

**Titel: Product Messages –
The Car as a Message Vehicle and Expression of the self**

Author: Chirine Etezadzadeh (2008)
Witten/Herdecke University, Faculty of Economics

Contact: Chirine Etezadzadeh
E-mail: ce@thinkandgrow.de
Web: www.thinkandgrow.de
Phone: +49 (0)7141/ 64 25 875

Abstract:

Many products have reached a high state of technological maturation. Thus, the additional value of new functions and features dwindles down, the products increasingly conform to each other, and finally the gadgets become interchangeable.

At the same time the expectations of the customers increase. Modern consumers expect to buy high-quality products at a reasonable price. Quality is more and more taken for granted. Hence, good product quality and new features do not suffice as determinants for product differentiation anymore (if they ever did). Commodities definitely have to be elaborated and functionally optimized, but a successful product additionally has to send a message, which convinces the consumer that this specific product must become a part of his/her world.

To achieve this ambitious aim, manufacturers should generate an extensive knowledge about the target customers' needs, emotions, motives, values, attitudes, social identities, life styles and their product understanding. The manufacturer should then implement this knowledge into the product development process, transform it into an appropriate product design and penetrate the market with a convincing product that conveys a coherent and (in the eyes of the target customers) attractive "product message".

This message oriented development process leads to a sustainable differentiation of the product and its "deep-seated" positioning in the customers' minds. Consequently, the customers will desire the product and even be willing to pay a premium price.

The reason for this acceptance lies in the fact that the product design emerges initially from an understanding of the customers' needs, wants, etc. The resulting product message will be a coherent extension of their world ("Lebenswelt"). This is important, since the meaning which is conveyed by the product to lead the customer to a purchase decision will be later on used by the customer to convey his/her personal communication target. "Attractive" information about the product will become "attractive" information about the customer.

Realizing these interrelations, this work concentrates on three issues:

1. The definition of the term "product messages",
2. The identification of determinants of "product messages", and
3. The operationalization of "product messages" for the daily business of a manufacturer.

Within eight chapters the author tries to generate a holistic understanding of Product Messages and their economic relevance. Starting from a highly interdisciplinary, theoretical basis, which results in a context-related product communication process and leads to a scientifically substantiated definition (chapters 1-6), the author illustrates the scheme of an integrated product message development process and introduces tools to implement this process. This dissertation project has been done in collaboration with Mercedes-Benz. Though this dissertation focuses on the automobile, the results can be used for any product (tangibles and intangibles/services).

Key words:

Product, product design, meaning, product functions, signs, semiotics, product semantics, archetype, product communications, consumer, needs, self-concept, product-message congruence, message clinic, message check, symbolism of status