

THE IDENTITY DESIGNERS

San Diego's Bulldog Drummond helps big, small companies around the world refresh their brands, or build new ones

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Branding guru Shawn Parr is paid millions of dollars by global corporations — such as Adidas, Virgin and Starbucks — to shake up their marketing teams, tell them bluntly what he thinks of their products, and get them thinking like a customer again.

His firm, Bulldog Drummond (bulldogdrummond.com), is perhaps the most connected San Diego company you've never heard of. Working with some of the biggest names in pop culture as well as promising startups, the company dreams up new brands and refreshes stale ones, finding ways to get the right kind of attention. Known for innovation, the company is frequently entrusted with improving products or even creating them from scratch.

Parr's team relishes the challenge of igniting passion among a company's best minds. That could mean forcing them to unplug their iMacs for a day of horseback riding and archery lessons, as Parr recently did with a group of WD-40 executives to inspire them with an idea of the "Wild West," where anything is possible, he said.

"We actually get to learn on the job," Parr said in a recent interview at his office. "Our clients have us look at their core product and say: 'How do we improve it? What can we do differently?' It keeps it very interesting because different clients can do very, very different things."

Parr, 45, a charismatic Englishman, moved to San Diego from London in the early 1990s and established his company soon afterward.

Many clients end up hiring the company for multiple initiatives. In the past year it has taken on dozens of projects, from helping Starbucks "relaunch" its Frappuccino for the summer, to working with American Eagle Outfitters on a new retail brand for younger children. Its San Diego-based clients include the Jack in the Box fast-food chain; the WD-40 line of multipurpose lubricant products; and startups such as The Honest Kitchen, an all-natural pet food company.

The company hosts strategy sessions in its clubhouse-like office, a historic home with no sign in the Bankers Hill neighborhood. Parr's team members — 20 strategists, design-thinkers and former chief marketing officers — work feverishly on tight deadlines.

Depending on the project, they can generate ideas for brand and product concepts, social-media campaigns — such as a contest with the prize being a year's worth of Frappuccinos — and ways to improve the consumer experience, and propose designs for logos, products and packaging.

Current projects include repositioning and refreshing an MTV network and working with Adidas on exploring applications for a new technology. The company charges from \$50,000 to more than \$1 million for its consulting services, depending on the project.

We asked Parr about how his company works, and for tips on how businesses of any size can manage their brands.

Q: Why do multinational companies such as Starbucks and Mattel hire Bulldog Drummond?

A: We're asked in as the protagonist to help internal teams look at their challenges or opportunities from a different perspective. We work closely with executive teams to help them work through big challenges and to look at what's next. We're hired by innovation teams to run projects on the outside and bring in new ideas. Chief marketing officers hire us to help them

refresh tired brands or to create new brands from the ground up. No matter the project, we bring objectivity, perspective, creativity, passion, energy and the ability to convert ideas into products, services or experiences.

Q: Tell me about a big product that your company handled that you consider a success.

A: At one end of the cleaning spectrum there are the established, chemical-based cleaning brands who are trusted and effective, but extremely toxic. At the other end of the spectrum are highly green natural brands that are perceived as somewhat ineffectual. Brands like Method and Seventh Generation were bringing a new, unique perspective to the cleaning space through brand and design, but no one brand was filling the void of a well-designed and highly effective all-natural brand.

Our friends at IDEO identified a cleaning technology based on essential oils that kills germs and disinfects without the use of any toxic or artificial ingredients. Bulldog Drummond and a team from IDEO worked closely with the inventor of the technology, a leading physician, our venture capital firm Hatch Ventures and a small team of amazing professionals to build the foundation for a truly innovative company.

CleanWell (cleanwelltoday.com) was launched as the first all-natural hand sanitizer that works just as well as alcohol-based sanitizers, yet with no toxic ingredients and no severe skin-drying properties ... Today you'll find CleanWell in Whole Foods, Target, Pharmaca, and as an ingredient technology in both Method and Seventh Generation cleaning products.

Q: What are some common mistakes that companies make in developing their brands?

A: Many companies include way too many people in decision-making around the brand. While everyone in a company has a responsibility to bring the brand to life, marketing has the responsibility to steward the brand. By including too many people in decision-making, powerful, good ideas often end up getting watered down. The opposite challenge we see with many companies is a total disconnect from their customers.

Q: Many small, local companies can't afford to hire a branding expert. What advice do you have for them? What are some steps that any business owner, however small, can do to build their brand?

A: A brand is not a logo or a tag line. It's a living strategy that is one of the most powerful assets you possess ... Take the time to define it very clearly so everyone inside of your company is working from the same platform, and then operationalize it across every department in your company. A branding expert is as important to the success of most businesses as a world-class lawyer, CPA or any other professional consultant. If you haven't put a line item in your budget for building your brand, plan on it for this year.

Q: You are involved in a venture capital fund that offers startups not only funding but also help with operational, legal, brand-building and marketing issues. How do you choose which companies to invest in?

A: We look for early-stage companies who are run by passionate and principled entrepreneurs who have domain expertise in the business category they're operating in. We look for disruptive technologies and clearly differentiated products that deliver value to the consumer. And, finally, we look at the market potential and potential exit for the business. (For information, visit hatch-ventures.com.)

Q: With global clients, you travel constantly to New York, Seattle, Pittsburgh and beyond. How has San Diego worked out as your company's home base?

A: For quality of life for our team, it doesn't get any better than San Diego. With our growing culinary, beer and wine scene, the indie music and art scenes, and the 340 days of near-perfect weather, the ocean, mountains and desert, San Diego is the place to come home to.

New Year's resolutions for your brand: 10 things to try in 2011

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From Shawn Parr, CEO of Bulldog Drummond (BulldogDrummond.com)

1. Be courageous, often. Take bold steps to stand out from the crowd. Reflect on 2010 and look at what you did well, and what you could have done differently. Take courageous steps to help your brand stand out in 2011.

2. Revisit and refine your purpose. Take the time to look back at your mission and vision and ask if you were living it in 2010. Look for places to bring it to life with your team and explore whether you need to refine it. Remember: The words aren't set in stone. If they're not resonating, rewrite and revise!

3. Shut up and listen. Make sure you ask your team for feedback, ideas and suggestions. Listen to your consumers and pay attention to research.

4. Find an enemy. An enemy gives you and your team something to push against, something to challenge. An enemy inspires passion! This year, define a clear enemy and rally your team. It could be a competitor, a trend or an element of your internal culture. No matter what it is, create a plan to beat it, share the mission with your team and go forth!

5. Stretch and set some big goals. Set at least one wild and audacious goal for 2011, something you've never tried before. Outline the goal, share it with your team and challenge them to play their part in achieving it. Just don't forget to celebrate the small victories and successes on the journey.

6. Build a passionate and engaged team. Your most valuable resource is your people. This year, weed out those don't contribute and aren't engaged. Replace them with active, passionate and energized people who will make a true difference to the rest of your team and your brand.

7. Inject fun into the everyday. Start doing small things that make your employees happy. A monthly massage for all those who have put in extra hours or a weekly potluck for the team.

8. Plan for learning. Create a program that allows your team to take classes. Host a "learning lunch" monthly with guest speakers.

9. Make friends with other brands. This year, chart a "circle of love," identifying brands with similar values that you'd like to partner with in 2011. Set one member of your team with a

potential relationship and have them explore how to collaborate. You'll be surprised by the results, even just the initial conversations you'll have about your own brand.

10. Say thank you and show that you really mean it. And, lastly, do what your mother told you. Thanking people goes a long way to creating valued and appreciated fans, both internally and externally.

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