

campaign



A view from Stephen Cheliotis

Superbrands ranking reveals Amazon and Google still need to win the hearts of consumers

The tech giants may believe they can conquer the world, but some factors of brand equity take decades to build, writes the chairman of Superbrands.

Stephen Cheliotis
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It's Lego's time to shine: after creeping up the rankings for the last three years, the toy brand has topped our Superbrands ranking for the first time.

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After being third in 2016 and second last year, Lego has toppled British Airways, the number one brand for the last four years, which has unceremoniously fallen out of the top 20.

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Superbrands sees 2,500 members of the public judge 1,500 major brands on three core factors: quality, reliability and distinction. For the first time this year, we also asked voters to categorise brands into those gaining or losing cultural relevance.

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	2018	2017
1	Lego	British Airways
2	Gillette	Lego
3	Apple	Rolex
4	Andrex	Andrex
5	Coca-Cola	Gillette
6	Disney	John Lewis
7	Marks & Spencer	Mercedes-Benz

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8	Boots	Kellogg's
9	Heinz	Apple
10	BMW	Coca-Cola
11	Cadbury	Dyson
12	Rolex	Boots
13	BP	Cadbury
14	Shell	Marks & Spencer
15	John Lewis	Jaguar
16	Heathrow	Fairy
17	Jaguar	Heinz
18	Kleenex	Google
19	Visa	Amazon
20	Häagen-Dazs	Cancer Research UK

The results are fascinating, and offer some useful lessons on brand strength – but also demonstrate that there is more than one route to success.

The top of the rankings is still predominantly made up of heritage brands, re-affirming the importance of a long-term emotional connection with consumers.

While many may not be obvious current case studies in marketing circles, they perfectly represent in consumers' eyes the three elements inherent in a Superbrand.

Mental market share

Aside from a few aspirational brands, the leading Superbrands are accessible, steady, and have built resonance with consumers over time, going about their business consistently.

What is also clear from the data is the leading brands, like Gillette or Andrex, are hitting the mark across varied audiences, young and old, male and female, and regardless of wealth or location.

It's not always desirable to have a brand that is not polarising, but it's not always unattractive: **vanilla sells best.**

Lego's success at the top of the table is partly because it's positively perceived across all audiences surveyed. They are viewed as the go-to, leading brand for what they do and are top of mind for it - think Byron Sharps' mental market share as a proxy.

That does not mean we all buy Lego bricks regularly, but it does mean we'd be likely to consider that brand, and positively, when purchasing toys.

The success of Lego, in the year its famous brick celebrates its 60th birthday, also shows that despite business challenges - particularly in the wider category - it has been able to keep itself in mind and in culture through clever PR, product partnerships and pushing its brand into new areas, such as film and the Art of Brick exhibitions.

Trust and goodwill

But if widespread fame, broad appeal and cultural relevance are key, where are the big tech brands, like Amazon and Google? **Despite coming near the top of brand value rankings**, both squeaked into the top 20 last year and fell out this.

They are glaring omissions because they have popular products that draw interest from across consumer groups - hence their business success. But their failure to hit the top 20 is perhaps because they lack exactly the emotional resonance and warm goodwill referenced earlier.

They are certainly deemed relevant: Amazon and Google place third and ninth in our relevancy index. But they are just not gaining the votes of other arguably less fresh brands.

Useful, yes, but liked? That's debatable - at least compared to the traditional stalwarts that dominate the top 20. Perhaps it is niggling doubts in consumers' minds about their ethics that is undermining their performance, or perhaps relationships and trust simply take time to build.

Either way the unconscious voting patterns show that many of these new giants are underperforming where, we in the industry at least, might expect.

Reliability and delivery

Nevertheless, these tech brands do generally deliver, and reliability is a key Superbrand trait and one that builds equity and bonds over time.

If traditional Superbrands with emotional resonance let people down, they can fall out of favour. BA's fall from grace is a warning to all.

The airline still has much goodwill, but in the last year has simply failed to live up to expectations, notably in its significant IT issues and the negative reaction to it withdrawing free food on short-haul flights.

BA's other problem could be that it is too preoccupied with its category and not focussed enough on itself, unsure of whether it is competing with low-cost operators or providing a full-premium service, resulting in an increasingly jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none positioning.

Still, with huge investment plans and underlying goodwill it can hopefully arrest its fall and bounce back swiftly, this is the platform emotional goodwill provides but its only realised when it goes hand-in-hand with delivery.

Growing relevance

What's clear from our relevancy index is that a whole wave of new disruptive challenger brands are waiting in the wings. The likes of PayPal, Netflix and Purplebricks are among those flying up the charts. Their challenge is to build on their relevance and usefulness to create deeper, sustainable emotional appeal.

	Brands gaining relevance, 2018
1	PayPal
2	Cancer Research UK
3	Amazon
4	Aldi
5	Macmillan Cancer Support
6	Lego
7	Lidl

8	Netflix
9	Google
10	Emirates
11	Apple
12	TripAdvisor
13	Dyson
14	Purple Bricks
15	Zoopla
16	Heathrow
17	Trivago
18	Marie Curie Cancer Care
19	Samsung
20	YouTube

Naturally, the optimal position is to be performing well in the overall rankings and relevancy index. Few achieve this, with Lego a notable example.

Our barometer, which has been running since 1995, is taking a snapshot of the UK's opinion to identify and celebrate those brands the consumer decides warrants praise.

Perhaps we need to look at the Steady Eddies as much as the shiny new toys to discover sustainable brand success. They may not win the creative awards but by simply going about their business, being reliable and warm, they win with consumers.

I believe the rising stars need to create a connection beyond utility and convenience, although all brands ultimately must give the consumers what they need to succeed as a Superbrand.

Stephen Cheliotis is chief executive of The Centre for Brand Analysis and chairman of Superbrands. The research was based on 2018 Superbrands' results, managed by The Centre for Brand Analysis in partnership with Research Now SSI.

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