be further developed. From this determination of the “oughts”, concrete measures can be derived for the programme and its communication.

### *What would you recommend to editorial departments?*

Get together and gather the information you have on how you view the brand. Examine whether you all have the same understanding of it and whether you are all doing the utmost to live out this brand. Alone, however, this can only be done rather poorly. For the process it is usually far more expedient if someone from the outside comes and says “I’ll have a look at what you are saying and check first whether everything is clear and lucid or whether I feel contradictions”. I also do this for my own company. ■

\* Shortened version of a conversation between Prof. Dr. Dieter Georg Herbst and Dr. Maya Götz (IZI).



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