
Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 14-05-2008 11:05

Oh, come on, we might as well.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 14-05-2008 11:07

Nike&
Starbucks&
Wal - Mart

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ad hoc - 14-05-2008 11:08

http://www.usa.gov/images/hp_Flag_Right.jpg

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by King Mob - 14-05-2008 11:16

<http://tbn0.google.com/images?q=tbn:N40WenIVxcScZM:http://www.aaronblake.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/russell-brand-web.jpg>

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by JtS - 14-05-2008 12:01

http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/images/38904000/jpg/_38904409_jo_bbc.jpg

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 14-05-2008 12:05

No contest:

<http://www.prairieforge.net/graphics/bush.jpg>

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 14-05-2008 12:06

I saw her last night at the recording of QI that I went to. As funny as ever.

Jo Brand, that is.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Hofzinsler - 14-05-2008 12:07

How did you get tickets for that?

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by You Are The Ref - 14-05-2008 12:08

EAT.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Hofzinsler - 14-05-2008 12:10

Sounds like a pretty good deal.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 14-05-2008 12:11

Hofzinsler wrote:

How did you get tickets for that?A friend applied through the Beeb's website. It's well worth a trip.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The Horse - 14-05-2008 12:15

I saw her last night at the recording of QI that I went to. As funny as ever.

Well, never mind. At least there were four other performers.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 14-05-2008 12:29

YATR: why?

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Phoebe Disco - 14-05-2008 12:37

Sunny Delight.

Think about it - when we were kids if a drink marketed itself as 'the great taste kids go for', with those original crappy adverts and was basically squash, it would have been told to fuck right off, instead of being the gateway drug to dairylea lunchables.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by You Are The Ref - 14-05-2008 12:52

GY- Dunno. The sudden omnipresence of their branches, and the faintly totalitarian-imperative sound of the name just creeps me out a bit. I know nothing about the company apart from that.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Crusoe - 14-05-2008 13:02

It used to stand for "Excellence And Taste", which isn't much better. Now they're just another Pret-alike. I miss Benjy's; worse food but a lot cheaper.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by King Mob - 14-05-2008 13:47

Have Benjy's bitten the dust? Their caramel squares were the nicest food made by anyone ever.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 14-05-2008 13:50

Not liking the brand, sure (although I quite like them). But how has it been damaging?

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by O Colluphid - 14-05-2008 13:51

I do rather like the soups they do in EAT and there's one just across the road from my office so it's tempting to go there all the time.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Mr Beast - 14-05-2008 13:57

Tescos

They won't rest until they're running the world

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by You Are The Ref - 14-05-2008 13:57

GY- well, for starters, they've pretty effectively derailed this thread.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 14-05-2008 14:14

The cunning bastards.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 14-05-2008 16:29

<http://www.ourtroopsrock.com/files/BudLightSwish.jpg>

Why is Nike blamed for all the evils in the world, while Reebok, Adidas and all the other companies who do roughly the same thing never get mentioned?

Are we all supposed to wear clunky ugly New Balance? (EIM to thread!)

Starbucks isn't actually so bad. I wish there weren't so damn many of them and the ambience inside is a bit grating, but at least they're "on the street" and they do the fair trade stuff and so forth. There are now more independent coffee shops around than there were pre-Starbucks. Starbucks essentially created the industry.

Wal-Mart is pretty nefarious. But they aren't a brand so much as a Devourer of Worlds.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 16:43

Nike and Starbucks are lightning rods for hatred because they're highly visible, not because they're any worse.

Wal-Mart, however, is pure evil.

But for damaging brands, I'd vote Hummer for its normalizing effects on the culture of 'I'll drive a gas-guzzling vehicle because I can fucking afford to'. If I recall correctly, someone on the old board linked to an article about a kid in Liberal suburban New York who'd worked two jobs to buy his dream Hummer, only to have it repeatedly vandalized by his tweed-jacketed eco-neighbours. I felt bad for him...for a minute or two.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Eggchaser - 14-05-2008 16:46

I hate Nike because they only make shoes for people with really thin feet. Plus they've royally, royally fucked up the England rugby shirt with their fuck awful cookie-cutter approach and that bastard Cornetto paint splash on the front.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 14-05-2008 17:07

Starbucks essentially created the industry.

As good a reason to burn them as any. I don't know what's worse. The fact that they sell a cup of hot fucking water with some coffe in it for 3 quid, or the fact that an endless procession of wank-hammers actually pay it.

I hate Nike because they only make shoes for people with really thin feet.

Fuck me, you must have hooves like manta-rays. I wear Nike a lot and I've got really fat feet, like the rest of me.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 14-05-2008 17:44

Before Starbucks, it was damn near impossible to find a decent cup of coffee in this country at any price.

It's still hard now, and a lot of people don't like Starbucks coffee either, but they've raised the standards by introducing the radical idea that coffee should taste good.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Eggchaser - 14-05-2008 17:49

I've never managed to find a pair of Nike football boots that weren't cripplingly slim. My feet are normal.

It was then I decided they were bastards of the highest order and I started buying Lotto instead.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 14-05-2008 17:58

Could you not just, I don't know make a cup of coffee?

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 17:59

Starbucks' success, when delved into deeply, has little to do with its (good or bad) coffee. Primarily, it sells an excellent experience with a beverage being the souvenir you take away with you. The stores are generally clean and appealing, offering a seemingly luxurious experience for what it essentially pocket change. You get something tailored to you (short to grande, your type of milk, temperature, foam, etc, etc) and hand-made by someone trained to focus on you exclusively during the transaction. You can sit around, read, and enjoy a bit of cafe culture without being made to feel like you're loitering. And with rare exception (see Joe magazine), their supporting brand hoo-ha has clicked with their customer base. I'm talking about Starbucks cards, exclusive music, coffee makers, collectors' cups and whatnot. The downside, as mentioned above, is the legion of twats they've created who feel they can't speak properly until they've had their cup of double-tall bold African yadda yadda in the morning. A case of "I don't hate the band, I hate their fans" if ever there was one.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 14-05-2008 18:03

"Before Starbucks, it was damn near impossible to find a decent cup of coffee in this country at any price."

This absolutely, positively, does NOT apply to New York, where you could get a good cup of American coffee at any of the several hundred Greek diners for 60 cents (and often free refills).

And for someone who lives in Italy, Starbucks' "espresso" is undrinkable.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The Horse - 14-05-2008 18:11

Starbucks have a branch at Guantanamo Bay, serving coffee to the captors. Fuck Starbucks.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 18:11

I saw Seth Godin speak yesterday. He of the marketing books 'Purple Cow', 'Free Prize Inside', 'Unleashing the IdeaVirus', etc. One of the great new brands he talked about was Little MisMatched. They sell socks to little girls. The come in sets of three, beautifully coloured and completely mismatched. Little girls wear them to school, say "look at my socks" to other little girls, who in turn go home and bug mom until they get 'em. The company doubles in size every 9 months. Godin's point was that this is the way you need to think to have a truly groundbreaking company. Starting a company 'kinda like Starbucks, but more _____' won't do it.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 18:17

Starbucks have a branch at Guantanamo Bay, serving coffee to the captors.

Well, they're there serving US Military personnel. "Brave men and women fighting the war on terror", if you will. And there's also a McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Wal-Mart, Subway, and a few others. Tough to parse capitalism, patriotism and politics in any meaningful way without getting yourself into deep shit with someone.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 14-05-2008 18:20

Starbucks espresso is deliberately over-roasted to being burnt to deliberately remove any identity from the coffee. It's hideous, but it creates a uniform basis for their various cafeinnated sugary desserts and is what they need for making light wavy vanilla half-moist caramel fraponettos or whatever they're alled.

Starbucks are bad, because they have reinforced the idea that burnt coffee is good, that burnt means strong (rather than actually meaning bitter and watery), they've created the impression that it actually costs £1.80 to make an espresso.

But much though I despise their coffee, I don't think they're particularly pernicious.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 18:30

They're no worse for overcharging for an espresso than Porsche are for charging you \$65,000 for a Cayanne that's nothing more than a \$40,000 VW Tourag with a new nameplate. It's not about price or cost. It's about brand and experience.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 14-05-2008 18:35

WoM, I know you do this for a living, but so far on this page you have proposed McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Wal-Mart, Subway, Porsche and a company whose business model depends on little girls extorting bribes from their mothers is order to engage in fashion competition with their cohorts as models.

I'm pretty sure that most of us would be more than happy to throw all of them in the gutter with Starbucks.

The Cayenne is hideous, they had massive difficulty selling them in Germany when they were introduced, and Italians

won't touch them. I also wonder whether your misspelling of Touareg is an indication of what you really think of VW.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Lyra - 14-05-2008 18:37

Have you ever read PopCo by Scarlett Thomas? It's really good. It's about all this 'branding' bollocks and it centres on a bunch of people challenged to invent something just like that.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 18:48

WoM, I know you do this for a living, but so far on this page you have proposed McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Wal-Mart, Subway, Porsche and a company whose business model depends on little girls extorting bribes from their mothers in order to engage in fashion competition with their cohorts as models.

I'm not sure what your point is. But then, I'm not sure what the point of 'targetting' big/popular/profitable companies is to begin with. I don't know many companies that aren't target for someone's hatred, but there don't seem to be any ways around it. If you do something good, you're greenwashing. If you make funky furniture that anyone can afford, you're spreading 'global cookie cutter design' (in one of many pieces of stupidity I've seen levelled at IKEA). If you sell expensive espresso, you're...I don't know what. But no one likes you.

But, (takes a few steps back), I don't know what's wrong with creating and selling (and marketing) things that people enjoy and want (socks, cars, beer, etc). We're all consumers, and we choose the brands we choose for many, many different reasons. But let's not fool ourselves that we only buy things for their utility, low price and corporate citizenry. I don't think that any of the brands above are any worse than their nearest ten competitors. Sure, there's someone in each category that's doing many more things right, but that experience doesn't generally reflect the reality of most peoples' daily existence.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 14-05-2008 18:48

UA, New York doesn't count. That's not America. That's not even Mexico.

Espresso doesn't really translate to the American context. We want something in a paper cup that we can take with us and sip for a while. If it's winter, it's nice to have the cup of hot coffee to warm one's hands. Hence, the Americano. We do not not run in, do a shot, and run out.

And yet Howard Schultz says Starbucks is meant to recreate the Italian espresso bar "experience." I've never even been to Italy, but I'm pretty confident it doesn't accomplish that. It recreates the Dunkin Donuts "experience," except with higher prices, better lighting, much slower queues, a full "pro shop" area, much-maligned stupid Italian names for everything and wanky music.

I don't know which Starbucks WOM is going to, but at the one's I've been to, they don't do anything "by hand" anymore. It's all automated. Like at McDonald's. And I don't know what is so luxurious about it, although they do let you just hang out, which is nice.

They've started to get away from that model by building more drive-throughs and locations in strip malls where nobody would ever want to just hang out. Apparently, Schultz is starting to think that's not a good strategy and wants to get back to focusing on the "experience." I don't see why he wants to build so many. It sort of defeats the idea that it's a special experience and a neighborhood meeting place if every neighborhood has six of them.

"Could you not just, I don't know make a cup of coffee?"

Not really. There was a time in America when there were lots of coffee roasters at mom and pop shops everywhere, but for whatever reason, most of those got wiped out (depression, I think) and all that was left were the big companies shipping the cheapest stuff in big cans - Folgers, Hills Brothers, etc.

Fifteen or 20 years ago, hardly anyone owned a coffee bean grinder or a French press or anything like that. Certainly, nobody was getting a espresso/cappuchino maker as a wedding gift. Now everyone gets one (I got a regifted machine from a couple I know. I don't know how to operate the espresso or cappuchino functions). I don't know if such things were even readily available.

I recall that some grocery stores ground beans in the store for you. I know that because it's a memory of my childhood smelling the coffee in the front of the Riverside (a supermarket chain that no longer exists), but I don't know if it was any good. It probably wasn't.

My parents didn't buy coffee that way. They bought it ground in big cans and made it in the coffee maker (they still do that). After dinner they didn't want to make a whole pot so they drank instant coffee. I drank that in college. It doesn't taste like coffee, and yet we considered it an acceptable substitute because we didn't know any better.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 18:50

The Cayenne is hideous, they had massive difficulty selling them in Germany when they were introduced, and Italians won't touch them. I also wonder whether your misspelling of Touareg is an indication of what you really think of VW.

Nah, that was just a typo. I own a VW and, quite frankly, love them.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 18:57

Have you ever read PopCo by Scarlett Thomas? It's really good. It's about all this 'branding' bollocks and it centres on a bunch of people challenged to invent something just like that.

I haven't. I actually tend not to actively read much about my industry. If someone's got a neat looking book laying on their desk, I might borrow it. But I generally get my fill from industry sources from 9 to 5.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Inca - 14-05-2008 19:01

King Mob wrote:

<http://tbn0.google.com/images?q=tbn:N40WenIVxcScZM:http://www.aaronblake.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/russell-brand-web.jpg>

The other guy in Forgetting Sarah Marshall?

Anyway, back to the topic:

<http://tbn0.google.com/images?q=tbn:D8jdOSAggSNy8M:http://students.ithaca.edu/~lsmall1/lab3/images/espn.jpg>

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 19:09

To Chubby and Reed: there really is no snobbery like coffee snobbery. 'Good' coffee is coffee that you enjoy drinking. If

you've drunk instant coffee for 60 years (as my parents have), that's good coffee. If you enjoy drinking heavily roasted coffee ('burnt'), that's good coffee. For many, Tim Hortons' or Dunkin' Donuts' coffee is as near to heaven as they can imagine. So what? It's roasted beans with hot water run through it. Again, with brands, you're not buying coffee. You're buying the perceived image and experience (the construct) that surrounds it.

You know how many people wouldn't be caught dead driving a Hyundai? "They're shit!". Yeah, and they're the best built car behind Toyota. Brands baby. Nothing but.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by TonTon - 14-05-2008 19:15

I like the coffee, me. Not Starbucks coffee, anyone who says they like Starbucks coffee is probably lying, or maybe suffering from dead mouth syndrome. I like coffee though. I'm not really into the "experience" so much.

Anyway, surely Coke has to be the worst, ever, doesn't it?

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Eggchaser - 14-05-2008 19:27

I'm OK. I hate coffee in all its forms, so I couldn't give a toss how burnt the beans are.

Cayenne drivers are twats, to a person. And you have to wonder if Porsche will ever manage to escape the 911 shape. I mean, it's been around for 40 years and whilst it's a design classic, at some point they're going to have to move on. Mind you, when that is I've no idea since the 924/944 was an attempt at that and what a success that was.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 14-05-2008 19:32

As explained in The Rebel Sell, the world would actually be a lot worse without brands, because they are "reputation mechanisms." In this day and age, we don't realize how often people got ripped flagrantly off in the days before established brands. (I plan to write a full book report on The Rebel Sell because it touches on so many topics beloved by OTF.)

One wouldn't be inclined to rip-off one's neighbor, because you'll see them again and want their business again, but when business becomes regional, let alone national or international, we need some way for a company to establish a "name for itself" so they have an incentive to treat customers fairly, lest word get out that they're dishonest.

As I recall from my Economics History class, the roots of this sort of reputation mechanism were traders in the middle ages who would often see the same people year after year at trade fairs.

Of course, the downside of this is that companies have figured out ways to create build a reputation for themselves that has little or no connection to the actual product.

As left-wing people who fancy ourselves well-informed, we find it very irritating that companies get away with this sort of flim-flammy and we should.

But it's not a great global capitalist conspiracy. It is a collective action problem. Nike has to create an aura of coolness around their sneakers because Adidas, Puma and Reebok are doing the same. If any company decides not to advertise, then they'll just be left in the dust and won't sell anything. I'm sure all of the companies would prefer not to have to spend money on advertising, but for that to work, they'd all have to agree to it, and that will never happen, because the company that knows its stuff is actually the worst would never concede that sort of advantage.

But they do have to give you something other than image. If the trainers fall apart or cause injury, they'll get a reputation for shoddy trainers, like LA Gear did when that NBA player's shoes exploded on the court (I forget the details).

The only way to combat this sort of crap, I think, is education. People need to be aware that a company's image is only that. It may or may not translate to anything substantive with the product. Of course, in the case of clothes or shoes or even cars, the image is the product to some extent in that people's preferences are based on what the thing looks like. That's ok - otherwise we'd all just be wearing grey jumpsuits or somesuch - but people, especially kids, need to be taught to look past the label and decide if they really like what the thing looks like. Of course, no aesthetic judgement is so pure, but I think at least being conscious of the brand influence helps a lot.

I know I'm always happier with my buying choices when I think all of that through, whereas I'm often disappointed in the long-run with things I bought based on short-term brand appeal.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 14-05-2008 19:46

The only way to combat this sort of crap, I think, is education. People need to be aware that a company's image is only that. It may or may not translate to anything substantive with the product. Of course, in the case of clothes or shoes or even cars, the image is the product to some extent in that people's preferences are based on what the thing looks like. That's ok - otherwise we'd all just be wearing grey jumpsuits or somesuch - but people, especially kids, need to be taught to look past the label and decide if they really like what the thing looks like. Of course, no aesthetic judgement is so pure, but I think at least being conscious of the brand influence helps a lot.

But what's the point of this? Why deconstruct a brand if you, as you state above, believe that brands serve a useful consumer purpose? And who gets to deconstruct that brand....you know, tell us 'the truth' about what the company is 'really like'? This just seems so "all consumers are idiots...except me", I think.

I agree that kids need to be shielded from many advertising messages. In fact, I believe that kids shouldn't be advertised to. But what is inherently evil about creating a product (like the funky socks I mention above) that one person loves, and someone else sees and wants? Even if that other person is a kid, what is wrong with that? And yeah, god forbid we're all wearing government issue track suits so we don't need to shop based on brands and colours and image. Lord protect us from ourselves.

I think consumer vigilance would be a great thing, but I really don't see that many people trying to fill their evenings reading reports of a company's manufacturing practices or its corporate governance. And why does Toyota get so much applause for the Prius but so few 'boos' for the Highlander and Sequoia? Who knows? Maybe because no one has the time or energy to think that much about it.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 14-05-2008 23:02

But what's the point of this? Why deconstruct a brand if you, as you state above, believe that brands serve a useful consumer purpose? And who gets to deconstruct that brand....you know, tell us 'the truth' about what the company is 'really like'? This just seems so "all consumers are idiots...except me", I think.

The point is to avoid buying something seems superficially better but actually isn't.

They can serve a useful purpose, but only insofar as the reputation of the brand has some grounding in reality.

The simplest example would be something like Volvo's reputation of building cars that are safe. I believe the testing data supports that claim. That's a pretty objective characteristic. So there's not much concern about "who gets to deconstruct the brand" as far as that goes.

But of course, if you're talking about matters of individual taste like fashion or food or beverages, then it's up to the individual to "deconstruct" the brand for themselves.

Of course, as you suggest, a lot of people think their analysis should be normative. It's one thing to say "I'm not a fan of Starbucks burnt bean coffee." Fine. But some people (like me) think it's ok. Just because you don't like it doesn't mean I'm a dupe because I do.*

People pay way more for North Face and Patagonia gear thinking it's better - in terms of how well it keeps them warm

and dry in the outdoors - than cheaper alternatives, but in fact there's usually not much basis for that claim.

If you're paying a hell of a lot more for just the label on a shirt, as opposed to the rest of the shirt, you should be well aware that that's all you're getting for the extra expense.

Most sensible people, when faced with that choice in clear terms, will go with the cheaper option. Some people, however, gladly pay way over the odds the label.

I'm perfectly comfortable saying that this behavior is just plain stupid and should be treated as such - mocked and ridiculed among adults and discouraged among children.

It's not about the evils of capitalism or brainwashing or any of that nonsense. It's just plain DUMB to pay more and not get more. And we, the consumers, are the ones being dumb.

Of course, we can't expect companies to be totally honest with us about all of this if for no other reason than what might be a meaningless difference between two products for one person may be worth a high premium to another, so it would be very hard to conclusively prove that, for example, a \$150 jeans from Armani are really the same as the \$20 ones I got at Old Navy. It's not their job to sort that out for you, because if they did, we wouldn't have choices. And that would suck.

Plus, freedom of speech and all of that.

So the onus is on the consumer to know what they're buying and give it some thought.

*However, I think in general, and with Starbucks in particular, I think a lot of people are duped. We get the little baggies of Starbucks coffee for our coffee maker in the kitchen at the office. I've noticed that when other people make the coffee, they usually only put in half the baggy into the filter. I always put the whole thing in. To me, their coffee tastes too watery. Mine usually tastes about like the stuff you get at the store. And of course, a lot of the more popular items at Starbucks don't really taste like coffee. They taste like sugar, milk, chocolate and whatever else goes into those various drinks. But it's the coffee that's supposedly merits the higher price (because Starbucks uses better beans and has experts roasting them, etc). This leads me to think that, when given a choice, people don't really like the taste of Starbucks. And yet, its staggeringly popular. So loads of people are paying over the odds for something they don't really like. That's just stupid.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 14-05-2008 23:29

We're all consumers...

And therein lies the problem.

We're all people. Only the constant bombardment of image over content and the incessant message that acquisition is good turns us into consumers.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 14-05-2008 23:37

What? I'm pretty sure the simple fact that we buy stuff and is what makes us consumers. Long before the bombardment began, there were consumers.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by E10 Rifle - 15-05-2008 00:36

But we are also, of course, producers and NON-consumers (ie I haven't bought any Nike stuff for more than a decade) and - above all else, citizens and human beings. Which is Hobbes' point.

Though I actually think your long post up there makes some important points there, Reed.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 15-05-2008 01:38

Good. I figured that if I just kept writing, I was bound to say at least one useful thing.

I agree, consumption is not our most important role in life. But people wanting stuff and valuing themselves and others based on their possessions did not begin with advertising or the industrial revolution.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by King Mob - 15-05-2008 09:58

It may be the case that Starbucks has kick-started a high-street coffee revolution, but not in a good way. All that I can see has happened, is that every pie and pasty emporium such as Greggs and their regionalised counterparts have bought a Gaggia on the cheap and serve coffee that Starbucks would be ashamed to peddle. It's not like there's been a proliferation of independent cafes dedicated to producing a variety of coffee styles and flavours.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 15-05-2008 10:52

I think Reed's right that "brands", in the sense of, you know, names that go on products that let you say "Yeah, I remember buying that a couple of months ago and it was lovely/shit", are useful constructs, against which the anger of people like Naomi Klein is misdirected. But it's a huge leap from that to WOM's claim that we're buying "the experience" or "the brand" rather than, you know, what's branded.

I'm sure this "buying the brand" does go on a lot of the time, but to claim that it's ubiquitous--well, it smacks of an advertiser's creed, frankly: an "industry's" attempt to big its collective self up and make it feel central to Civilisation. An exercise in collective self-justification.

We buy "brands" mainly when we don't care about the products. I can't really distinguish toothpastes and I can't be arsed to attend to the business of cultivating discernment in this area, so I reach for a familiar one, without really thinking about it. What sometimes gets called "brand loyalty" is in reality inertia.

Whenever I do think about what I'm buying, I'm not buying a brand at all. To some extent I may be buying an "experience" (I don't go to pubs just because they sell beer), but the product is central to that "experience". Part of the reason Starbucks is successful is that people like to think they're the cast of Friends. But (and sorry, Cyclist et al) part of the reason is that you can rely on the coffee being, you know, not too bad. And better, by far, than the mean standard of "ordinary" coffee in the two countries (the US and Britain) in which it's been most successful. Most people can't go to work via some lovely little place in Milan (unless, of course, they work in Milan), and if it's either Starbucks or stewed straw (US)/ drowned granules (UK), Starbucks is better.

In summary: brands only really become important by default, when people can't be buggered attending to anything less glaring. And their centrality to the consumer "experience" is overstated.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The_Liquidator - 15-05-2008 11:03

The other guy in Forgetting Sarah Marshall?

His name is Russell Brand. Geddit?

Anyway, the solution to all this coffee related malarkey is simply to not drink it. Anyone drinks coffee instead of tea should be put on a national register, frankly.

Oh and I mean proper tea by the way, not Earl Grey or herbal tea or any of that vile shit. Normal tea that tastes like tea.

*This post was brought ot you by Alf Garnett

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 15-05-2008 11:08

Be sure to bring a few boxes with you when you move.

Wyatt, as Spangles will be all too pleased to confirm, the coffee in Milan is crap by Italian standards. It's the water, which is too highly calcified (or something) to produce proper coffee, even in the hands of a barrista who is using good coffee and knows what he is doing. We use bottled water in a moka pot at home, which produces better results, but isn't really a workable solution for a commercial enterprise.

It's one of the crosses we have to bear . . .

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 15-05-2008 11:12

The_Liquidator wrote:

The other guy in Forgetting Sarah Marshall?

His name is Russell Brand. Geddit?Be fair to Inca, he doesn't live in a "culture" utterly infested by the git. I was just about to post about how lucky it was to be an American...

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 15-05-2008 11:12

Coffee in the morning, tea in the afternoon. Basic, that is.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The_Liquidator - 15-05-2008 12:06

Be sure to bring a few boxes with you when you move.

They sell Twining's breakfast tea out there so I'll be all right I reckon. I wasn't talking about PG Tips.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Cal - 15-05-2008 12:12

Good examples all, but how about Microsoft?

think of the 'damage' people/companies have suffered w/ their buggy, porous OS.

The only computers I've ever owned have been Macs, so that puts me in the Apple-snob category, but I've also never had even the slightest OS problem either.

There is no other company that has so much market share dominance (though it is apparently slipping) and yet put out

such a crummy product.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 15-05-2008 12:25

I'm sure this "buying the brand" does go on a lot of the time, but to claim that it's ubiquitous--well, it smacks of an advertiser's creed, frankly:

Maybe I'm misunderstanding what you're saying, Wyatt, but I have always been under the impression that the view that branding is ubiquitous was a lefty-Naomi-Klein-inspired meme, not a capitalist advertiser's meme.

This:

We buy "brands" mainly when we don't care about the products.

is very wise, and is probably true 90% of the time (it's also what I understood WOM to mean when he said we mostly "buy the brand"). But sometimes a company which invests a lot in a brand does actually have a product worth buying and which one does like a lot. In my case, let's go with Starbucks coffee, which I do find a little bit on the burnt side but is better than *most* small shops in Toronto and infinitely better than the smaller brands in Canada (Tim Horton, Timothy's and Second Cup) Yes, the downside of Starbucks is that there might be a few fewer "local" coffee shops. But I'm not sure how many of these there really used to be, and the upside is that I can get a coffee I quite like pretty much anywhere in town and in most places when I'm on the road.

Is it Italian quality? Of course not. I wish I could get Italian-quality coffee here, but I can't, not really (Dooney's on Bloor makes a decent cappuccino, though). But in the absence of that, Starbucks will do.

Why should I hate them just because they happen to be large and have a recognizable brand?

And on the Guantanamo point...the US has had a naval base there for 100 years. It's about 50 square miles and had 10,000 inhabitants. It's not a surprise to me that American businesses like Starbucks have pitched up there (just as there is now a Tim Horton's in Afghanistan for the Canadian troops). If Starbucks does have an outlet there (they are not listed on wikipedia's list of Businesses in Guantanamo Bay, though that's hardly definitive), I'm fairly sure that it's not to specifically sell to workers at the detention camp there, but rather to base workers (and their families) as a whole.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 15-05-2008 12:37

The only computers I've ever owned have been Macs, so that puts me in the Apple-snob category, but I've also never had even the slightest OS problem either.

Apple are far more evil and insidious than Microsoft as has been pointed out before. If Apple had had their way, they'd control the software AND hardware supply.

In addition to which, Apple computers are designed to work with Apple hardware. Windows is designed to work with everything. That much freedom has a reliability overhead, usually caused by shit driver creation by the hardware producers.

As a final point, as I've said any number of times, Macs are as unreliable in my support experience as PC's/ They have less niggly problems, but when something goes, they go completely. I've only ever owned PC's at home and I've never had an OS problem there. It's hardly conclusive evidence that Windows is perfect.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Lyra - 15-05-2008 12:45

I think I mostly have concerns about ethics, the environment, etc etc. And while Starbucks make a big deal about fair trade and non-GM and organic milk etc, I believe that only 1% of the coffee they buy is fair trade? And I have a distrust of big businesses simply because they are in existence to make profit, not to act ethically. And the current awareness of green/ethical issues that they like to tell us they now have is of course just the latest thing that sells. Oh they have fair trade, they must be OK. But you only have to look at the number of car adverts - cars! - that try to claim some kind of green credential to know that this kind of marketing is all about the image.

So even if I liked coffee which I do not, I wouldn't go to Starbucks, but I am lucky in that there's 2 or three independent places near me that will also do fair trade/organic milk etc. I understand that not everyone has this. But I feel that the companies are quite duplicitous and I have a hard time with the idea of supporting that.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Cal - 15-05-2008 12:54

i'm not championing apple as a noble brand by any stretch -- their ipod monopoly is not much different than Microsoft's -- and Microsoft is in an unfortunate position in that they have to take years to gear their new OS code to all the apps out there...

that said, they are still a 'damaged' brand in my opinion as their product is one that is far from perfect yet consumed by millions who seem to think they have no other choice

i have friends who run the IT depts of universities and hospitals and they speak far differently --- the apple networks run smoothly, and they are constantly putting out fires w/ the microsoft one

you'll never get me to believe that Apple is MORE evil than Microsoft -- sorry

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 15-05-2008 13:04

Imagine if Microsoft and Dell were one big company.

That is what you'd have had if Apple had successfully pursued their business plan in the 80's.

In addition to which, Bill Gates is a seemingly far more decent human being than Steve Jobs. In fact you could argue that the jobs that microsoft creates, added to the fact that Gates has announced that he intends to use the vast bulk of his money for altruistic purposes (and indeed already has spent billions) that Microsoft are a company we should admire. They redistribute money from the wealthy the comfortable and big business to those who have little and create a thriving economy while they do it.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Gangster Octopus - 15-05-2008 13:08

Shouldn't you be declaring an interest around about here?

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 15-05-2008 13:13

Heh. It's a bit tongue in cheek I admit, but there are few companies and owners who would do what Gates and Microsoft have done.

And I have no vested interest. I work for a financial company. I support whatever stuff they have.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Tony C - 15-05-2008 13:23

Having just got back from Manchester city centre I'd like to nominate Glasgow Rangers.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Inca - 15-05-2008 14:51

Gangster Octopus wrote:

The_Liquidator wrote:

The other guy in Forgetting Sarah Marshall?

His name is Russell Brand. Geddit?Be fair to Inca, he doesn't live in a "culture" utterly infested by the git. I was just about to post about how lucky it was to be an American...

Yep, I had never heard of or seen him before. I suppose I can Google him to find out his deal, but I'll assume I'm not missing much and pass.

Though perhaps our nations can arrange a loan swap of him for Heidi & Spencer.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 15-05-2008 15:20

I think he's pretty funny sometimes.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 15-05-2008 15:35

"It's not like there's been a proliferation of independent cafes dedicated to producing a variety of coffee styles and flavours."

I don't know about the variety bit, but in a lot of places in the US there has been a proliferation of independent and local chains of cafes since the emmergence of Starbucks.

In some cases, the independent or semi-independent places emmerged in a town before the Starbucks (inevitably) arrived. I know that's the case in Williamsburg, VA and State College, PA, for example.

Which makes me wonder if Starbucks can really claim to have created the industry. Perhaps they are just the company to have most-successfully taken advantage of a much larger shift in consumer tastes. Either way, I see little evidence that Starbucks is putting smaller coffee shops out of business the way Wal-Mart does.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Inca - 15-05-2008 15:49

Reed of the Valley People wrote:

"It's not like there's been a proliferation of independent cafes dedicated to producing a variety of coffee styles and flavours."

I don't know about the variety bit, but in a lot of places in the US there has been a proliferation of independent and local chains of cafes since the emergence of Starbucks.

Spot on.

Besides independent coffee houses, there has also been the emergence of smaller coffee chains that people like me go as an alternative to Starbucks. Some of them, like Peet's or the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, had been around as maybe one or two stores for many years, but have grown into somewhat big regional chains, and others like It's a Grind (which I think is only in California, but gets a lot of exposure on the Showtime show Weeds) started as one independent store--in my hometown, Long Beach--and are growing into chains.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 15-05-2008 15:58

Coffee Bean features prominently on Entourage.

Interesting note: The original Mr. Peet was the guy who taught the original Starbucks founders how to roast coffee properly. The original Starbucks just sold coffee beans, not coffee by the cup.

On the fair trade issue, my understanding is that places like Starbucks pay a premium for expensive beans, so the farmers they buy from are doing relatively ok. It's the big mass production stuff like Folgers, etc, that are harder on the farmers, so I'm told.

I think all of this info is coming from a talk I saw on CSPAN by the guy who wrote this.

Obviously, when a Starbucks moves in to a place it replaces something and often that something is a locally owned business but, and given that there are already so fucking many of them, it's reasonable to ask why we need another. However, it seems, it doesn't usually supplant a similar coffee place.

It's also reasonable to ask what all of this caffeine is doing to us. I know that I need to cut back but I'm addicted. I'm in a vicious downward spiral of no-sleep and trying to stay awake with caffeine. It's brutal.

Along those lines, Chris Connelly made an interesting observation that Singles was actually the 1990s first great drug movie and the drug was caffeine. All of the characters are messed up because they think too much because they're all wired. Interesting thesis. It may also explain why I like that movie so much and relate to the characters in it.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Not me - 15-05-2008 21:30

A pretty good criticism of Starbucks might be that the culture they've created has raised caffeine consumption to ridiculous levels, leading to a massive hike in stress levels, tetchy behaviour and mild digestive disfunction. No-one used to drink coffee; now everyone seems to, except for reformed coffee drinkers.

The idea that everyone is "buying an experience" from Starbucks is, frankly, horseshit. The vast majority of people get a take-away cup of coffee from them, and if they don't end up shouting "JUST GIVE ME A FUCKING CUP OF COFFEE!" after a bleary glance at the board might mutter "grande muhmuuhhh" or something. The people who actually sit in there do so because Starbucks own most of the places you can sit in, in any given city centre. People do not care about The Brand with food and drink places beyond - as Reed and Wyatt have emphasised - identifying what they'll actually get to consume in there. They never will.

Inca Russell Brand is brilliant on the radio (he has a show on Radio 2 - not sure if you can listen to it where you are), OK at stand-up, and terrible on TV. I've not seen his film, but I doubt I'm missing much.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Not me - 15-05-2008 21:39

Bloody hell, I posted that without reading this page and Reed made the same point five hours ago.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 15-05-2008 21:41

I'd be willing to bet large sums of money that overall societal caffeine consumption has not increased due to Starbucks. If only because people are drinking more lattes and the like, which are made with espresso, which has less caffeine.

The original Starbucks in Pike's market in Seattle still mostly sells beans. It actually looks like no other Starbucks in the world - nowhere to sit down, no food sold.

The movie is good; Brand is just tolerable. See the (very short) "Sodomize Intolerance" thread on "Film & TV"

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 15-05-2008 21:44

I think we are running into significant North American/Britain issues at this point.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Not me - 15-05-2008 21:54

Definitely. No one I know used to drink coffee at all unless they were extremely tired or something, and then it would have been instant (granulated) coffee. I reckon 80-90% of the people I know now drink at least one coffee a day, and if they don't buy it from a coffee place it's a cafetiere (French press) job at home, which no one used to have.

We're traditionally tea drinkers, as Stephen Fry's recent strengthening of the Twinings brand illustrates.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 15-05-2008 21:57

Despite the fact that I am American, I never drank coffee until I was in mid-20s and on an extended trip to Spain, where ordering tea resulted in one getting a bag with a cup of tepid water.

I've been sliding down the slippery slope ever since.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Not me - 15-05-2008 22:01

Although tea has caffeine in it, I think I'm right in saying that coffee also has a couple of other stimulants and hits people harder. Plus those Starbucks cups must hold nearly a pint.

Also: neo-dinner jazz. Thanks for that, you cunts.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 15-05-2008 22:11

Geographic issues? Really? I've been inhaling coffee since I was 17. 30 oz a day, minimum.

This may account for my number of posts.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 15-05-2008 22:11

And here I thought it was youth hockey in Winnipeg . . .

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by TonTon - 15-05-2008 22:12

It might be a pint cup, but there's shag all coffee in it.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 15-05-2008 22:14

This data, which is the only thing I could find without paying for it, suggests that coffee consumption in the US had declined since the war as consumption of Coke, Pepsi, etc, have grown.

And this shows that Americans consume considerably less caffeine, relative to other countries, than one would think. The Dutch and Scandanavians, of course, are completely tweaked on the stuff.

So its not at all clear that Starbucks has increased coffee or caffeine consumption.

I do think, however, that it's put an acceptable face on a very widespread drug addiction. A respectable middle-class professional woman can claim "Oh, I just can't get buy without my caramel machiato triple-foam latterama in the morning. Hah hah! You know me, got to have my fix! ha hah" and everyone laughs knowingly and come off all cool and executive-like (of course, if anyone says that in your presence, you should smack them. Hard.)

In former times (by which I mean, like 1992), caffeine addiction was not cool and executive. It was the province of those wild-eyed English-major, black turtle-neck wearing guys I'd see down at the diner at all hours of the day and night, or long-haul truck drivers or students like me who always seemed to find that the only way to get a paper done was to work all night (which is why when I think of college, I think of a sharp pain in my stomach) or soldiers (my friend who went to West Point says that on long training excercises the only way to stay awake and keep marching was to eat the MRE freeze-dried coffee grounds dry.)

It wasn't really socially acceptable, but it was a lifestyle.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Not me - 15-05-2008 22:22

We're talking about all big cups of coffee from post-Starbucks chains, to be fair, Ton Ton. I bet some of them put coffee in there.

Actually, one of my housemates works at Starbucks, and brings us back free packs of coffee. They're really good, much nicer than anything you can get in a supermarket, and strong enough to make me want to dance to The Fire Engines (although that's down to how I make the coffee I guess).

I'm off thinking about the music/branding interface now, anyway, which is far more important. Microsoft commissioned Brian Eno to create the starting sound on their computers, whereas Apple use a rather smug synthesised version of the

closing chord from the Beatles' A Day In The Life. Even before you get to Apple's heavy implication in the promotion of U2, Microsoft are clearly better people, aren't they? Despite being cunts with stupid programs.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by TonTon - 15-05-2008 22:35

Some do, yeah, true enough. Caffe Nero do, for example. As do Costa. I OD'd on Costa once, forgetting how much coffee they use and ordering extra shots. I think it was Costa, can't think who else it would have been.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by King Mob - 15-05-2008 23:07

I'm a Nero man meself.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Inca - 16-05-2008 00:07

Reed of the Valley People wrote:

I do think, however, that it's put an acceptable face on a very widespread drug addiction. A respectable middle-class professional woman can claim "Oh, I just can't get by without my caramel machiato triple-foam latterama in the morning. Hah hah! You know me, got to have my fix! ha hah" and everyone laughs knowingly and come off all cool and executive-like (of course, if anyone says that in your presence, you should smack them. Hard.)

Walking into Starbucks over a year ago for her morning ridiculous blended drink, my mom fell and broke a bone in her foot. She got up and still went in to get the coffee before going to the hospital.

I started drinking coffee when I was about 12. Not every morning, but it eventually became that when I was in high school. I think the old wives' tale about coffee stunting your growth is true, and I point to myself as proof.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 16-05-2008 08:30

Nero are my favourite chain coffee in the UK (Monmouth on Monmouth Street make my favourite espresso of all, and is where I buy my coffee for home).

From all this I think I'll say again that although I dislike Starbucks coffee, the company are just not insidious and damaging (except in as much as not buying fair-trade and so on). As others have said, the very fact of Starbucks has meant that every town in the US and most towns in the rest of the world now have some place which isn't scummy where you can go and sit down and read a paper and drink a non-alcoholic drink without feeling like you're stealing a table from someone who wants a meal. The fact that there are myriad independent coffee houses who've become successful enough to be chains is also a good thing.

And, by the way, the fact that the Scandies and Dutch are the most wired on caffeine surely gives a lie to the suggestion that the increase in espresso consumption has turned the world into a bunch of wired psychos.

(Although there is a bizarre but entertaining thesis that coffee is the driver of wars and imperial success).

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 16-05-2008 09:57

I am forever thankful that I don't like coffee. I have a can/500ml bottle of diet coke a day at lunchtime and that's all the caffeine I need or want.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 16-05-2008 10:41

I'm buzzing on Delice de France espresso as we speak, but then I was heavily into the beers of Franconia and the Lower Rhine last night, and though the Schweinebraten sandwich did a manful job of soaking it all up, I'm still feeling a few effects.

Beer. There's an example. I never buy the "brand". Only people who don't care what they drink buy the "brand".

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 16-05-2008 10:53

The Chubby Cyclist said:

"As others have said, the very fact of Starbucks has meant that every town in the US and most towns in the rest of the world now have some place which isn't scummy where you can go and sit down and read a paper and drink a non-alcoholic drink without feeling like you're stealing a table from someone who wants a meal."

I think this is another example of a key regional difference. In New York, and San Francisco, and Cambridge (Massachusetts), we had significant numbers of such places decades before Starbucks came along. They were called coffee shops (in California, coffee houses) and had infinitely more character and individuality (and better coffee) than Starbucks (even when they were part of a chain, like Chock Full o' Nuts or Horn & Hardhart). They were also cheap, which Starbucks most definitely is not.

Linus and I could no doubt bore the rest of you to tears by reminiscing about Berkeley coffee houses (we were Cafe Med people, linus), but rather than do that I would just note that the reaction to Starbucks in places where their "branding" and "purchasing synergies" have allowed them to displace such institutions (and other goddamn useful things like hardware stores) may well be different than that in places where we are just talking about who fills one of a dozen drive-throughs or one of 200 slots in a megamall.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The_Liquidator - 16-05-2008 11:05

Perfectly healthy then, hobbsey.

I have to say I agree with you on Apple though, despite the fact I'm actually typing this message on a desktop mac right now (feel my rebelliousness). Apart from the overwhelming, cloying smugness that dominates much of it's advertising - most apparent in the Mitchell and Webb adverts they used over here - is the constant stream of balls about how great they are to look at. My old editor kept hold of a six year old mac that was basically knackered because it was 'a design classic'. What's that all about?

Everytime I see someone with a mac I get that Sainsbury's advert voice in my head - 'this isn't an ordinary laptop, this is a mac Air, which allows you to do lots of things you only need to do if you are a graphic designer, mmmmmmmmm let me lick your balls for your superior consumer choice.'

The announcement of the iPhone was one of the most embarrassing things I have ever witnessed - Steve Jobs entering stage right to the sort of raptuous applause that only those who believe they're witnessing the second coming of the technological christ. Apple are a cult, and one based almost purely on aesthetics. Bill Gates might be taking over your work place, but Steve Jobs wants to take over your life. Think about that.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Eggchaser - 16-05-2008 11:11

M&S advert, you mean.

I hate M&S food. It's Vesta boil in the bag curry for Daily Mail reading old people, pretending it's haute cuisine because it costs eighteen times as much.

Good pants and socks though.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The Horse - 16-05-2008 11:34

M&S's dried pasta, extra-mature Cornish cheddar, Golden Wholemeal bread and sloe gin are all great. (Not all mixed together.)

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Eggchaser - 16-05-2008 11:53

OK, I admit some of their stuff is good, generally the packaged goods such as those you mention.

But look at the bulk of their stuff. It's all premade microwave stuff which, if it had an Iceland label on it, would be dismissed out of hand as chav food by those who eagerly lap it up as though it were the nectar of the gods.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The Horse - 16-05-2008 12:00

Oh yeah, the above is all I buy in there. There's something quite funny about going to M&S simply to purchase bread and cheese.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by SpanglyPrincess - 16-05-2008 12:11

I tend to go for Caffè Nero if I am in the UK and have to choose a high street coffee chain. Then I harangue the unfortunate barista in an effort to get something remotely approaching an actual espresso. Then I mutter bitterly about the fact it costs one pound fucking eighty, almost precisely three times as much as a cup of coffee at home. They hate me. And rightly so.

What I like best is that they all wear t-shirts proclaiming "the best coffee this side of Milan" which as Ursus has explained is pretty funny.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 16-05-2008 12:17

We also go to Nero (and engage in only a slightly toned-down version of the same behaviour). Ursus minor laughed at the shirts last time we were there.

So, folks, if you are looking for Anglo-American expats acting lairy at a coffee place, Nero is your best option.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by TonTon - 16-05-2008 12:37

What do you actually say to the aforementioned unfortunate barista?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by SpanglyPrincess - 16-05-2008 13:06

usually, something along the lines of:

"I want much more coffee in half the liquid. Stronger and much more concentrated than usual. Even, make it like you would a double, but produce less liquid than you normally would for a single. I don't want the pissy dribble at the end."

I think they worry you expect some kind of value for money ratio where spending more money on less liquid makes no sense. so they keep running the machine well into the pissy dribble stage, and fill up your cup with black water. I don't want that.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 16-05-2008 13:14

How much sugar do you put in your coffee, SP? For me, the thing about having Italian coffee is that it has to be simply loaded with sugar to offset the bitterness of having it that concentrated.

And since I tend to drink it with either a cannolo or cartoccio in my other hand, the sugar-rush is quite dizzying.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 16-05-2008 13:18

Spangles, if you think it's bad at Nero, I want to see you order an espresso at Ally Pally ice rink, and I want to video you tasting it.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 16-05-2008 13:18

Sugar? No sugar!

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 16-05-2008 13:22

Really, no sugar? Ouch.

Making the little tinkling sounds with my spoon as I stir in the sugar is an essential part of the espresso experience.

Never any sugar with my Starbucks, though (sips deeply). Pure black.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 16-05-2008 15:00

Espresso at an ice rink?

Drinking really shit coffee or hot cocoa in a styrofoam cup at a hockey rink at some ungodly hour while watching one's kids or siblings play is a common experience that binds all of us "northerners" together.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by TonTon - 16-05-2008 15:20

Cortado, that's actually my coffee of choice.

Spangs - I'm really surprised you don't get sworn at.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 16-05-2008 15:22

Reed, we always used Dunkin' Donuts coffee for that purpose.

Gramsci, I use less than half a packet, but only if I've not just finished eating something sweet. And it has to be unrefined.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by dglh - 16-05-2008 15:32

There are still a few good independent coffee stores around my part of NYC, but they are no longer cheap. The one nearby that opened in an old Falafel store is doing very well, and make a really good coffee. No cups bigger than 8oz for anything.

Then there is Think, where I am meeting my parents today. My step-dad mentioned meeting in a Starbucks, so I suggested somewhere that didn't make crap coffee (to be fair, he was picking somewhere convenient more than anything, and was more than happy to change). Organic coffee, organic milk, donations to local charity from profits, Lower East Side Girls Club cookies, and a barista with a red spiders-web elbow tattoo. It is so hipster it is pretty hideous, but they serve good coffee. In typical style, the number of macs to other laptops is always dominant in favor of style (more Macbook Air's sighted there than anywhere). I wonder why Greenwich Village hates NYU...

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 16-05-2008 15:52

UA, yes and Tim Horton has built a massive marketing campaign around the image of parents keeping warm with TH coffee while lacing their kids' skates (presumably in some old barn of a rink in a small town on the Canadian prairie where everyone knows each other).

But sooner or later, if you spend enough time at an ice rink, you'll find yourself needing a warm beverage and will take whatever is on offer. The choice is often that shit that comes out of the machine where you press the buttons for sugar or "whitener" and as often as not what you order isn't what you get.

I think that's why my parents made me quit hockey.

When I was growing up, there was no Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts. There was a Mister Donut (a chain which has mysteriously disappeared from our land).

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 16-05-2008 16:11

Reed's right about the hockey connection but slightly off on the geography. Timmy's is more suburban than rural. The "Tim Horton's vote" in Canadian political terms is roughly akin to the "soccer moms" of the US - suburban, minivan hockey parents.

(the last election in Canada was heralded as a victory of the Tim Horton's vote over the Starbucks vote...I'm relatively certain that the Clintonistas "latte liberals" crack was based on a Canadian model...look for McCain to start prominently sipping Dunkin Donuts coffee soon)

Timmy's is also not quite so big on the prairies, where Robin's Donuts has a big share of the market. Robin's equivalent in the Toronto is "Country Style" donuts. The clientele divide themselves on class and ethnic lines and as a result, in the same way that a Starbucks within a block of a house will raise the price of the house by about 30K (no I'm not kidding), a nearby Country Style will lower it by about the same amount.

The block I live on is quite unique in that I have a Starbucks on one end of the block and a Country Style on the other.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by SpanglyPrincess - 16-05-2008 16:46

TT: I tend not to use the phrase "pissy dribble". And I usually start off with "Sorry to be a massive pain but would it be possible please...."

and I smile at them. best to get a male server since they are usually more susceptible to the smile. (is this bad of me?)

but yeah: I'd swear at me, if I were them.

Meanwhile, I put about half a packet of zuccherio grezzo in my espresso, and I can't remember the word for it but I know we don't say dirty do we. coarse?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 16-05-2008 16:48

Good to know. The pictures in the ads always seems to imply "salt of the earth, real Canadians" which I translated into "rural."

The notion that Starbucks is "upscale" or "affluent" is a canard passed around by the media and idiot political pundits who spend most of their time in Dupont Circle.

Not that I've surveyed all of their customers about their income, but of all the branches I've been to, the clientele seems to be a cross section of the people who work or shop in that neighborhood. It's not really "downscale" either, but "middle class" in the broadest sense.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Coffy - 16-05-2008 16:50

Spangly: raw?

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by SpanglyPrincess - 16-05-2008 16:52

yes that might be the word as well

I have clearly done too much work since I can no longer communicate effectively in either language

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 16-05-2008 16:53

or unrefined.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 16-05-2008 17:08

Crude

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The_Liquidator - 16-05-2008 17:23

"I want much more coffee in half the liquid. Stronger and much more concentrated than usual. Even, make it like you would a double, but produce less liquid than you normally would for a single. I don't want the pissy dribble at the end."

I've seen this in action - half the time I'm waiting for her to get behind the counter, show the minimum wage 'barista' how to make the coffee while stabbing them with a fork and then robbing the till for good measure.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 16-05-2008 17:32

It's people like Spangly wot cause unrest.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 16-05-2008 17:56

I want much more coffee in half the liquid. Stronger and much more concentrated than usual. Even, make it like you would a double, but produce less liquid than you normally would for a single. I don't want the pissy dribble at the end."

Sally: I'd like the chef salad please with the oil and vinegar on the side and the apple pie a la mode.

Waitress: Chef and apple a la mode.

Sally: But I'd like the pie heated and I don't want the ice cream on top I want it on the side and I'd like strawberry instead

of vanilla if you have it if not then no ice cream just whipped cream but only if it's real if it's out of a can then nothing.

Waitress: Not even the pie?

Sally: No, just the pie, but then not heated.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 16-05-2008 18:09

You just don't understand caffe culture . . .

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by SpanglyPrincess - 16-05-2008 19:03

if they're going to charge me three times what it ought to cost, the least they can do is try to make it half-way drinkable, surely?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Bombanero - 16-05-2008 19:21

I suppose at Caffè Neros they probably clean the machine sometimes, which will help. I tried and tried and tried to get something halfway drinkable at the coffee chain shop I worked in, but never got close to what came out of my flatmate's stove-top thingy.

All the ice rinks I've been to in Finland have a licensed bar. If I ever have a child that plays hockey, I'm not messing about with coffee (not without a bit of jaloviina or something, anyway).

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Auntie Beryl - 16-05-2008 19:31

I know this is re-railing the thread away from coffee culture, but I'm only just climbing on this donkey, so here goes.

Tesco. I know they were mentioned upthread, but in my view were not vilified enough, so here we go again.

I have dealt with supermarkets, some global brands, some UK-centric, for the last few years of my career (that wasn't the plan at 21, but still...)

I can safely say the Tesco's "screw the supplier" policies have done immeasurable harm. Not that everything was fine and dandy before Tesco decided to hurtle from 4th to 1st in the Supermarche Championnat in the 90s, but they have blazed a trail that other chains have had to follow, or perish.

I'm not going to go into hardcore supply chain theory here - it would bore even me - but to boil it down to an essence an efficient and profitable supply chain requires co-operation and as much stability as the changing markets can muster.

Along come Tesco and ramraid every supplier on terms, sending a good few out of business and the rest running scared. For two, three years they make spectacular gains in the marketplace until the other supermarkets (and yes even Asda/Walmart dragged their feet in the UK) matched their business practices.

Suppliers are funding Tesco's global expansion plans, which are going very well in Europe but suffering a little in the US. Good.

It's just business, I know, and shades of dark grey, but this lot are black.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 16-05-2008 20:35

"If they're going to charge me three times what it ought to cost, the least they can do is try to make it half-way drinkable, surely?"

Demanding vaule for the money! The nerve! Who do you think you are?

All the ice rinks I've been to in Finland have a licensed bar. If I ever have a child that plays hockey, I'm not messing about with coffee (not without a bit of jaloviina or something, anyway).

Most youth hockey events are early in the morning (because the ice time is cheapest), and in our country it's considered bad form to consume alcohol before noon (unless it's a mamosa or bloody mary at brunch) I don't know why, it just is. If this is not the case in your country, well that's just another thing you've got over us, I suppose.

Also, most ice rinks are either exposed to the elements or kept very cold, so people want something warm.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 16-05-2008 21:19

Youth hockey rinks also tend not to have bars (at least in New York/New Jersey). And even if they did, they wouldn't be open at 6 am.

That said, it was not unknown for some adults to "correct" their Dunkin' Donuts coffee with something from a hip flask. We generally hoped that they weren't the ones driving their kid back home after the game.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Bombanero - 16-05-2008 21:43

It is generally frowned upon here too Reed, but if the other parents think I'm always drunk I should avoid the long drives to Kainuu.

I don't really know why my local rink has a bar. If they expect a bigger crowd than 200 or so, they move the game to Hakametsä 2, and licences are pretty darn expensive in this country. I can't help but compare it to the 4,000 capacity football ground where they're not allowed to sell beer.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 16-05-2008 22:02

I think some bigger rinks/recreation facilities in the US and Canada have bars. At least, I've heard of such things. Probably some nuance in the licensing law that lets them claim to be a "club" or somesuch.

I think alcohol in coffee is great. I should drink that more often.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 17-05-2008 00:27

M&S's greatest branding idea, food wise, was skipping labels and making the jars see-through. Things like artichokes in oil, Kalamata olives or pear halves just look so much classier and tastier when you can see them through a clear container.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Lyra - 17-05-2008 00:43

They have these olives at m&s that are stuffed with sundried tomatoes. They are soooo gorgeous they're worth the extortionate price.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by twohundredpercent - 17-05-2008 01:01

Ick. I hate olives.

I vote M&S.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 17-05-2008 15:12

The final word on the subject of Tim Horton's, from one of Canada's best and grouchiest columnists.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Inca - 17-05-2008 15:20

To continue reading this article, you must be a Globe Insider subscriber.

Was Tim Horton's the place that hired back the waitress after firing her for giving away a donut hole to a kid?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 17-05-2008 15:26

Ok, let's try that again.

I doubt anyone can locate the moment Hortons stopped being a mall doughnut shop serving, at best, indifferent coffee and transmuted into a hallowed piece of Canadiana, but that it arrived no one can doubt. Outside of Hockey Night in Canada, and - with reverence - Don Cherry, there are few institutions or companies that have blended into the character of the nation as the Tim Hortons.

I became a hostage to Boston cream doughnuts so long ago the year is lost in gooey memory. And now in every town and city across the country, despite the advances of the upscale chains, the aggressive yuppie haunts of Starbucks Corp., the gentrified caffeine oases of Timothy's and Second Cup, Tim Hortons remains the venue of choice for all everyday Canadians. You knew the Canadian effort in Afghanistan had registered with the great Canadian public when Tim Hortons opened in Kandahar. Hortons is not the red Maple Leaf, but it has brewed and baked its way into being an essential piece of Canadiana.

Up to now, anyway. I think Tim Hortons is drifting out of its special status. This has nothing to do with the fury of recent weeks over the woman fired for giving away a Timbit to a crying infant - though that incident may be a signal of how the brand has strayed. Nor has it to do, in my judgment, with the consideration that Tim Hortons was, until recently, owned

by the American chain Wendy's.

No, the change is more subtle and has crept in by a kind of osmosis.

Perhaps the invisible moment was the first time a Canadian went to a Tims not for itself, but more because it wasn't a Starbucks. A reverse-preference moment. Perhaps it came when Tim Hortons became conscious that it really wasn't just selling cheap coffee and doughnuts. (That, incidentally, was more than a while ago. Just one old-fashioned plain is 80 cents now; years back you could buy the whole front counter display case of doughnuts for about five bucks.) Perhaps it was the moment when they started self-consciously to see themselves as a symbol.

Something has leaked out of the enterprise. Did the coffee change? Are the doughnuts still as fresh as once they so boasted they were? I'm not sure what it was or is, but, for me anyway, the zest has gone out of the transaction between chain and customer. Their "roll up the rim" is a farcical gimmick. The signature phrases - "double-double" being the most familiar - gall more than they please. Their ridiculous lineups - in some places it takes longer to get a coffee than to pick up a licence at motor vehicle registration - have lost the kind of self-congratulatory charm they had some time back. People used to smile at each other for the silly indulgence of lining up for a not-very-good cup of coffee. They don't smile as much any more. They mutter.

Most of all, people don't feel the loyalty they once did. It is no longer a traitorous act to wander into Second Cup, though, it must be noted, treading into Starbucks is still a barista too far. All in all, I think Timmy's - another unfortunate coinage - is past its best-by date. The romance has wilted. The coffee has cooled. It had its acme moment as a badge of this great white north, but unless something in the chemistry between coffee and customer changes, real soon, the days of Tim Hortons as an essential Canadian experience are dwindling and few.

Yes, Inca, the free donut incident a couple of weeks ago was a Timmy's thing. They hired her back within hours, though.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 17-05-2008 15:59

"Perhaps the invisible moment was the first time a Canadian went to a Tims not for itself, but more because it wasn't a Starbucks. A reverse-preference moment."

I think Dunkin Donuts, at least in New England where they're everywhere, has a bit of that same dynamic going on right now. Compared to Starbucks' very forced "experience" - the bland alternafolk music, the Italian names and all of that - the flourescent lights and fast service at DD is a refreshing change. This is emphasized by one of DD's recent series of TV ads (soundtrack by They Might Be Giants) where they mock a certain unnamed chain for writing their menus in "Fratalian."

The fundamentals of the experience of going to a place like Dunkin Donuts remains the same - it tastes the same, it looks the same, you see the same old guys having their regular morning salon in the same corner, etc.

But it "feels" different when you very self-consciously chose something that used to just come naturally by default. At some point, the store's self-conscious effort to project "lack of pretense" becomes a pretense and the customer (at least me) starts to feel obligated to participate in that effort, which is exactly why we left Starbucks (or whatever) in the first place (other than the price). That takes some of the joy out of it.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 19-05-2008 10:38

We shouldn't kid ourselves that any of these homey non-Starbuck's "brands" are any better.

Canada's got a bit of a problem here, I think: its neuralgic sensitivity to charges that it's really quite a lot like America too often forces it into absurdities like this. A chain of doughnut shops as a national symbol? Fuck off.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 19-05-2008 14:55

I, like Hobbes, am really glad that I don't like coffee, after reading this thread.

However, that doesn't mean that my life is untouched by Starbucks (and their competitors), whose policy of opening branches at a loss, sometimes with as many as three pointlessly clogging up the same high street, just to force smaller cafes out of business is truly evil, and means there are fewer places where I can get a nice cup of tea and a fry-up.

Wyatt's post about "brand inertia" early on in the thread was a cracker. A lot of truth in there.

How can you give away a "donut hole"? Isn't that giving away thin air? (Actually, isn't there a Pink Panther episode where he has a portable 'hole'?)

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 19-05-2008 15:12

Spangly and any other vistor to London might like to know that Caffè Vergnano 1882 apparently has very good Espresso. It even has a menu of about 8 of them and serves them on a little wooden tray with a tiny cup of coffee, a small glass of water and a little chocolate.

The one at the South Bank centre also does rather nice food too in the restaurant downstairs.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by hobbes - 19-05-2008 15:15

Oh and they do that proper hot chocolate which is super thick and dark that you can dip pastries in, like I had in Barcelona.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 19-05-2008 15:20

Caffè Vergnano is a real Italian coffee company (from near Torino), perhaps best known here for using ads featuring Dustin Hoffman.

They should know what they are doing, but I'm not sure what the relationship between the overseas cafes and the home base is (some kind of franchising?). I first saw one of those in Nice a few weeks ago, and was slightly tempted, though the reality is that Nice has so many smaller and cheaper cafes run by real Italians that getting decent coffee isn't a serious problem.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by King Mob - 19-05-2008 15:22

I'm very glad I like coffee, as it means I can buy some nice coffee grounds, take them home and make a nice cup of coffee in my cafetiere, all without having to set foot in a Starbucks. One day, I must go on a coffee tasting course, so I can appreciate the taste even more. I suspect however that I am not one of nature's 'supertasters', and that the subtle nuances of the coffee's flavours are forever destined to pass me by.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 19-05-2008 15:55

We shouldn't kid ourselves that any of these homey non-Starbucks "brands" are any better.

It depends on what you mean by better.

It gets back to what I said about brand choices sometimes being stupid and mock-worthy.

Insofar as Starbucks is serving the same thing at a higher price just with prettier packaging and "experience," one's choice of Tim Horton's or Dunkin Donuts or McDonald's or 7-11 marks one as both shrewd and unpretentious. These are generally good qualities.

However, my unscientific research suggests that Starbucks' coffee is actually a good deal better than the coffee served at those other establishments, in which case an attempt to eschew Starbucks in order to appear - either to others or in one's own mind - as shrewd and unpretentious, makes one just as much of a sucker for marketing bullshit as the ponce who thinks going to Starbucks proves they're sophisticated.

SR's charge the Starbucks goes out of his way to drive out competition is a serious accusation that deserves inquiry by anti-trust authorities. However, I'm not aware of evidence that they're doing that in this country, at least. In most places, if there are establishments competing in roughly the same "space" as Starbucks, they probably came after Starbucks.

These days, I only go to a Starbucks if I want coffee and it's the closest option, which it often is since there are so damn many of them.

My morning routine, however, is to buy a Diet Coke from the little Korean market in my building. It's an ideal beverage for driving. The 20 oz or 1 liter bottles fit perfectly in my car's cup holder and doesn't spill.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 19-05-2008 16:00

SR: Donut holes, known in these parts as "Timbits"

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/budget/gfx/timbits.jpg>

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Pan Tau - 19-05-2008 16:03

Excellent post by Reed. Except for the Diet Coke habit (yeurgh!).

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 19-05-2008 16:05

Insofar as Starbucks is serving the same thing at a higher price just with prettier packaging and "experience," one's choice of Tim Horton's or Dunkin Donuts or McDonald's or 7-11 marks one as both shrewd and unpretentious. These are generally good qualities. Sure: and as you say, if not, not. But however you slice it, making one's choice of hot drink part of one's self-image is daft, as is imagining that either chain is doing anything but unsentimentally pitching for a slice of your money.

Nothing wrong with that, of course, but the down-hominess of Tim Horton's is just as much a piece of corporate spin as the look-at-us-we're-so-sophisticated thing that Starbucks do. Buy either coffee if you like it, but don't buy the hype in either case.

I hate "traditional" North American coffee, personally, because it's weak and stewed. It's the worst coffee in the world, unless "the world" includes the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which I guess it does. So in that case it's the second-worst.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 19-05-2008 17:12

"Nothing wrong with that, of course, but the down-hominess of Tim Horton's is just as much a piece of corporate spin as the look-at-us-we're-so-sophisticated thing that Starbuck's do. Buy either coffee if you like it, but don't buy the hype in either case."

I think that was the point of that article and sort of what I was saying. In the pre-Starbuks era, people would go to Tim Hortons or Dunkin Donuts or McDonald's (I'm pretty sure every small town in America has a group of old guys who meet in McDonald's every morning) simply because it was there, it was cheap and that's where one's neighbors were. It was "down homey" because it was the default/only choice for the locals and turned out that way naturally.

But now the companies have cottoned on to that and tried to sell it back to their customers, going to such an establishment doesn't "feel" as natural as it did before. It feels like one is buying into the company's ad campaign, which is unsettling for a lot of people.

Excellent post by Reed. Except for the Diet Coke habit (yeurgh!).

What you need to understand, PT, is that when you're into Diet Coke, you have only one worry: finding enough change for more Diet Coke (or Coke Zero, or Diet Pepsi, or whatever. I'm not picky). And when you're off it, you're suddenly obliged to worry about all sorts of other shit. Got no money, can't get drunk. Got money, drinkin' too much. Can't get a girl, no chance of a ride. Got a girl, too much hassle. You have to worry about bills, about food, about some football team that never fucking wins. About human relationships and all the things that really don't matter when you've got a sincere and truthful aspartame habit.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 19-05-2008 17:29

All right, since we're having a go at national coffee cultures, here's mine: the Germans. Jesus Christ their coffee is undrinkable. Ask for a cappuccino as likely as not you'll get Sanka with whipped cream.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 19-05-2008 18:01

Sanka still exists?

Sanka is something that really, really, really old ladies order.

Is there a connection between quality of coffee in a country and the colonies it formerly possessed and or stil influencences?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 19-05-2008 18:05

Yes, it still exists. And it's German (although its name comes from the french "sans cafeine"). It was the first ever decaffeinated coffee, dating back before WWI.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 19-05-2008 18:11

As I recall from my restaurant days, Sanka's branding was so dominant that the color orange (the color of Sanka's packaging) became the universal symbol for "decaf." So in restaurants, the decaf pot has an orange handle.

But I haven't seen their ads in a long time.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by treibeis - 19-05-2008 18:15

All right, since we're having a go at national coffee cultures, here's mine: the Germans.

Depends how you define the "national coffee culture" in Germany. If you go to a Kaffeehaus in the sticks, where the chairs are made of wood, the list of beverages contains more German words than English or Italian words, the waitress says "draußen nur Kännchen" and the only hot drinks they've got are Filterkaffee, Milchkaffee and Kakao (and possibly tea as well), then the coffee's all right. It's the places where they put caramel flavouring in everything and serve what they think is cioccolata calda and whatnot that the coffee's shit.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 19-05-2008 18:17

Whereas I always thought that Kaffee Hag was the first decaffeinated coffee.

And now Wiki tells me that the same stuff that was sold as Hag in Germany and elsewhere on the continent was called Sanka in France and the US.

Hag was still synonymous with decaffeinated coffee in Italy 15 years ago, just as Sanka was in the US of my youth.

Gramsci is right about German coffee, especially if one is talking about what one gets at conferences or on planes or trains. The fact that a country that otherwise revels in multitudinous versions of fresh dairy products sees nothing wrong with using completely ersatz "whitener" in their coffee tells you all you need to know about the general lack of respect for the product. It also goes a long way towards explaining why Starbucks has been quite successful in Germany.

There are, however, some decent coffee places in Germany if one knows where to look.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 19-05-2008 18:17

Reed: that's true, except for those places that served Folger's in which case the decaf pot had a green handle.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 19-05-2008 19:20

Reed: that's true, except for those places that served Folger's in which case the decaf pot had a green handle.

I didn't know that.

I think a big part of Starbucks success, at least thus far, isn't that most people like their dark roast taste. Indeed, Starbucks just introduced a new blend that doesn't taste burnt.

Why so many people responded to Starbucks is that it tasted like something. The problem with most coffee that one gets at McDonald's or 7-11 or from the big metal thing in the back of a conference hall or church basement is that it is so watery.

This came as a revelation to Americans. And of course, people who are looking for a caffeine fix may associate, wrongly probably, a strong taste with a strong kick.

The cause of this being, obviously, that water is cheaper than coffee so it makes sense for the seller/provider to put as little actual coffee in the pot as they can get away with.

Most Americans are accustomed to putting a lot of sugar and milk/cream in their coffee out of habit, but what they're really doing is giving an otherwise near flavorless drink some flavor. Indeed, in New England, a "coffee regular" does not mean, as I first assumed "black coffee with caffeine." It means, coffee with cream and sugar. A bit like Canada's "double double."

Starbucks introduction of the new flavor on top of recent news that their same-store sales are stagnating, suggests perhaps that the novelty of coffee that tastes like coffee has worn off and now people want coffee that tastes like coffee that they like. We'll see.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 20-05-2008 12:00

More likely, it implies that their strategy of opening a new franchise every two and a half blocks is finally cannibalizing sales.

You know that line from Best in Show, where Parker Posey describes how she met in her husband: "I was sitting in Starbucks and I saw him...sitting in another Starbucks on the other side of the road"? There actually is a place like that: in Vancouver, on Robson street (can't remember the intersection) there are two Starbucks kiddy corner from one another.

The odd thing is, they're both packed.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by TonTon - 20-05-2008 12:10

Diet Coke (or Coke Zero, or Diet Pepsi, or whatever. I'm not picky

How can you possibly not be picky between Coke and Pepsi? Seriously?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 20-05-2008 13:10

The gap between diet coke and diet pepsi is a lot smaller than the one between coke and pepsi proper.

They're both swill for starters.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by TonTon - 20-05-2008 14:01

Spoken as a true drinker of wet sugar.

The essential coke/pepsi-ness is as clear in the diet versions as in the icky sugary ones, to anyone with a modicum of taste.

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Kurt Mondschein - 20-05-2008 14:12

Actually the average coffee in Germany, while far behind France, Italy or Austria, is still far better than in the English-speaking world. Gramsci really has to present some evidence for being served de-cafeinated coffee when he ordered a cappuccino (the whipped cream bit is correct though).

And ursus, Starbuck's isn't very successful in Germany, seeing that they've been trying to get a foothold for 15 years and only can must a handful of outlets in the large cities (mostly where you also find American tourists).

Italian coffee machines have been all the craze for the past 10 years, so all that is improving rapidly, with the snobbishness and exaggeration that come with it, of course.

I must say I am a bit disappointed in Brazilian coffee culture whenever I go there. Do they have to export all the good stuff? Did it never trickle down to the middle class?

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 20-05-2008 14:30

I think presenting evidence might be difficult without actually doing taste tests, Kurt. All I can say is that repeated assaults on my tastebuds in cafes in Frankfurt and a couple of airports in Germany (and Zurich too, which probably isn't fair but there you go) have convinced me to stay well close to Starbucks when in Deutschland (there's one with a nice view of the cathedral in Koln, and one on Friedrichstrasse in Berlin where I can watch people and pretend to be a character in Emil and the Detectives).

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 20-05-2008 14:42

TonTon wrote:

Spoken as a true drinker of wet sugar.

The essential coke/pepsi-ness is as clear in the diet versions as in the icky sugary ones, to anyone with a modicum of taste.

Very true. Pepsi is grim. Coke is quite nice.

I'm still waiting for Coke to bring out their Citrus Zest coke in full sugar version, because it would actually be very nice if it weren't for the vile taste of artificial sweetener.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 20-05-2008 14:45

Kurt, my view was Frankfurt-biased for obvious reasons. I'd agree with you that there are more possibilities in Munich, Hamburg or Berlin, though that is true for just about anything of value.

And Gramsci, should you be going back to FFM anytime soon, you can try Kaffee Wacker (the one in Nordend has a nice garden in the back) or the Metropol, both of which know what they are doing.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 20-05-2008 14:49

Why would you ever drink coffee in Koln when you could be drinking a glass of Fruh?

Although, generally, I've found German coffee to be ropey but tolerable, and even the stuff in Tchibo is better than Starbucks.

What Wyatt was saying on the other page about the watery stewed nastiness of North American coffee is absolutely right. Outside of the UK and the Caribbean, it's the nastiest coffee I've drunk.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 20-05-2008 15:00

A chain of doughnut shops as a national symbol? Fuck off.

As opposed to what? Britain being known for quaint pubs? France for baguette shops? America for roadside diners?

And SR is right: where other chains draw territory circles on maps and make sure they almost touch, Starbucks overlaps them by a great margin as an economic disincentive for other brands. But it doesn't matter to them if they cannibalize sales, since they're all corporate-owned stores anyway.

And I think Tim Hortons blew it the moment they started doing ads about how much people revered Tim Hortons. Talking about your brand is one thing: talking about how much other people talk about your brand is quite another.

And I say again for the sake of saying it: this thread has proven that there really is no snobbery like coffee snobbery.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 20-05-2008 15:01

"The gap between diet coke and diet pepsi is a lot smaller than the one between coke and pepsi proper."

That is true. I like the fizz and the artificiality. I don't disagree that Diet Coke and Diet Pepsi taste different, but to me, it's not as much of a difference as most people think. I just like both (with a slight preference to Coke). To adamantly insist on only one would be like drinking only one kind of beer.

After years of consuming only the no calorie versions, I can't drink the full sugar versions anymore. It tastes like syrup to me now (but not good maple syrup. Like just the syrup that comes in the plastic bag that they hook up to the machine to serve Coke at a bar).

More likely, it implies that their strategy of opening a new franchise every two and a half blocks is finally cannibalizing sales.

I don't know about that. They were chock-a-block in a lot of cities five or ten years ago. (Best in Show was made eight years ago.) They only showed a decline in same-store sales for the first time a few months ago.

As you point out, they're all company owned so they don't have to worry about stepping on a franchisee like some other chains. As long as it's working, it's not so absurd for them to be accross the street from one another.

Most businesses expand when they succeed and nobody thinks much of that. But its hard for a Starbucks store to expand in place since it's usually in a fairly small space that wasn't built for a Starbucks (and the bathrooms are always really small). Therefore, the only way to expand is to open another location nearby.

Also, I imagine they think the "experience" would be undermined if they opened a large store the size of a McDonald's (four or five registers, 30 tables, etc). So instead their strategy is to put a small store, or stall, in every available nook and cranny in America.

They've also realy sewn up the "big contract" business, for lack of a better word. Most of the hotels I've been in lately - Hilton, Westin, etc - have Starbucks in the coffee maker in the room and have a small Starbucks in the lobby. Convention

centers have Starbucks. Turnpike Service Areas all have Starbucks, it seems (and Sbarros, of course).

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Kurt Mondschein - 20-05-2008 15:05

Now there's an interesting bit of history there. The people Coca-Cola (they're far larger than Pepsi over here) hired to distribute those syrup bottles or cans are known in Germany as "Cola Millionäre". They usually had good relationships to some higher GIs from the 1950s and became very rich very fast in the 1960s. German football legend Uwe Seeler is one, legendary Munich 1860 president Adalbert Wetzel another.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 20-05-2008 15:11

If I'm not mistaken, Coca Cola is also know for continuing to do business in Nazi Germany long after other American companies thought it might be wise to pull out for a while.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by King Mob - 20-05-2008 15:28

Talking of global brands and the Nazis, has there been a shout for Ikea on this thread yet?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 20-05-2008 17:49

WornOldMotorbike wrote:

As opposed to what? Britain being known for quaint pubs? France for baguette shops? America for roadside diners? Well, none of those are chains, or "brands", for a start, and also I think on the whole they're what other people associate with the country rather than what the inhabitants do. Ask a French person what La France means to them, and would hope that liberty, equality and fraternity (for example) would come higher up the list than the baker's.

(Although in reality they're probably better at baking than they are at liberty, equality or fraternity.)

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 20-05-2008 18:37

<http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2007/01/18/Starbucks372.jpg>

Quaint pubs are pretty high up on my list of what Britain means to me.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 20-05-2008 18:50

Our last extended discussion of Tim Horton's and other "iconic" Canadian brands starts at the bottom of this page .

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 20-05-2008 19:51

They closed that one earlier this year, GY. great snap, though.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 20-05-2008 19:57

That was a great thread.

I have to think that some of those are just publicity gimmicks. Like when Ben & Jerry's opened a shop in Moscow about a week after the wall came down.

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by linus - 21-05-2008 03:28

I've got to say, the Starbucks logo is gorgeous. Great color, composition and central motif.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 21-05-2008 05:57

They're going to wheel out their throwback logo for a while.

http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/apr2008/id20080411_065581.htm?campaign_id=rss_daily

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by chippy - 21-05-2008 08:53

Starbucks? No. They have made it possible to go out in the evening without getting smashed. This is a social good. They have also made it possible to buy a coffee without having to buy a meal.

Tesco? No. They have actually brought about a downward pressure on prices that have made good food affordable to many. However they are clearly the worst of the major supermarkets for unnecessary packaging, etc.

McDonalds? Good call. Responsible for the obesity boom, addieced-hyperactive children, disgusting coffee, the lingering smell of stale fat that surrounds all our major towns and cities, litter in the streets and mountains of styrofoam landfill. Each time they try to improve their image they screw it up: salads with more fat than a cheeseburger!

But I wonder if McDonald's are just an easy target. Is there someone else royally screwing up the environment on a grand, unnecessary scale.

I guess for that we need to look at the pioneers and market leaders in low-cost air travel. I guess EasyJet in europe, followed by Ryanair. Both have devloped a market for unnecessary travel at the expense of the environment, neither pay any of the social cost of their pollutants so exploit our environment to keep their prices down.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 21-05-2008 14:30

For horrible gobs of unnecessary packaging, the single worst offender (besides innumerable toy manufacturers) is Costco/Price Club. A single pair of sunglasses often involves a 'display package' that stands upright in a cardboard base. The hard plastic package itself - for a pair of sunglasses, remember - is often 8 or 10 inches wide, and 12 to 14 inches high.

Sorta like this, proportion-wise.

<http://homepage.mac.com/unixjunkie/pics/MSiPod.jpg>

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Crusoe - 21-05-2008 14:36

Apple gear in Microsoft boxes? Ha.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 22-05-2008 09:07

On the "North American coffee is swill" meme:

I forgot the pass card to my building last night and so had to leave my laptop there overnight. I just went to pick it up now at 3:30 AM. I'm pretty tired, and Starbucks isn't open until 6:00. So I went to Seven-eleven (also to pick up some OJ because my throat is killing me after all the singing in the pissing rain last night), where I got myself a cup of coffee.

Experience-wise, Sev is much different than Starbucks. The lighting and ambience, obviously. And then there's the fact that I can't actually remember the last time I was in Starbucks and was accosted by a toothless Crystal Meth addict with red lipstick covering most of her face berating me for trying to steal her children.

Oh, and the coffee was swill. Hot water that has absorbed some dark crayons. I'm drinking it right now because I am that fucking tired, but it's quite awful. I'm looking forward to Starbucks opening.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 22-05-2008 11:28

Antonio Gramsci wrote:

Experience-wise, Sev is much different than Starbucks. The lighting and ambience, obviously. And then there's the fact that I can't actually remember the last time I was in Starbucks and was accosted by a toothless Crystal Meth addict with red lipstick covering most of her face berating me for trying to steal her children. Hey, I was raised by a toothless bearded hag. You don't suppose...?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 22-05-2008 11:29

(Cafe Hag, we used to call her.)

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 22-05-2008 11:48

Bravo!

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by OngelukigOranjeVoetbal - 22-05-2008 13:27

Starbucks retro logo update: This man is protesting against, and is mad as fuck.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Eggchaser - 22-05-2008 13:54

Talking of global brands and the Nazis, has there been a shout for Ikea on this thread yet?

I will speak against them (and be shot down as a weirdo throwback for preferring an old fashioned chair to shit furniture).

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by TonTon - 22-05-2008 14:20

I don't think anyone was particularly sticking up for IKEA stuff. Just, you know, pointing out that your ideal chair was, well, shit. On toast.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 22-05-2008 14:36

No, I'll stick up for them if it's just the usual lazy 'shit furniture' bit. If they've done something egregious on a corporate level that I'm unaware of, I'll need to rethink it.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 22-05-2008 21:50

One of the many charms of 7-11 are the random encounters with at-risk youth and/or the people who are being let down by America's inadequate public mental health services.

That, and the Slurpees.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by chippy - 23-05-2008 08:54

I guess whilst we are railing against the big corporates, there is one brand that has brought more death and destruction than any other. It has made wars and conflict cheap and affordable.

I have seen Kalashnikovs for sale for \$30 in Somalia and \$75 in DR Congo. This cheap, robust killing machine is not only responsible for the deaths that have directly occurred from it, but also indirectly from the insecurity and underdevelopment caused by making conflict and insecurity cheap and affordable to any wannabe tyrant.

Every year, throughout the world, roughly half a million men, women, and children are killed by armed violence – that's one person every minute. <http://www.controlarms.org/>

You might want to sign this petition and support the joint Oxfam/Amnesty/IANSA campaign on small arms. It might help.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Eggchaser - 23-05-2008 09:19

TonTon wrote:

I don't think anyone was particularly sticking up for IKEA stuff. Just, you know, pointing out that your ideal chair was, well, shit. On toast.

And again, the wrongness of you lot knows no bounds. It's hard being a beacon and taste and decency amongst the herd.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 23-05-2008 12:09

Kalashnikov isn't a brand is it? I thought those were Soviet guns that they cranked out by the truckload.

Lord of War is a pretty good film and focuses on the international trade in Ak-47s - "The real weapon of mass destruction."

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by chippy - 23-05-2008 12:24

I think it clearly is a brand. Obviously its ownership is unclear, but it has all the hallmarks of a world famous brand. With 100 million in circulation, they have great market penetration...

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 23-05-2008 12:28

Are they still being made, or is the world still working with the supply made by the Soviets? If they are still being made, is it just one operation or is an "open source" design sort of thing?

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by JtS - 23-05-2008 13:13

http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/44654000/jpg/_44654506_newlabour226.jpg

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Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by ursus arctos - 23-05-2008 13:24

Reed, they are still being made, refined and modified

And this has to be one of the most tasteless "brand extensions" ever attempted.

"It looks like the legendary AK-47 Rifle, but it holds several rounds of the finest Original Russian vodka."

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Andy C - 23-05-2008 13:30

Loads of AK-47s are still being made - I've heard figures in the region of a million each year. Because the design is so simple it's easy to copy, and there are illegal workshops all over the place turning them out. It's also been licenced to many countries - a large proportion of those in the hands of militias originate in China, for example.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 23-05-2008 14:09

Ironically, old man Kalashnikov is still alive.

=====

Re:Most damaging brand of the last decade?

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 23-05-2008 14:14

I stand corrected. The answers to my question are yes and yes (to the "open source" thing).

New Labour's marketing gurus, and anyone who listens to them, should be aware that there already is a New Britain. It's near Hartford and its the home of the Twins' AA affiliate.

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