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## **Sell Me the Old, Old Story: Retromarketing Management and the Art of Brand Revival**

*Retromarketing is all around. From the re-released Volkswagen camper van to the recent relaunch of Charlie cologne, retro is one of the most pervasive marketing trends of our time. This article examines and empirically investigates the rapid rise of retromarketing. It explains the demographic, socio-economic, cultural, and organisational factors that have precipitated the latter-day retro outbreak. It reveals the paradoxical character of retro's remarkable consumer appeal. It contends that retro involves searching for authenticity in an inauthentic world and presents a list of factors that managers bent on brand revival need to take into account.*

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### **Introduction**

In mid-1998, the world's oldest pair of blue jeans were discovered at the bottom of an abandoned mine in Nevada. Three years later, they were sold at auction on eBay, when Levi Strauss paid \$46,532 for the garment it manufactured approximately 120 years previously. Within months, the company re-released a limited edition of the "original" Nevada jeans, as part of its Vintage range of exact reproductions. These not only proved very popular with Levi's aficionados – despite the somewhat stiff \$500 price tag – but also surprisingly functional, since the side pocket for pliers, chisels, wrenches etc, turned out to be perfect for cell phones, PDAs and the hi-tech tools of today's post-industrial workforce. As it was, so shall it be (Marsh and Trynka 2002).

Remarkable though they are, Levi's Nevada jeans are just one example of the so-called "retromarketing revolution". As the merest glance across the marketing landscape reveals, revivals, remakes, reruns, recreations, re-enactments and reissues are everywhere apparent (e.g. Boym 2001; Bracewell

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2002; Carlin 1998; Leadbetter 2002). Long abandoned brands, such as Aladdin (lunchboxes), Beemans (gum) and Chuck Taylors (shoes), have been adroitly reanimated and successfully relaunched. Ancient commercials are being re-broadcast (Ovaltine, Alka-Seltzer) or brilliantly updated (Britney Spears sings "Come Alive" for Pepsi). Retro styling is *de rigueur* in countless product categories, ranging from cameras and colognes to telephones and trainers. Even automobiles and detergents, long the apotheosis of marketing's new-and-improved, washes-whiter-than-white, we-have-the-technology worldview, are getting in on the retroactive act, as the success of the Chrysler P.T Cruiser and Colour Protection Tide daily remind us.

Retro, moreover, is not just an American thing. In Italy, management training programs based on gladiatorial contests are all the rage. In France, old-time dance halls - *guingelles* - have made a dramatic comeback. In Germany, a retro auto based on Hitler's limousine, the Maybach, is being manufactured by Daimler Benz and sold for the princely sum of \$375,000. In Britain, the West End is dominated by theatrical revivals, everything from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* to *We Will Rock You*, a musical based on Queen's greatest hits. In Ireland, the *Titanic* is resurfacing once more, in a retroscape dedicated to the greatest new product failure in history. In India, the diamond industry is back on top, albeit in the form of low-grade industrial stones rather than the Kor-I-Nors of yore. In Afghanistan, there are plans to rebuild Kabul's 500-year-old Mogul pleasure gardens as a symbol of post-Taliban regeneration. In New Zealand, the tourist industry has been transformed by *Lord of the Rings*, a big budget movie of the '60s bestseller, set in a mythical medieval landscape. In Australia, the post-September 11 increase in precious metal prices, coupled with a collapsing stock market, has precipitated a retro gold rush to the outback. In Japan, the tamagochi craze of ten years ago has been revived, only this time on the Internet, itself a remarkable manifestation of the retroactive imperative (Brown 2001a).

The worldwide rise of retro is undeniably impressive, but what does it all mean? Why is it happening and why now? How come retro's a big hit with twenty-first century consumers? What are the implications of today's retrospective propensity for the principles and practice of marketing? The purpose of this article is to address these issues by means of empirical research and conceptual reflection. It commences with an overview of key causes; continues with a summary of retro's consumer appeal; culminates in a case study of an emblematic retro product; and concludes with some meaningful managerial lessons on the art of brand revival.

### Key Causes

Many factors have been put forward as possible causes of the recent retro

outbreak. Perhaps the most common explanation is that it is an unavoidable consequence of demographic developments (Naughton and Vlasic 1998). As generations age they are increasingly inclined to cast nostalgic glances at the brands and products of their gilded youth. These are the wares they grew up with and remain favourably disposed towards, even if they have long since departed to the great brand cemetery in the sky. Certainly, it is no accident that the rise of retro coincided with the communal mid-life crisis of the baby boom generation, who are prone to look back fondly on those long-gone, late-lamented days when bodies were firm, tummies were flat and follicles unchallenged. Retromarketing is thus a side-effect of Boomers' – and increasingly Generation X's – slow but steady slide into senescence.

Another common explanation of the latter-day retro-fest is that it is due to the stresses and strains of today's tumultuous world (Harris 2000). The sheer pace of modern life, where everyone is expected to keep up, keep moving, keep ahead of the cut-throat game, is accompanied by a countervailing yearning to kick back, hang loose, slow down and look back to seemingly happier days, if only for a moment. People thus pine for the times – and the products – when life was simpler, safer and much less stressful. It was a time, was it not, when picket fences were pearly white, American Beauties were always in bloom, and mom's apple pie was perpetually cooling in the kitchen. It was a time, was it not, when neighbours were friendly, streets were safe, and drug dealers were only ever found in Walgreens. It was a time, was it not, that never actually existed, except in the overactive imaginations of Hollywood studio executives and theme park developers.

In this regard, Davis (1979) argues that people are particularly nostalgia prone during times of political uncertainty and socio-economic turmoil, an hypothesis that is borne out by developments in the immediate aftermath of September 11. Stay-at-home cocooning shot up. Sales of traditional comfort foods – cupcakes, chocolate chip cookies etc – took off. Handicrafts, basket-weaving and communal quilt-making quickly became the thing to do. Church-going, good-neighbourliness, God-bless-America patriotism, and attempts to get in touch with estranged friends, extended families and the authentic self were the order of the day (Tompkins 2001). And rightly so.

Today's nostalgia boom, to be sure, long predated September 11. Antiquarianism, according to Jacques Barzun's (2000) monumental history of western culture, is always around in some shape or form, though it waxes and wanes in intensity. The propensity is particularly intense at the turn of centuries and millennia, which has given rise to yet another explanation of retro, the *fin de siècle* effect (Stern 1992). During centurial transitions, humankind is inclined to cast backward glances at the successes, failures, lucky escapes and catastrophic decisions of the preceding epoch. This pattern holds good for the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth



centuries (Briggs and Snowman 1996), as well as our recent millennial rewind, where 1000 years of triumph and disaster were on parade instead of a paltry 100.

Be that as it may, one doesn't need to subscribe to grand theories concerning pre-millennial tension, or centurial epicycles, to account for the rise of retro goods and services. As many authorities point out, it can be readily explained by the costs of doing business (van Bakel 2002). At a time when national product launches run south of one hundred million dollars, with no guarantee of success, relaunching an old product is considerably cheaper and much less risky than starting from scratch. Similarly, the evident success of certain high-profile retro products, such as Volkswagen's new Beetle or Broadway musical *The Producers*, has encouraged many other companies to sift through their Growth-Share archives in the hope that yesterday's question marks may turn into tomorrow's stars.

That said, there's much more to retro than me-too-ism. In a world of identikit brands, where all cars, colas, computers, cornflakes, condoms, cell phones and so forth are functionally indistinguishable, the length of one's lineage is an important point of differentiation (Brown 2003a). It not only makes the most of an organization's illustrious heritage, where there is one, but it intimates that the competition is less reputable, less trustworthy, less long-established than the original. And best!

### Consumer Appeal

The marketing retroquake can thus be attributed to a combination of demographic developments, socio-economic turmoil, the *fin de siècle* factor and good old-fashioned organisational opportunism. But what is it about retro that appeals to today's sophisticated, sated, seen-it-all-before consumers?

Well, the secondary literature suggests that the success of retro products is partly due to aging consumers' nostalgic leanings – as noted above – and partly because they meet contemporary standards of performance (Brown 1999). They may look like a throwback to the thirties, or whenever, but they are also bang up to date. Retro autos, like the new Ford T-Bird, don't have the soggy brakes, gas-guzzling engines and prohibitive maintenance costs of the originals. Retro radios evoke their 1950s forerunners, but the station settings are contemporary, a socket for headphones is provided and double cassette decks are available as optional extras. Ralph Lauren's vintage watches are identical to the 1930s' originals, though where there were once mechanical escapements there are now solar-powered microchips. Disney's Celebration, a new old town in central Florida, may seem like a perfect recreation of Smallville, or similar, yet it's got all the 21<sup>st</sup> century comforts as well. The phenomenally successful Harry Potter books are set in a ye-olde



UK boarding school, Hogwarts. However, its students are surrounded by the debris of today's consumer culture, everything from record stores and video games to friendly neighbourhood fast food franchises. Even the language they use – “totally”, “cool”, “wicked”, “tell me about it”, etc – is just about as contemporary as it comes (Brown 2001b).

Better yet is the recently reanimated *Star Wars* saga. At one level, the new episodes simply trade on movie-goers' fond memories of the 1977-84 trilogy. The kids who were taken to the originals now have their own kids to take. The special effects, what's more, remain at the cutting-edge of CGI technology. Just as the first movies pushed back the frontiers of special effects, so too the new additions are required to do likewise, if only to be true to the originals. At another level, *Attack of the Clones* is actually a sequel of a prequel, *The Phantom Menace*, and, when it eventually appears, *Episode III* will be a sequel of the prequel's sequel. Epochs are all over the place, much less ewoks (Brown 2001a).

The available evidence, then, indicates that retro goods and services are in the ascendant because they carry consumers back to the past. At the same time, however, they carry them back to a past that's been expunged of the bad bits, the stuff most people prefer not to remember. The backbreaking chores. The lack of labour saving devices. The absence of air conditioning, refrigeration, jet travel, desktop computers, modern medicine. The necessities of life. The past is a nice place to visit, but you wouldn't want to live there. Retro thus combines the best of the past and the best of the present into an attractive marketing package. Akin to lite beer or diet ice cream, it enables consumers to indulge their maudlin cravings for rose-tinted times, without the catastrophic calorific-cum-coronary consequences.

### Quisp Quest Questions

Insightful though they are, such speculations are based on casual observation rather than empirical research. In order, therefore, to find out how real consumers respond to retro, a “netnographic” investigation of Quisp breakfast cereal, a recently revived brand beloved by consumers on the cusp of middle age, was undertaken as part of a larger study of cult brands, media fans, and virtual communities of consumption (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

For readers unfamiliar with the term, “netnography” is a brand new old-fashioned research technique, inasmuch as it transplants ethnography, one of the most venerable research methods, into the latest marketing milieu, cyberspace. Like its off-line counterpart, netnography necessitates in-depth immersion in, and prolonged engagement with, the multifarious consumer cultures that populate the World Wide Web. As several scholars have demonstrated, this is a place where abundant information on the belief

systems, buying behaviours and object relations of online consumer groups is readily available (e.g. Kozinets 2002; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). It is thus ideal for the study of cult brands like Quisp.

Not only is netnography an appropriately retro research method – old and new in perfect harmony – but Quisp is the quintessential retro product. Made by Quaker Oats from sweetened corn, Quisp is a flying saucer-shaped breakfast cereal. It was introduced in 1965 and quickly commanded a sizeable market share, thanks to an endearing cartoon eponym. Developed by Jay Ward and Bill Scott of *Rocky and Bullwinkle* fame, “Quisp” was a diminutive, pie-eyed, propeller-headed, green-uniformed, shocking pink creature from Planet Q, whose rambunctious adventures were acted out on the obverse of cereal boxes, as well as accompanying television commercials. Like all good serials, the storyline started from a strong basic premise – that Quisp is a technologically-superior being from another world, who comes to Earth with twelve billion boxes of the energy-filled cereal to give away before he can return home – and developed the on-going narrative from there. Thus Quisp found himself fighting various cosmic-sized enemies (such as a gigantic ball of intelligent yarn) and, in so doing, happily spoofed the whole Saturday-morning serial stereotype, while promoting his wired-up wares with gusto.

From a marketing perspective, the prodigious product peaked in 1972, when Quaker pitted Quisp against Quake, a sibling cereal. One brand would be cut from the company's complement, the other given a stay of execution, depending on the outcome of a consumer plebiscite. Fearful that their favourite alien was about to be beheaded, cereal lovers voted in their thousands, Quisp carried the day, and Quake was banished to the brand boondocks, alongside Breck, Brylcreem, Burma Shave and similar marketing has-beens. It was a pyrrhic victory, however, because Quisp too was withdrawn from national distribution in 1977, when the kids who grew up with it grew out of it.

Bowed but unbeaten, the bypassed brand languished in a limited number of regional markets for twentysomething years. Until such times, that is, as Quisp kids had their own kids to feed and brand revivals became the marketing manoeuvre of the moment. In October 1999, Quaker re-released the product in a bright new, cartoon-encrusted box, courtesy of *South Park* supremos, Trey Parker and Matt Stone. Although the premium priced comestible is carried by several leading supermarket chains (\$3 for a tiny, nine-ounce box), it is mainly sold on-line, thanks to a dedicated website ([www.quisp.com](http://www.quisp.com)), which also serves as a rallying point for the community of consumers that is again accreting around the much-missed brand.

When the culture of this brand community is examined netnographically,

it is clear that the principal issue exercising Quisp fans is *Authenticity*. The genuineness of the reanimated cereal is causing considerable consumer consternation and not a little controversy. For some aficionados, new Quisp is a pale imitation of old Quisp, a sad regression from the glory days of the '70s, when Quisp felled Quake in the celebrated cereals shoot-out. "Logistics," Jeremy laments, "killed the cereal star".

For other connoisseurs, the taste, texture, colour, and crunchiness of the new product are immaterial, since the resurrection of the intergalactic icon represents the realisation of a childhood dream. Like the legend of King Arthur in Avalon, Quisp has been roused from its extraterrestrial slumbers and, as such, its physical attributes are less important than the fact that the hibernating brand is back in the land of the living.

For yet others, the exactness of the reproduction product, or its welcome recall from brand Valhalla, is second to the perfidious actions of the producers. Far from reanimating the once and future cereal, Quaker appears to be selling another product, Sweet Crunch, under the guise of Quisp. New Quisp is a fake, an interloper, a usurper of the imperishable alien's inalienable heritage!

Interestingly, the allegation that new Quisp is Sweet Crunch in disguise has polarised cereal devotees. If Sweet Crunch is Quisp, some wonder, why spend a fortune on a small package of over-priced corn slivers, especially when the exact same product is available at a considerable discount, if in less lustrous livery? Canny consumers can avoid paying for the sizzle by settling for filet mignon in plain wrapping.

Set against this penny-pinching perspective, another contingent of cereal cognoscenti contend that Sweet Crunch and Quisp are *not* the same, notwithstanding the manufacturer's acknowledgement that they are. In this regard, an avid Quisp couple, Chris and Kori, conducted comparative "research" into the two ostensibly identical brands and posted photographic evidence to corroborate their conclusions. They found that, compared to the impostor Sweet Crunch, Quisp "has more of a brown sugar smell to it", "a richer, deeper colour", is "sweeter and more flavourful", "crunches better and doesn't get soggy in milk as fast", "has a better overall texture" and "also crunches louder for a more satisfying breakfast experience!" Their conclusion and recommendation to fellow fans pulls no punches: "If you can't find Quisp in your area, don't fool yourself by thinking Sweet Crunch is the same thing!"

Yet, regardless of such differences in opinion, Quisp buffs are as one in their anti-marketing ethos. Not only did Quaker's mendacious marketers get them hooked as children - only to peremptorily remove their desperately-needed, sugar-suffused narcotic - but the devious dealers also brought it back in a less refined form when they were susceptible to nostalgia's siren



call. Marketing, Quisp consumers contend, is a milieu of trickery, deceit and corruption, where only the most Machiavellian survive. The best way to outsmart the debasers of Quisp's sacred memory, many maintain, is to eat cheap-and-cheerful Sweet Crunch instead of paying through the nose for Quaker's fake flakes.

Marketing, then, is the archetypal bad guy, a necessary evil empire at the core of the Quisp cosmos. It is a powerful force, a dark force, a force that is fascinating in its nefariousness. Nevertheless, it is a force that adulterates authenticity, co-opts childhood innocence, and defiles everything it touches.

As the Star Wars-ish quality of these consumer constructs suggest, the central issue of Quisp's authenticity, or otherwise, is embedded in a narrative, a fable, a *Story*. Consumers not only buy into the canonical Quisp storyline – the one contained on the box backs – but they concoct their own Quisp-related adventures. Almost all of the web postings revolve around the consumer's quest for Quisp, the search for that happy childhood moment when the amiable alien's escapades held them in pre-teen thrall. Their lives, unlike those in T.S. Eliot's *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, aren't so much measured out in coffee spoons as in breakfast cereal bowls.

In addition to Quisp questors' personal picaresque tales, tales of tales are also spun around the cyber campfire, as in the celebrated case of freelance food critic Jim Leff. In a frequently forwarded posting, Leff describes his putative pilgrimage for Quisp. He searches for it as if it were the Rosebud of his childhood. He claims to have recurring dreams about finding Quisp openly displayed on supermarket shelves. He will not buy the blessed brand over the Internet, or receive boxes from friends, but claims he must journey to find it, travelling to distant cities in pursuit of the Holy Grail. The culmination of his cereal crusade will involve a "black tie party with other fanatic friends", where Quisp will be served "with organic milk on fine china". Most importantly, perhaps, he shares his saga with other Quisp questors, who draw sustenance from and further disseminate Leff's sally into the heart of marketing darkness. The horror, the horror.

### **Authenticating Authenticity**

If a general conclusion can be drawn from the Quisp case study – and retro products per se – it is that today's consumers are *searching for authenticity in an inauthentic world* (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). Certainly, there is considerable conjectural evidence to support this contention. One of the most striking things about contemporary consumer culture is the overwhelming desire for authenticity (see Holt 1997, 2002; Lewis 2000; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Real food, pure water, fresh air, natural cosmetics, organic farming, traditional remedies, genuine antiques, additive-

free snacks, unspoilt holiday resorts, hand-built furniture, hand-made suits, hand-thrown ceramics, hand-crafted collectables and hand-picked hand-me-downs are the order of the day. Reality TV is all the rage, as *Jerry Springer*, *The Osbournes*, and *Temptation Island* attest. Real movies, using handheld cameras, improvised performances and Dogme dogma, are relieving the tiresome diet of special effects-led blockbusters. Real rock 'n' roll, based on bass, drums and lead, or played on scratchy vinyl albums, is making a comeback. Real art is being championed by the Stuckists, an international movement opposed to conceptual artists' reliance on shallow gimmickry, while advocating a return to painting, sketching, engraving, palettes, brushes, berets, smocks and all the rest. Reality has even intruded into the otherworldly world of self-help philosophies, as evinced by the dramatic success of "tough love"-disbursing, "authentic self"-espousing Dr Phil McGraw (Juarez and Figuerda 2002).

Retro goods and services are part and parcel of this on-going search for the authentic. They evoke the old while remaining bang up to date. They epitomise the fact that, for all today's obsession with what's real, there is *no such thing as authenticity*. In our hyper-capitalist, marketing-mediated world, there are only varying degrees of inauthenticity (Brown 2003b). The unspoilt holiday resort is designed to look unspoilt. The traditional Irish bar is assembled from mass produced, cod-Celtic kitsch. The free-range chickens are free to range around a fetid factory farm. The classic blue jeans are pre-shrunk, pre-faded, pre-ripped, pre-grimed and, pre-personalised with machine-made creases and abrasions. Authentic authenticity, so to speak, is unattainable. But it can be staged, it can be created, it can be evoked, albeit some evocations are better than others (cf. Dollywood's version of Appalachian culture versus that contained in the open-air Museum of Appalachia). Some consumers, similarly, will accept the evocation (confirmed Quisp questors) whereas others will challenge its basic premises (Sweet Crunch swindle). The challenge to marketers is to challenge the challengers, by successfully evoking the authentic, and thereby overcoming their mistrust of marketing.

### Out With the New, In With the Old

So, how can authenticity be evoked in an increasingly inauthentic world? In two main ways. First, by telling a compelling story, a story that persuades consumers to: (a) suspend their disbelief; (b) set aside the idea that they are being manipulated by mendacious marketers; and (c) become part of the narrative, in much the same way as video gamers immerse themselves in the "realer than real" world of *Myst*, *Quake* or *The Sims*. Stories, remember, are many but plots are few. As Hollywood's dream factory regularly

demonstrates, adding new twists to old tales is the secret of cinematic success (Thompson 1999).

In this respect, the power of retro products – perhaps their principal attraction – is the fact that they are predicated on the primordial appeal of myth and legend. They sell consumers the old, old story. They carry them back to a time before marketing was everywhere, before high pressure sales tactics were the norm, before everything was completely, crassly, contemptibly commercialised, before advertisers assaulted us morning, noon and night, or importuned people from every conceivable surface, from sidewalks and headstones to shopping carts and restroom stalls. Retromarketing softens the hard sell (Harris 2000).

The second and closely related means of evoking the authentic is to call up a time when storytelling was credible, comforting, certain. Childhood, in short. It is no accident that many of the most successful retro products look like refugees from Toys R Us (Brown 1999). Retro autos are straight out of the pre-school sandbox. The Dyson vacuum cleaner is a life-size, day-glo Tonka Toy. Alessi's much admired kitchen utensils, the handiwork of celebrity designer Philippe Starck, wouldn't be out of place in a Warner Brothers cartoon. The Apple iMac is a throwback to the swinging sixties, when flower children of all ages got in touch with the inner innocent. From *Aladdin* onwards, Hollywood has been pitching its products at parents and children simultaneously (*Toy Story*, *Shrek*, *Chicken Run*, *Stuart Little*, *Monsters Inc*). The same is true of network TV (*The Simpsons*, *South Park*, *King of the Hill* etc). Even management gurus are plundering kiddie culture in their attempts to divert jaded executives (Lego "Serious Play", *Winnie the Pooh on Management*, "The Harry Potter Way to Higher Profits" etc).

Retro, then, represents a return to the fairy-tale-freighted world of perpetual childhood. It is a paradoxical combination of reality and magic, old and new, grift and gift, happiness and regret, pleasure and pain. It is, like nostalgia itself, a bittersweet sensation, something that is both mournful and mirthful, whose sufferers are glad to be sad (Lowenthal 1985). It is the epitome of what novelist Alex Shakar (2001) calls "paradessence", the two opposing desires that successful products satisfy simultaneously – stimulation and relaxation (coffee), eroticism and innocence (ice cream), terror and reassurance (amusement parks), groundedness and freedom (sneakers), eternity and transience (muzak).

Most importantly perhaps, retrospection is a societal sensibility that is unlikely to evaporate in the short term. The greying of the Baby Boomers, coupled with the nostalgic propensity that accompanies ageing, will ensure that the past has a big future, among marketing executives at least (Naughton and Vlasic 1998).



## Managerial Implications

In a world where “as good as always” is superseding “new and improved” as marketing’s pre eminent rallying-cry, executives must learn to adapt to the retrospective dispensation. They must acquaint themselves with the art of brand revival. They must appreciate that retromarketing isn’t simply a matter of scouring the archives in search of long-deleted brands with 21<sup>st</sup> century potential, or coming up with brand new products that can be made to look suitably antiquated with appropriately old-fashioned package designs. In order to successfully surf the retro tsunami, marketers must realise that brand revival is predicated on six key characteristics:

- *Dormancy* is the ante to get into the game. Like King Arthur in Avalon, or Snow White slumbering in the briars, the brand must reside in collective memory but remain undisturbed by current marketing attention.
- *Iconicity* is central to the brand’s appeal. The brand must have been salient during a specific developmental (or transitional) stage for a particular generation or cohort.
- *Evocativeness* animates the retro-brand. The brand must be capable of summoning vivid experience from collective memory, and of encouraging consumers to embroider that experience with contemporary relevance.
- *Utopianism* is perhaps the hallmark of the retro-brand. The brand must be capable of mobilising an Elysian vision, of engendering a longing for an idealised past that is satisfied through consumption.
- *Solidarity* is an important unifying quality of the retro-brand. Whether as extreme as a cargo cult or as moderate as fictive kinship, the brand must inspire among its users the sense of belonging to a community.
- *Perfectibility* is the final trait a retro-brand encompasses. The brand must be indefinitely updateable, both technologically and ideologically, to assure its perpetual relevance to consumers who are constantly revising their own identities.

These six characteristics, it must be stressed, represent the starting point for successful brand revival, a base condition on which to build. They are not ends in themselves. More significant than the raw marketing materials is the accompanying managerial mindset. This involves an appreciation that

brands are co-created. They are a collaboration between marketer and consumer. Consumers have a stake in the retromarketing process. They grew up with the brands, invested them with meaning, and wove stories of personal development around these mass-produced yet indelibly individual totems. They will work with marketers bent on bringing brands back from the dead. But they won't be pushed around, or dictated to, nor will they accept anything that fails the "authenticity" test. Retro brands operate within the parameters that managers impose and consumers permit. The narrative structure of that management process can become a jointly told tale or a verbal duel, as the Quisp case indicates. Successful retromarketing management involves the creation of consumer comfort stops along the much-travelled route to the really real.

## Conclusion

In a recent anthology, *Hooking Up*, the best-selling author Tom Wolfe (2000) makes a series of predictions about the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whereas the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by its emphasis on progress, on amelioration, on making it new, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he maintains, will be an era of regression, of deterioration, of making it old. Sated, sybaritic, self-satisfied consumers, Wolfe (2000, p.144) suggests, will "sink ever deeper into their Neo-Louis bergères, idly twirling information about on the Internet, killing time like Victorian maidens doing their crocheting, knitting, tatting, needlepoint, and quilting, content in what will be known as the Somnolent Century or the Twentieth Century's Hangover".

Less than a year after Wolfe's words of wisdom, the Somnolent Century was given a rude and cruel awakening. Nevertheless the retrospective propensity he identified prior to September 11, remains as potent as ever, possibly more so. Such is the ubiquity of retromarketing these days that it is difficult to think of an unaffected product category. Retro restaurants, retro refrigerators, retro telephones, retro T-shirts, retro T-Birds, retro locomotives, retro lawnmowers, retro motor bikes, retro pogo sticks, retro sports equipment, retro garden furniture, retro wrist watches, retro writing instruments, retro computer games, retro cookery books, retro coffeepots, retro cosmetics, retro candies, retro comics, retro colas, retro cigarillos, retro casinos, retro cruise liners, retro roller coasters...the list is endless.

This article has examined the recent rapid rise of retromarketing and concluded that it represents consumers' search for authenticity in an increasingly inauthentic world, a search for the comforting certainties of childhood. This is a search that is likely to become more important in years to come, as the population of the western world inexorably ages. It is a search that astute marketers can exploit, provided they understand the

demographic drivers and operative principles. Retromarketing is not merely a matter of reviving dormant brands and foisting them on soft-heated, dewy-eyed, nostalgia-stricken consumers. It involves working with consumers to co-create an oasis of authenticity for tired and thirsty travellers through the desert of mass-produced marketing dreck. As the prominent postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1983, p.12) judiciously notes, "when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning".

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## Introduction

Co-branding, the cooperative use of two separate brands on the same product, has a special significance to New Zealand. For much of the last century market cooperation has been compulsory in the New Zealand Agricultural Industry. However, today cooperation is an optional activity for most of the country's agricultural products marketers. Despite this, history has led to a tradition and predisposition to cooperate that may be unique within the developed world. New Zealand is therefore a fertile

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