

# PROPELLER

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**BRAND THAT YOU CAN SEE, HEAR AND FEEL**  
The Power of an Active Brand



*Propeller* offers FutureBrand insights, opinions and ideas on the world of branding. The cover art features FutureBrand creativity and visual thinking.

With a cluttered landscape and emerging technologies, companies face the challenge of reaching global audiences with a consistent brand experience that resonates deeply and dynamically. As additional channels of communication and technologies emerge, further opportunities present themselves.

One such opportunity lies in the component of an Active Brand. Active Branding involves the use of immersive elements, such as sound and animation, to bring a landmark to life. The benefit of Active Branding is not about differentiation; it is about creating an emotional bond with audiences and extending the reach and dimension of an existing brand.

An Active Brand lives in multiple channels and environments, and creates meaningful and memorable interactive experiences. Successful Active Brands accomplish these critical branding goals:

- Build Share of Mind
- Alter preconceived perceptions
- Create a universal experience
- Trigger emotional bonds

#### Share of Mind

An Active Brand resonates immediately, creating instant associations as well as communicating expectations. Yahoo! creates an immediate association of a fun, engaging brand in the passive listener's mind upon experiencing just the audio component of the Active Brand. To leverage this association, Yahoo has invested sports marketing dollars to pay for a recording of the Yahoo yodel to be played after every San Francisco 49ers touchdown at 3Com Park.

Intel is perhaps one of the most recognizable Active Brands. Although used only primarily through traditional mediums such as broadcast and radio, the four-tone chime enables a subtle yet powerful communication vehicle. The sound of "Intel Inside" forms in the listener an immediate connection to the brand, even if the listener is not familiar with the products that Intel produces. Manufacturers which utilize Intel technologies in their products also benefit by instilling a sense of trust and familiarity with consumers, and Intel benefits by being the "voice" of well-established partnered consumer brands.

NBC is another good example of the share of mind an Active Brand enables. Originating in 1929, the chimes were used on the hour and half-hour to announce station breaks on affiliate radio stations, and later on television to alert viewers to a sports-score ticker. Today, when hearing the NBC chimes, the listener makes an immediate association between the sound and an NBC show, as well as evoking a visual image of the NBC brand mark.

With sound and animation, the obstacle of language is nonexistent, enabling the core essence of a brand to be experienced on a global scale, creating a universal, shared experience.



Active Branding can alter preconceived perceptions of a stagnant brand by offering a new experience and extending the language and texture of an existing brand through various Touchpoints. These Touchpoints are ever-expanding, and can include points-of-sale, wireless devices, kiosks, Internet and interactive television or navigational devices, for example. A consumer may have the opinion that a certain brand is antiquated or that its appeal only lends itself to a specific audience. An Active Brand can change this perception by living on unexpected channels, expanding the existing brand vocabulary and experience.

A new brand launching with Active Branding components has unlimited opportunities to create an instant emotional connection and carry this connection through for the life of the brand, enabling, through a suite of sound, possible sub-brand development and partner relationships. Merging companies looking for a way to combine strengths, leverage a new positioning, and integrate two separate corporate images and attributes may find an Active Brand effective. A consistent, portable brand communicator reinforces the new positioning, drawing on the positive combined corporate aspects and creates a dynamic new sonic and visual personality.

With sound and animation, the obstacle of language is nonexistent, enabling the core essence of a brand to be experienced on a global scale, creating a universal, shared experience. Heard in airports around the world, the CNN audio signature is associated with the sound of civilization, transporting travelers who may be experiencing difficulties with the contrasting cultural and language differences to a familiar, safe place by the brand.

Sound creates an emotional bond with audiences. Music has the ability to influence the behavior and spending habits of consumers' in retail environments. According to Dr. Adrian North, sound reaches both lobes of the brain – the rational and emotional.

**Dimension** of an Active Brand refers to the psychological and physiological impact of sound and motion, and the share of mind that is held between many people each time the Active Brand is seen or heard.

An Active component creates an immediate connection to the brand and the promise, without requiring the individual to participate in the process, such as having a television turned on but not viewed. The individual can “hear” the audio component of the Active Brand and makes this connection; seeing the animation coupled with sound is not necessary. Such audio cues are used in broadcasting to tell television viewers who may be doing other things what is going on in the broadcast, and when the commercial break has reached an end. According to Cheskin Research, sounds associated with brand identity on the web can carry the same level of brand recognition and brand attributes as the visual brand identity alone.<sup>1</sup>

Adding motion to a static brand mark, along with elements of sound or music, offers audiences a new perspective of an existing brand, but also engages new audiences with a contemporary freshness that may not have been a previous brand attribute. An Active Brand has the ability to communicate through sound and motion the personality and essence of a brand in a simple, direct manner, yet also in a manner in such that the physiological and psychological resonance has an immediate and lasting effect.

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### Immersion of an Active Brand

Active branding brings new dimension to an existing brand by engaging audiences with multi-sensory elements, such as sound and motion. These elements allow users to immerse in the brand experience and when successful, merely the audio component of an Active Brand can engage, motivate, and influence users. For example, ad banners that use audio have improved click-through rates of sometimes more than 300%.<sup>2</sup>

Sound is an immersive medium because:

- Sound creates a 3-dimensionality of the perceptive experience
- Spatial clues construct a mental image of the physical space
- Sound enables a sensation of presence, particularly in the case of surround sound

This immersive quality enables the immediate recall and physical construct of the animated brand mark when the Intel Inside Active Brand is heard. This immersive characteristic is highly portable, and can be experienced in the same manner regardless of language or cultural differences.

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In addition to the emotional connection an Active Brand triggers, it also has tremendous reach, moving beyond traditional channels like television and radio, to break through the clutter in a variety of environments and retail scenarios – scenarios utilizing the technology of today and tomorrow.

### Tomorrow's retail experience

With use of Radio Frequency Identity Chips – miniscule microchips that have the ability to store and transmit information, the potential exists to revolutionize supply chain, distribution, and the way companies think about and execute marketing strategies. As a platform for an Active Brand, an emotional connection can be deepened even further, with high levels of personalization. The next generation of shopping cart is on the horizon, equipped with readers mounted on the handle for easy swiping of a RFID-embedded loyalty card. Once activated, the cart can “speak” to kiosks and advertising displays, as well as the screen on the cart itself, providing a rich environment for the dynamic expression of an Active Brand.

Within the context of the automotive showroom, opportunities to immerse buyers in the brand within the automobile environment can not only be utilized during the buying process, but can continue to be leveraged once the car is driven off the floor. Instead of “dead” telematics displays within automobiles in the showroom, the buyer's tendency to get into cars to avoid salesmen can be used to the dealer's advantage by activation of the Active Brand once the door is closed, and once the sale is made, to announce ignition at startup.

### The future of targeted messaging

Wireless devices such as cell phones and PDA's exemplify the pursuit of cutting-edge applications amongst technology companies, and full-color displays for photographs and movies are only the beginning. The next generation of cell phones will function as lifestyle operating systems – acting as organizer, photo album, Internet service provider, remote control, even billfold. As a platform for an Active Brand the opportunities are numerous, such as sonic reminders from service providers to animations at point of transaction, all tailored to the individual.

With the advent of dynamic billboards, such as phone and bus kiosks that scroll and display sponsored content as well as news, advertising in major cities is quickly evolving in an effort to connect with consumers in marketing-dense areas. The future of targeted messaging is exemplified by Boston-based Vert. Enabling patented Geo-Targeted Technology, precise targeting to specific locations, down to the zip code and time of day, is possible – all from the roof of taxi cabs. These innovative platforms have the ability to connect the Active Brand with crowds outside a competitor's store, advertise an online music site outside an entertainment venue, or advertise a cereal manufacturer's new product during the morning rush.

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## **Stephanie Carroll**

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Stephanie is a copywriter in FutureBrand New York's Brand Experience practice. She has also written articles on topics such as automotive telematics and brand management tools. She obtained a BFA in painting from Moore College of Art and Design in 1990.

*Cover art:*

**Untitled**

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## **Building the brands of tomorrow**

One of the most important strategies in building a brand is leveraging the future to creating a meaningful bond with the customer, appealing to both the rational and emotional, while expanding this experience over multiple marketing channels. Sound, like music, is by nature an emotional trigger, and combined with the visual representation of the brand, an Active Brand can readily take advantage of traditional and emerging advertising communications and environments, leveraging the opportunities offered in both the digital and physical world.

*1 Cheskin Research, Sounds Like Money: The Importance of Audio Branding On the Web  
2. Excite@Home& Iposos-ASO, The Rich Media 2 Study, August, 1999*