

# ***“United We Brand”***

Mike Moser

(Harvard Business School Press 1953)

Summary by Bob Littell, Chief NetWeaver

**Foreward** – Why I believe this work is so significant – **Bob Littell**

In an article I wrote recently for the **Association for Corporate Growth (ACG)** – “***Top Ten Things CEO’s and Leaders at ALL Levels Within ACG Should be Doing During These Challenging Times***”, one of my top 10 was to “***Focus on strengthening your brand***” – There’s way too much clutter in the world and many companies do a lousy job differentiating themselves and clearly stating their ‘**value proposition**’. They focus more on ‘**features**’ rather than what they SHOULD be focusing on - ‘**benefits**’ and genuinely why someone would want to do business with them over and over again.

I indicated that while business has slowed, this is a great time to sharpen your value proposition and your ‘branding’ since that can also keep you and your key people focused on ‘**positives**’ rather than ‘**negatives**’. Many younger people are taking this time to go back to school – or to upgrade their skills. This is the time for you and your company to **hone your brand**.

## **Preface**

The author, Mike Moser, argues, “. . .*the problem isn’t that executives don’t ‘get’ their brand. It’s that they don’t know how to funnel that knowledge into a form that is easily communicated and understood by every person – whether employee, partner, customer, or investor – who comes in contact with it.*”

What Moser does in this book is to present a ‘**hands-on**’ tool he developed over the course of two decades of branding experience with brand giants like Reebok and Dell Computers – down to fledgling startups. . . as well as to nonprofits.

My good friend, Chris Lemley, now a professor of entrepreneurship in Georgia State’s Robinson School of Business, and who at one time headed the International Division of Saatchie & Saatchie, one of the world’s largest advertising agencies, was the one who recommended this book to me. After reading it, I could see why.

In his early years, Moser spent much of his career with the major agencies representing major companies seeking to win against a key competitor and in most cases, “. . .*working on the brand that had less money, less awareness, and less of a brand than its competitors.*” It was from that experience that taught him “*the competitive advantage of having a core set of corporate values, a microscopically focused brand message, a distinct brand personality, and a consistent set of brand icons.*”

In an attempt to create a “**brand consistency**” and a “**common sense of direction**”, and the same “**gut feel**” for the brand, Moser came up with a booklet which he called a “**Brand Roadmap**”. . .”*designed to be a down-to-earth, practical guide to help both clients and agency people make day-to-day branding decisions*”.

He did these for companies like Kia Motors, Cisco Systems, Dell, and also for many start-up companies..

It was all about focusing on “**the messages that mattered**” instead of just some glitzy marketing materials with which all the ‘**creatives**’ in the agency were enamored. Some stupid multi-million dollar Super Bowl ads are great examples of this, aren’t they?

Moser doesn’t claim his ‘**brand roadmap**’ to be totally a new idea referring to various forms other corporations, branding experts, and brand consultancies had used called by such names as “*brand print, brand optimization, brand DNA, brand intent, brand visioning, and other iterations, etc.*” The problem was that these proprietary forms were beyond the reach of most companies, other than the ones with the big bucks to spend on that kind of expertise.

What Moser wanted to do was to create a simple, generic process and template to enable **ANY** company – large or small – “*to achieve some of the same brand insights, brand focus, and brand consistency delivered by many of those proprietary formulas.*”

Moser also cautions in his Preface that he doesn’t want people to think that this book is a comprehensive book on ‘branding’ and definitely not what he would consider to be a ‘*scholarly work*’. After all Moser never went to a 4-year college. He graduated from Los Angeles Trade-Technical College with an associate’s degree in commercial art. As he says, “*The driving force in my career has been practicality*”. How refreshing.

In the book, Moser also uses “**company**” as a generic term applying it to *schools, nonprofits, service businesses, small, medium, or large businesses, corporations, megaconglomerates, or other organizations.*”

In the Preface, he gives credit to a number of people who helped him and influenced his career as well as how they helped shape his thinking. He also apologizes for the fact that he’s sure some of his best ideas came from or through others: “*Throughout my career, my modus operandi has been to latch on to whatever ideas would work for my clients, without my necessarily worrying about who came up with the idea or documenting where the idea came from.*”

Nevertheless, I thought the tributes he gave to his family were especially appropriate.

From his kids, he learned the importance of ‘**creativity**’ and ‘**fresh insights**’, as well as the importance of ‘**humor in everything we do**’.

From his dad, who was a top salesman, he learned not only **how to sell effectively**, but the importance and the **‘value of relevant and powerful product demonstrations’**.

And from his mom with her common sense and practical problem-solving Irish background, he learned to **‘keep his ideas and solutions grounded in reality’**. .. (**‘pragmatism and consistent character’**) rather than placing too much emphasis on ‘image’ and ‘impression management’.

## **Chapter One – “You’re Five Steps Away from Having a Customized Brand”**

Moser defines a brand roadmap as *“a document that is unique to each company and that serves as a template for you and everyone else to follow to ensure brand consistency.”* It’s designed to give everyone a clear vision of the company’s brand.

Moser suggests you might come up with your own unique term for your own **‘roadmap’**. For Stuart Anderson’s Black Angus restaurants, they came up with the term, a **“brand trail map”**.

For my **“NetWeaving International”** company, I think I’ll call mine a **“brand webmap”**.

For my newest project, **“Paw It Forward”**, I think I’ll call it a **“brand pawprint map”**.

One strong reason Moser argues why you need a brand roadmap is that every company has an **internal** as well as an **external** identity. Whether it’s just you or if you have 1,000 employees in your company, *“the internal part has to do with the company itself: how well it knows itself, what its values are, how consistently it acts in accordance with those values, and what it really believes about the quality of its products and services.”*

The **‘external’** part of a company’s identity is *“how well it connects and relates to others”*. And ‘others’ refers to *“everyone who comes in contact with the brand: customers, suppliers, employees, prospects, even competitors.”*

Just thinking about the U.S. auto industry, it strikes me that one of the main causes of its downfall was a disparity between the big automakers **‘internal’** and **‘external’** identities and leadership’s failure to recognize this.

As Moser points out, *“When the internal and external identities are the same, the brand is strong. When the internal and external identities are inconsistent, or at odds, the brand is weak.”*

**How about you and YOUR company (remember the context of ‘company’)? How do YOU see your company’s identity vs. how all the other external to the company**

see it? (**Hint** – this will be one of the questions we discuss when we break out into smaller discussion groups).

Moser gives an OVERVIEW of the 5 steps in creating a unique brand in the marketplace and each step builds on the one before it:

1. **Learning how to articulate your company's core brand values** – 3 or 4 of these which create *"the foundation of every decision your company makes – from the kind of people you hire; to the kinds of customers you pursue; to the partners you choose; to the marketing decisions you make – and they'll be the pillars of any message you deliver."*
2. **Learn how to create and fine-tune your core brand message**, *the key message that captures your company's reasons for being.. .Once established, "all other messages support and add credibility to that message."*
3. **Learn how to determine your brand personality** – *this will determine what tone and attitude your organization is going to use to deliver your core brand message – creating a personality that acts and sounds like a real person.* The ad that comes to my mind here is the great **"Apple vs. PC"** ad and the instant recognition which differentiates the two different **'personalities'**.
4. **Learn how to clarify and prioritize your brand icons** – *by understanding your brand values, message, and brand personality, these will all help you make decisions on appropriate "colors, typefaces, voice-overs, logos, layouts, music, signage, and architecture for your brand."*
5. **Learn the process of putting together your own brand roadmap.** . .brand trail map, brand menu, brand publication, brand trip, etc. The idea is to *"eliminate redundancies, smooth out any inconsistencies, and make the document as lean and as pragmatic as possible."*

Also because Moser believes too many company design their own roadmaps more as a counter to their competition's brand – he's refers to this as **'brand myopia'** – he suggests that you should occasionally ***"step outside your own category every now and then."*** For example if you're in the business of software, imagine instead you're a car company, and what would you do. He reflects, ***"It's amazing how many concrete solutions can come out pretending you're someone else."***

## **Chapter Two – "Core Brand Values"**

The 3 parts to this chapter include: 1) why core values are so important; 2) some examples of core values to help you see how they can apply to your company; 3) help you narrow your choices to the top 3 or 4 and to help you articulate WHY those values are unique to your company.

I'll skip the first part which you can read. One of the great examples Moser gives of core values which you'll recognize and how if you're not **TOTALLY** honest, it can turn around and bite you.

When you think of the advertising Volvo has done over the years, if you're like me, one word comes to mind immediately – **'safety'**. I'd forgotten, or maybe I never heard about their major advertising *faut pax*, but once they did a product demonstration showing a Volvo being run over by a monster truck, which turned out to be staged and rigged, "*the credibility of the brand was suddenly on shaky grounds.*"

Luckily though, because the brand was so strong and because in truth, "*Volvo does make safe cars*", they recovered. "*The marketing was flawed, not the car.*"

I wonder what the person within that ad agency who came up with that '**rigged product demo**' TV ad is doing today? He may be driving that monster truck.

Moser suggests that a good place to start is to review a list of core values which he compiled from a number of companies he worked with, as well as from core values listed in "*America's Greatest Brands*" (New York, America's Greatest Brands – 2001). He adds, "*If none feels quite right, feel free to add some of your own.*" Then after you end up with 7 or 8 that feel right, narrow it down to 3 or 4 core values.

- *Which values are **SO** inherent in your company that if they disappeared, your company would cease to exist as it is?*
- *Which values does your company consistently adhere to in the face of **ALL** obstacles?*
- *Does the word **PASSIONATE** come to mind when you look at a value and apply it to your company?*
- *Which core values does this culture value?*

In the book, page 18, there's a list of 45 words with a block which can be checked beside each one, and Moser asks you to pick the ones which best represent the core values of your company?

As another sneaky way to get you to actually **buy** the book, I'll give you only the ones which I picked out from the list in reference to my own NetWeaving International:

**Community, Innovation, Trust, Connection, The Golden Rule, Integrity, Quality, Creativity, Nurturing, People, and then I added three more – Inspiration/Aspiration, Enrichment, and "Pay It Forward".**

Moser suggests that to narrow these down to the 3 or 4 most important core values, he asks, "*What Values Does Your Company Consistently Adhere to in the Face of All*

*Obstacles?” and “Does the word “PASSIONATE” Come to Mind When You List Each One of These Values?” “What Core Values Does the Culture Value?” – do they mirror the larger core values of our culture or of the culture to whom you are truly appealing?*

He goes on to suggest an interesting exercise which is also used in focus groups to identify the key core brand values. He refers to this as the “**Tombstone Exercise**”.  
*“What would your customers/clients write on your tombstone if your company went out of business today?”*

Once again in my own case, I wrote these which hopefully those familiar with NetWeaving would mostly agree,

*“I would miss how they inspired us all to be better **connectors** and ‘no-strings-attached’ **resource-providers** for others”*

*“I would miss how they encouraged us, when we are helped – especially when someone ‘hosts’ a meeting for our benefit, to then **‘pay it forward’** and do the same for someone else.”*

*“I would miss that these both were done simply with the genuine belief that **‘what goes around, does come back around’**. ”*

After going through this exercise, Moser asks you to review them and to ask yourself, *“Do they point to your company’s being **people oriented**, or **product oriented**?”*.

The answer to this will *“help you arrive at the core values that your company truly values and will also help you when he [Moser] gets to the brand personality and brand icon sections of the book”*.

Moser makes it clear that, *“Core values should live in the world of black and white, not shades of gray.”* As he points out, if **“honesty”** (one of the 45 words listed – I picked **‘integrity’** in my own case which I thought was about the same as honesty) is chosen as one of your **‘core values’**, you need to ask yourself: *“Are you more or less honest than your competitors? “How honest are you when you learn about a possible product [or service] defect [screwup]?”* (I bet the CEO of Peanut Corporation of America wouldn’t have selected this one – at least he shouldn’t have);

Moser suggests that now it’s time to test these core values by writing a paragraph about each core value explaining WHY that particular core value defines your company. As he stresses, *“If you leave those words up to individual interpretation, you’ll get as many interpretations as you have individuals.”*

**(Hint #2 – this is another exercise which we may do within the smaller breakout groups with each person picking ONE of their core values and what he or she would write to clarify this core value in the context of their company)**

Here's one example Moser gave regarding "**Inspirational and aspirational**" which interestingly enough weren't on his original list of 45, but ones which I added to my list of core values. Looks like someone else certainly agreed:

**Inspirational and Aspirational** (from "*A Home Away From Homelessness*" - a nonprofit organization in San Francisco that helps children and families in homeless situations): *People are surrounded by homelessness. On the streets. On the news. In magazines and newspapers. And it's all skewed to talking about what's not working. Our goal is to talk about what is working. We believe that people deep down in their hearts want to help. They want to believe there's a light at the beginning, middle, and end of the tunnel. They want to support an organization that empowers people to go beyond their current situation and thrive. We are that organization."*

At the end of this chapter, Moser does something you don't see in many other books, he congratulates the reader for having gotten this far:

*"If you go no further in this book, you've succeeded. You're already ahead of the opportunistic companies that do whatever they can, and say whatever they need to say, to attract an audience and make a buck. You're light years ahead of the companies that see their employees as numbers and their customers as open wallets."*

I congratulate you in the same way for agreeing to come to this session of the "***Don't Need to Read the Book***" book club because it shows that you do have the same drive to identify your company's core values which can 'brand' yourself and your company in ways that will truly make a difference both '**internally**' and '**externally**'.

At the end of this chapter is a great worksheet which asks you to list 8 to 10 potential brand values:

The brand values I listed for NetWeaving International included:

1. The Golden Rule
2. "Pay It Forward"
3. Connecting and 'no-strings-attached Resource-Providing
4. Trust
5. Integrity
6. Enlightened self-interest
7. Energizing
8. Quality
9. Creativity
10. Genuine belief in the 'law of reciprocity' – what goes around, does come back around

Then Moser asks you to make sure that the values you end up with are core values.

1. *Which values are so much a part of your company, that if they disappeared, your company would cease to exist as it is?*
2. *Are these the values that you believe your company can adhere to under stress and in the face of all obstacles?*
3. *Does the word ‘passionate’ come to mind when you list a value?*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> step is to decide if these core values reflect that you are “**Product Focused**” or “**People Focused**” because your core values should reflect that focus.

The 4<sup>th</sup> step is to now limit your list to the 3 or 4 values that you believe are core brand values for your company. Then as Moser suggests, follow each core value with a description stating why you believe each value applies specifically to your company..

***Just out of curiosity, if you were to guess the four (4) I selected for NetWeaving as core brand values, which ones do you think I selected?***

If you guessed the first four I listed, you would be correct.

### **Chapter Three – “Core Brand Message”**

Moser says that “*Now that you have a set of core brand values, the next step is to create a core brand message that communicates the essence of your brand*” – to ALL audiences internally and externally. He points out that, “*The more closely your core message reflects the REALITY of your brand and why it exists, the more effective your brand message will be – both within your company and to the outside world.*”

Moser makes a great point which I think all of us need to ask of ourselves and of our company. “*Is there an ‘internal’ problem within the company – a product or service that’s broken or needs fixing, or is it a ‘perceptual’ problem – the way you and your company are perceived which can mean a **communication misunderstanding**?*”

He suggests that if there’s a serious **internal** problem such as a defective product, poor distribution or nonexistent service [anybody ever experienced ‘vaporware’?], you’ll need to correct that problem before you focus your resources and marketing materials on branding.

To address this issue of ‘**perceptions**’ vs. ‘**reality**’, Moser suggests creating two columns – “**Perception**” and “**Reality**”. He then says to be as objective as possible and write

words down which genuinely reflect a possible disconnect between the two. I would advise that you actually invite some outsiders whom you trust to also be honest and objective to help give you accurate feedback.

Moser also points out what he calls, “**The Big Idea**”. Will your core brand message pass the test of time? He gives a couple great examples and one that ain’t so great these days:

- **Constant Improvement** – (Avis – “*We try harder*”)
- **Tenacity** (Timex – “*Takes a licking and keeps on ticking*”)
- **Perseverance** (Citibank: “*The Citi never sleeps*”) - I respectfully disagree and based upon what’s happened, I think that some key executives were asleep at the wheel here.

In coming up with your Core Brand Message, Moser suggests you ‘**triangulate**’ it, meaning to come at it from three different angles. Then when you think you’ve got it, you should solicit input from outsiders to test it.

Questions he suggests asking include:

- **Is your core message simple and clear enough?** – read it someone and ask him or her to repeat it back to you.
- **Does it differentiate you in the marketplace?** – does your cutesy tagline leave customers walking away remembering your competition instead of you?
- **Is it true?** – It better be, but be brutally honest with yourselves.
- **Is it relevant?** – Does it speak DIRECTLY to your target audience so it answers the question ‘*what’s in it for them?*’
- **Is it consistent with your company’s core brand values?** – Is it concise and something that literally rolls off your tongue.

**For example, someone asks me “What is your ‘NetWeaving’ thing all about?” I quickly respond with my ONE-LINER, “It’s a Golden Rule and Pay It Forward form of networking”**

**If I’ve got a little more time and I can sense interest, I add, “It’s all just about connecting people and providing ‘no-strings-attached’ resources to others as a better way of building trusted relationships, with the genuine belief that what goes around, does come back around”.**

Sometimes I also add, “*It reverses the mindset of more traditional ‘networking’ which is more ‘what’s in it for me?’ and instead first asks, ‘what can I do for you?’*”

- **Can you be the first to say it?**

The balance of this summary is meant to further entice you to ‘**purchase**’ the book and to have it in your reference library. Here are some of the other valuable areas in the book with page references to make it easier for you to go there directly:

- How does the mind work in storing information and why does this apply to the importance of shortening and simplifying your core brand message? **Pages 49-51**
- Who are “**Lightening Rod**” targets? There’s a great similarity here between Malcolm Gladwell’s three (3) groups needed for the “*Tipping Point*” to occur – *Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen*. (We can address this at the meeting). **Pages 52-53.**
- What is the “**Bull’s-Eye Exercise**” and how can it help you determine who your true competition is and how to defend your core brand message against competitors? **Pages 59-61**
- There’s a second great worksheet on **pages 63-65** which will help you develop your **Core Brand Message**.

**Hint #3** – This is another exercise which you should do on your own – One more reason to buy the book.

## **Chapter Four** – “**Brand Personality**”

- What does Moser mean by ‘**brand personality**’ and why in most cases is it one of the keys in differentiating yourself from your competition? How to avoid having a ‘zero’ personality? **Pages 67-68**
- Should your Brand Personality change to fit your audience? **Page 70**
- Why does Moser say, “**Poof! You’re A Person, Not A Company**”? **Pages 76-78**
- Ok, so how DO you choose the right Brand Personality and here again I refer to one my favorites – **the guy representing Apple in the commercials as opposed to “PC”**? So what from the list he provides are YOUR ‘general’ brand personality traits and how do you hone that down? **Pages 79 –85**

- Then on **Pages 87 – 90**, there's another great worksheet exercise to help you develop your **Brand Personality**.

### **Chapter Five – “Brand Icons”**

- “**Icon**” usually refers to a ‘**visual**’ sense but why does Moser look at it in a much broader sense? **Page 91**
- Once you create brand awareness, why does it make sense to introduce multi-sensory experience and how does this validate your brand? **Pages 93-94**
- The balance of this chapter deals with areas which frankly I believe are best done in conjunction with a graphic artist who is open and flexible and someone whom YOU can educate on the process which you've now gone through. They should be willing to get outside some of their own artistic preferences and really listen to you and to study all of what you have come up with in arriving at your Brand Values, Brand Message, and Brand Personality.

### **Chapter Six – “Your Brand Roadmap”**

As a Type A – action-oriented person, it's difficult for me to make it all the way through an ‘instruction book’ of any kind. Once I feel I've mostly figured it out, I tend to launch out on my own, sometimes to my own detriment.

I have fought this tendency with this book and as a consequence, I believe I have developed a clarity with the NetWeaving concept which I would not have otherwise been able to achieve and I challenge you to do the same.

Admittedly, I have not entirely completed the actual “**Brand Roadmap**” brochure which Moser lays out on **Pages 130 to 151**, but I've taken most of his instructions in this section to heart and am continuing to work toward that end.

**I've probably made more notes to myself and completed more of the exercises in this book than any I can ever recall and I hope you will take the time to do the same and that you'll derive many of the same benefits I have.**

**Bob Littell, Chief NetWeaver**

**NetWeaver's Motto: “Good Things Happen to Those Who MAKE Good Things Happen”**

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