

Ads, mantras and Zen

 By [Mike Freedman](#)

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Many great brands have brand mantras that in a few words capture their spirit. The mantra is not a slogan - it is the golden thread that holds everything together, from what a company makes, to its hiring policies.



A mantra instills in employees and marketing partners what the brand means to customers, giving all actions a common goal.

At Nike the slogan is *just do it* - the mantra is *Authentic Athletic Performance*. As Scott Bedbury, who was chief marketing officer of both Nike and Starbucks, says in *A New Brand World*, the mantra was not written down, never framed on a wall - it was felt. The emphasis was on *authenticity* - Bedbury writes about pulling a golf catalogue from distribution when he saw a group of *exquisite looking male models... rather than real golfers. Golfers hold their clubs a certain way; non golfers hold them like fireplace tongs or baseball bats*. The brochure wasn't authentic, so it was junked. "It was also a \$35 000 error we would never make again," writes Bedbury.

At Disney the mantra is *Fun Family Entertainment*. A large financial services company approached Disney, wanting to use Disney characters to promote an endowment policy that began with the birth of a child and funded the education. It fitted in with 'family', but was neither 'fun' nor 'entertainment', so Disney turned down the multi-million dollar deal. Mantras help you to know when to say no.

Authentic Athletic Performance and *Fun Family Entertainment* have much in common. Start with the last word: 'Performance' and 'Entertainment' state what the organisation delivers. 'Athletic' and 'Family' describe performance and the type of entertainment, while 'Authentic' and 'Fun' are emotional descriptors.

Branding is a state of being. It is the architecture of your head office as well as the flower arrangement in a branch. It is your best salesman, your worst and all the moments of truth in-between. It is the five million buck television commercial and how your employees feel at the end of the day.

Every minute branding is the only way to create a timeless brand.

Before you show the world who you are, know yourself. Discover your mantra and practice every minute Zen.

Advertising isn't branding, but good ads define and grow the brand. Employees respond to *Authentic Athletic Performance*, the public buys *Just do it!* and the Nike swoosh.

The best advertising gives employees a reason to believe and customers a reason to buy.

Ads are the clothes the brand wears and help form first impressions as well as making the wearer feel good. You don't need great ads to make a great brand - but they help.

ABOUT MIKE FREEDMAN

Mike Freedman, a doyen of the advertising and branding community, is founder of Freedthinkers (www.freedthinkers.com) which has offices in Johannesburg (at Turbine Hall in Newtown) and Cape Town. He was a prominent copywriter at some of the big ad agencies in London and here before helping form ad agency Freedman and Rossi, and then Freedthinkers. They helped Johannesburg create its branding "A World Class African City" and the energies and strategies that flowed from that including the development of Newtown, Constitutional Hill, etc... Other major clients include Discovery, healthbridge, FOCit, Absa, MultiChoice, Coca-Cola and Nando's. Contact Mike at mike@freedthinkers.com

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