

## Top Stories

'Why Johnny Can't Brand'

By DANIEL B. ENGLAND, Special correspondent

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Bill Schley, author of "Why Johnny Can't Brand," was the first speaker in a new series of business-related presentations at the Post Road offices of Capitol Photo. The series was established to celebrate Capitol Photo's 30th anniversary in business and in memory of Steven Madwed, the company founder, who died in 2003. "Steven was always very involved in the community and the community has been very good in supporting us," said Regina Madwed, who now runs Capitol Photo. "We just want to give something back." Fairfield First Selectman Kenneth Flatto was among those present.

Schley, a partner with Carl Nichols, Jr. at david, inc, an international brand consulting firm headquartered in Connecticut, began his talk with the assertion that America suffers from "an epidemic of misguided branding.

"Branding is not optional - it happens because people naturally form impressions, and that's what branding is and does. So you have a choice. Either you shape the brand or people will do it for you," Schley said.

He was critical of those who confuse entertainment with branding, citing Super Bowl ads as prime examples. "What does a flatulent horse have to do with getting you to drink beer?" he wondered, citing a Budweiser ad.

Instead, he advised, companies big or small need to identify their point of differentiation and then claim and own "that one central idea that you stand for.

"Branding and positioning require decisive commitment to a single path and that means risk," he said. "Amateurs are petrified not to list every possible feature and benefit in every communication, afraid they'll leave something on the table and miss some fraction of the market. But by saying everything, they heave themselves upon the clutter and end up saying nothing. Professionals know branding is about relentless focus on the most singular message, always."

### Being the best

Schley is a great believer in the number "one." "Nobody cares about number two. You need to be the best at something and that becomes your dominant selling idea," he told his audience at the anniversary celebration.

"Look, if Purdue could brand a chicken - you can brand anything."

"So the most fundamental rule of branding," he continued, "is to be number one at something, even if that is only a niche in a huge market."

While Schley had plenty of examples from large companies, he was mindful that many in the audience were small business owners. "One woman had a massage business," he said, "nothing special there. But because she had a Native American background, she called the business Native Palm with the slogan, 'My heritage is in my hands.' It worked."

Similarly, he said every town has its share of pizza places. But the one that has identified what he called "a dominant selling idea" he cited as a case study. It's Pepe's Brick Oven Pizza - "Real Brick Oven Taste in Every Slice" - which correctly branded itself and its product.

He recalled how Enterprise broke into an already overcrowded rental car market with a single idea: "We'll pick you up."

To achieve such focus, he said you must commit to a single dominant selling idea. He referred to his hobby of skydiving in gaining focus. "Believe me, when you're standing in the door of that plane you are focused. At some point you have to say, 'Go,' and you have to remember with the noise of the engines and rush of the air that 'no' sounds an awful lot like 'go' and 'I don't want to go' sounds like 'Geronimo.'"

In his book, "Why Johnny Can't Brand," which can be at once helpful and snarky, he details what he refers to as the 17 granite pages. "They're called the granite pages because they would have been chiseled in stone if it weren't for the shipping costs."

These range from Granite Page No. 1: "The Number One is Holy," through Granite Page No. 10: "People Like What They Understand," to No. 17: "Trust Isn't Everything. It's The Only Thing."

The book takes its own advice and is organized around one concept: the dominant selling idea, what he refers to as DSI. "A dominant selling idea is your motivating difference - the one difference that tips the scale in your direction versus all other at the moment of purchase."

#### Images and ideas

When someone asked about the use of images, Schley was enthusiastic. "Imagery can be powerful," he said. "That bullet being fired into a Master Lock says it all. You don't even need words."