



# THE ENERGY OF THE EXTRAORDINARY

by Will Marré

How do the world's most outstanding brands generate such amazing customer loyalty?

Last year, I began a research project focused on companies that thrived during the recession because I wanted to discover what their leaders were doing differently. The project, conducted with two universities, is called *Apple to Zappos: Leadership Lessons from Today's Successful Leaders Who Are Doing Things No One Else Is*. It's a fascinating story about innovative companies that turn "business as usual" upside down.

One of the key findings is that super-successful companies — like super-successful people — possess extraordinary energy. Energy is the capacity to perform, and great enterprises in the 21st century have a very high energy index. Most do not.

In fact, most businesses appear generic, with no clear differentiator. These companies are desperate for attention, so they spend tons of money on branding. Or should I say blanding? A cute tagline, for example, is not sufficient to motivate someone to switch banks. The energy required to endure the change process makes the status quo more attractive than vague brand benefits. In other words, most branding is low-energy and generates little activity. *Blah* does not cause people to act.

Our research shows that charismatic brands — including Apple, Disney and Zappos — produce powerful energy, just like charismatic people. This energy creates more than

brand loyalty. It creates *brand insistence* — a belief among customers that a certain brand is the only one that will satisfy them. This outcome occurs when companies develop six sources of energy:

- 1. Physical.** Physical energy is driven by the five senses. Great enterprises emphasize distinctive design. Office spaces are extraordinary. Materials and graphics have personality. Employees dress to reinforce important attributes, like friendliness or expertise. Every detail is considered. Disney theme parks and Apple products have high physical energy.
- 2. Emotional.** Emotional energy creates optimism. Every encounter reaffirms a customer's perception that choosing the company

improves their happiness. Zappos sells shoes online — a simple concept. But the company reached \$1 billion in sales in 10 years because they are devoted to customer happiness. Employees have full authority to blow customers' minds with unexpectedly great service. This creates abundant emotional energy.

- 3. Mental.** Mental energy taps into the human desire to grow. Enterprises rich in mental energy make you smarter with each encounter, sparking new ideas, delivering new information, creating new opportunities. Google has billions of megawatts of mental energy. So does Apple. (Who else calls their retail employees geniuses?)

**4. Social.** Social energy allows customers to connect with employees and other customers in deeper ways. Facebook boils with social energy. So does Nike, with its global sponsorship of hundreds of customer-engaging sporting events, and a new outreach program aimed at partnering with customers to change the world.

**5. Spiritual.** Spiritual energy lets customers support important causes and speaks to shared values. Gap’s Project Red raised \$100 million to fight AIDS — and sold a lot of clothing. TOMS shoes sold 10 million pairs in five years because they gave away an equal number of shoes to the needy.

**6. Personal.** Personal energy is the magnetic force created when customers believe a brand aligns perfectly with their identity. For instance, many people now self-identify

as a “Mac” person, rather than a “PC” person. Many travelers only fly Southwest. There are “Target” people and “Prius” people too. Authentic personal energy usually results when an organization’s leader is committed to vastly exceeding expectations on a consistent basis.

As you think about brands that generate high energy — and create followers loyal enough to pay higher prices, endure inconvenience and buy only from “their” company — remember: it’s a very small club. It’s one defined by *brand insistence*, and it only comes from over-investing in at least four of the six sources of energy. That’s simply what it takes to become extraordinary. Only companies willing to make investments no one else is — investments that are risky, investments that are not yet proven to be successful — produce enough energy to

make a difference in the minds of consumers.

These findings make sense. Essentially, what it takes to attract people to a business is the same as what it takes to attract them to other people. We are all drawn to the energy of truly extraordinary people.

However, it is fruitless for any organization to simply mimic extraordinary behavior. Instead, we must find our own voice, our own values, our own authentic purpose that will benefit customers. All the great companies in our research are outstanding because they have the courage to do this. That’s a lesson for all of us.

For more details on the *Apple to Zappos* research project, visit: [willmarre.com/wm/21-companies-leadership-research](http://willmarre.com/wm/21-companies-leadership-research)



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