

Red Flag Brands

As the 20th century ends, many of the brand icons that identified with the times and emotions of that era, won't have what it takes to make it across the millennial divide. Lacking vitality and weighed down by associations with mediocrity and marginal quality, the old brand names will be overtaken by the new challengers as well as by established competitors that have better positioned themselves to make the millennial leap.

With the millennial change come changes in expectations. Even many of today's biggest, most popular and powerful brands, seemingly ingrained in the American consciousness, will suffer from obsolescence and marketing plans that are out of step with the times. Indeed, these brand behemoths will be perceived as Red Flag Brands by the consumer – products, services and places to stay away from at any cost or any price point.

Regardless of attempts at reconfiguration, relabeling or product modification, these brand names and their aging logos, are warning signals that instill low

expectations and even lower consumer interest.

THE SEARS EFFECT.

For example, following in the footsteps of Woolworths, Sears is on the way to the retail graveyard. With its best years clearly behind it and no promise of regaining its former stature, the old-timer's off-trend marketing schemes and product lines have created an atmosphere that resonates with dying generations, and alienates the new generation of big spenders.

Brands like Campbells, Clairol, Kraft and Nabisco have achieved similar off-trend results to those of the retailing giant. Their products, once looked upon as standards of acceptable quality in a post-Depression, post World War II era of new economic growth, do not meet the level of new millennium demands. Their products symbolize the dull and boring—mediocre, undistinguished styling, and a generally old-fashioned feel without the pleasures of old-fashioned quality.

While their early success often came from appearing superior in their product category, these brands have now fallen victim to

years of cost cutting formulas that cut too deeply into the integrity of their product. For them – as for Sears, that spends millions on promotions and cosmetic quick fixes – new advertising gimmicks, and transparent make-overs won't bring their geriatric brands back to prominence.

For the new millennium leading-edgers, society's trend setters, the products with appeal will be those that sparkle with stylish individuality, high levels of integrity, and the shine of the new. Locked out of the leading-edge minds and banned from their households, the old millennium "also-brands" will languish as their hard-won market share is undermined forever.

Note: While there are brilliant marketers within the ranks of the also-brands, they are coasting on old successes and even older strategies. Initially they may be successful at snaring a new generation of consumer with clever advertising and massive advertising budgets. But ultimately, these old-line brands will fail to deliver on their implied promises and will fail in the marketplace.

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P.O. Box 660, Rhinebeck, NY 12572-0660

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