STRATEGIES FOR DISTINCTIVE BRANDS

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Abstract:

Brand identity complements brand equity and it forms an important part of the strategic management of brands. Identity elements include a well-known brand name, logo, font-type, symbols, colour, shape, as well as unique product and benefit descriptions. These different elements can contribute to distinct consumer perceptions of various brands in the marketplace and help to differentiate brands from competitors.

STRATEGIES FOR DISTINCTIVE BRANDS

Much literature in the area of branding has focused on brand equity and its importance to strong brands (e.g., Aaker 1996; Kellar 2002; and Kapferer 2004). While everyone agrees that understanding and creating brand equity is essential for marketing, very little academic attention is paid to understanding the importance of brand identity and its relation to brand equity and brand management. Brand identity is the visual picture and meaning derived from the visual impact of the brand. For the consumer to identify brands with their respective manufacturers, the brands must be sold with distinctive features supplied by that particular manufacturer. Strong and unique links to one source is what complements and protects brands from being interchangeable in the marketplace.

Brand differentiation, or identity, may be achieved through a well-known brand name, logo, typeface, symbol, colour, shape, distinctive design of the package or product, as well as product benefit descriptions known as unique selling points (Meyers and Lubliner 1998). Brand identity is an important component and compliment to the brand equity model, and is not the same as brand equity. Brand identity may have nothing to do with the more abstract brand associations of quality, awareness and loyalty, but it has a lot to do with the consumer's perception of the brand and its attributes, either real or imagined.

The phrase made famous by Walter Landor is paraphrased as, "Products are produced in the factory, but brands are produced in the minds of the consumer". This is true because the costs of brand differentiation are in the initial and additional dollars spent on production and marketing, which may not be related to the quality or necessary benefits of the product. Take Grey Goose® Vodka, for example, a relatively recent entrant to the vodka market. Here an unknown brand was

elevated to international luxury status by linking itself to France, home of the luxury goods market, and by telling people through advertising that Grey Goose Vodka tastes better than other vodkas. France has no history of expertise in producing vodka. Advertising, that stated experts rated Grey Goose as the number one tasting vodka in the world, provided a unique selling point through concrete information for consumer decision making¹. This is a very good example of a perceived unique selling point because vodka is rarely consumed 'pure'. It is usually mixed with soda pop, fruit juices, vermouth, olives, orange slices, etc. How one could ever really taste vodka in a natural consumer setting to a point where a true differentiation can be made is quite beyond rational reason. However demand for Grey Goose Vodka skyrocketed and the brand was recently sold to Baccardi for two billion dollars. This is an example of sheer marketing genius of brand differentiation and positioning by Sidney Frank, who now has turned to the tequila market.

The purpose of this paper is to review the various components of brand names, logos/symbols, typeface, colours, shapes, and product benefit descriptions that help to create distinctive and differentiated brands in the minds of consumers. Examples are drawn from industry and the academic literature, which at times goes far beyond marketing, and includes design elements and perceptual processing. The goal is to provide brand managers with a developed and applied source of concepts related to brand identity.

Brand Names

Because consumers rely heavily on brand names to identify goods and services for purchase, it is important for brand owners to select a name that is distinctly theirs when they want their products to stand out in the marketplace. The kind of name selected for identifying one's goods might range from the following: 1) strong distinctive coined letter combinations that have no

¹ Early work by Mackenzie JCR 1985 showed that concrete information creates more attention than abstract information.

meaning whatsoever, for example, Accenture® for Business Consulting; 2) less strong inherently distinctive words that have a meaning in English but have no reference or relationship to the goods or services associated with the mark, for example, CREST for toothpaste; 3) relatively weak inherently distinctive words that are suggestive rather than descriptive of the character or quality of the goods or services, for example, SUNKIST for oranges; and 4) weak inherently distinctive words that describe but arguably do not clearly describe the character or quality of the goods or services associated with the mark, for example, GARDENFRESH for frozen vegetables.

There is some evidence that consumer judgments associated with descriptive or non-descriptive brand names varies with the product category (Zaichkowsky and Vipat, 1993). For low involvement products (e.g., household cleaners), brands with descriptive names were consistently rated as higher quality, more effective, more positive, and more likely to purchase than brands with non-descriptive names. One might think of the success of the Swiffer (swifter) cleaning products from Procter and Gamble. The name Swiffer is close to sweep and swift, meaning quick easy cleaning, and is a good example of a descriptive name.

More recently researchers have focused on more nuanced aspects of brand names such as phonetic effects (Yorkston and Menon, 2004), naming of brands by colour and flavour (Miller and Kahn, 2005), and semantic associations (Wanke, Herrmann and Schaffner, 2007). Subtle effects for consumer perceptions and choice were found for all studies. However these effects for brand attitudes and perceptions might not be found for brand names for high involvement products (e.g. computers). Here consumers look beyond the brand name and inherent attributes are more important. The consumer wants more information about the brand and will then evaluate that information to form beliefs about the brand. Therefore brand names may serve different purposes for low and high involvement product categories.

Whatever type of brand name is desired by the company, the objective is to have the brand name linked to only the goods of the owner of the name. This distinctiveness is accomplished over time through extensive advertising with quality products, service, and image building.

Developing Unique Brand Names: A Case Study of Exxon

There are many consulting companies that specialize in creating new brand names (e.g., Javed, 1993). Some of these firms are worldwide, charging hundreds of thousands of dollars to develop brand names, which will "work" globally. The amount of time, research, effort, and money that goes into the selection of a good brand name is demonstrated by the classic case of Standard Oil, New Jersey (Enis, 1978). Standard Oil had four other company names at this time (Esso; Enco; Enjay; and Humble) and sought only one name to build its identity. The company's objectives were to select a brand name that was easily identified on a world-wide basis; available and appropriate for use on a wide range of products; would convey a desirable image for all audiences; and would be free from legal restrictions on usage.

Consumer analysis and research suggested the new name should have no meaning at all and be very simple. The search for a new name began with a team of linguistic experts, a leading graphics-design firm, a battery of lawyers, and a computer. The computer search generated 10,000 words of four and five letters. More consumer research and testing reduced the number of names to 234. The Committee then cut that list to 16 for further testing. Six names, including two existing trademarks (Enco and Enjay), were selected for final testing worldwide in 56 languages that are spoken by more than five million people. As a result, the two existing company names were eliminated: Enco, which meant 'stalled car' in Japanese, and Enjay, which had translation problems in Chinese. Exxon became the clear choice for both company and brand name. The research indicated that it conveyed the idea of a large, international enterprise, and portrayed the petroleum and chemical business in a way that was

significantly superior to others. Exxon is easy to pronounce and remember, and it has no meaning in any language.

Brand Names for Innovative Products

If a company is first in the market, it can reap profits by having a brand so well known that all other similar products become known by the original's brand name. Manufacturers often view this as an ideal situation as consumers often end up buying the brand because they are unsure whether competing products are of the same quality. The cost of this success is that consumers may use the original brand name as the name for the product category, for example Thermos® for a container to hold hot beverages, Jell-O® for gelatine desserts, or Kleenex® for tissues. Over time, some consumers may not realize that these are brand names.

Taylor and Walsh (2002) call this *genericide*, or the threat of the brand name being used as a generic term. Research by Simonson (1994) and Oakenfull and Gelb (1996) point out the difficulty of such brand names, but the brand manager can take steps to prevent genericide from happening. First, they can use the trademark as a descriptive adjective, such as RollarBlade® inline skates or I-Pod® MP3 player. A trademark identifies a particular brand of some product; hence, grammatically it is an adjective. It is not the name of the product itself and it is not a noun. Second, a company can make sure the media uses the trademark properly to ensure the consumer recognizes the brand name as a trademark. In other words, firms should use the trademark notice in advertising and labelling, for example, Blackberry®. Third, companies need to display the mark with some form of special typographical treatment.

In summary, companies that launch new product brands should: 1) actively pursue any misuse of their brand name; 2) differentiate their product on more than brand name; and 3) extend

the brand name to other related product categories. Successfully protecting one's brand name involves much more than attention to the brand name; it may involve a whole company strategy.

Typeface/Fonts Used for the Brand

One aspect that seems so minor, but is extremely important, is the type of font used for represent the company name. NAME-IT® is a company in California that creates a selection of names from which clients can choose to fit their marketing criteria. In Exhibit one the various names and fonts for a new caféare displayed. One can see the choice of name and font seems to be unlimited, and the best choice to represent the brand might be a difficult decision.

Insert Exhibit One about here.

The type of font used by a brand can be compared to different hand writing styles and their link to personality traits (Sogren, 1995). Early research on fonts showed different type faces were found to vary in perceived abstract qualities (Poffenberger and Franken 1923). **Century Bold** was perceived to represent economy and strength, where *Garmond Italics* was perceived more exclusive and luxurious. Further research by Osgood (1960) found *italics* to be associated with activity and **bold** to be associated with potency. Lewis and Walker (1989) investigated the consequences of using the appropriate font, as images (or font) and the words give parallel routes to meaning of the stimulus. They found people's response times are faster when the font is appropriate for the word being presented (e.g., *fast* vs. fast and strong vs. **strong**). Therefore, there are behavioural consequences to font-word paring in reaction times and perceptual fluency.

The relationship between brand name and font style on choice was applied to the product category of chocolates by Doyle and Bottomly (2004). They selected two equal brand names for the chocolates (a low-involvement affective product), namely Temptation and Indulgence. Then

they selected two different fonts Salem and Signet Roundhand. In a two by two experiment, they crossed font type and brand name. They found no effect for brand name. That is, there was no difference in the number of people choosing chocolates named either Temptation or Indulgence. But an effect was found for font type. Seventy-five percent of the people chose the chocolates when the brand name (either Indulgence or Temptation) was presented in the Signet Roundhand, and only 25 percent chose the chocolates when the font of the brand name was in Salem.

From the research, it can be concluded that fonts generate their own connotative meaning. The font style used needs to match the company image, perhaps the involvement category, and the message of the brand. Businesses also need to adopt a coherent font policy to cover current and possible future brand extensions. In some cases the font chosen can represents a symbol to the customers and define the company's visual image. For example, the well known script of Coca-Cola is used to enhance the identity of the brand and build market share.

Logos

While brand names are central to the identity of the brand, the name itself may not be enough to be distinctive. The company must also think about how that name is portrayed through its graphics or logo, as Coca-Cola has done. The attention to the design or logo portraying the brand name is extremely important in the global marketplace where the identity of the brand must transcend language and even alphabets. One of the world's most famous logos is perhaps the Nike swoosh. The simple elegant symbol was commissioned when the company first started for a mere \$35.00. The objective was to create something that represented speed and movement. One might say that abstractly it represents a wing on the original running shoe.

Not all businesses are perhaps that lucky at having the correct symbol signify their company. Eurobusiness (2003) published a very unscientific analysis of various logos in different product classes. They concluded neither cost nor history was a barrier to greatness and that great logos had irresistible resonance. The Volkswagon logo was deemed superior over the Skoda logo (autos); the Shell oil (a scallop) over the Yokos logo (oil companies); Adidas over Henkel (sportswear).

Link Between Logos and Brand Names

There is an interesting study that looks at the theoretical relationship between company names and logos, from figurate (or descriptive) to abstract (Lecastre and Beirao 2004). The company can then follow different decision trees for names and logos from abstract to figurative². These decision trees by are shown in Figures 1 and 2. The creation of a name or logo can be analyzed within this framework.

Insert Figure 1 and Figure 2 Decision Trees for Brand Names and Logos

The objective of the firm is to have high recall and recognition of their brand identity or name and logo. Generally brand names that are harder to pronounce are more difficult to remember. There is the well established practice of simple abbreviations, for example, IBM for International Business Machines. Then there are many spelling abbreviations or acronyms, which have, lexical phonetic proximity with existing words: PALMOLIVE joins 'palm' with 'olive'. The discovery of new words is made by manipulating the existing lexis such as Swatch® from 'Swiss Watches'. Then finally there are strong symbolic names like JAGUAR. On the left side of Figure 1 are the abbreviations and then there is a continuum of names from most abstract to most concrete on the far right.

² There is a body of literature on the interactive effects of pictures and words in advertising starting with Lutz and Lutz,

Journal of Applied Psychology, August 1977. Researchers have found enhanced processing and recall when relevant images accompany brand names.

The same search for motivating images inspires the logo creators and the decision tree in Figure Two. On the left side are logos with a dominant lettering component, such as SONY (hence more abstract) and on the right side are more abstract logos with a dominant drawing component, such as WELLA and hence more figurative. The same reasoning for figurative logos are found in the brands of Dove® soap and Turtle® Wax. Theories from Cognitive Psychology and applications from marketing (Henderson & Cote, 1998; MacInnis & Price, 1987) predict that when both the name and the logo are abstract, more forgetting should take place. When both the brand name and corresponding logo are extremely figurative, then both visual recognition and cognitive recall occur.

In an empirical study of 21 prototypes of names and logos along these continua (9 variations in name and 12 variations in logo), Lencastre and Beirao (2004) found memorization scores increased when moving from abstract names and logos to figurative names and logos. Therefore, it may be that the most distinctive names and logos are the ones which use both figurative brand names and logos. One example is Apple® computers, the name is Apple and the logo is a rainbow coloured apple with a bite out of it. Recent research found that the Apple logo generated far more creative thinking in people than the competing IBM logo (Fitzsimons, Chartrand, and Fitzsimons 2008). Furthermore some of the exposures to the logo were at a subliminal level, and the effects were still found. The understanding of why Apple is better than IBM, and why a stripped IBM is better than a plain IBM is now being demonstrated in more than semiotic terms.

Brand Identity Through Colour

One can think of colour and brands as the modern form of heraldry, where distinctively coloured emblems pertain to a specific individual, family, or a community. The first coats of

arms, which appeared on battlefields and at tournaments, needed to be seen from a distance so bright and contrasting colours helped to identify the bearer (Pastoureau, 2001). All that was needed was a quick glance at a flag to reveal identity. Today one can think of businesses and consumers using the same quick images of colour for identification on crowded supermarket shelves. Brands need to be identified with single manufacturers to distinguish themselves from competitors in the cluttered retail environment. Colours are remembered more than shapes and are the first point of identification of the brand (Kapferer, 1995).

One of the best examples of differentiation by colour is the product category of home insulation. Owens-Corning manufactures Fiberglass Pink insulation. It is dyed pink. The pink colour is an added cost with no value added quality or necessary benefit to the product other than as identification. In the first ten years of the product (1972 to 1981), Owens-Corning spent over 42 million dollars on advertising to build unique brand identification by associating their pink insulation with pink flamingos and the Pink Panther cartoon character. The results of its campaign (or advertising strategy) resulted in an overwhelming consumer association of pink insulation with Owens-Corning. This identity is still going strong and dominates their communication strategy. Their phone number for customer inquiries is 1-800-GET-PINK; their web site is printed in pink and the Pink Panther cartoon character remains their mascot/spokesperson.

The National Bureau of Standards lists 267 distinctive colours (Woo, 1993). Given this vast array of colours from which to choose, companies should have little difficulty in selecting distinctive colour combinations to identify themselves or their brands. The colour combinations should be limited because designs with a multitude of colours have no specific identity, while designs with one or two colours are recalled with ease (Cheskin 1947). Of course the colour

combination needs to be congruent with the target population for the product, as the perceived meaning of colour might vary across cultures and nationalities (Mortimer, 2004).

Although single colours are most often used in the marketplace, their protection may not be as straight forward as the use of distinctive colour combinations. A company cannot lay claim to a single hue unless there is overwhelming evidence that the customer identifies only that one brand or company with that particular colour. While some companies are successful in building identification with one colour as an integral quality cue of the product, such as Corning's pink fibreglass, the package or logo of the product is a more likely place for colour identification. This is where distinctive combinations are crucial along with a particular design. If the company selects only a single hue for the package, there is greater likelihood that a similar or even the same hue will be used by subsequent competing brands entering the marketplace.

Besides the distinction of colour, there is a wealth of research that recognizes colours have a strong impact on human moods and emotions. Even some physical sensations can be modified by the presence of various colours (Pile, 1995). Weight is inferred, as white coloured packages are judged to be lighter than dark coloured packages. On a bigger scale, planes are mainly painted white so they blend in with fluffy clouds and look to float. One can infer temperature, blue being a cool colour and red being perceived as hotter. Red has been shown to stimulate appetites, so is a favourite colour for foods (e.g., MacDonalds, and Kit-Kat chocolate bars). Orange is deemed to be inexpensive. Think of ING banking services. Blues are relaxing and refreshing. While purple signals royalty and brands from Britain have seized that opportunity (e.g., Cadbury chocolate and Crown Royal whiskey).

Distinction by colour should flow through all aspects of the company brand: signs, packaging, and all advertising materials. If all these aspects are colour coordinated they assist each

other in projecting the character of a particular business to encourage customer satisfaction and loyalty (Pile, 1995). A good example here is Tiffany blue, which flows through the products, the packages, and the advertising. Colour, whether in packaging or product make-up, is an easy cue to use to differentiate brands. Combinations of colours are superior to a single color for identification, because linking a single colour to a single manufacturer's brand may not imply an unique origin.

Differentiation By Shape

Avoiding confusion by shape can be unrealistic in some markets and integral in others.

Examples where shape is standard and difficult to differentiate are cereal boxes, cracker boxes, or pasta boxes. Cardboard boxes are important packaging for some products and the square shape makes the package very easy to display and stock. In these cases, the design and colour are even more critical to a distinctive identity than the shape of the package.

Goods that are packaged in aluminum, plastic or glass, on the other hand, are easy to differentiate by shape. The packaging products manufacturer, Crown Holdings Inc (CCK) creates new and distinctive shapes, combined with unusual graphics to help brands stand out in the marketplace. Instead of normal cylinder-shaped beverage, food, or aerosol cans, their technology can create cans in distinctive shapes that become part of the brand image. A keg-shaped can was developed for Heineken® beer to differentiate its' canned beers further from other canned beers and Budweiser has introduced a canned beer in the shape of a bottle (NYSE Magazine, 2005). Sales of both brands have soared since that change. The prime example of shape for beverages is the distinctive Coca-Cola bottle and the shape is one of the prime factors in warding off retail store brands of colas. Coca-Cola had been using a two-litre cylinder shaped bottle just like the store

brands' and when they switched to the uniquely shaped bottle they owned, Coca Cola's sales took off at the expense of their store-brand imitators.

There are theoretical reasons for the increased sales of the differentiated packages, which recently have been supported through FMRI research. In conceptualizing involvement Zaichkowsky (1986) hypothesized that differentiation within a product category creates involvement. When people are more involved with a brand they may prefer the brand or choose the brand without apparent cognitive reasons. Empirical evidence (Reimann, Neuhaus and Weber 2008) shows that differentiation by package design (or novel packages) significantly impacts reward anticipation and choice, as measured by the brain activity by FMRI. Therefore novel packaging actually increases activity in the emotional brain of consumers.

Shampoo bottles, perfume bottles, and deodorant bottles are but a few product categories where distinctively designed shapes lead to distinctive brand identity. Manufacturers of perfume put great effort into linking the distinctive shape of the perfume bottle to the brand name. Every single new fragrance has a new distinctly shaped bottle. This is a major identity and brand image factor in the perfume business. National shampoo brands may develop distinctively shaped bottles, but retail and knock-off competitors readily copy the shape of their packages. Big brands fight off imitators by constantly redoing and updating even their best selling brands, with few packages being the same for more than a year or two (Collins-Dodd and Zaichkowsky 1999).

Sometimes shape may not be enough due to the recycling of bottles. As an example, Budweiser was plagued by knockoffs in China because local brewers were refilling 'real' bottles. To counteract this practise, Budweiser started using expensive imported foil and technologically advanced heat sensitive labels, which turned red when cold. Therefore consumers could easily distinguish the real Budweiser beer from a knock-off (Business Week, 2005).

Product Benefit Descriptions and Unique Selling Points

Some brands may be able to claim a unique selling point (USP) in their brand name, for example 1000 Flushes (toilet bowl cleaner) or Five Minute Rice. Others may rely on image and marketing efforts to be different, for example Mike's Hard Lemonade or Obsession perfume. The benefits of a differentiation strategy, along with an extensive advertising campaign informing of the brand differentiation, should permit companies to set a higher price for their goods which they otherwise could not have achieved or maintained. For example, Di-Star Inc. started as a generic diamond manufacturer in 1978. In 1996 it changed its name to Hearts on Fire to match its branding program for a new diamond cut, it had trademarked, which refracted light into hearts and arrows. As a result of the unique cut and sales-force training program to teach customers about the differentiation, sales and profits for the company skyrocketed while industry sales only marginally increased (Heckman, 1999).

The suggestion is that if manufacturers can differentiate their product in appearance and protect the distinction through advertising and consumer perception, purchasers will buy the product even though the quality level is no higher than a non-differentiated product. Another benefit of product differentiation is that due to the advertising, purchase decisions are partly based on the advertising rather than on any active comparison on product attributes that the consumer makes among the different brands. The advertising should drive the purchase decision emphasizing the relative quality, source of the goods, and desired image. Being distinctive is not difficult, but it may be expensive to communicate the unique identity of the brand.

SUMMARY

The major areas to be aware of in creating distinctive brands are:

- 1) Brand names in a product class should be unique in terms of sound, pronunciation, spelling, and meaning. Different types of names may be more appropriate for either low or high involvement product categories. A company should use the brand name preceding the name of the product category to reinforce the brand name to customers. For example, the manufacturer should refer to Breton® crackers in advertising, not just Breton's.
- 2) The type of font used needs to be congruent with the image of the brand and product category. Subtle differences in font type can lead to increased perceptual fluency and more affect toward the product category.
- 3) Colour combinations are superior to single colours for brand identification. No more than three colours, and two dominate colours are best, otherwise no distinction is created. Furthermore, the protection of colour combinations in the courtroom is much easier than protection of a single colour.
- 4) Unique shapes of containers, packages, or products help to create a distinctive identity.

 These unique shapes might be best coupled, where possible, with distinctive coloured labels for identification.
- 5) A distinct identity through unique selling points and product benefit descriptions providing concrete information for consumers gives the consumer reasons for buying one brand over another. More cognitive reasoning is taking place and decisions are made for the consumer, especially for low involvement products.

The long term benefits of having a distinct identity within a product class include the ability to set higher prices for brands, e.g., Grey Goose Vodka or Hearts on Fire Diamonds. The consumer is willing to pay more to purchase a particular brand over other alternatives in the marketplace. The purchase decisions are partly based on an advertising halo rather than a direct

product attribute comparison. Furthermore, there is an increased association and identification to a particular product category.

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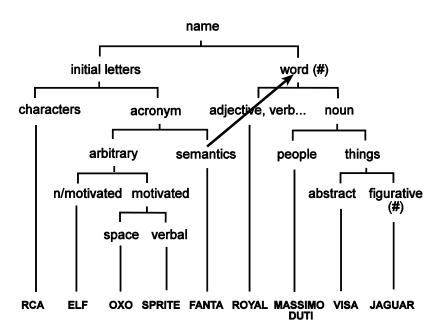
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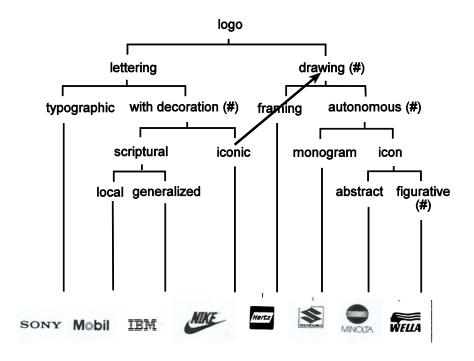
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Source: Figure 1 Decision tree for the brand name choice



Source: P. Lencastre and A.F. Beirao (2004), "The Figurativeness of Brand Signs: An Empirical Research on Names and Logos Memorization" in 3rd International Conference on Research in Advertising, Oslo, Norway, pp. 36-44.

Figure 2 Design tree for the brand logo choice



Source: P. Lencastre and A.F. Beirao (2004), "The Figurativeness of Brand Signs: An Empirical Research on Names and Logos Memorization" in 3rd International Conference on Research in Advertising, Oslo, Norway, pp. 36-44.

Exhibit One

Different Fonts and Brand Names for a cafe

RIO TROPICS THRSTES Juice n' Java Isle JoJo Juicer Daily Pit-Stop	PARADISE ISLAND SHORT STOP Thirsty Isle Columbia Classics Trango Isle	JAMMIN TIME! JAVA JUICER ROCK N' RIO PARADISE KEY GOURMIT ISLAND
Commuter Pit-Stop TASTE TROPICS JOURNEY STOP RIO CLASSICS DAILY BLAST JAMAICA JAVA JUICTED	RIO STOP JOURNEY OASIS Thirsty Tropics Java-Joogen Juic-1-Java	Deredisc Dit Stop BLVFRAGE TIME Jolly Juicer TEXAS KEYS Jazzy Tropics