

THREE LITTLE QUESTIONS.

Wanna bring a high-level marketing meeting to a screeching halt? Just do what brand consultant Greg Galle of Creative Capital does—demand unambiguous answers to three little questions:

- 1) Who are you?
- 2) What do you do?
- 3) Why does it matter?

Now, the first question is fairly easy for most companies to answer. “We’re Global Grommets, a multinational provider of grommets.” The second question is a little harder. “We make grommets—no, we make more than grommets, because we have a full line of widgets, too.” But the third question, why it matters, can get sticky. “It matters because we make really good grommets—and widgets.” (Sure, but everyone says that.) “Because we sell the widest selection of grommets and widgets.” (Right, but I only need one kind of grommet, and I already buy it from someone else.) “Because we have the best people.” (Yeah, right—prove it.) Unless you have compelling answers to all three questions, meaning that customers find them irresistible, you haven’t got a brand. If you do have compelling answers, great—you can skip this chapter.

DIFFERENTIATE

Still reading? Thought so. Because most companies have occasional trouble answering the first question, a little trouble answering the second, and a lot of trouble answering the third. Together, these questions provide a litmus test for what makes you different, what gives your company its *raison d'être*.

A good example of a company that knows what it's about is John Deere. "We're John Deere. We make farm tractors and related equipment. It matters because generations of farmers have trusted our equipment." Their trademark is a silhouette of a leaping stag, and their tagline is "Nothing runs like a Deere." As long as the Deere folks can keep it this simple, their brand will keep running. If they begin to add too many UNRELATED products and services to their line, however, their message will turn muddy and their brand will get stuck. Let's say, for example, that they decide to hedge their bets by adding health care, real estate, and fertilizer to the mix. How would they then differentiate their brand? "We're John Deere. You know us for tractors, but we do much more. It matters because you can come to us for lots of things." (Hmm, I think I'll buy a Kubota.)

Clorox is a company that understands differentiation. When Clorox purchased Hidden Valley ranch dressing, their marketing people had the good sense not to add it to their product line and rename it Clorox Hidden Valley. In fact, the name Clorox has never appeared on any of Hidden Valley's packages, advertisements, or other marketing materials. Yet you'd be surprised at how many companies have violated common sense and paid the price. The lesson? Keep it pure, keep it different.