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## What Becomes an Icon Most?

**Every society needs myths – simple stories that help people deal with tensions in their lives. Today’s most potent brands succeed by providing them.**

**by Douglas B. Holt**

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Some brands become icons. Think of Nike, Harley-Davidson, Apple, Absolut, Volkswagen – they’re the brands every marketer regards with awe. Revered by their core customers, they have the power to maintain a firm hold in the marketplace for many years. Few marketers, however, have any notion of how to turn their brands into icons, and that’s because icons are built according to principles entirely different from those of conventional marketing. These brands win competitive battles not because they deliver distinctive benefits, trustworthy service, or innovative technologies (though they may provide all of these). Rather, they succeed because they forge a deep connection with the culture. In essence, they compete for culture share.

It’s a form of competition that is particularly fierce in what marketers refer to as “lifestyle” categories, such as food, clothing, alcohol, and automobiles. Here, the name of the game is symbolism: The strategic focus is on what the brand stands for, not how the brand performs. And it’s the only form of competition that yields icons. Their impressive market power is based on a kind of customer value we don’t think about very often: Icons are valued because, through them, people get to experience powerful myths.

Myth making isn’t the sort of skill a marketer acquires in the course of hawking cornflakes. But neither is it ineffable or random. I’ve researched many of the most successful American iconic brands of the past four decades to discover how they were created and how they have been sustained. The underlying principles I discovered were consistent across these brands. As we’ll see, even a seemingly unremarkable product like Mountain Dew – water, sugar, green dye, and carbonation – can take on iconic power and keep it.

### **The Makings of an Icon**

People have always needed myths. Simple stories with compelling characters and resonant plots, myths help us make sense of the world. They provide ideals to live by, and they work to resolve life’s most vexing questions. Icons are encapsulated myths. They are powerful because they deliver myths to us in a tangible form, thereby making them more accessible.

Icons are not just brands, of course. More often, they are people. We find icons among the most successful politicians – think of Ronald Reagan – artists and entertainers like Marilyn Monroe, activists like Martin Luther King, and other celebrity figures, such as Princess Di. People feel compelled to make these icons part of their lives because, through them, they’re able to experience powerful myths continually. Iconic brands operate similarly.

When a brand creates a myth, most often through advertisements, consumers come to perceive the myth as embodied in the product. So they buy the product to consume the myth and to forge a relationship with the author: the brand. Anthropologists call this "ritual action." When Nike's core customers laced up their Air Jordans in the early 1990s, they tapped into Nike's myth of individual achievement through perseverance. As Apple's customers typed away on their keyboards in the late 1990s, they communed with the company's myth of rebellious, creative, libertarian values at work in a new economy.

As these examples suggest, iconic brands embody not just any myth but myths that attempt to resolve acute tensions people feel between their own lives and society's prevailing ideology. Such tensions are widespread. An ideology, by its nature, presents challenging moral imperatives; it lays out the vision to which a community aspires. But, inevitably, many people live at a considerable remove from that vision. A national ideology may, for example, promote the ideal of a family with two parents, even though many citizens contend with broken homes. The contradictions between ideology and individual experience produce intense desires and anxieties, fueling the demand for myths.

That demand, in turn, gives rise to what I call "myth markets." It's in these markets, not in product markets, that brands compete to become icons. Think of a myth market as an implicit national conversation in which a wide variety of cultural products compete to provide the most compelling myth. The topic of the conversation is the national ideology, and it is taken up by many contenders. The winners in these markets become icons; they are the greatest performers of the greatest myths, and they bask in the kind of glory bestowed on those who have the prophetic and charismatic power to provide cultural leadership in times of great need. More often than not, in America at least, those who win in myth markets are performing a myth of rebellion.

### **The most successful icons rely on an intimate and credible relationship with a rebel world.**

No matter the era or the ideological climate, Americans are resolutely pragmatic and populist in spirit, deeply distrustful of political dogma and concentrated authority. For guidance and solace, Americans turn to those who stand up for their personal values instead of pursuing wealth and power. The country's myths draw on its stockpile of rebels, people who are often a threat to the prevailing ideology. These figures are usually found where populism takes its purest and most authentic form, among those who live according to beliefs that are far removed from commercial, cultural, and political power: on the frontier, in bohemia, in rural backwaters, in athletic leagues, in immigrant areas, and in ghettos.

The most successful icons rely on an intimate and credible relationship with a rebel world: Nike with the African-American ghetto, Harley with outlaw bikers, Volkswagen with bohemian artists, Apple with cyberpunks. And even before these, there was the soft drink Mountain Dew. Let's take a look at how, back in the 1950s, a small bottler in Tennessee succeeded with a rebel myth that addressed one of the most potent ideological contradictions of the day.

### **The Case of Mountain Dew**

To understand the early iconic power of Mountain Dew, we must hark back to the American ideology of the 1950s and 1960s, which was deeply influenced by World War II and the Cold War. The success of American military operations – executed according to a rationalized, hierarchical model – and the nation's ability to "out-science" the Nazis in the race to develop the atomic bomb announced the beginning of a new era.

Ideology lauded scientific expertise, the power of which would be unleashed by professionally managed bureaucracies. Popular culture was filled with visions of technology used to create fantastic futures and to help the country conquer new markets and beat back the Soviet bloc.

Ideas about rugged individualism had become anachronistic; manhood was now to be earned in a corporate environment. The man who was mature enough to subsume his individuality under the umbrella of corporate wisdom was praised. Outside of work, these ideals found expression in the new “modern living” practiced by nuclear families in planned suburbs.

These values produced a litany of contradictions. For men, these ideals felt coercive and emasculating when measured against America’s historical populism. Books like William Whyte’s *The Organization Man* and David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, which damned the new conformity of corporate America, became best-sellers. Myth markets soon sprang up – using the Western frontier, the Beats’ bohemia, and the hillbilly backwater – to provide salves for these tensions.

The hillbilly first caught the public’s attention in the 1930s in *Li’l Abner*, a comic strip in which Al Capp exaggerated the hillbilly’s lack of civility to create biting social satire. As the 1950s unfolded, the hillbilly – a figure who is in touch with his innate animal qualities – seemed powerful and dangerous, the exact opposite of the corporate man. Elvis Presley, the poor Mississippi hillbilly who brought “primitive black music” to a white audience, oozed a titillating sexuality and sent young people in search of rock-and-roll records. CBS’s *The Beverly Hillbillies*, a populist allegory that championed pragmatic knowledge over “book learning,” character over self-presentation, and traditional hospitality over proper etiquette, became one of the most popular television shows of the 1960s.

Mountain Dew’s inventors named their product after an old-time Appalachian folk song that told of the pleasures of “mountain dew” – moonshine liquor. They filled the beverage with caffeine and sugar so that it would deliver a heart-pumping rush and gave it fewer bubbles than most sodas so that it could be chugged. They then created a comic hillbilly character – Willy – who drank Mountain Dew to “get high.” Invoking Appalachian stereotypes like the blood-feuding Hatfields and McCoys, the bottle’s label featured a barefoot Willy pointing his cocked rifle at a neighbor running away in the distance. Tied to Willy’s hip was a stoneware jug, the type usually associated with homemade booze.

**When ideology shifts, we see new icons take off and incumbents struggle to remain relevant.**

When PepsiCo bought the brand in 1964, the company kept the hillbilly character, renamed him Clem, and put him in animated television ads. One ad, called “Beautiful Sal,” features a cast of barefoot country folk. Two bumpkins court Sal, a buxom redhead in a brief, tattered dress. Sal refuses flowers from both men and tugs their hats down over their faces before she struts away. Enter Clem. Half Sal’s height, Clem seems like an unlikely mate. But from under his ten-gallon hat, Clem reveals a tall bottle of Mountain Dew. Sal swipes the bottle and takes a few gulps. As Clem gazes lustily, Sal lifts a leg and hollers, “Yahoo, Mountain Dew!” Her long hair snaps into curls beside her head. If the audience failed to understand that Dew has the power to change attitudes in a heartbeat, the muzzle flash that explodes from Sal’s ears seals the deal. She growls like a panther in heat, embraces Clem passionately, and smothers him with a kiss. The spot then cuts to a single-toothed old man who reaches behind his head, wiggles his finger lasciviously through a bullet hole in his hat, and says, “Mountain Dew’ll tickle yore innards, cuz thar’s a bang in ever’ bottle.”

Sales took off like a shot in eastern rural areas. Mountain Dew had succeeded in

creating a kind of manhood that rivaled the buttoned-up emotions and routines of the organization men. Its hillbilly was a devilish prankster who called on male viewers to let loose their own wild man.

### **Traversing Cultural Disruptions**

Mountain Dew's success as an icon becomes all the more impressive when one considers how it outlived the ideological tension it was initially positioned to address. National ideology works something like Stephen Jay Gould's idea of punctuated equilibrium or Clay Christensen's and Michael Tushman's descriptions of innovation cycles in technology markets, which have extended periods of incremental innovation disrupted occasionally by radical technological changes. As an ideology loses its relevance, people lose faith in its tenets. Experimentation ensues, historical ingredients are reworked, and society finally arrives at a new consensus. When such a shift in ideology occurs, people are forced to adjust their aspirations and their views of themselves. Myths provide a powerful sense of structure at these junctures, and they grow up spontaneously around the emerging ideology, forming new myth markets.

These are the moments when we see new icons take off and incumbents struggle to remain relevant. Mountain Dew, which has enjoyed dramatic growth since the 1960s, is one of only a few iconic brands that have been able to increase their market power across disruptions in national ideology, crossing cultural chasms instead of being dismantled by them.

Consider what happened to the ideology that provided the grist for Mountain Dew's original myth. As the 1960s came to a tumultuous close, the nation's scientific-bureaucratic ideology crumbled under the weight of a variety of conflicts and weaknesses. Massive urban riots dramatized the limitations of the Great Society programs, Japanese corporations showed that American companies were hardly world leaders, Arab oil companies demonstrated the vulnerability of America's economic power, the Vietcong made a joke of U.S. military superiority, and Watergate undermined Americans' confidence in their political system. So the country began to experiment with new ideological possibilities, influenced by the rebels of the day: black power activists, hippies, environmentalists, and feminists. The hillbilly's challenge to conformity became irrelevant, and he soon disappeared from the mass media. Mountain Dew sales slid, and a variety of new branding initiatives failed to break the fall.

### **Slackers made fun not only of the ideals of the free-agent nation but also of the people who tried to dictate their lives: marketers.**

Ronald Reagan finally galvanized the United States around a new ideology, one that resuscitated Teddy Roosevelt's frontier myth. He cajoled Americans to stand up to the country's twin threats: Soviet communism and Japanese economic prowess. Reagan masterfully painted a portrait of the country using images of the cowboy and the Western frontier, relying on his many actor friends who'd portrayed cowboys and similar characters in films: John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Charlton Heston, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Sylvester Stallone. Stallone's film *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, which depicted a Vietnam vet overcoming an ineffectual government bureaucracy to save soldiers missing in action, became the signature film of Reagan's administration.

As Reagan trotted out metaphors from the past, they were retooled by the mass media to make sense of the dismantling of the American economy. Economic restructuring was led – in the popular imagination, at least – by a new, Machiavellian type of businessman, represented by Donald Trump and Ivan Boesky on Wall Street and by J.R. Ewing on television. Reviving the economy seemed to require a new breed of manager who ruthlessly pursued wealth and power. Urban professionals quickly

picked up on their role as the economy's new cowboys, and by the mid-1980s they were decked out in cowboy boots and heading out to urban cowboy bars on the weekends.

The media celebrated these MBAs and lawyers who put in 80-hour weeks orchestrating billion-dollar LBOs, but working-class men had trouble seeing this new breed as frontier heroes. These "yuppies" weren't patriots (they had no problem sending jobs overseas), they weren't tough (they ate Lean Cuisines and liked to jog), and, worst, they worked hard to buy their BMWs and Rolexes, not because that's what a man does for his family, his community, and his country.

Many working-class men instead identified with the redneck rebel, a cousin of the hillbilly, who emerged in the rural South during the 1970s. The redneck was a reactionary, standing against vast cultural and economic changes. Southern rock, featuring bands like Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Charlie Daniels Band, the Outlaws, and Molly Hatchet, became a radio staple. In 1978, a new television serial, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, quickly became a huge hit outside major metropolitan markets. And Mountain Dew took the cue as well, retooling its wild man to deliver a redneck rebuttal to Wall Street's incarnation of the frontier myth.

A look at Mountain Dew's 1981 television ad "Rope Swing" shows how the brand moved into this new mythic territory without betraying its constituents' understanding of what the brand stood for. The ad depicts an informal teen outing in lush, hilly terrain. A sinewy young man dressed only in shorts and running shoes stands with his buddies on a ledge high above a river. He waits for the perfect moment to swing out, Tarzan-style, over the water on a knotted rope. On the opposite bank, four teenage girls swing an empty rope out to meet him halfway. Filmed in slow motion, he executes the switcheroo perfectly, his body taut and rippling as he releases the first rope to grab the second, after which he swings safely to the other side. The girls cheer his crossing – a clear rite of passage – and greet him, bouncing excitedly. Intercut with the action, the hero appears in close-ups chugging a bottle of cold Mountain Dew. By the spot's end, he's polished off the entire bottle without coming up for air. Shaking water from his hair, he faces the camera, eyes shut but mouth wide open. The film freezes with him seemingly shouting, "Ah!"

As corporate executives donned cowboy gear in the mid-1980s, Mountain Dew responded even more assertively with a campaign called "Doin' It Country Cool." A dozen vignettes show our redneck studs, this time decked out in cowboy regalia, once again showing off their athletic talents and buff bodies to cheering young women. Mountain Dew argued, through myth, that virile guys live to play dangerously, not to sweat it out at the office. The brand retained its iconic power by reinterpreting the wild man to fit the new ideological reality. Again, Mountain Dew championed the wild man against the emasculation of corporate work, but this time by asserting physical toughness and derring-do over the flaccid cowboys of Wall Street.

### **From Redneck to Slacker**

By 1987, Mountain Dew was again an endangered icon as the nation's ideology underwent another shift. The country became disenchanting with the ideals of the Wall Street frontier in a matter of months as Reagan left office, scandals rocked the financial world, and the stock market crashed. A deluge of popular books and films excoriating arbitrageurs for their greed and indulgence marked the end of this era. Before long, it became clear that the very nature of the economy was changing: Companies had to be more agile and aggressive to compete globally, and workers faced an increasingly Hobbesian, winner-take-all labor market. In the new era of the "free agent," in which seniority systems were thrown out in favor of performance-driven meritocracies, every job was up for grabs to the most talented and most tenacious worker.

During this period of cultural disruption, a new, turbocharged version of Reagan's frontier myth took hold, this one lauding heroic individual achievement. Now manhood was defined by the ability to tackle extremely difficult and sometimes dangerous challenges that demanded both mental and physical toughness. Myths of the day defined heroes as those who competed most ferociously, such as rebel athlete Michael Jordan with his brand of "in your face" basketball. Professionals no longer savored expensive dining and Rolexes. Now they headed into the wilderness for tests of will against whitewater and mountains, and the must-have item was an SUV – if not a ranch in Montana. This new version of the frontier myth galvanized both male and female professionals and those who competed in the labor market to join their ranks. But most people ended up in a secondary labor market with depressed wages and no job security, or in service work that promised only stifling, micromanaged employment.

Contradictions between the free-agent frontier and the realities of work were extraordinary: While many young people were moving into jobs as telemarketers and retail clerks, popular culture was lauding executives who in an average week conquered markets, technology, whitewater, and rock walls. To make matters worse, in households across America parents pushed their kids ever harder to "make it" in this fiercely competitive environment.

The myth market that sprang up to feed these anxieties centered on a new rebel figure, the slacker. As glorified by Richard Linklater's film of that name and by Douglas Coupland in his quasi-novel *Generation X*, the slacker is a character who would rather pursue quixotic activities than "grow up" and get serious about a career. Channels such as Fox, MTV, and ESPN2 immediately picked up on the slacker ethos and delivered programming that emphasized its do-it-yourself sensibility, extreme version of manhood, and iconoclastic tastes. Slacker heroes excelled not at rule-bound professional sports but at improvisational sports like skateboarding, which they pursued on their own without rules and without corporate interference. In the music industry, rap, techno, and alternative rock all emphasized the do-it-yourself ethos: Anyone can and should make music, with a turntable and some old records, a computer, or a beat-up guitar.

So-called "extreme sports," in which guys fearlessly risk bodily harm to perform never-before-attempted stunts, became the rage. The professional wrestling program *SmackDown!*, featuring enormous costumed men spilling fake blood on each other, was the entertainment choice of the day. Ultraviolent video games enticed guys to spend hour after hour reveling in over-the-top conquests – without getting off the couch. The slacker myth market had taken the masculine expressions of the free-agent frontier myth and turned up the adrenaline to an extreme.

Slackers made fun not only of the ideals of the free-agent nation (particularly in the comic strip *Dilbert*) but also of the people who tried to dictate their lives: marketers. The rock band Nirvana came on the scene with its jab at youth branding, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," and the hit film *Wayne's World* proposed an ironic kind of one-upmanship over corporate marketing. Instead of buying what corporations sold, slackers reclaimed old stuff – TV programs, music, clothes – that industry had given up on. Professionals may have had the power and money, but they couldn't force slackers to buy their wares. Instead, slackers could use their own creativity to make the refuse of popular culture valuable.

And where did all this leave Mountain Dew? In the face of the new American ideology, Mountain Dew's redneck was reduced to irrelevance just like the hillbilly before him. So Mountain Dew's wild-man ethos was reformulated once again, this time within the new world of the slacker.

A TV ad called "Done That," part of Mountain Dew's "Do the Dew" campaign, was the company's breakthrough into this new mythic territory. The ad opens with a hair-



raising shot of a guy jumping off a cliff and free-falling toward a narrow canyon's river bottom. Accompanied by a thumping thrash-metal soundtrack, a stomach-tightening shot trails behind the jumper's feet as he falls away from the cliff. The music stops abruptly, and the camera zooms in on four young men, dressed like low-rent gym rats, standing in the Mojave Desert. The guys hang on one another in a kind of casual street camaraderie. In rapid succession, each mugs for the camera and comments on the skydiving the viewers have just seen: "Done that," "Did that," "Been there," "Tried that."

The camera cuts back to live action, showing an athlete diving off a 20-foot waterfall on a boogie board and surfing the rapids. The four dudes return, still among Mojave cacti, and quickly announce their boredom with that high-risk activity as well. But the dudes' dismissive statements paint only half the picture. Their cocky body language betrays no fear of the camera, as each leans toward it to make his feelings absolutely clear. The guys, parodying the jockeying of young bucks in business, play at being cocksure daredevils.

The soundtrack resumes as abruptly as it had stopped, and we cut to a Mountain Dew dispensing machine in a jungle setting. "Whoa!" "Never did it," "Never guzzled it." Cans blast like cannon shells from the machine's opening. Each dude snatches a can from midair and chugs it down under the desert sun. Sated, they say in rapid succession: "Did it," "Done it," "Liked it," "Loved it."

In the three sequels to "Done That," the stunts become increasingly fantastic and absurd: waterskiing behind a helicopter past icebergs in the Arctic, rollerblading off the Sphinx in Egypt, wrestling a crocodile in the Amazon, taking a platform jump off London's Big Ben clock tower. And the dudes become harder and harder to impress. After a skier shoots off a cliff and falls with no landing in sight, he somersaults and opens a parachute. The dudes appear in front of a sand dune to dismiss him: "Blasé," "Passé," "Okay," "Cliché." A rock climber rappels headfirst, a mountain biker leaps in front of a wall of flames, a surfer launches off a sand dune, a scuba diver feeds a voracious shark by hand, and a snowboarder tumbles head over heels down a steep slope, but the dudes' posturing grows only more indifferent: "Obvious," "Frivolous," "Tedious," "What a wuss!"

With the "Do the Dew" campaign, Mountain Dew reinvented the wild man as a slacker. In these spoofs of extreme sports, all presented as do-it-yourself quests, the brand asserted that the real men of America's free-agent frontier weren't the most buff or competitive athletes but the creative guys who pursued their stunts as whimsical art. Slackers didn't just face down dangerous situations that came their way. They sought out insane life-threatening risks. The Dew guys upped the ante on masculine risk taking to absurd levels, which, in the end, made fun of the idea that manhood has anything to do with such feats. The people with real power, in Mountain Dew's worldview, were people with extreme – and very particular – tastes. Slackers had no power as workers, but they could assert their will in the corporate world by asserting their opinions. Companies and their managers would have to take notice.

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sorely lacking in most managers' arsenals.**

### **How to Build an Icon**

Today Mountain Dew is a \$5 billion brand, surpassed in size only by Coke and Pepsi. During the past two decades, its sales have risen faster than those of any other carbonated soft drink. Key to this phenomenal growth has been the ability of managers at PepsiCo and its ad agency BBDO to reinvent the Mountain Dew myth each time American ideology ruptures and is remade. But Mountain Dew's experience is not unique: The same principles apply to the other iconic brands I've studied. In brief, a

brand becomes an icon when it is able to do the following five things.

**Target National Contradictions.** Icons don't target consumer segments or psychographic types. They go after veins of intense anxieties and desires running through society, the psychological consequence of the national ideology. While market fragmentation is the rule in many sectors of the economy, icons necessarily speak to a mass audience.

**Create Myths That Lead Culture.** Unlike conventional branding, icons don't mimic pop culture; they lead it. They create charismatic visions of the world to make sense of confusing societal changes in much the same way as have Marilyn and Elvis, JFK and Martin Luther King, Ronald Reagan and Rambo, Steve Jobs and Bart Simpson. Icons earn extraordinary market power because they deliver myths that "repair" the culture when it's particularly in need of mending. They put existing cultural materials to new purposes in order to provoke audiences to think differently about themselves. Mountain Dew was a breakthrough success in the 1990s because, in the midst of a labor market shake-up, the brand provided a symbolic solution to young men who weren't stars of the new free-agent nation.

**Speak with a Rebel's Voice.** Icons don't seek to mirror the thoughts and emotions of their customers. They speak as rebels. To assemble a credible populist challenge to the national ideology, iconic brands draw on people who actually live according to alternative ideals. And icons don't simply borrow the trappings of rebel lifestyles, mimicking their clothing or language. Rather, they understand the rebel's point of view so well that they can speak with the rebel's voice. Mountain Dew didn't simply offer up extreme sports or retro clothing. Instead, by creatively mixing and matching slacker elements, the campaign evoked the slacker zeitgeist.

**Draw on Political Authority to Rebuild the Myth.** Unlike conventional brands, icons don't behave as if they have a certain DNA, an essential truth that must be maintained. Icons must be reincarnated when ideology ruptures because the value of their myth is erased. What remains intact as an artifact of the original brand, however, is its political authority. When an icon's myth loses value, its constituency still looks to the brand to shed light on the kinds of contradictions it has addressed in the past. Because the brand has been a trustworthy and committed advocate, consumers believe that it will speak for them again.

Mountain Dew's "Do the Dew" campaign, for instance, appears to be worlds apart from the hillbilly and watering-hole ads. Yet the brand's remake was welcomed because it drew on a deep reservoir of political authority. Mountain Dew was, once again, championing the id over the ego for young men who felt excluded from manhood as defined by the nation's ideology. Icons "own" an imaginative politics that can be reclaimed virtually at will, even if the brand has fumbled or abandoned this commitment for years.

**Draw on Cultural Knowledge.** Cultural knowledge is critical for building icons yet is sorely lacking in most managers' arsenals. The "Do the Dew" campaign worked because its creators understood the angst of low-wage earners looking up at the new heroes of the marketplace, a tension that was invisible to managers who understood Generation X simply as a psychographic jumble of attitudes and emotions. And the campaign worked because its creators were so immersed in the slacker subculture that they could use it to express the slacker ethos in a new way rather than just parade slacker gear in their ads, as many other brands did at the time.

### **Getting Close to Culture**

When the national ideology crumbles and is then reinvented, new contradictions form. It's a window of opportunity for would-be icons, but it's bad news for existing ones. Brands that seemed like monoliths often slide into deep funks in such situations. How



could it be that Levi Strauss would struggle to compete with a J.C. Penney store brand? Or that Cadillac now seems like the butt of a *Saturday Night Live* parody in ads that have the once admired auto revving its engine to Led Zeppelin? Even the most successful iconic brands routinely stumble. Volkswagen went off its game for more than two decades, Budweiser faltered for almost a decade in the 1990s before recovering, and even Mountain Dew, one of the most nimble icons I've studied, took several years for each reinvention.

For marketers, the central challenge is to divine how best to reinvent a brand's myth when a cultural disruption hits. And doing that requires knowledge and skills they may not have. Managers must learn to anticipate new contradictions and to select the one that best aligns with the brand's political authority. And, as if that weren't enough, they must then choose to align with the appropriate rebel subculture and understand the rebel's ethos deeply enough to construct a credible and evocative new myth.

Such knowledge doesn't come from focus groups or ethnography or trend reports – the marketer's usual means for "getting close to the customer." Rather, it comes from a cultural historian's understanding of ideology as it waxes and wanes, a sociologist's charting of the topography of contradictions the ideology produces, and a literary critic's expedition into the culture that engages these contradictions. To create powerful myths, managers must get close to culture – and that means looking far beyond consumers as they are known today.

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It looked even more like trademark Gehry before the latest redesign (about No. 45 in what he expects to be about 75 redesigns, according to Gehry), closer to the Disney concert hall in L.A. This new version is more organic, but there has to be some irony in designing something that, according to the Star's Christopher Hume in June, is "reminiscent of the industrial structures that would be torn down to make way for the new stuff." While I agree with Hume that city planning rules are made to be broken (and often are), I'm still not sure why height alone is a deciding factor for planners. If we're going to let anyone else, ever, move into Toronto, we have no choice but to grow vertically, and if we're going to be a skyscraper city, we might as well be a great one. Some brands become icons. Think of Nike, Harley-Davidson, Apple, Absolut, Volkswagen—they're the brands every marketer regards with awe. Revered by their core customers, they have the power to maintain a firm hold in the marketplace for many years. Few marketers, however, have any notion of how to turn their brands into icons, and that's because icons are built according to principles entirely different from those of conventional marketing. These brands win competitive battles not because they deliver distinctive benefits, trustworthy service, or innovative technologies (though they may provide all of these). Rather, they succeed because they forge a deep connection with the culture. In essence, they compete for culture share. The icon is an integral part of not only Russian culture, but also of Europe during the Middle Ages, which had a different chronological timeline than in Russia. Unlike Western European countries, Russian art skipped the Renaissance. The image becomes a window into the sacred world, undetectable to the human eye and beyond logic. Due to the reverse perspective the world opens up in front of the audience, striking in its cosmic scale. A circle as the most harmonious and perfect form is another way to designate the heavens, in contrast to a square that symbolizes the Earth. In an icon you can see the drawn circular aureoles of the saints. Icon painters often place the figure of Christ and the Virgin Mary in round or oval mandorlas in their moments of glory.