

# The Art of Marketing

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Banksy is a pseudonymous graffiti artist, political activist and painter known for his satirical graffiti art and subversive epigrams, which combine dark humour with graffiti done in a distinctive stencilling technique (Banksy, n.d., Dickens, 2014; Medal, 2016). He tends to display his art on walls of streets, alleys, tunnels and buildings rather than in art galleries. Banksy is also known for *brandalism*, a method of using techniques and language from brand-name advertisements to create slogans and images to subvert those brands (Dickens, 2014).

Banksy did an effective job at connecting to his audience(s) through *enticement* and *enrichment*. On a basic level, Banksy enticed the audience through the visual aesthetic of his art; providing sensory stimulation to please the visual senses. On a deeper level, Banksy used cognitive stimulation, emotional touch and empathy to engage his audience. Core aspects of Banksy's work are his epigrams that speak out about political hypocrisy and social injustice (Dickens, 2014). His provocative quips and messages, supported by rich graphics and statements on his website, draw attention to socio-political issues and cause the audience to ponder over them on a cognitive level. As people think about these issues in more depth, they may then empathise with the victims of the issues, such as migrants in France.

Furthermore, such epigrams also resonate strongly with the audience on a self-relevant level. Banksy makes sure to connect his works with the *zeitgeist* and *counter-zeitgeist* of the time; these associations make his work extremely relevant to his audience, particularly as such issues are those that are deeply cared-for. For instance, during his 2013 exhibition "Better Out Than In" in New York City, he painted about topics such as 9/11 and Occupy Wall Street (Rae, 2013). Banksy's work essentially serves as an outlet for the people's voices and their ideas, especially their discontent with society. This relevance to issues that people deeply care about subsequently creates brand prominence as well as brand respect. It is also worth noting that Banksy often communicates messages through imagery only, essentially allowing his audience to make their own interpretations and form their own ideas. This action further enriches one's self-identity as one is no longer just part

of a group passively letting Banksy speak on their behalf, but is also actively projecting their values.

Moreover, Banksy provided his audience with a community and group affiliation – people were drawn together under a common cause, which enriched the self (Park, MacInnis, & Eisingerich, 2016). What is amazing about this is that Banksy appealed to a wide range of group affiliations. Art-seekers appreciate Banksy's work because of the distinctive stencilling technique, imagery and status-signalling; these people are usually the ones who pay six figures for his art. However, there were also numerous groups that supported the various issues he addresses, such as Occupy Wall Street, Palestinian freedom and treatment of migrants. By identifying with individual and group values and uniting people together under group affiliations, Banksy strengthened audience members' self-esteem and self-identity.

Through enticing and enriching his audiences, Banksy has built close relationships with his followers, who form a loyal fan base that supports and shares his work, as well as created brand admiration. This brand admiration and tight connection with Banksy's relevant messages has resulted in the audience seeing Banksy's brand as part of themselves (Park et al., 2016).

Banksy built up attention and brand prominence through several different methods, with word-of-mouth and social media sharing as key marketing channels. Firstly, Banksy was unpredictable regarding when and where he would show up next. For instance, he orchestrated a stunt in Central Park where a middleman sold original works, each worth over £30,000 at the time, for only \$60 apiece (Kennedy, 2014). In addition, he announced his New York City exhibition, *Better Out Than In*, only a week in advance and through a mural in Los Angeles, even though the show was to be held in New York City (Rae, 2013).

Next, Banksy enhanced desire of his art due to its scarcity, since people tend to attribute more value to and desire things that are less available (Cialdini, 2008). Scarcity of his artwork led to enhanced valuation and attention paid to them (Rae, 2013). Additionally, most of Banksy's work were (and still are) on tunnel, alley, and building walls. This is an interesting medium that further drew attention to his work. Unlike art pieces in museums or galleries, Banksy's work was on public display and could reach a much larger audience, exposure which is accentuated by news coverage and social media.

Moreover, Banksy used his art to spur conversation and social sharing. He painted 9 images on the West Bank Wall, a barrier separating Israel from Palestinian territories (Dickens, 2014). This move sparked fierce debate in the media, since the United Nations International Court of Justice had ruled the wall as illegal – thus it was unclear whether his paintings qualified as vandalism. Some of his works on the wall are shown in Appendix A. Finally, Banksy's pseudonymity created a lot of hype around his work. Because no one knew his real identity, people wanted to find out know more about the person behind the mask. Therefore, Banksy used his pseudonymity to establish relationships with the audience, and

then used visual imagery and slogans to nurture and grow those relationships. As his art enticed and enriched the audience, relationships with the audience and brand prominence were enhanced as people increasingly identified with Banksy's brand and messages.

### **Key Takeaways for Business**

There are some concepts from Banksy's work that marketers could learn from and apply to their own brands.

#### **1) Be consistent**

A brand needs consistent branding, such as a value proposition or trademark. Popdan (2013) asserts, "[a] brand should have one voice and one personality across all platforms". In addition, it is not only branding that needs to be consistent, it is also frequency of content, which boosts awareness and expectations.

#### **2) Provide quality and relevant content**

Great positioning of a product or authenticity of a campaign is useless without strong content (Popdan, 2013). It is also important to stay current to topics that the audience will be more likely to care about. Marketers can easily find out current trends through market research such as the news, Google Trends, Askthepublic.com and surveys.

#### **3) Leverage social media**

In providing relevant content, also leverage the power of social media sharing. Information can be shared with the click of a button and is easily-accessible. Marketers should be present on social media platforms and publish content that is easily sharable such as images, videos and stories.

#### **4) Be unpredictable and unique**

Unpredictability often translates to mystique and interesting results, and will increase word-of-mouth online and offline as people share the content and discuss 'what next'. Thus, content should be fresh and new, yet also meaningful and current.

Banksy is perhaps one of the most famous unidentifiable people in the world. He has a famous quote: "if you want to say something and have people listen then you have to wear a mask". Wearing the mask of Banksy is not only required given some of his illegal actions, he also intends to keep his identity anonymous. Such anonymity allows him to express ideas freely and also encourages his audience to simply focus on what he wants to express by eliminating any personal-related associations (age, looks, etc.). For public figures, the audiences can be influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by their personal images when the audiences try to understand and interpret their productions such as songs, acting,

paintings and so on. By hiding behind the curtain, Banksy allows his audience to interpret his art pieces without additional noise.

In addition, such anonymity creates buzz on social media platforms, which helps Banksy to augment his influence and reach more people. The audience's curiosity toward Banksy holds their interests and engagement of discussion about Banksy and his art. Consistent with his mysterious and unpredictable image, Banksy never informs fans about his next step. Every time Banksy releases new graffiti, it is always a surprise for fans that generates immediate discussion on social media and tends to spread like wildfire.

Banksy entices and enriches his audience through his rich graphic stencil-art and provocative epigrams. His main aim has been to raise awareness of socio-political controversies and shift attitudes and perceptions. Banksy has achieved this using scarce paintings, unpredictable locations and publicity stunts, pseudonymity and relevant topic choices. Banksy has also created admiration for his brand, whereby admirers are willing to pay a price premium for his art (Park et al., 2016) and develop brand communities through social media such as on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and blogs. In turn, the public scope of Banksy's work, satirical messages and imagery and the high auction prices enhance his brand prominence (Dickens, 2014; Medal, 2016; Popdan, 2013). From Banksy's work, marketers of the future should learn to have consistent branding, provide relevant content, leverage social media and be unpredictable and unique.

Questions to consider:

1. What makes Banksy stand out in a noisy and crowded marketplace?
2. How can the Banksy brand be leveraged? What may potentially hinder its growth in the future?
3. Who is Banksy's target audience? How does it relate to the brand's identity?
4. Is there a case to be made for business to wear a mask at times? If so, when? Why not?
5. What are some of the potential downsides of wearing a mask? When and why could it hurt business?

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## Appendix – Some of Banksy's Pieces



Source: [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-hDSS8l\\_wZul/UHN1m3Hfb9I/AAAAAAAAABQ/OrRNQwri5GI/s1600/balloon+float+away.jpeg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-hDSS8l_wZul/UHN1m3Hfb9I/AAAAAAAAABQ/OrRNQwri5GI/s1600/balloon+float+away.jpeg)



Source: <http://www.stencilrevolution.com/photopost/2012/09/Girl-with-a-Balloon-by-Banksy.jpg>



Source: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/5d/0b/3f/5d0b3f8c429455ecfb5a6b1d59602948.jpg>

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