



# 10 Proven Ways to Differentiate for Success

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## It all starts by thinking differently.

In today's highly competitive business environment and cluttered media space, it's tougher than ever to gain mind share and market share. Especially if you're a young, emerging brand.

Consumers are exposed to more than 2,500 promotional messages in a day. Thousands of brands are competing for their attention. "Me too" just won't cut it anywhere.

**So how do you stand out?** By being different (and we mean truly different) than all the other brands in your category.

Here are ten strategies for you to consider — ways you can think or act differently than other brands in your category — along with specific examples of brands that have earned distinction through differentiation. They're meant to provide inspiration.

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## Transform the customer experience.



A transformational brand is a company that looks at its industry — and how customers relate to it, differently. They are change agents in their respective categories. Transformational brands create new and better ways of doing things. They change the customer experience in some meaningful way. **Airbnb.com**, for example, has created an online community for people to list and book unique accommodations around the world. The company has grown an astounding 750% in a few short years and is now valued at over \$10 billion.

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## Create a completely new category.



**Zipcar** created a new car rental category. The membership-based, car sharing system provides an economical way for urban residents to easily grab a vehicle for a few hours at any time of the day, without the time-consuming red tape experienced with traditional car rental companies. Since 2000, the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based firm, which is now a subsidiary of Avis, has seen phenomenal growth and now has over 760,000 members in cities throughout the U.S. and Europe.

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## Market to a specific niche.



Niche marketing, also known as micromarketing, is aimed at a portion of the consumer population with some special characteristics. Niches don't exist. They are created — by identifying consumers' needs, wants and requirements currently not being addressed by other marketers. **Ties.com** is an Internet-based niche retailer that focuses exclusively on men's neckties and related products. Founded in 1998, the company now offers the world's most comprehensive selection of neckwear and was one of Inc. Magazine's 500 fastest growing private companies.

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## Become a thought leader.



The brand that comes to mind most readily is **IBM**, with their "solutions for a smarter planet." Over the years, IBM has morphed from a technology company to a technology services and consulting company. It helps other enterprises solve problems, maximize efficiencies and improve lives. Today their brand communications are very effective at showcasing how technology can make cities, schools, hospitals, you name it, work better. You can't get a more compelling value proposition than that.

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## Use media pre-emptively.



Consider some examples of companies that have used non-traditional media to create a lasting impression. **KLM Airlines** demonstrated a unique kind of comfort by having a man seated on an invisible chair in a shopping mall. **H&M**, the clothing retailer, used a street performance in San Francisco Union Square to showcase its new fashions. With inspired use of media like this, it's impossible for consumers not to notice — and remember.

# 6

## Deliver exceptional service.



A few years ago a Redditor's 89-year-old grandfather got snowed in with no food in the house. His daughter called several markets to see if any offered grocery delivery, but the only one that said they did was **Trader Joe's**. (They don't usually but were willing to help under the circumstances.) As the man's daughter placed an order, the customer representative on the phone recommended other items that would be good for her dad's low-sodium diet. And TJ's didn't charge her a dime for the delivery — or the groceries.

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## Embrace a social cause.



A recent survey cited in Entrepreneur Magazine found that the number of consumers who say they would switch from one brand to another if the other brand were associated with a good cause has climbed to 87 percent. Take **Yoplait's** 'Save Lids to Save Lives,' for example. The company donates 10 cents to Susan G. Komen Foundation for every Yoplait yogurt lid it receives from a customer. Started more than 15 years ago, this initiative has raised more than \$37 million dollars for breast cancer research.

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## Partner strategically with another brand.



Co-branding can be a valuable tool for creating an exclusive line of products. For more than two decades, the **Ford Motor Company** and **Eddie Bauer** have partnered to create a special series of SUVs. The Bronco II was the first vehicle in this collection. The famous designer Isaac Mizrahi created a line of women's ready-to-wear clothing exclusively for Target. And Betty Crocker produces a line of brownie mixes featuring Hershey's cocoa and chocolate syrup.

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## Develop a superior product.



The Greek company **Fage** introduced Greek yogurt to the U.S. in 1998. But it wasn't until **Chobani** founder, Hamdi Ulukaya, got into the game in 2005 that Greek yogurt really took off. After purchasing an abandoned yogurt plant in upstate New York, he spent the next two years rigorously testing hundreds of recipes to perfect the texture and taste before launching in a small Long Island grocery store in 2007. Today Greek yogurt has surpassed regular yogurt in popularity.

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## Make a product that's different.



One car brand that does a superior job of differentiation is **MINI**, made by its parent company, **BMW**. First introduced in 2001, at a time when gas was cheap and when large trucks and SUVs ruled the road, MINI created a small car for individuals that wanted a funky vehicle with personality. According to the first MINI advertising, the MINI was designed for "individuals who are not interested in following the crowd." And the brand has remained true to that mission.

# [ So how can we make you different? ]

The list of potential strategies for differentiating your brand may not be right for everyone. But they're a starting point — to help you think creatively and preemptively in your category.

Whatever path you take toward differentiation, make sure you stay true to your brand values, the attributes and aspirations that make you who are as a company. Differentiation begins and ends with focus: understanding where you've been and where you want to go.

It's also essential to take a close look at your customers and the reasons they're attracted to your brand. You want to make sure that any efforts to differentiate won't distance yourself from these loyal fans.

### **Need help differentiating? Contact us.**

Our mantra is "Be different." We specialize in helping companies find their point of difference and the best way to communicate it. Our team has worked with innovative brands that have truly differentiated themselves in their categories: American Express, Apple, Motorola and St. Regis Hotels, to name just a few.

## **PARTNERS & HARRISON**

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