# How do you assess brand health? Smart answers from the new marketing bestseller 'Better Brand Health' by Jenni Romaniuk.

Reading time 8 minutes

I was really looking forward to the new book by marketing professor Romaniuk. It continues the important insights of Byron Sharp's 'How brands grow and what marketers don't know' books. Sharp and his team at the Ehrenberg Bass Institute are the scientific ghost busters of the many marketing myths. Romaniuk's new book is not particularly extensive at 200 pages, but is really packed with concrete knowledge on how to track the health of a brand based on the really important parameters.

Romaniuk's book is not a nice read for the bedside table, but a intensive book that demands high concentration from the reader. This is because detailed arguments follow without interruption, which must be followed cleanly in thought in order to understand the insight. This makes the book difficult to summarise, which is probably one reason why there are practically no book reviews in English or even German yet. In the following, I will highlight the central insights of the book, which will probably take away some of the pillars of brand work that readers have grown fond of. If you are in the mood for better brand health tracking, you cannot avoid reading the book in its entirety. (Or talk to us). This makes this BrainCandy especially suitable for marketing and market research fans.
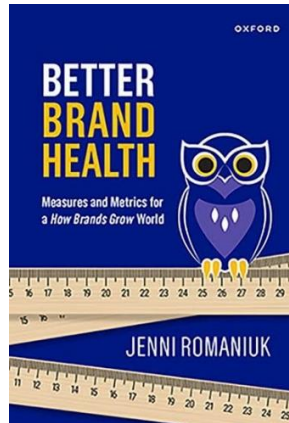
Picture credits: Amazon

Romaniuk's book fits so well in BrainCandy because the central theme behind the author's insights is how our memory works and how our memory influences buying behaviour at the POS and our response behaviour in surveys. And to my great delight, contexts play the central role in the interplay between brand recall and purchase behaviour. Which should look pretty familiar to BrainCandy readers by now.

Let's go:

1. Brand growth should be the foundation of any brand health tracking!
Brands grow mainly by adding **new** buyers to the customer base on a regular basis. Empirically, increasing loyalty of existing customers contributes less to growth than the new buyers. Even though it is often claimed otherwise. Therefore, it is important for tracking not only to understand the existing buyers, but to give special weight to the current very light / non-buyers, because this is where the main source of growth lies.

1. Buyer profiles hardly differ between competing brands

This should be known by now, but which product manager can accept that the much-loved brand has no special buyers. Therefore, the sample should look for a normal buyer profile of the category to get a realistic picture of the market and the potential of the brand.

2. Your brand's main competitors are almost always the biggest brands in the category.

This is not new either. Therefore, the sample should be aligned with all relevant players in the market, not just the assumed competitors of one's own brand.

3. Brand awareness is a central variable for the evaluation of the brand

- but is often examined incorrectly today because people still cling to old ideas of memory. She thinks little of the popular unaided brand recall. The question is too strenuous for our memory. Big brands benefit. Small brands perform too poorly. Very-rare and non-buyer analyses become difficult. For her, aided brand recall is better because it is closer to our memory content. She also criticises the popular top-of-mind measure, i.e. which brand comes to mind first, because the imputed effect on the preferred purchase does not show; depending on the context, the brand that only comes to mind as the third brand may also be purchased. She is particularly critical of the fact that only a simple category cue is used when querying awareness:

"What brands do you know when you think of sparkling wine?" However, we don't think of brands simply because we think of sparkling wine, but we think of different brands depending on the context in which sparkling wine is used.

Different brands for the girls' night than for the important anniversary celebration or the aperitif with friends. Romaniuk recommends using all relevant contexts as stimuli to activate the respondents' memory. Because these situations, which she calls Category Entry Points (CEP), will evoke different brands as appropriate.

2. Which brand attributes should be measured?

A: Evoke the brand in the memory: Contexts / CEP
B: Describe the brand: qualities associated with the brand
C: Brand identifier: stand-alone assets
Romaniuk recommends focusing about 2/3 on the contexts and about 1/3 on the qualities and assets of the brand.

3. How do you measure the attributes?

Romaniuk focuses on improving the chance of getting a complete, uninfluenced collection of brand-property associations in memory:

- Avoiding comparative phrases or superlatives. Thus our memory is not structured and the mental effort involved in finding answers hinders especially smaller brands among non-buyers
- That's why pick any scales are better, our memory says thank you for that.
- Comprehensive brand list of all brands with above the line activities
- Ask anyone about any brand.

4. Mental availability of brands: Contexts / CEP

Without the linking of contexts with the brand in memory, there is realistically no purchase-relevant memory of brands. Because most people don't just go to buy brands, they think about dinner with the neighbours and then go shopping for it. Hence Romaniuk's strategic
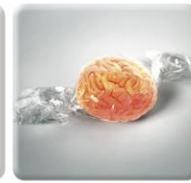
recommendation: connect **more** contexts to **more** category buyers to create broader, fresher memory networks. This increases the brand's chance to succeed in buying situations.

8. Brand Attitude: One question is enough

Brand love is the place of longing for many marketers. And correspondingly emotionally charged. I myself have often pointed out that this concept dramatically overestimates the role of brands in the lives of us consumers.

Picture credits: istock.com/ AronAmat

Moreover, brand love is a consequence of use and does not drive it. Romaniuk argues in detail and quite diplomatically allows for one question.

9. Which marketing activities were perceived?

Consistently, Romaniuk again recommends the prompted evaluation of communication tools. The most important variable is how many respondents noticed the activity and also correctly assigned it to the brand. This can be used to assess whether the activities have achieved sufficient reach to influence the tracking values.

10. Is low-cost social monitoring an alternative to tracking with surveys?

Romaniuk's answer is a clear no, which she backs up with many arguments. She does see useful applications for other issues, but the comments on the web are heavily coloured, either too negative or too positive. Above all, however, the brand growth target group of infrequent and non-buyers is missing.

There is a whole lot more in the way of clever and practically relevant insights. But that is beyond the scope of a BrainCandy. My favourite quote in the book sums up her critique of standard tracking nicely: "It's like you pay a research agency to build a haystack and (hopefully) hide a couple of needles of insight inside for you to find". So the really important things remain buried in a flood of charts. Who has not experienced this? Even independent of tracking, the findings on the strong connection between brand memory (mental availability) and contexts are a strong impetus for successful brand work at any level.
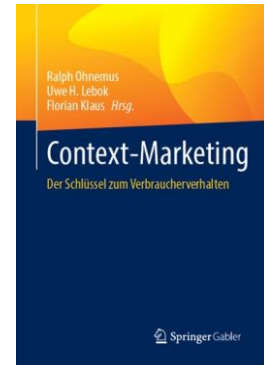
Book recommendation

By Ralph Ohnemus, Uwe H. Lebok, Florian Klaus:

Context marketing

The key to consumer behaviour to order.

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