

The Five Ws



I'm ashamed to admit that it wasn't until my eighth year in brand consultancy that I found out about the Five Ws. In retrospect, this means I probably wasn't much of a consultant for the first seven years, but then again nobody seemed to notice at the time. It probably also means I wasn't much of a student, either, since I'm reliably informed that the Five Ws are taught in school. Collectively, they represent five of the most critical questions to answer if you want to create a brand strategy:

- WHO: which audiences should your brand seek to influence or interact with?
- WHAT: which products and services should your brand be used to sell?
- WHERE: in which spaces or channels should your brand seek to interact with its target audiences?
- WHEN: on which moments or occasions should your brand seek to interact with its target audiences?
- WHY: which rational, emotional, and/or social needs should your brand seek to fulfil?

The Five Ws are absolutely critical to being able to plan and organise a brand portfolio: you should be able to explain the specific and unique role of every brand, sub-brand or range in your portfolio using the 5Ws. And the template below is pretty much the only brand portfolio planning tool you'll ever need.

As with many so-smart-it's-simple tools for thinking, the Five Ws has a famous parent: Aristotle. And as with so many parents, Aristotle had a favourite child: he loved 'why' above the other Ws. Not because he was related to Simon Sinek, but because he was interested in ethics and the motives behind our actions. Brand managers and consultants don't always start with 'why'. While some brands grow by targeting novel 'whys' (H&M Conscious), many emphasise other Ws in their portfolio strategy:

- 'whos' - Gap Baby, Gap Kids, Gap Maternity
- 'whats' - Zara Home
- 'wheres' - Tesco Metro
- 'whens' - Pimm's Winter

	RANGE A	RANGE B	RANGE C	RANGE D
Who				
What				
Where				
When				
Why				

The simplicity of the Five Ws also means that we get to riff on the theme. I used to work with a consultant who added 'why not' to her list of Ws (a handy way of addressing barriers to brand adoption). My favourite expansion of the Five Ws comes from Rudyard Kipling, who wrote:

*I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.
I send them over land and sea,
I send them east and west;
But after they have worked for me,
I give them all a rest.*

The addition of 'how' to the Five Ws is profound. Or at least it is to me. Because it epitomises in a single word the difference between 'brand strategy' and 'brand positioning'. Although these terms are often used interchangeably, to my mind they refer to very different things. Answering the questions posed by the Five Ws is fundamentally an analytical challenge. Great brand strategy is a matter of accurately identifying the right Ws to point your brand towards. That's why it is primarily a rational, intellectual process, which should be based as far as possible on robust insight. Brand strategy should be rooted in a firm grasp of reality.

Once you've identified the most promising 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when' and 'why' to target, you're left with the most difficult and open question of them all: 'how'? Truly great brands find unique, surprising and often unpredictable ways to answer this question. That's why brand positioning is an emotional, creative process, which should be rooted in inspiration.

The best and most brilliant brand consultants I've worked with are equally at home with the 'how' as they are with the Five Ws. They are able to use data and insight to create a solid strategy, and then use this as a platform for taking a bold, creative leap. These are the people I look up to. Professionally, at least. Someone I used to work with would often talk about great brands containing a combination of love and logic: the 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when' and 'why' provide the logic; and the 'how' is where the love comes in.