Chapter 3

# A Signature Is Not Enough

## How to Define Your Organization's Personality

**In 1872, a traveling** salesman changed the landscape of American retail. Before him, the only way rural farmers could purchase goods was through middlemen like him, who created a monopoly, allowing them to overcharge for everything. The salesman's name was Aaron Montgomery Ward and when he published the first mail-order catalog the world had ever seen, he started a brand-new industry. His catalog, more than 50 years later, was exhibited by the Grolier Club (a society of bibliophiles in New York City) as one of the 100 books that have had the greatest influence on the life and culture of the American people.

Yet Ward's creation had an unintended side effect: he killed the signature. His mail-order catalog was also the commonly recognized start of direct mail as a marketing tactic. Before then, signatures were important. Important communications were affixed with a wax seal for a signature. Documents creating governments and laws were put into effect with flowing signatures. A signature used to mean something.

Fast-forward to today and think about all the direct mail you recently received in your mailbox. Every one of those letters has a fake signature on it, promising you that you are a sweepstakes winner or offering you the preapproved credit card that can solve all of your financial woes. The

signature on each is an obvious piece of "photoshoppery" meant to put a human name upon the worst of form letters. Signatures have lost their significance because of the prevalence of communications like this. Perhaps it is wrong to blame it all on Ward. In truth, it was the marketing industry that killed the signature.

Here are three reasons why signatures don't work anymore.

1. They can be easily forged.
2. They carry little weight without context.
3. They are no longer unique or personal.

And if signatures have lost their impact, where does that leave brands that try to focus solely on finding a signature element in their product or service to talk about? To try to answer this question, let's look at one of the largest automotive repair franchises in the United States, which built its business on two principles: its signature service and the importance of convenience.

## Convenience Is No Longer King

Jiffy Lube was founded in 1979 in response to the decline of full-service gas stations during the 1970s. Often called the "McDonald's of the auto service industry," both out of scorn and admiration by its competitors, Jiffy Lube pioneered the quick oil change business with its focus on speed and consistent service above all else.

The problem for Jiffy Lube is that convenience is not as important as it once was. In a prescient book published in 2000 called *The Soul of the New Consumer,* authors David Lewis and Darren Bridger chronicled the shift away from convenience by introducing the idea that authentic-

ity and convenience were at two opposing ends of a pole (or spectrum). Today's consumers, they argued, were more involved, more informed, and more likely to value authenticity above convenience. Convenience alone was no longer enough. Jiffy Lube offers real proof of this point, as their focus on convenience and speed has caused the company some problems in the past decade.

Consumers may get the same checklist of items completed by their signature service as they always did, but a quick search on the brand will lead to hundreds of stories of negative customer experiences. Ask any independent mechanic about Jiffy Lube and many will readily have a story to tell about a time when they had to address a problem in a customer's car that they believe was related to a service that a customer had done at Jiffy Lube. Of course, none of this represents a truth about Jiffy Lube (and they are likely no worse than any other automotive maintenance provider), however it does create a wealth of negative word of mouth. Among the online reviews you can find about Jiffy Lube, there are very few glowing reports, and an increasing number of fan sites dedicated to negative experiences with the brand have approved. In a telling warning sign, a higher and higher percentage of the online word of mouth on Jiffy Lube is not so good.

This is not to single out this one brand. The problem facing Jiffy Lube is the same one facing many other companies in the world today. It falsely believes it has found a way to stand out and expends all its effort and communications budget talking about its signature service and convenience—both attributes that no longer set the company apart. Instead, it should be finding a way to address the one emotion that any customer who has ever had to visit a new automotive service shop will relate to: vulnerability.

## Marketing to Vulnerable Customers

Whenever they drive into an auto repair shop, people are vulnerable to being taken for a ride (figuratively speaking, that is) and to being placed in a situation where they have no option but to agree to whatever the mechanic suggests. After all, who is really going to shop around for competitive offers when you are already at one auto repair shop? Even if you were willing, your car may not be drivable. It is the ultimate sales hostage situation: where you are unable to avoid being taken advantage of and must give your trust reluctantly to someone who may or may not be trustworthy.

Many people believe that mechanics know this and are therefore mentally expecting to be unfairly treated. It is not a pleasant experience. What people really want is to be able to trust their mechanic. But trust usually takes time, so how can you earn it in what is meant to be a quick experience?

Oil Can Henry's, a regional franchise with branches in only seven states, may have the answer. As a much smaller and less recognized regional chain of automotive services centers, it has several unique service features that are all centered on fostering more trust between customers and staff. In addition to its own "Famous 20 Point" oil change service (an element that directly, and effectively, challenges Jiffy Lube), the focus at Oil Can Henry's is on building a relationship. Their tagline reads "The One You Can Trust" and every interaction with the company is meant to follow through on this promise.

The key insight that allows Oil Can Henry's to do this is the insight that if its customers are able to watch a mechanic work on their car, it automatically creates a feeling of ease and encourages trust. Of course, in most auto repair shops standing above the mechanic watching his every move would be awkward or impossible. Instead, you are shown to a waiting room with crusty old issues of *Sports Illustrated*, a TV tuned to soap operas or local news, stale coffee, and the distinct aroma of spilled oil.

At Oil Can Henry's, there are no waiting rooms. You stay in your car and watch the mechanic work on custom TV screens that show a live video feed from underneath your car. Being able to stay in your car is nice, as is their commitment to explain what is happening with your car. They will even bring you coffee and the paper to read in your car while you wait.

What Oil Can Henry's knows about personality is that it is more than having one or two signature service things that you can do for everyone. It is about offering a unique experience that fulfills a need and gets customers to talk about it to others as a result.

As I first stated earlier in the book, a personality has three core qualities—it is unique, authentic, and talkable. A signature service may be unique for a short time, but eventually others will offer the same service and it will no longer be enough to make the company stand out. The great brands are the ones that can be more than just unique.

The rest of this chapter will help you to learn how to develop all three qualities. To help get you started, I will introduce a new way of thinking about personality. To introduce this approach, let's start by looking at the methods used by what is arguably the most personality-driven group of companies and brand in the world: Virgin.

## Virgin Gets Mile High in America

When the Virgin brand is mentioned, the first image that likely comes into your head is that of Sir Richard Branson, the self-described "adventure capitalist," who has often been called "the world's greatest entrepreneur." He's been called lots of other things too, but regardless of whether you like him or not, his approach to launching new businesses is unarguably successful. When Virgin enters a new industry, you can assume it will challenge the long-held assumptions of that industry. This is an effect I have seen over and over with the brand through firsthand experience.

I have had the pleasure, so far, of working on two different launches of new Virgin companies in my career: first on the launch of the Virgin Money Credit Card in Australia in 2003, and more recently on the launch of the long-awaited Virgin America, a domestic airline for the United States.

When I helped launch the Virgin Money Credit Card, our entire campaign was based on giving your old card the "plastic surgery" it needed. The credit card itself had one rounded corner, giving the physical card a unique look that set it apart from others. Virgin Mobile also offered customers the ability to pay as you go without signing lengthy contracts and even poked fun at how competitors charged extra for essential services with billboards that proclaimed "Voicemail is like sex. . .you shouldn't have to pay for it."

The Virgin Group has launched a long list of new businesses that demonstrate the individuality of the Virgin brand, including:

- Virgin Brides—they sell wedding dresses (obviously; shame on you if you thought otherwise!).
- Virgin Galactic—on a quest to be the first commercial spacecraft-carrier in 2009.
- Virgin LimoBike—a deluxe limo service in the UK—on a motorcycle.
- Virgin Experience Days—a collection of unique life experiences that can be given as gifts.

When it comes to the businesses Virgin is best known for, outside of its music business, these are most certainly within the travel industry. Travel is a particular passion for Richard Branson himself and the brand is increasing its reach in the industry with both international and domestic airlines, including Virgin Atlantic (for transatlantic flights), Virgin Blue

(in Australia), Virgin Nigeria (in Africa), and in 2007 the long-debated launch of Virgin America.

The reason for the debate was that the American domestic airline market is notoriously one of the toughest for a new entrant. Customer satisfaction scores are at an all-time low. Terror alerts and inconveniences caused by fears of terrorism are omnipresent. In late 2007 when Virgin America finally got its wings through U.S. government approval allowing it to start flying domestically, many experts expressed concern and wonder that Branson would even go into such a market.

Virgin America started right away by changing the way that the business of U.S. domestic air travel was conducted, and, more important, experienced by passengers. First, during the time it was still waiting to get its flights in air, Virgin partnered with what many consider the most popular blog in the world, Boing Boing, to run a contest to name one of their planes. The resulting name, *Unicorn Chaser,* built enormous buzz through the blog's huge audience, a tactic that was also used for the launch of Virgin Atlantic a few years earlier. Both airlines were a throwback to an era where flying was elite, prestigious, and executed with much more fanfare. As a launch stunt, the names of the planes gave a personality to each flight.

In addition to participation in naming, passengers on Virgin America flights were treated to brand-new custom-designed planes that included lots of long-awaited features, including a seatback entertainment system with on-demand movies, a plug for a laptop in every seat, the ability to order food directly from the seatback, and what is perhaps the single most viral feature on their flights, a feature that many people love, seat-to-seat chat. Although not for everyone, this technology allows you to start instant messaging conversations with any other passenger on the plane who has opened his or her profile to be contacted (of course, there is an invisibility option as well for privacy). Perhaps most significant, the

staff on a Virgin America flight is not angry, rude, hostile, or overregulated. When your staff has the ability to be genuine and real, it makes a difference to the experience.

The result of all this attention to detail was that Virgin America's inaugural coast-to-coast flights gathered rave reviews from people who had taken the flights. Whether you look at Virgin America or any of the other Virgin brands, they all challenge conventions and stand apart in some way. It really is the perfect brand example to start helping you understand what your organization's personality is because it is unique, authentic, and talkable—the key elements of personality.

## Isn't Personality in the Eye of the Beholder?

Building on these elements, the rest of this chapter will introduce you to a framework for personality through something that I call the *UAT Filter*. First, though, we need to address what some might consider a flaw in the idea of defining something as indefinable and broad as personality. If you equate having a personality with a quality like being beautiful, it would be impossible for any study to break down the idea of beauty into neat categories or quantifiable standards in order to determine whether something or someone was beautiful or not. Ideals based on human emotion are all like that.

Personality when referring to an organization, as I mentioned earlier, is different. The personality of an organization is not a combination of character traits like it is for individuals. To return to the definition I shared earlier: **Personality is the unique, authentic, and talkable soul** of your brand that people can get passionate about.

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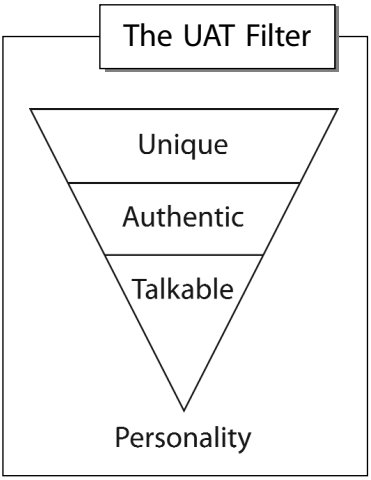
The three elements of personality noted above are chosen very deliberately: personality requires all three, and the way to look at them is operating together as a filter. Personality does not have to be a subjective idea

left up to each person's sensibilities to define. Before you can help your organization get more personality, there needs to be a common framework for describing it. That's the goal of the UAT Filter.




At first glance, this may seem a bit formulaic as a framework for something as creative and different as a personality. The thing to remember about this particular simplification is that it is not a scientific model; it is a creative one. That's why the word *formula* doesn't really work. "Filter" is much better. A filter is a sequential way of getting to an end result that fits certain criteria. A filter usually also indicates quality. The best water is pure filtered. Vodka is too. Even air quality is controlled by filters.

In terms of defining your brand personality, the best way to think about uniqueness, authenticity, and talkability is to regard them as filters that build upon one another. Every brand used as an example in this book can be put through the UAT filter to identify the core elements of its personality. In addition, the filter provided a model for identifying the right brands and messages to include in this book.

The reason why this filter should be the place where you start is that personality can be easily confused with other things, including marketing campaigns or product design. If you look at the three core elements of personality, all are themes in marketing that you will find lots of resources and advice devoted to. The problem is, most businesses and businesspeople are taught to focus on these elements separately.

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When you do that, however, you end up with something different. Before we begin to discuss how you can use the UAT filter to define your organization's own personality, let me share a word of caution about another marketing tactic that will be tempting to consider as you seek to define a personality for your organization—the marketing stunt.

## Anatomy of a Stunt Marketer

A stunt is usually the enactment of a big idea that involves something highly visual and unique. Having spent most of my career working in an agency helping all kinds of marketing teams promote their products, I know that focusing solely on the stunt is one of the most common mistakes marketers make. Stunts are fun to watch and can often become viral and spread from person to person. Unfortunately, they are also often ideas that are run in the absence of real strategy and have uncertain outcomes.

I don't mean to sound negative about using stunts for marketing, because when used correctly, they can be very effective at attracting notice. The main problem with stunts, though, is that they often will raise eyebrows and obtain momentary notice, but then the bump disappears. Of course, some stunts like Taco Bell's famous April Fools' Day prank in 1996, when they issued a press release saying they had purchased the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia and renamed it the Taco Liberty Bell (inciting letters of complaint to the government until the "announcement" was revealed as a prank), are remembered for a long time. But the connection to the brand is minimal and weak.

Stunts are designed to make impressions. They are limited in scope and often fleeting. To really use your personality for marketing, it needs to go deeper than a stunt. You need to be able to separate having a personality from having a few great marketing stunt ideas. This is the difference between having a real strategy and a collection of tactics. Tactics

are executions meant to promote your products or service. Personality offers something more deeply connected to your brand.

To make sure you are focusing on your personality instead of stunts, you need a framework to help you evaluate your ideas, so you can predict what will make an impact. The intention of the UAT Filter is to give you that framework so you can evaluate your ideas and choose the right ones. Often, the problem is not one of having ideas for what to do, but getting direction to help identify where to focus your efforts.

Let's get started by talking about the first element of the filter—being unique.

## Street Food Is Unique. . .Sometimes

People travel from all around the world to Chowpatty Beach in Mumbai, India, to sample a type of street food called bhelpuri. A mix of puffed rice, potatoes, onions, chili, mint, coriander, and chutney, the spicy snack is so much of a staple at this popular location in Mumbai that many even consider it the one dining experience in Mumbai not to be missed. Clearly, the bhelpuris on the beach are a unique draw for the city, so it may come as a surprise when I tell you that this is not what I mean by creating a unique experience. The problem with bhelpuris is that once you get to Chowpatty Beach, there are dozens of vendors all selling the same thing. They are not all exactly the same, but you would need to be a very experienced bhelpurist to discern the differences among them. When everyone sells the same "unique" thing, it is nearly impossible to stand out.

Contrast this with an entirely different type of street food served by a guy in a trailer at Woolloomooloo wharf in Sydney, Australia, near an old naval yard. This destination, called Harry's Café de Wheels, is a local legend, which started just after World War II. Harry's serve meat pies loaded with mashed peas and gravy, or hot dogs piled high with top-

pings. The trailer is right by the water, open late, and most of the patrons eat standing on the curbside because there is no place to sit. No one else does what Harry's does—and his curbside café has been doing it for more than 50 years. Harry's is unique.

Go to just about any other city in the world and you will see the same kind of thing. Climax Jerky is a business based in a buffalo wagon outside the Silverthorne outlet shopping center in Colorado selling every type of jerky imaginable. Voodoo Doughnuts is another iconic local favorite in Portland, Oregon, which markets itself as the best-tasting donut in the world (created from the secret recipes of "donut masters" from Pico Rivera, California), and described as the choice of "artists, actors, washed up sports stars, old people, disillusioned tourists, and musicians." Unique finds like these often define the places they come from, or vice versa. They are the local legends that inspire people to have new experiences that they could not have anywhere else. There is one city that seems to inspire more of these unique destinations than others, because of how it chooses to describe itself: weird.

The residents of Austin, Texas, like to note their location in the heart of conservative Texas as an ironic coincidence. The city brands itself as the "Live Music Capital of the World" and with the internationally famous South by Southwest (SxSW) music, film, and interactive festival taking place there every March and T-shirts all over the city imploring visitors and residents alike to "Keep Austin Weird," it is easy to see how it could live up to its self-inscribed reputation. One Austin resident doing his part to help is Steve Busti, the owner of a gift shop called the Lucky Lizard.

The Lucky Lizard stands out as one of the few retail destinations on Sixth Street that is not a bar or a restaurant. Steve describes his shop as being all about carrying unique, one-of-a-kind gifts, many of which are created by local artists. To further the cult of weird, Steve also used the

back of his store to open what he calls the Museum of the Weird. The store within his store features shrunken heads and other assorted freaky knickknacks. In a weird city, Lucky Lizard offers a stage for the weirdness and a way of taking a piece of it home with you.

From meat pies on the streets of Sydney to the Museum of the Weird in Austin, there are thousands of unique travel destinations everywhere around the world. The lessons they offer include not only how to create something unique, but also how to use the first element of the filter to put your brand on a track toward acquiring personality. Being unique is the first step.

## How to Be Unique

Street food and travel experiences offer many wonderful examples of how to be unique. Beyond signatures or stunts, there are four true methods for creating something unique.

1. **Find the Uncontested Space.** This is the most reliable, but most difficult, method. It involves finding a business that no one else is in, and then defining it through your company. It is also the hardest to rely on, because as soon as you create a new industry there will be other challengers entering and ready to take you on. Priceline and eBay have both managed to do this online. Nintendo's Wii, Cirque du Soleil, and Crocs are all examples of others that have created a new niche for themselves by forging into new areas to make their competition irrelevant.
2. **Position Yourself.** Positioning is the art of defining how you want to be perceived without necessarily changing the product you have. From the citizens of Halfway, Oregon, renaming their town to Half.com in 1999 for the notoriety of being the first real town

to be named after a dot-com, to a small town in Romania called Sighişoara that proudly proclaims itself the birthplace of Vlad Ţepeş (the prince who inspired the Count Dracula stories)—the art of positioning uniquely is alive and well in small towns around the world. Ultimately, this is closely linked to storytelling—a topic we will explore fully in Chapter 4.

3. **Create a Twist.** Many times, you will be in a business where finding that completely different position seems impossible. In these businesses, you need to find an element that is unique and ownable that sets you apart. This is the twist. Finding this twist can be tricky because it should be about more than just finding your "signature service." It needs to be more significant. Introducing a new variety of Coke, for example, is not a significant enough twist. On the other hand, Fadó Irish Pub opened in 1996 in Atlanta and featured furniture and stones for the exterior of the bar directly from Ireland and created a unique experience that stood apart from all the other bars in the popular Buckhead area of Atlanta. That was their twist.
4. **Think Outside Your Region.** This is not about changing your business, but about changing where you do it. If you have a regional business that is the same as that of several competitors, consider uprooting and establishing it elsewhere. This is not possible for everyone, but for those who have the option, it can offer a strong way to stand out. A single bhelpuri vendor on the streets of Manhattan would stand out. There is a restaurant in Washington, D.C., called Cassatt's that is the only place in the city where you can get a flat white (a popular espresso-based coffee drink similar to a latte and served mainly in Australia and New Zealand). Bringing a regional experience

to an unexpected place and doing it in a way indistinguishable from the "real thing" makes Cassatt's unique.

As you know by now, being unique is only the first (and arguably the easiest) of the three elements of personality. So far, many of the examples for unique businesses have focused on one particular type of industry—restaurants and travel destinations. Let's broaden our focus and start to talk about the second element that influences how your personality is truly shaped and how your customer's perception of your business is formed—authenticity.

## Transparency Is Overrated

Being the only one on the block to sell something will take you only so far. Authenticity can be the hook that takes you from simply offering something different to building trust with your customers. Of course, as I shared earlier in the book, the word *authenticity* is rapidly becoming a cliché in business today. Part of the reason is that we live in a world where authenticity is often and easily faked. The examples of brands faking authenticity today abound and are increasingly familiar to people. Häagen-Dazs, Foster's, and Bombay Company are just a few examples of brands built upon the claim of a global heritage, but whose roots are solely and distinctly American. Every day there are more and more brands that try to claim authenticity through creative branding. They all want to be authentic.

The main reason why "authenticity" is such a buzzword right now, though, does not have to do with where products come from, but with the changing way that businesses communicate with their customers. The most common misperception about authenticity is that it is all about transparency. There are entire manifestos being written about how important transparency is, while government organizations are simultaneously mandating

transparency when it comes to financial records and transactions. Isn't this the same as authenticity?

It isn't and here's why. Transparency requires being open about what you are doing and admitting that you are doing it. What's missing is an evaluation about whether what you're doing is right or wrong. If you're transparent about the fact that you don't listen to your customers and are not interested in their opinions, you're not being very authentic even though you are transparent. That's the danger of focusing too much on transparency, and why you should leave it to the lawyers and accountants to figure out what you need to be transparent about and shift your attention to authenticity. Unless, of coarse, that lawyer happens to be your company's founder.

## Authenticity in Every Pocket

The last place anyone would have expected to see a brilliant example of an authentic brand is in a company created by a former lawyer. Scott Jordan was a corporate and real estate lawyer on the usual trajectory out of law school. He worked at a big firm and quickly became used to commuting across the country every week for his job. By every definition of the word, he was what is commonly called a "road warrior." On each of those trips, he would watch business travelers slowly empty their pockets of all the gadgets they owned in the airport security line, and he would think to himself that there must be a better way to carry our ever-increasing bundle of gadgets around with us each day. Inspired by his idea, he founded SCOTTEVEST (SeV) as the first company to produce what he then called "Gear Management Clothing."

In 2001 when Scott first started producing his clothing, gadget overload was just starting to hit. Many men were increasingly carrying around what was derogatorily called the "man purse" and it was not exactly the most masculine of choices. The real problem was that a line of clothing

that would allow you to carry around all these gadgets, without making you look like you could win first prize at a geek fashion show at MIT, didn't exist. So Scott and his wife Laura founded a company to create it.

When I got my first vest from SCOTTEVEST, it had 29 pockets. If it sounds like a lot, it is. This was the first piece of clothing I ever owned that I would have to learn how to use. Thankfully, each pocket included a small business card with ideas for what could go into the pocket. The vest also came with a stack of small cards that I could give to friends, along with Scott's personal story.

It is these little touches like the cards in the pockets, or the fact that Scott still personally answers his phone and responds to e-mails directly, that make SCOTTEVEST what it is. It also made it easy to get in touch with Scott to talk to him about the premise for my book. In one particularly telling moment, Scott spoke about the need for his company to scale quickly and attract investors. A part of it was demonstrating how the company was "real" through their Web site. To that end, he described the inside story of adding a fictional member of the management team named Kelly Adoggi. Here is Kelly's corporate profile on the company site:

> Kelly Adoggi is the Director of Marketing of SeV. A recent graduate, Kelly is the product of home schooling and private tutors. Her parents—described by Kelly as "unconventional mavericks"—felt that traditional education would not prepare her for this dog-eat-dog world. They saw in her the ability to take the ball and run with it and, consequently, put her in real life situations to develop her problem-solving skills. Kelly raves about her unique education. A self-described leader of the pack, her only bone to pick with her parents was her lack of classmates. Kelly was very excited when she heard about the position at SeV, as she felt it was something she could really sink

her teeth into. Although her experience was more limited than some applicants, she won Laura and Scott over with her never say die attitude. In her interview, she had Scott in stitches as she explained that she is not one to roll over and play dead—that she will sniff out information with rabid enthusiasm. Kelly's hobbies include hiking, running, walking, sleeping and eating. She is currently working on her first book, a collection of feminist short stories about loyalty and faithfulness tentatively titled, *Every Dog Has Her Day.*

If you haven't figured it out already, Kelly Adoggi is a pseudonym for one of Scott and Laura's dogs—and an inside joke about the company that Scott sometimes shares with customers. I talked earlier about the desire for many small companies to appear big. Some let this desire force them into choices that hide their personalities. Kelly's profile is a great example of how Scott has managed to keep his company authentic while still fulfilling the need to appear at times more established than he was. Recently the company added 12 new employees (including a real director of marketing) and is fielding a rapidly increasing number of orders. His company's personality, however, remains friendly, authentic, and conversational. And yes, Scott still answers the phone.

## How to Be Authentic

What Scott Jordan's story shows us is that authentic brands know how to keep their real voices and use them to build credibility and trust with their customers. They have values that their customers share and are honest in their interactions. Honesty, in particular, can be a scary word for brands. For some, it means giving up information that was previously kept secret or refraining from making promises to customers that the brand cannot

live up to. For these reasons, authenticity must be built from several key components.

1. **Define a Credible Heritage.** Where a company comes from is a great place to start to build the authentic story behind the brand. Having a real heritage that customers can identify with brings a brand to life and demonstrates that there was a real struggle by real people to start and build the company. As we will explore in Chapter 4, telling this story well is the key to providing the right foundation for your customers and employees, enabling them to believe in your brand.
2. **Demonstrate Passion and Belief.** The real passion behind a company is something that cannot be faked or manipulated, and people easily recognize it when this is being done. Authentic companies have people working there who are passionate about the mission of the organization. When this passion comes through in its interactions with customers, the brand is perceived as far more real and powerful.
3. **Foster Individuals Instead of People.** It is of the utmost importance to have your employees act as individuals rather than as parts of one monolithic and impersonal group. Authentic brands have individuals working for them who are the ones that demonstrate the passion and belief behind the brand—a point we first talked about in Chapter 2.
4. **Have Motives Beyond Profit.** Companies that have an authenticity are also the ones that focus on goals beyond short-term profit. This criterion includes the idea of good and bad profits, as well as of authentic and inauthentic motives. If a customer

feels like every interaction with you is nothing more than a chance for you to sell something, trust erodes. If, on the other hand, the interactions are about something more than profit, you can build trust.

You are almost there, but if you are only focused on being unique and authentic—you will have a great story but with hardly anyone telling it. The last element of the UAT filter is all about amplifying your personality and making it visible. In traditional marketing terms, if you think of finding your unique element as positioning and interacting authentically as the way to build trust and credibility, then talkability is the all-important final component of personality. It allows your brand to travel from person to person and manifest the benefits of positive word of mouth.

## How Talkability Relates to WOM

Just about every piece of marketing advice you get these days will repeat the same obvious truth—word of mouth is the most influential source of trusted advice for most consumers. At one time, it was easy for brands to think of word of mouth as an add-on effect that happened outside of your marketing, almost beyond your control. What pioneering WOM thinkers like Andy Sernovitz and Ed Keller have been illustrating through their books[1] and work with the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) is that there is a way to foster word of mouth and help it happen for your products and brand *on purpose*. Word of mouth doesn't have to be an accidental phenomenon.

Talkability is the third part of the UAT filter for a reason. It ties the idea of personality back to the core benefits of word-of-mouth market-

[1] *Word of Mouth Marketing* (Sernovitz) and *The Influentials* (Keller).

ing. Talkability is the hook that makes someone want to share your message with her or his friends and family. Creating something talkable is all about finding the right hook and helping your customers pass it on.

The reason this can often be difficult is that achieving talkability requires a type of thinking that many brands are not prepared for because the "sell" is not your product but the talkable message that someone is likely to pass on to someone else. Imagine you have a new DVD for a documentary film that you want to distribute. Consider two approaches you could take. The first is to identify the demographics of your target audience, find the media that they read, and place advertising or PR messages there. This is what most marketers would do.

The second approach is to find the much smaller group of people who would be interested in the film and also highly inclined to tell 10, 15, or 50 others about it. Then you give each of them two copies for free, one for them to keep and the other to give someone else. The talkability of that approach means your film will get in front of many more people and eventually you will sell it to people who you never anticipated (assuming it is good and people recommend it—don't forget that personality can't make a bad idea better).

## What Dave Matthews Knows about Buzz

This focus on recommendations is also the secret behind the viral success of the Dave Matthews Band (DMB). When I was living in Atlanta in the mid-1990s, DMB was just a popular college band that did shows at small venues and had a big college fan base, including a fellow who lived in my college dorm.

On his shelf were hundreds of bootlegged cassette tapes (yes, it was back when people still used tapes) and each was of a different show by the Dave Matthews Band as it played across the United States. At each

show, there were cover songs, different versions of some of their favorite songs, and real concert moments. Each was a unique experience and collecting them made you feel like part of the band. What DMB realized early was that giving their most involved fans the freedom to tape and distribute their shows was the ultimate way to create their own army of ambassadors for their music. The experience of listening to any of these shows was immediately talkable because you were sharing in a unique moment. DMB was a live band in the truest sense of the word, every one of their shows was different and had unique moments.

That unique experience is what I remember about the band (and what I still tell others about it). Though they have now become "mainstream," I still associate them with those scratchy bootleg cassettes that I listened to in my college dorm room just over a decade ago.

## How to Be Talkable

How did DMB create something so talkable that it kept fans engaged for more than a decade and helped propel them from a college band to mega-superband status? For one thing, they demonstrated a strong understanding of the following core lessons:

1. **Offer something of value and that is limited.** By letting their fans tape and share shows, DMB had a built-in distribution channel that would ensure that their music spread from person to person. Having a very different sound certainly helped (as they were unique), but letting these show recordings travel offered fans some ownership of discovering the band. It also provided the incentive to share—which is the most important benefit of offering something of value.

2. **Have a hook that is shareable.** The hook is the factor that gets people talking. It is the thing that makes your brand or product interesting and worthy of discussion. For DMB, it was the composition of the band (they have the normal guitar, bass, and drummer—as well as a violin player and a sax player), as well as Dave himself and his wildly difficult guitar riffs that went way beyond the typical three-chord guitar riffs that many other alternative bands of the time were using to create their hit songs.
3. **Get out of the way.** This may seem like the strangest strategy of all, but sometimes it is the best one. Consumers want to share their opinions and discuss things they are passionate about. If there is a vibrant discussion happening already and it is on your message, the best thing you can do is step back and let it happen.

So now that we have learned about the different elements of the UAT filter, it is time to put all the pieces together and start using it. To learn how, let's start by looking at the case study of a company that took the idea of a local grocery store and infused it with a human tradition that people have been engaging in for thousands of years: trading.

## A Trader That Breaks All the Rules

Imagine that part of your job involved tasting 12 types of dark chocolate from around the world to find the perfect one to sell? There are people whose jobs involve this type of tasting, but they are not usually among the regular employees at a company. They are most often wine or food critics or people who are writing some type of commentary on food and beverages. At Trader Joe's, these tasters are the employees and their qualification is that they are real people just like their customers.

As Jeff Caporizzo, a former senior art director with Trader Joe's, notes:

> No matter what department you worked in, you could look forward to tasting an assortment of fine chocolates, jumbo shrimp, nutty soy-milk or other tasty submissions. It brought us together as co-workers and exemplified the personality of the company. . .a place where FOOD comes first and we would stop a workday, get together, eat and talk about the experience.

Traders thousands of years ago pioneered a particular model of commerce that didn't involve money, but instead giving someone one item in exchange for another. It was the ultimate trust deal, sealed with a handshake and built on a collection of personal experiences. More than 40 years ago, Trader Joe's was opened as a new kind of grocery store founded on principles inspired by those of the early traders. The main principle was that every product sold in the store was tasted and selected by a member of their buying team.

As a result, walking into the store is like walking into the pantry of a good friend and seeing a range of products selected with you in mind. The store publishes catalogs full of products like Mojito Salmon (fresh frozen Atlantic-grade salmon with a signature mojito sauce) and it sells the majority of its products, sourced from producers around the world, under its own brand name. The Trader Joe's Web site describes the mission of the company:

> We travel the world in search of interesting, unique, great-tasting foods and beverages. We buy direct from the producer whenever possible. We strip away all the fancy stuff and focus on the important things like natural ingredients and inspiring flavors. We run a pretty

lean ship, too—you won't find any corporate jets or fancy offices around here. Heck, our CEO doesn't even have a secretary!

And what does our fanatical frugality do for you? It guarantees you the best values you can find anywhere around on the best foods and beverages we can find from everywhere around the world.

Among the myriad supermarkets and grocery stores housing countless faceless aisles of mass-produced food, Trader Joe's has pioneered a different experience that customers rave about. Along the way, the company has broken just about every traditional rule of the grocery business. Their stores are smaller and do not waste real estate on the wide aisles that their largest competitors say are a requirement. They take liberties with their brand, changing their name and logo from Trader Joe's to Trader Giotto's for products if it fits better. They carry relatively few fruits and vegetables, ensuring that they will not fit the mold of a "one-stop shop."

In a sea of the same experiences, Trader Joe's is unique and stands apart. It has a mix of a diverse range of products, an authentic brand identity, and an experience that consumers can't help telling one another about. From the plastic lobsters (there's one in every store) to its focus on selling products that have all been taste-tested and specially purchased to be sold at Trader Joe's, the experience of visiting a store is less like a chore and more like an adventure.

## The Personality Principles

When it comes to Trader Joe's or Oil Can Henry's—the common elements that unite these brands is an understanding of how to use personality to stand out, and their focus on something that is more than a signature. Across the first three chapters of this book, we have seen how and why brands lose personality, how accidental spokespeople are start-

ing to help brands tell stories and rediscover their personalities, and now have the framework to understand the personality behind your brand and how to define it. When it comes to putting that personality into action, there are three core principles you need to know.

1. **Principle 1: Talk like a real person.** Avoid clichés or a form of writing or what is affectionately known to businesspeople as "marketingspeak." The purpose of talking like a real person is one that was first introduced in Chapter 1: to build credibility. Using a conversational style of communication is one of the cornerstones of personality and a necessity for any brand.
2. **Principle 2: Admit you are marketing.** Guess what? Your customers already know what you're trying to do. Admitting that you are marketing addresses the "elephant in the room" and demonstrates that you are willing to be honest about what you are up to. You have a product or service you think someone would be interested in, they have their attention as currency that they can either give to you or not. Ironically, the admission that you are marketing can often create a compelling reason for a customer to pay attention, as long as your message is relevant.
3. **Principle 3. Have a sense of humor.** Faceless companies never laugh. They have inane policies and laughable marketing proclamations but are loath to poke fun at themselves. Companies that can do this automatically win credibility for being more authentic and real. This is not about turning everything into a joke or always making people laugh, however. Humor has to be appropriate, but having it is an essential element.

The UAT filter is all about positioning and how you define your organization. Remembering these principles will help you as we move from talking about positioning your brand and finding the right spokespeople into actually putting personality into action. The next chapter focuses on how to create a backstory for your brand that your customers can believe in.

## The Sellevator Pitch

The personality of your organization is the combination of what is unique, authentic, and talkable about it. The UAT Filter helps you identify your personality by looking at these elements sequentially.