Observation Position Direction

UNIQUE CAPABILITIES

> "From the consumer's perspective, what are our brand's distinctive personality traits and how do they position us relative to our competitors...?"

BRAND IDENTITY MAPPING

BRAND AS METAPHOR

One of the defining traits of a strong brand – as compared to a good product – is the target customer's ability to conceptualize the brand as a metaphor:

- To see the brand as a type of person, or as a specific place.
- To imagine the brand as having a home, and as living in a specific type of neighborhood.
- To associate a brand with specific activities and the social interactions they typify – a dinner party, a beach vacation, a family meal, etc.

**BRAND IDENTITY: FEATURES OR CHARACTER?**

Automotive advertising often focuses on features, be they drive-train specs, leather seats, navigation systems, or some other aspects of the car's comfort and performance. But for the consumer, these features often are mere proof-points for something much larger and yet more elusive: the character of the brand.

PERSONALITY TRAITS AS THE DEFINING MEDIUM?

For this study, we dispensed with features altogether; we focused, instead, on personality characteristics – a lengthy list of adjectives that are commonly used to describe or characterize an array of contrasting personality types. The interviewing technique was relatively simple:

- We would expose an example of the marque's logo or hood ornament and then probe for familiarity with the brand (in the luxury end of the market, this is rarely an issue).
- We then would take the subject through the list of personality adjectives, asking how well – or poorly – each adjective described the brand in question.

The resulting map of the luxury import market was developed by analyzing the personality rating scores with a multi-dimensional scaling program.

THE IMPORT HIGH GROUP CIRCA 1992
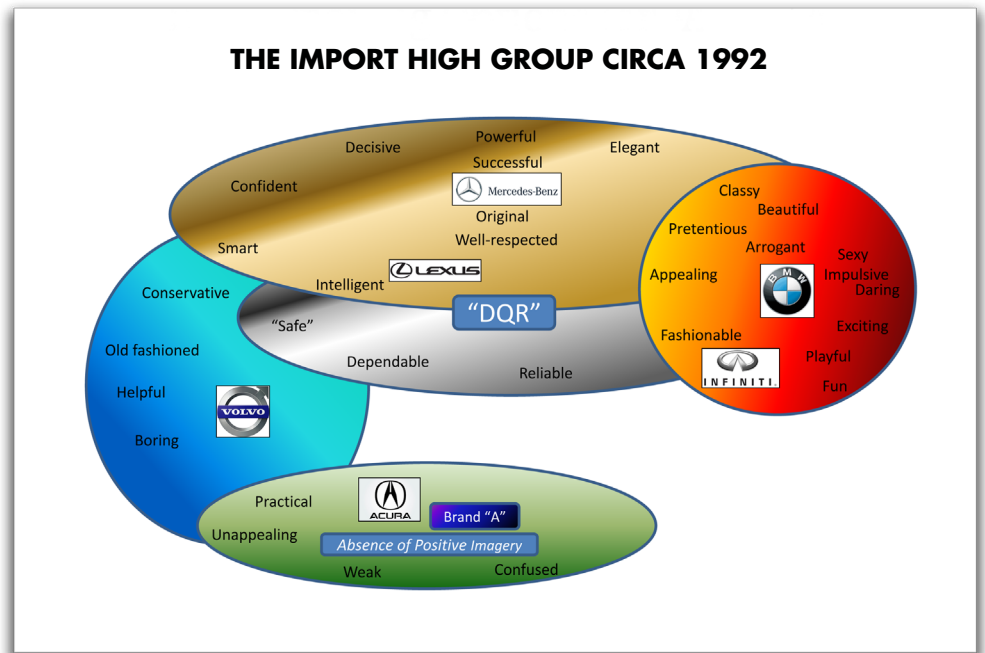
## MAPPIING THE CATEGORY: BRAND POSITIONING AND CATEGORY STRUCTURE

The first thing to note about this map is that it does not make reference to any automotive features – it is grounded exclusively on how luxury car buyers characterize the personality traits of the major luxury import brands.

Even so, the map demonstrates remarkable "face validity": the key brands are positioned exactly as one might expect, suspended within adjective halos that concisely capture the principal aspects of their brand's heritage:

- Mercedes-Benz is at the top of the heap and closely associated with power, success, elegance and originality.
- BMW is seen as sexy, impulsive, daring and arrogant.
- Volvo is taken to be safe and helpful, but also seen as conservative, old fashioned and boring.
- Among the relative new-comers, Lexus – riding a distinctive and highly-focused introductory ad campaign – had successfully invaded the luxury import high-ground and was clearly nipping at Mercedes' heels.
- By contrast, Infiniti was seen as potentially challenging BMW – but the confusing imagery of the introductory ad campaign left a trail of comparatively weak personality associations.
- Though longer in the market, Acura had yet to crystalize its considerable technical sophistication into a consistent, recognizable marketing image, a challenge many feel the marque faces to this day.

Finally, the brand character map serves as a "what-if" platform for considering potential positioning alternatives for Brand "A". Three of the many options are indicated on this map are:

- Address the safety issue head on and, in the process, enter Volvo's domain with a direct attack on their key positioning premise.
- Pursue Mercedes (and Lexus) into the luxury market high-ground of power, success and elegance.
- Change the narrative away from safety or perfection by emphasizing style, performance, and driver engagement.

REPOSITIONING OPTIONS FOR BRAND "A"
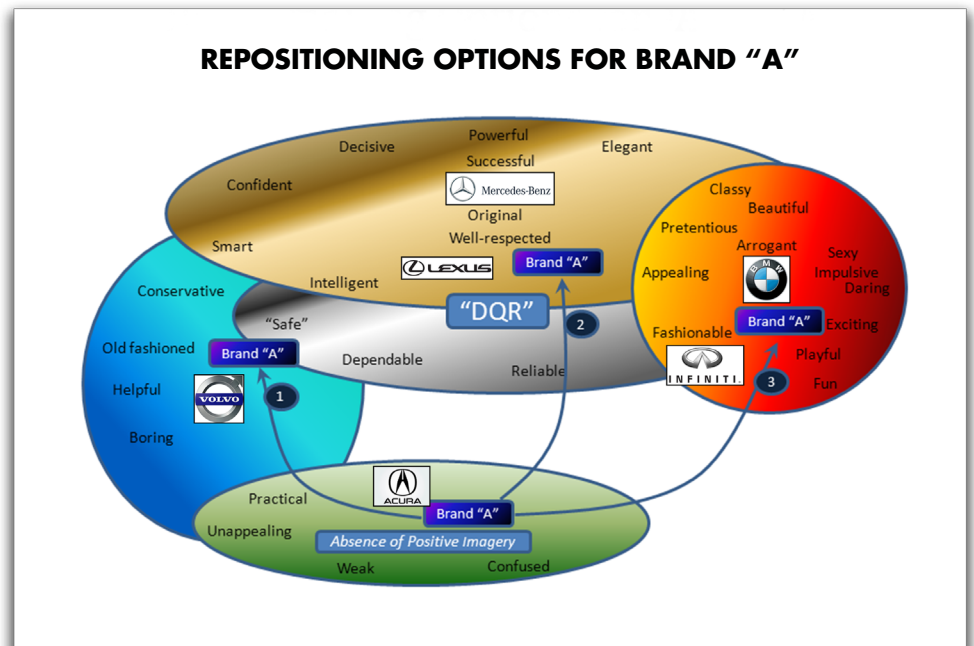
In conclusion, we feel that Brand Identity Mapping is a highly instructive approach for understanding how category participants view the principal brands available to them. It shows brand positioning from the perspective, and through the analogies, that consumers use when discussing and assessing their options.

Brand Identity Mapping is one of several unique capabilities we have developed at StarPoint Consulting. To learn more about this technique, its application and its interpretation, please feel to contact us directly. We look forward to reviewing your marketing challenges and then helping you determine whether Brand Identity Mapping – or one of our other innovative approaches – could contribute to your brand positioning efforts.

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