

# Brand Topography

a dd|a off white paper

Is your brand optimally positioned to leverage business success and maximize profits? Where is that optimal position? How do you move your brand there?

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# Executive Summary

As market factors change and the broader cultural, political and technological environment alters, so does the relationship between the brand and its audience, which includes the organization's leadership, staff and partners as well as its customers. Every brand requires constant review to ensure it is positioned most attractively to the target audience. The best position often changes.

The relationship between brand and audience can be explored and mapped. In discerning the new market landscape, your brand can traverse the shifting topography to enhance its connection with the audience. By taking steps to ensure your brand is positioned at its most appealing perspective, your brand will be optimally situated for business success.

# What is a brand?

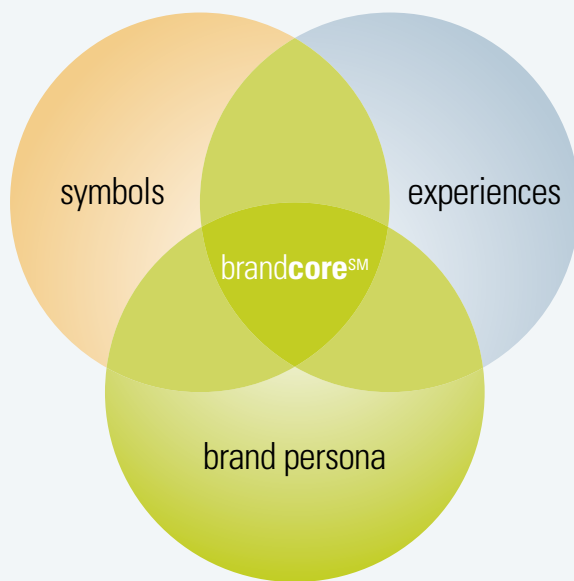
We should first set out a definition for a "brand." There are many definitions, which indicates the ephemeral and the flexible nature of the word. The American Marketing Association provides this definition:

*"A brand is a customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas; often, it refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan, and design scheme. Brand recognition and other reactions are created by the accumulation of experiences with the specific product or service, both directly relating to its use, and through the influence of advertising, design, and media commentary."*

This definition indicates that the expression "brand" may be a reference to:

- › **Symbols:** The group of tangible symbols that are used to represent a brand, such as a logo, signage, decor, uniforms, tag lines, jingles and so forth.
- › **Experience:** The experience that a person has encountering the brand, whether
  - › Managed or influenced by the brand owner, using the 4 P's of marketing (Product, Price, Place and Promotion)
  - › Indirectly gained through the opinions and expressions of others
- › **Brand Persona:** The perceptions of or expectations of a brand, shaped by the user's experience and as triggered by recognition of the brand's symbols. These perceptions or expectations, both rational and emotional, might be considered the consumer's affinity with the brand's "personality" or the "character" that the user has conceived of the brand.

The amalgamation of tangible symbols, managed consumer experiences and the consumer created persona determines the essence of the brand. We call it the BrandCore<sup>SM</sup>.



## Why bother with your brand?

By definition, every business decision, operational activity, employee initiative or consumer engagement involves your brand. Brands are not static. They are changeable entities, varying over time depending upon the tectonic shifts in the broader cultural environment and the more frequently changing dynamics of your marketplace, strategy, internal organization and product offering. With change being a constant feature of business, the status quo is an untenable situation.

*"If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less."*

General Eric Shinseki, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army

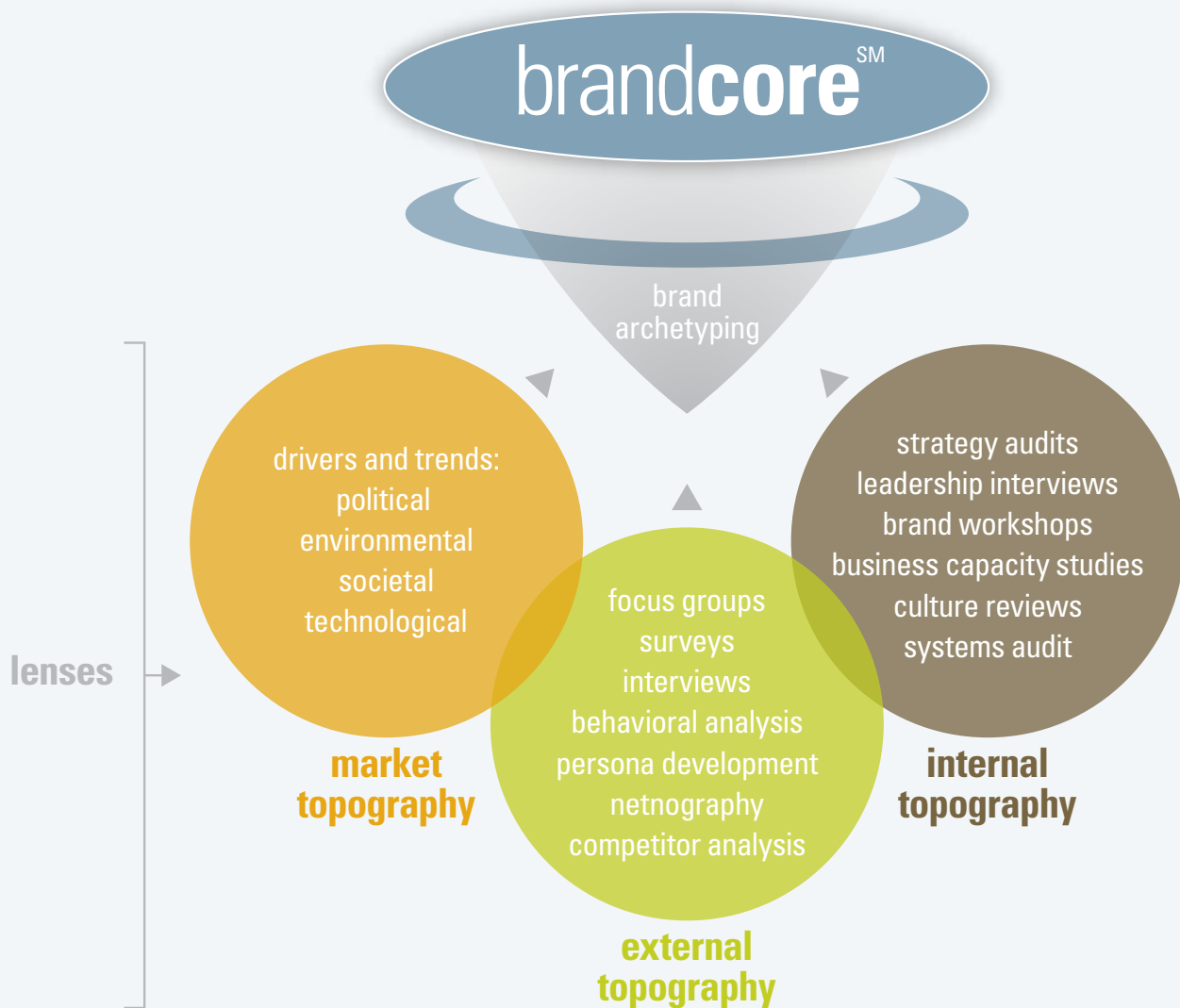
An optimally placed brand is more likely to:

- › Appeal to the broadest possible pool of consumers within your target area
- › Allow for premium pricing against your competition
- › Insulate you during price wars and recession
- › Carry the credentials of implied endorsement, making your offerings stronger
- › Allow better leverage when negotiating
- › Make you more attractive to potential co-branding partners and other alliances
- › Insulate you from a PR or brand crisis and help you mitigate any damage from these events
- › Help you recruit the best talent
- › Help you retain valuable associates and instill a strong sense of workforce pride
- › Mandate internal comprehension, clarity, focus, planning and effective execution

Ignoring the changes happening within your audience, your market and larger social environment is to abdicate ownership of your brand and to lose its power to drive business success.

# Mapping your Brand's Position

To locate the current position of your brand and to identify its optimal position, we must conduct a comprehensive exploration of the landscape in which your brand operates. That exploration requires us to survey both your environment and your brand from several different perspectives.



## Market Topography

The first element in this triangulation is an investigation of the broader macro-environmental factors that influence the market landscape. Applying techniques such as P.E.S.T. Analysis (political, environmental, societal and technological) and using market research, data and expert opinion, we examine the overall “lay of the land” from a strategic vantage point. By reviewing these issues, we can observe broad-scale economic drivers and trends that will change the shape of the brand’s marketplace.

## External Topography

External topography requires the mapping of the perspective of the market landscape from the brand’s position, as well as considering the brand’s position from the perspective of the audience and other brands placed in that market topography. Several tools and exercises are used to discern those perspectives, including:

- › **Audience Perspective:**
  - » Focus groups
  - » Surveys
  - » Interviews
  - » Behavioral analysis
  - » Personas
  - » Netnography
- › **Competitor Perspective:**
  - » Audit of brand promise and expression
  - » Secret shopper
  - » Data gathering and operational insight

## Internal Topography

Internal topography requires the mapping of the perspectives of those who direct and live the brand. This includes not only those managing the business, but equally importantly the cultural situation within the business organization. Several tools and exercises are used to discern those perspectives, including:

- › **Leadership Perspective:**
  - » Interviews
  - » Vision, mission, BHAGs and strategic goals
  - » Brand workshops
- › **Business Capacities:** Audit of business performance, metrics and operational activities
- › **Internal culture:**
  - » Review of talent, HR and policy systems
  - » Insight into beliefs, values and behaviors through surveys, interviews and observing operations.

A tool relevant to both the external and internal topography is archetype analysis, which offers insight into organizational identity as perceived by various stakeholders.

## BrandCore<sup>SM</sup>

We effect this survey using our BrandCore<sup>SM</sup> process, the outcome of which is a distillation into a comprehensive plotting of the brand’s current position and the perspectives of the audience and competitors set within the market context. The BrandCore<sup>SM</sup> map also reveals the optimal location for the brand should its current position be obscured to the audience.

# Journey to the Brand’s Optimal Placement

Recognizing the need to monitor your brand’s position is only the first part of the process. The second requires an insightful determination of where the brand must be relocated to maintain and enhance its affinity with that audience, whether that audience is the employees, leadership, customers or all of them. Great care is required in taking steps to move the brand to avoid misaligned action that places the brand in a poorer relative position.

## Changing the Market Topography

This off white paper addresses the movement of your brand relative to your audience and competition within the market topography. The market topography is the total landscape in which your brand operates, as formed by P.E.S.T. trends. Given the extensive cultural and even generational implications of these macro P.E.S.T. factors, they and the market topography that they shape are not generally capable of being influenced by most brand owners. Of course, some brands do have the power to affect or become a part of such political, environmental, societal and technological issues. Coca Cola's Hilltop ad, teaching the world to sing, tied in to the post-Vietnam and post-Woodstock society. Levi's used their early laundromat ads to weave the brand into the pop culture zeitgeist of the early 80's in the United Kingdom. The positioning of brands like that is not dealt with in this off white paper.

## Moving the Brand

The BrandCore<sup>SM</sup> process results not only in the pinpointing of the brand's current position and its optimal position, but also provides directions for the journey. These directions are uniquely tied to that brand and its optimal position within the market topography. The mapping process may have revealed not only the need to reposition the brand to maintain affinity with the current audience, but also highlighted a new audience pool, presenting new vistas of business opportunity.

The insights derived from the BrandCore<sup>SM</sup> process are essential in indicating where the brand has lost its way and what path the brand must take to assume its optimal position.

We indicate above that brand owners can control two key aspects of the brand: the Experience and Symbols, each of which comprises a myriad of elements.

## Experience

Consumer interaction with the product or service may be direct or indirect. Direct interaction might include points of purchase consideration, the actual purchase, setting up and using the product, maintaining and displaying it. Indirect interaction typically derives from word of mouth and third party reactions and opinions.

Where the BrandCore<sup>SM</sup> has identified that the brand has lost its way because of negative consumer experiences, the directions to the optimal brand territory will include brand management tools that shape interactions with the brand. These may arise out of either or both of the External Topography survey and the Internal Topography survey.

## Tools for External Topography

Tools to redirect the brand across the External Topography will often feature the 4 P's of marketing:

- › **Product:**
  - » Creation of a new product or adding value enhancements to an existing product.
  - » Improving product performance, behavior or utility.
  - » Enhancing interaction experiences with the product through, for example, redesigned packaging, set up instructions or assembly process. This can be for positive utility or, as in the case of the recent Toyota recall, to address a problem.
  - » Elevating the user purchase consideration experience by, for example, improving the product's presentation display, point of sale position, online presentation or customer service.

- › **Price:**
  - » Introducing operational enhancements to reduce cost of production
  - » Adjusting cost inputs
  - » Creating demand for greater volume of the product
  - » Establishing the broadest catchment of consumers
- › **Promotion** (marketing strategy):
  - » Print, broadcast, online and outdoor advertising
  - » Web sites, interactive and online resources
  - » Guerilla, ambient and viral activities
  - » Word of mouth
  - » Public relations
  - » Product placement
  - » Stakeholder engagement, such as interaction with influential bloggers and industry briefings.
- › **Placement:**
  - » Establishing different channels of distribution, such as direct B-to-C stores, stores inside other stores, e-Commerce sites and ingredient branding partnerships.
  - » Managing the physical presentation (merchandising displays) within the sale environment and the process of sale, such as training sales staff on demonstrating the product.

### **Tools for Internal Topography**

Redirecting the brand across the Internal Topography can be the more challenging part of the journey. There is an inevitable degree of strategic self-examination, which is a difficult exercise. Harder yet, although often more rewarding, is the emotional introspection that accompanies any exploration of organizational cultural beliefs, systems and identity.

Tools for redirecting a misaligned Internal Topography will frequently address issues around employee engagement. There are numerous studies that

indicate a disengaged internal culture correlates with and is causative factor for consumer disengagement. These tools might include:

- › **Strategy:**
  - » The BrandCore<sup>SM</sup> insights may require the revisiting of business competencies across operational activities, talent management and product development. Sometimes, the content or implementation of the whole business strategy needs to be reconsidered.
- › **Systems:**
  - » Considering that studies demonstrate engagement is often affected more by non-financial motivators rather than financial ones, a re-alignment of human resource policies, reward and recognition initiatives, feedback mechanisms and talent management practices is essential in developing an engaged culture.
  - » Some systems simply need to be rewritten to get back on track. Other systems ingrained within the organizational culture may require proprietary employee engagement tools, such as those offered by Gallup, Talent Plus or Kenexa.
- › **Communicating key brand messages:**
  - » Institute a campaign of brand events, workshops, roadshows, town hall meetings, get togethers and so on at which the core cultural tenets of the brand are communicated consistently.
  - » Develop a campaign of relevant physical devices, visual materials and environmental elements to instill core brand messages.

Additionally, for an all around perspective, identifying and exploiting an archetypal icon helps an organization to understand its story, its central values and its personality. The archetype informs all aspects of the organization's decision making, operations, systems, communication and messaging.

## Symbols

These tangible symbols of the brand evoke in the consumer a perception of the brand or the expectation of a certain experience with it. The BrandCore<sup>SM</sup> may have identified that these symbols are misleading audience perceptions or expectations. Once, Tiger Woods evoked for his sponsors, such as Nike and Accenture, a certain emotional affinity with those brands. Just after the scandal, Tiger Woods as a symbol for those brands potentially evokes a different and undesired perception or expectation.

At their most basic, brand symbols are found in primary design expressions, such as logos, and the ancillary design expressions, such as graphical schemes for promotional channels and tactics like Web sites and print advertisements, packaging, uniforms, building decor and signage. Brand symbols also include:

- › **Personalities**, such as Tiger Woods or Martha Stewart; in the former case acting as a symbol for other brands and in the latter as a brand in herself. Personalities may even be artificial creations, such as the Burger King character or the Geico Gecko.
- › **Words**, such as abbreviations that come to be better known than the full name, like IBM, and tag lines like Nike's Just Do It.
- › **Sensory associations**, like sounds, scents and feel. National anthems and TV show theme tunes are superb examples of the power of sound to bring a "brand" to mind. Brands have also used the power of smell to energize positive brand associations, whether through packaging of food products designed to release the optimum scent or retail stores enhancing their shopping environment with injected scents. Brands like Frette and Method also understand the importance of the sensory feel of their products and their alignment to how they want consumers to identify attributes with the brand. For

its stores, Apple creates a completely identifiable environmental experience that is consistent and saturated with its other brand expressions.

All of these symbols are important way-finding devices that help the brand owner steer the audience to a desired perspective of the brand. In relocating the brand to optimal territory, these guidance symbols may be renovated, redesigned or renewed entirely.

## Brand Mapping in Action

As we noted above, locating the precise territory to relocate the brand and guiding its journey there are key to optimizing the brand's power to create value for the business.

The diagram on the next page plots the movement of three companies that ddla has helped guide.

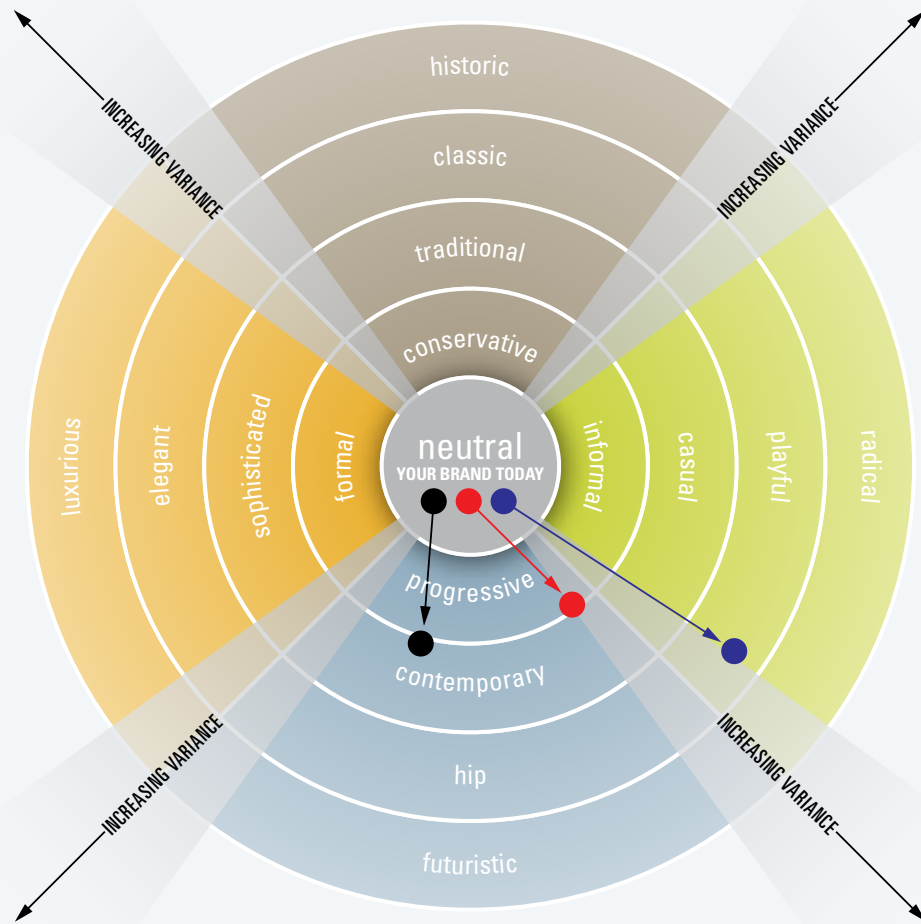
### Omaha Steaks

#### Market Topography

The food processing and distribution industry landscape is occupied by thousands of companies with total revenues exceeding \$100 billion. Omaha Steaks is a nationally renowned food company that boasts an outstanding pedigree, notable community heritage and fifth-generation family ownership. Omaha Steaks recognized the need to expand its consumer audience and to position itself more appealingly to a broader consumer area and twenty-first century marketplace.

#### Survey and Brand Movement

Our survey demonstrated significant brand equity, a respected history and a loyal existing consumer base, but a fragmented audience experience and competitor copy-cats. Omaha Steaks uses direct marketing channels as well as online, telemarketing and retail



- Omaha Steaks
- The Maids Home Services
- Culver Co.



before



after

stores and, accordingly, we had to carefully test into the repositioned expression. At this critical crossroads, the journey directions moved the brand to:

- › A refreshed logo that better expresses the “lover” archetype, but retains recognizable elements to maintain consumer loyalty
- › Consistency in the design scheme for brand expression and elimination of fragmentation in promotional activities and channels.
- › The creation of symbolic differentiation to competitors.
- › A series of Internal Topography recommendations for strategic, system and cultural enhancements.

### Optimal Territory for Business Success

New brand direct mail and other touchpoint tests are producing positive returns on investment. It’s an important initial step in a continuing journey for the brand, guiding every area of engagement with Omaha Steaks’ customers. The journey has been so successful that this brand repositioning was honored as a 2010 REBRAND 100® winner.

## Culver Company

### Market Topography

For over 30 years, Culver Company, Inc. has helped North American utility companies with their public outreach programs to promote water and energy conservation, and safety around electricity and natural gas. Annual Web site licenses are the premier product in Culver Company’s catalog of public outreach materials for utility companies. Educational Web sites are sold alongside other product categories, chiefly educational books and promotional giveaways. There has been an increased socio-economic focus on energy efficiency, education and security.

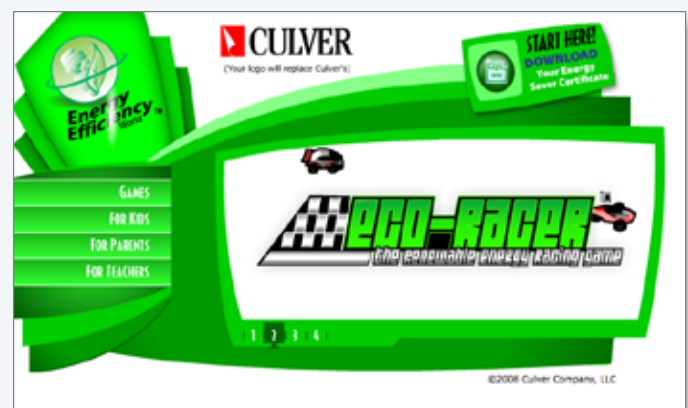
## Survey and Brand Movement

Our market review revealed the challenge for Culver in appealing to new utility customers while providing a product that resonated with a different end audience of teachers, children and parents.

The utilities’ aims and those of parents and educators were mutual: to reach out to children. The design we conceived and tested is kid-friendly and the navigation structure is intuitive and easy to use. We also conceived, designed and developed a new game for children: Eco-Racer, as well as an energy efficiency calculator activity. The Web site included new sections for parents and for teachers, with increased content and valuable materials, such as information on global warming, Energy Star® and alternative fuels. To allow for utility “ownership” of the product, the home page allows for placement of the utility’s brand.

### Optimal Territory for Business Success

The new product generated a 39% revenue increase in the months following launch compared to the same period for the older version. Additionally, more customers purchased or renewed an annual license of the new version in the first 6 months of launch than the combined total of companies who did so in the previous 39 months.



## The Maids International

### Market Topography

Flexible work/life balance arrangements; the huge boomer generation; a focus on social activities and an upward trend in home sizes are among many factors contributing to the market topography in which The Maids Home Services operates. The Maids, founded in 1979, is a residential cleaning company in the U.S. and Canada with more than 164 franchise partners serving over 90 major U.S. and Canadian cities.

### Survey and Brand Movement

Exploration of the external topography demonstrated that the visual symbols that The Maids used to represent their brand were fragmented and disconnecting with their consumer audience and their franchise partners. However, there were elements within the visual symbols, such as the vacuum cleaner, that had substantial positive recognition. The directions for The Maids brand journey therefore included a comprehensive adjustment to their visual brand expression, retaining the core parts of the brand symbols that generated positive brand affinity with their target consumers, as well as conceiving a renovated brand expression scheme to guide consistent brand expression by all the franchise partners.



before



after

## Optimal Territory for Business Success

The new brandscape has supported The Maids propulsion over the last few years to a dominant position in its market, consistently ranking highly as a premier Franchise business in independent rankings such as the Wall Street Journal, Entrepreneur magazine and Franchise Business Review.

## Conclusion

Positioning your brand at its optimal place will generate superior internal engagement and preeminent appeal to your consumers. An optimally positioned brand will dominate its market territory and deliver business success. Locating and moving the brand to that optimal position is not an easy journey, but a diligent process exploring the market topography and examining the external and internal perspectives of your brand will reveal how to get there. It is time to take out the brand compass, look at the map and plot your brand's course to success.

*"If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change."*

Giuseppe di Lampedusa

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## about dd|a

dd|a is a branding consultancy that provides superior business outcomes for its clients through the synergy of the science of brand identification and the art of brand expression.

## in the client's words...

*"The dd|a process was fabulous. It brought our entire organization on to the same page and created an alignment of our brand across multiple channels. No question that dd|a added tremendous value."*

Todd Simon, Owner & Senior Vice President Marketing, Omaha Steaks

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