Brand tags. A web-way of researching and understanding brands. Could it inform your organisation or client?

Noah Brier is a 'new media and marketing strategist' based in NYC. He recently launched a simple but intriguing website, called brandtags - www.brandtags.net/ .

Be warned, if you are interested in brands and how people think of them, it becomes compulsive!

However, its premise is insightful and convincing: it is "that a brand exists entirely in people's heads. Therefore, whatever it is they say a brand is, is what it is."

Brandtags invites users of the site to respond to logos from different companies (some US-centric, but many known to us Brits) and then to type in the first thing - a word or perhaps phrase - that comes into their head.

Very cleverly, the results are then displayed as a 'cloud': the relative size of the word reflects the number of times it has been typed in. "Neat", as I imagine Noah might say.

Whilst superficially just a bit of fun, the results are both revealing and potentially complex for brand owners.

Typically, the 'good' and the 'bad' impressions are there on the same page. For example, Dell's big words include 'computer', 'boring', 'cheap', 'crap', 'dude', 'hell', and 'laptop'. So there.

Lindt's biggest word is, unoriginally, 'chocolate'; but the second is more colloquial and useful to know: 'yummy'.

Brand owners who have spent time and money to convey a certain set of attributes, only to then see their brands discussed in such a forthright (and spontaneous) fashion, may sometimes be deflated. Or perhaps given a useful wake up call.

The research participants are self selecting of course - and thus perhaps not a representative sample (dude). (Evidence of this may be the words associated with Rupert Murdoch's US Fox TV News... 'bias', 'conservative', 'evil', 'liars', 'propaganda', 'right wing', (all of which makes something of a mockery of their positioning 'We report. You decide.')...oh, and 'Simpsons' (Fox TV's most famous and loved series).

The brandtags site is an important example of the way market research could go thanks to the web. It's a visual and involving research method which will inevitably become more commonplace as the web continues to develop. It is also a long way from the traditional questionnaire.

Attached fyi are samples of the words ascribed to a) Greenpeace and b) Harley-Davidson to give you a flavour of what to expect.

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W I L D D U C K