



**STAR
FISH**

Protecting Your Brand's Soul in the Age of AI

By David Kessler

Introduction

The roar of a Harley-Davidson.

The real beauty behind Dove.

The irreverent nature of Liquid Death.

The outside-at-all-costs DNA of REI.

If you live and breathe brand strategy, advertising, or marketing, you know the superpowers of these brands. By all means, they are textbook examples of exemplary branding. Given the article's topic, it's plausible that you're thinking to yourself, "I know where you're going with this, but my brand and company are nothing like theirs." But the truth is, it is. Because these brands, like yours, have a soul.

The difference, however, is that their values, voice, and beliefs are defined, embraced, internally operationalized, and consistently and deliberately on display. And because of this, their identities are differentiated, their employees live their brands every day, and their audiences are aware and deeply loyal.

Define and Differentiate or Become Indistinguishable

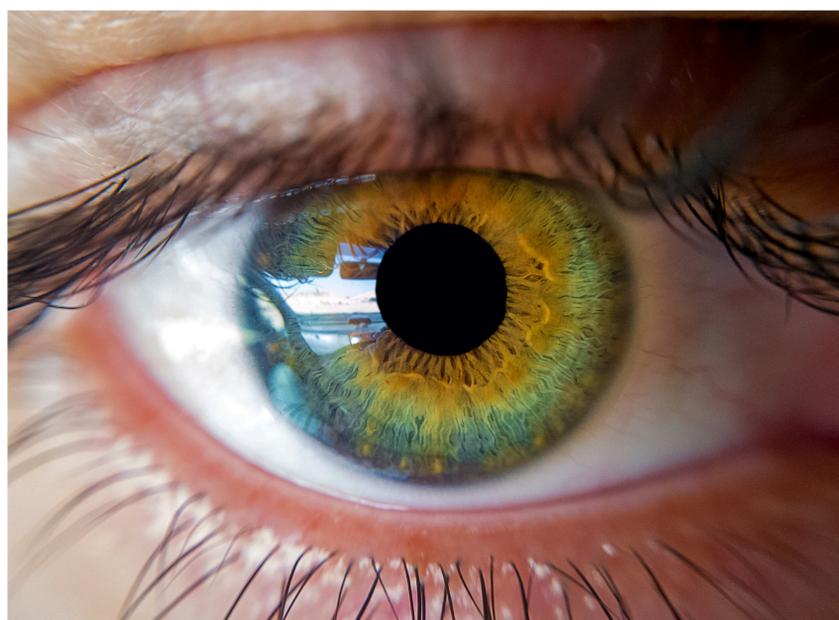
As we progress further into the age of AI, where learning and understanding are brought to life through data systems, the emotional levers and ties of brands are being democratized. So if your brand's soul and beliefs aren't well defined and human-led, and you rely on AI to be its architect and steward, you will inevitably be lost in the sea of sameness.

Differentiation through a holistic, relentlessly consistent brand experience has been our mantra since our inception. And it's allowed us to successfully guide Fortune 100 brands, start-ups, and nonprofits to true differentiation.

Most importantly, these elements are born out of a company's existential foundation and require tremendous EQ to identify and articulate. And thus, this is where the danger of AI enters the equation.

"Branding adds spirit and a soul to what would otherwise be a robotic, automated, generic price-value proposition. If branding is ultimately about the creation of human meaning, it follows logically that it is the humans who must ultimately provide it."

David Aaker
The Father of Modern Branding



Unlike other technologies

(like in the Digital Age, when we all slowly got on the information superhighway) and their adoption cycles, AI is moving at a blinding pace. There is no yield or merge lane on its on-ramp.

Living every day on the front lines of branding, we're seeing many marketers, brand managers, and CMOs using AI as a panacea. Across all categories, the opportunity to elevate what makes brands unique through the understanding of and outward expression of their brand's soul has never been more urgent.

BRAND CREED

A Declaration of Your Being

The most powerful way to capture a brand's soul is through its creed: the coalescing of your beliefs, values, and commitments in the form of a nonnegotiable promise.

Bold and emotive, your creed shapes your culture and employee mindset, and when operationalized across every part of your organization, it defines every aspect of your brand's behaviors and communications. Strategically, it's what elevates you in a crowded marketplace.

We absolutely believe that your creed is the conviction that fuels your brand's existence and cannot be counterfeited. It has consequences, character. It's the core that helps brands stand apart.

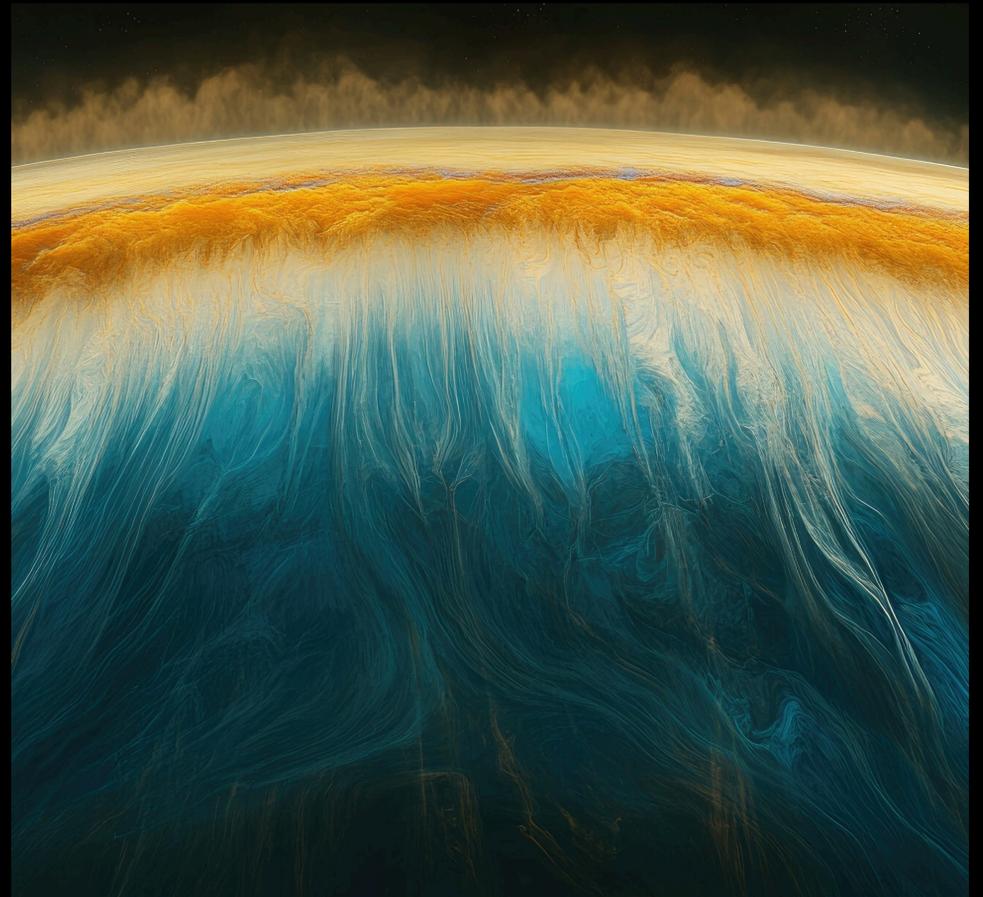


INTERNALLY

By building cultures worth rallying around

EXTERNALLY

By radiating authenticity in a sea of sameness



STRATEGICALLY

By owning not just a category but a world view



Brands Must Inspire a Human Connection

Regardless of a brand's commercial offering, what makes it unique and valuable to its audiences is how it uses its soul to create a meaningful, relevant connection.

The Machine Age can't process the idea and identity that exists in the soul. Which makes the creed critical. Looking at the iconic brands below, the identities seem so obvious.



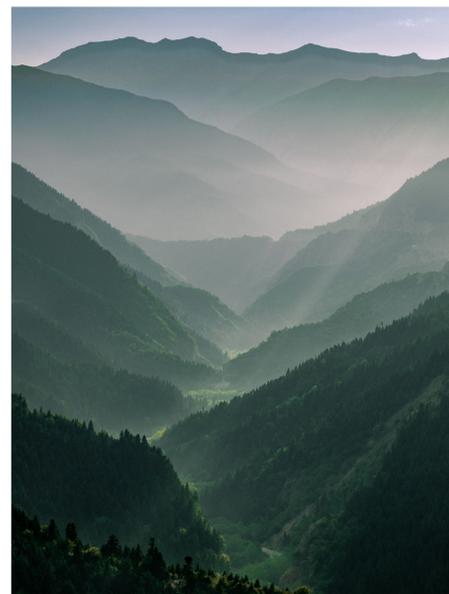
Harley-Davidson™
Rebellion and freedom on the open road.



Dove™
Beauty should be a source of confidence, not anxiety.



Liquid Death™
Make health and sustainability radically more fun.

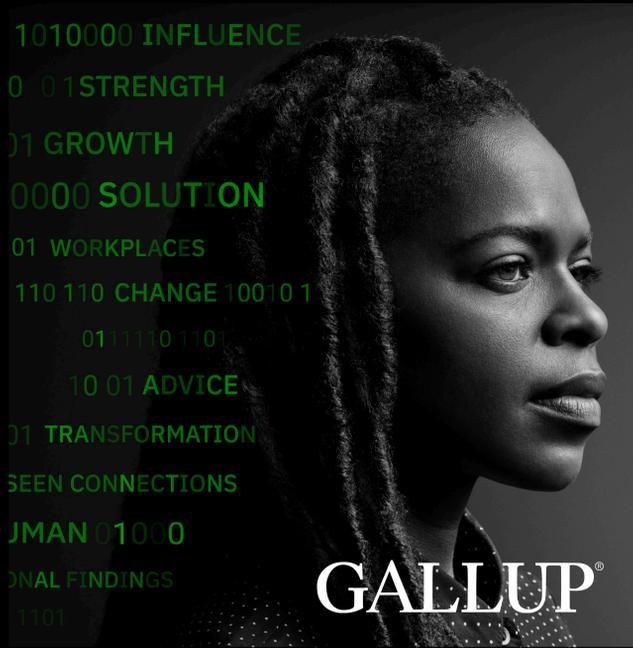


REI™
Inspire, enable, and advocate for life outside—so people and the planet thrive.

With profound understanding, these iconic brands didn't just write grand belief statements; they embedded why they exist and what they believe into their culture and operations, enabling them to create defining, integrated brand experiences.

With the founding philosophy "the brand experience is the brand," where every expression is informed by a brand's soul, we've been helping brands across B2C, B2B, and G2C articulate and activate their true meaning and difference for the past twenty-four years.

OUR WORK



FINAL THOUGHT

In the Era of AI, Bare Your Soul

Constantly fed data, artificial intelligence is getting smarter by the second, which is why **soul**, as a brand driver and operating system with all its beliefs and values, is critical.

Taking the next strategic step, formalize a brand creed to shape your narrative and activate experiences born of what makes you singularly and authentically unlike others.

With methodologies and a proprietary brand strategy process that uses brand creed as a connective layer between rational strategy and emotional resonance, we can awaken your brand and help give it greater meaning.

In the age of AI-driven marketing and creative agencies, it may be the most important differentiator you have.

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starfishco.com

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Starfish is a NYC-based branding and creative communications agency that ignites powerful and sustainable customer connections through the unique discipline of brand experience.

