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## Brand Magic: Harry Potter Marketing

**3** The typical brand manager is an ageist. It goes with the territory, because whatever the formal customer segmentation driving a brand strategy, the segments will almost certainly be differentiated by age.

Innéov, a line of nutricosmetics jointly owned by L'Oréal and Nestlé, is a case in point. Its main product, a nutritional supplement called Firmness, targets women aged 45 to 55. One of the Firmness brand manager's greatest worries is that if too many "older" consumers (that is, above 55) are stuck to her

proach. Instead of seeking to build immortal brands that generations mature into and then out of, they could create brands around a given cohort of customers. As the customers matured, the brands would evolve with them. The aim would be to match the needs of that cohort at any moment in time. We call this "Harry Potter marketing," after the fictional schoolboy wizard who grows older with his readers.

How would it look in practice? Let's assume that instead of targeting Frenchwomen "of a certain age," Innéov targeted women born between 1955 and 1965 and launched a brand called Souplesse (Suppleness) in 2005. Because this customer pool would not change over time, the company could explicitly manage for brand loyalty, responding to the actual preferences of its customers rather than trying to sell them a predesigned set of preferences.

Like Harry Potter, the fictional schoolboy wizard who grows older with his readers, brands that mature with their users can prove particularly durable.

brand, 45-year-old potential consumers might get the impression that Firmness is "not yet for them – thank goodness."

Like Firmness, most brands target a specific age group, either explicitly or implicitly, through the choice of media used to advertise them. To serve customers outside that age group, the company has to create new brands. As customers mature, the company must replace them with younger ones and encourage the previous customers to switch to an allied brand rather than to a competitor.

The big problem with this approach to branding is that it positively discourages customer loyalty – and, as we all know, it's a lot cheaper to keep customers than to find new ones. To get around this problem, we propose that companies like L'Oréal consider a new ap-

This more balanced dialogue would enhance the targeted cohort's emotional bonding with the brand. For example, the brand could continue to capitalize on the fact that many of its consumers grew up in the age of disco or thrilled to the tunes of ABBA.

Various components of the marketing mix would be affected. The proportions of active ingredients in Souplesse would progressively change to take customers' aging into account. The company might want to retain the same celebrity (the French actress Carole Bouquet, perhaps, or the fashion icon Inès de la Fressange) to endorse it for many years, creating further emotional bonding. However, her message about the product's benefits would change over time. When most members of the cohort had reached the age of 55, the em-

phasis could switch from “attacking the first visible signs of aging” to “providing a complete skin treatment.” Distribution strategies should take into account the evolution of the cohort’s shopping habits. When the majority of the cohort had reached the age of 65, for instance, L’Oréal might make beauty salons a retail option because older consumers spend relatively more time there.

Unlike traditional brands, Souplesse would face a certain death. For most brand managers, this would be a disaster; but L’Oréal would already have launched other Innéov skin creams for subsequent cohorts. Would this constant churn be expensive? Perhaps. But the continual relaunching and repositioning of age-specific brands is also expensive – and our preliminary work with L’Oréal suggests that Harry Potter marketing would not necessarily be more so. For one thing, evolving Harry Potter brands would presumably profit from greater brand loyalty. Of course, this sort of marketing won’t work in all industries, and it needs to withstand the test of, well, time. But it could be used for food, health care, clothing, and the media. This perspective can help explain why, for instance, Club Med and Gap, whose original successes were each due to a single generation’s strong emotional bonding, have experienced a downturn in their sales.

One last word: A world of cohort-specific brands will probably favor first movers, because if they do their job well, second entrants will find differentiation difficult. This suggests that fans of Harry Potter should proceed quickly.

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