

Billion-Dollar Brand Playbook



7 Marketing Principles for Brands
Transitioning from DTC to CPG

ONE
BILLION
!AGENCY



OneBillion! Agency was founded in 2023 by three marketing & advertising veterans who spent decades growing billion-dollar brands. We realized that growing a billion-dollar CPG brand isn't complicated, but it can get complex.

Billion-dollar CPG brands follow a similar playbook, and we realized that while many agencies can help a brand grow on social media, a unique and dangerous growth ceiling exists for DTC brands. The very strategies that create a \$50M DTC darling—hyper-targeted ads, first-party data, and direct customer relationships—are the same ones that fail spectacularly in the world of retail buyers, trade spend, and shopper marketing. We've spent our careers navigating this specific, complex transition.

It's our mission to leverage our decades CPG of experience to help you successfully navigate your transition from DTC to CPG.



We've used the following principles on brands of every size and in every category, and the effect is always the same. If you follow these principles in a way that is authentic to your brand, **your brand will gain new customers, increase market share, and win at the retail shelf.**



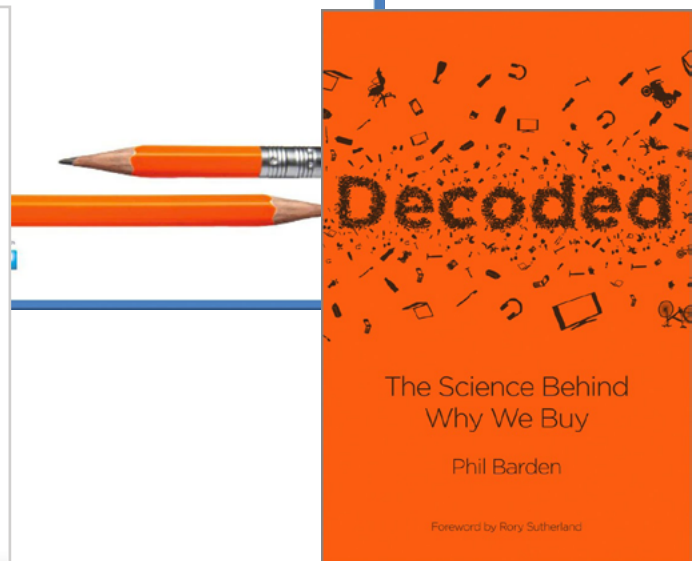
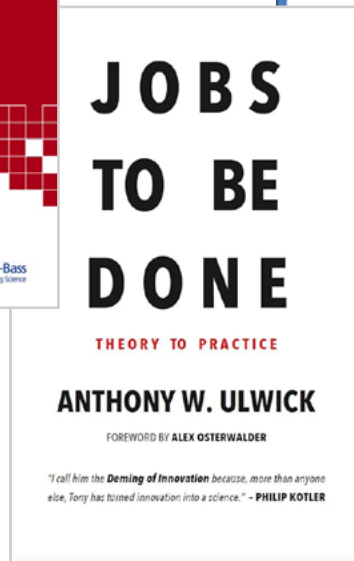
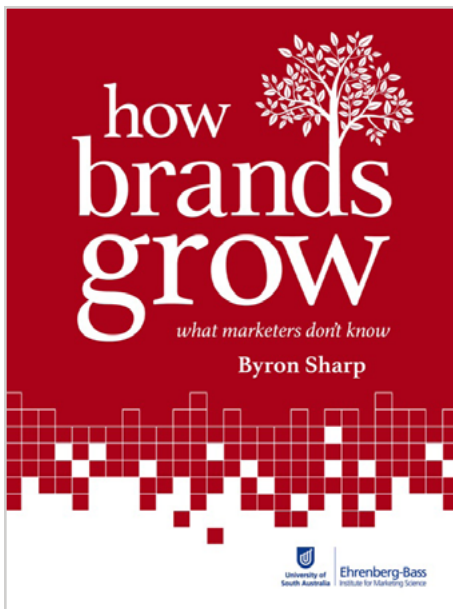
The following principles can be applied to any brand's marketing efforts, however, the manner in which these principles are applied must be tuned to the brand's objectives and audiences.

No brand can just follow a playbook.

That being said, in our decades of building CPG brands, we've noticed that the best brands in the world follow the 7 principles covered in this playbook. These 7 principles are easy to understand, yet difficult to execute, especially for successful DTC brands.

Why?

DTC brands have probably grown through focus on a handful of performance media channels, email campaigns ... the typical digital playbook. Yet, CPG brands in retail need to follow a new set of strategies that sound heretical to many DTC marketers' ears.



WARC



The following 7 Principles are based on rigorous research by global leaders in marketing science, neuroscience, brand strategy, and marketing effectiveness over decades of testing and analysis. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude for their work and it's our mission to share their thinking, through the lens of our decades of hands-on experience, with marketing professionals, entrepreneurs, and brand leaders.

Now, let's get into the 7 Principles of billion-dollar CPG brands!

Respect Your Customer.

Know your audience so well ...
you never pander to them.

Audience understanding is at the core of all great marketing campaigns. The challenge to you and your teams for Principle #1 is to go deeper in your audience understanding so you never pander to them.



We've all seen pandering marketing, it's easy to spot because it stinks.

If the marketing team producing that work actually understood their audience, they would know they were missing the mark.

For a DTC brand, this means accepting that you're losing the comfort of first-party data. "Respecting the customer" in retail means learning to understand the anonymous shopper in the aisle through qual-style shopper research and retailer data.

The extra effort will go a long way to building real relationships with your audience.



Cast a Wide Net. Target creative, not your media.

A once heretical statement, we know, but this isn't an opinion, this is marketing science fact proven by dozens of studies. Targeting your media is more expensive and less effective.

Why?

Ad platform CPMs go up the more you target, meaning, your media is less effective because it's speaking to fewer people. The modern ad serving algorithms are built to go after people most likely to convert, and by adding layers of targeting, you're hurting the algorithm's chances and increasing your costs.

As your brand transitions from DTC to retail, casting as wide a net as possible will ensure you're building mental availability while you expand your physical footprint. Driving velocity for retail partners like Target or Kroger, requires a broader audience of category shoppers.

Use your deep audience understanding (Principle #1) to make your creative speak in a strong and clear voice. **Your people will respond.**

Connect with Emotion.

People post-rationalize purchases.
Focus on selling the feeling.

The marketing adage, “Sell the hole, not the drill” doesn’t go far enough and keeps you trapped in “feature / benefit” messaging. Challenge yourself and your teams to go beyond the practical features and benefits of your product or service, and ***identify the emotional benefit.***



From toothpaste to luxury cars, the buyer is ultimately motivated by an emotional outcome.

On your website, you have endless space to tell your story. On a crowded shelf, you have seconds. Focus on distilling your brand’s emotional benefit into an immediate, powerful message communicated through packaging and in-store displays.



Prioritize Growth.

New customers aren't just how a brand grows, it is how a brand survives.

Imagine you're on a pristine beach. Now, scoop up as much sand as you can in cupped hands. Is it possible to keep every grain of sand in your hands or are small rivulets of sand slipping through your fingers?

Now, take this (clunky) metaphor and apply it to your customer base. The sand slipping through your fingers is customer churn, and even the best brands have churn. Customer loyalty is a myth.

Your growth now comes by prioritizing retail sell-through. This requires a strategy where your DTC loyalty and retention programs don't sabotage your retail partners sell-through. Channels must now grow in harmony.

Stand Out in the Crowd.

Attention is the ultimate metric.
Grab attention and you will win.

Principle #5 is one of our favorites, because it intrinsically ties Principles 1-4 together in an elegant way. “Attention” has many names in the marketing world: Message recall, Top-of-Mind Awareness, Share of Voice, etc., etc.



It all boils down to attention.

Attention, being interesting and creating an emotional response, isn't just good creative practice, it saves you money. Multiple studies show that “safe” dull marketing costs more because you need more impressions to get your message across. Stop wasting your money on frequency and be memorable.

At shelf, your distinctive brand assets and package design must instantly grab attention and communicate your place in the category.

How? Continue on to Principle #6!

Be Different but Familiar.

MAYA is the key to unlocking distinctiveness and grabbing attention.



In the mid-1900s, Raymond Loewy shook the design world with his aerodynamic interpretations of objects from pencil sharpeners to locomotives. His central design principle was MAYA - **Most Advanced, Yet Accepted.**

This principle is just as relevant to brand assets, marketing campaigns, and in retail, your package design. Grabbing and holding attention is about being relevant to your category, while being just different enough to be distinct from the competition.

How do you get there? In addition to understanding your audience (Principle 1) you also need to understand your category and competition, so you can identify distinctive whitespaces for your brand to own.

Consistency is Everything.

If all else fails - use clear,
consistent messaging.

At the most basic level, **a brand is consistency over time.** Marketers get bored with messages, assets, and campaigns - your audiences rarely, if ever, grow tired of repetition (unless your frequency is too high, but that's a different document.)



Stay consistent with all of your distinctive assets in every message, on every channel, in-store and online and your brand will grow.



So, now you may be asking ... How do I apply these 7 Principles to my DTC to CPG evolution??

We're *Star Wars* geeks, so we're going to borrow a framework for you to apply these 7 Principles based on the Machete Order.*

(I would add Rogue One at the beginning and forget about the final trilogy, but that's a topic for another day.)

Whether you're just starting out on your DTC to CPG journey in early distribution, scaling up to national distribution, or are determined to be a omnichannel household name, **these 7 principles will grow your revenue** ... but the order in which you prioritize them could change ...

* [More info about the Machete Order](#)

Setting the Foundation

Brands in Pre-launch and Early Distribution

Brands setting their foundation are planning to, or have launched with 1-2 retail partners. In this phase, you're juggling maintaining sales on your DTC channel, while also driving interest at shelf.

Package design, building your buyer sell-story, and gaining broad-based attention in store are essential in this phase.

The Machete Order

7 Consistency is Everything. For small companies, establishing a clear and consistent brand is foundational. When resources are limited, consistency helps build recognition with minimal waste. Your audience needs to know exactly who you are every time they see you at the shelf.

4 Prioritize Growth. Driving sales velocity is key to smaller brands entering retail. Media plans must focus on acquiring net-new category shoppers for your buyer relationships to survive. To do that ...

2 Cast a Wide Net. The DTC media mindset will no longer work. Your brand needs as many eyeballs on it as possible. Turn your media plans into reach and frequency machines and let your creative work speak to your audience about your story.

then ...

1, 3, 5, 6

Scaling-Up

Brands Expanding Doors and Driving Velocity

Brands expanding from regional to national distribution have the basics covered, but now the game has totally changed. In this phase, you're proving sell-through to buyers, launching shopper marketing programs, and exploring retail media networks.

The Machete Order

- 2 **Cast a Wide Net.** At this stage, scaling requires reaching new audiences beyond your core. Scaling brands have proven there is demand for their product — now broaden your reach while letting creative and mass reach in digital, CTV, and in-store.
- 4 **Prioritize Growth.** Medium-sized brands often hit plateaus when they over-focus on loyalty programs. Remember that the DTC retention mind-set no longer works. Your brand needs a steady flow of new customers to offset inevitable churn.
- 3 **Connect with Emotion.** You've established product-market fit, now deepen the emotional connection. Scaling brands can start shifting from purely functional benefits to emotional territory that builds stronger brand affinity.

then ...

1, 5, 7, 6

Omnichannel Household-name

Brands focused on optimization and category dominance

You've established nation-wide retail footprint, and now you're focused on category dominance and claiming more market share. You're defending your share of shelf, maximizing channel profitability, and using brand marketing to tell your story across every media channel: in-store, online, and everywhere else.

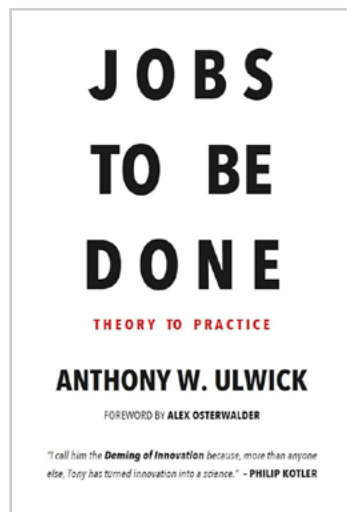
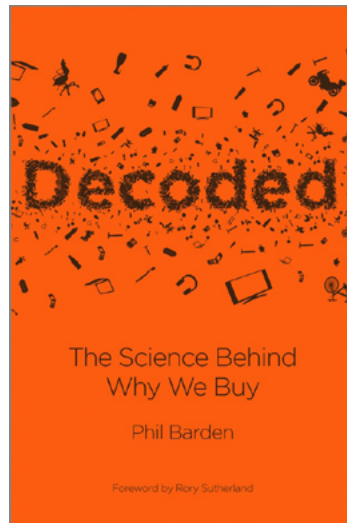
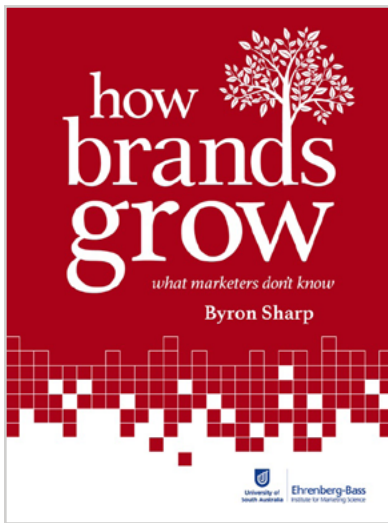
The Machete Order

- 7 Consistency is Everything.** Ironically, we would argue that for the largest and smallest companies, consistency is the most important thing to solidify a brand. Small brands need to build memory structures, while big brands need to retain and strengthen them.
- 2 Cast a Wide Net.** The only way to grow market share as a CPG brand is to gain new customers. Share-of-Voice in a crowded category is directly correlated to Share-of-Market, so you need to go as broad as possible and optimize every media channel.
- 3 Connect with Emotion.** All the reach you have across channels is worthless without emotional creative. Make people laugh, cry, go "aww", or feel joy, surprise, or nostalgic in a way that is true to your brand, and it's impossible not to win.

then ...

1, 4, 6, 5

Recommendations



Essential reading

The most essential books for marketers, entrepreneurs, and brand leaders.

Great podcasts

Some of our favorite weekly podcasts covering strategy, creativity, trends, and most importantly marketing effectiveness.





Let's build your Retail Roadmap!

A successful transition to retail doesn't happen by accident—it happens by design. If you're ready to move from uncertainty to a clear, actionable plan, book a complimentary "Retail Readiness" discovery call with our founders today.

We'll help you assess your current capabilities, brand assets, and media plan to determine if our strategic roadmap is the right next step to secure your brand's profitable growth on the shelf.

[Book a Call](#)