



**BRANDED** *ed*  
*Entertainment*

Dealmaking  
Strategies &  
Techniques for  
Industry Professionals

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# CHAPTER 1

## **Defining Branded Entertainment: What It Is and What It Is Not**

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Our media options have increased and evolved more in the last decade than over the last century. Think about that. We are living in times that call for constant change. Changes all around us are happening instantaneously. Changes are being experienced at a surface level but are impacting us collectively to the core. How we act, react, and consume mutates constantly.

How does constant change impact a brand? Today, a brand preserving the status quo is almost nonexistent. Brands are experiencing a process of evolution: riding a fast track and being forced into an express lane. The positioning

of a brand within a tumultuous world of options is the new challenge. Today, the labyrinth of media options that a brand must consider requires a new order for action. This new order redefines when it makes the most sense to be “in” and for how long. The big question is whether to live inside or outside relevant content (yes, inside content that has been created with the brand in mind). The informed answer to that question hinges on having an understanding of Branded Entertainment (BE)—knowing what it is and what it is not.

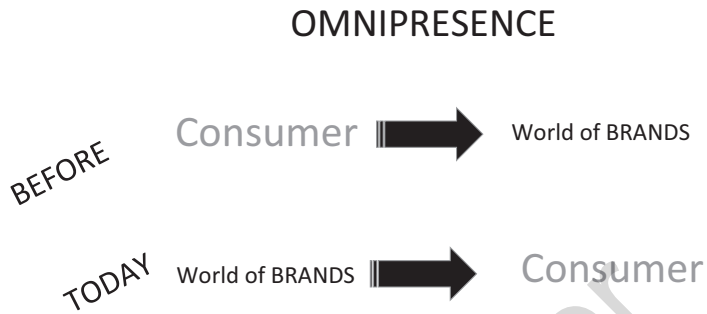
## WHAT BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT IS

### Branded Entertainment Is a Solution to an Evolution

The evolution of our media options has revolutionized the way we view entertainment. Viewers want it all *now* and are no longer willing to wait—the immediate self-gratification syndrome. This syndrome can also be seen in the world of brands. Brands continuously evolve, faster than ever before, while more brands are coming into the market to compete. With so many options available at only a glance, consumers do not want to wait for results. If a brand does not deliver its promise on the spot, the brand can be immediately replaced—with no remorse.

Brand “doctors” now have to rethink ways to evolve along with technology. Media evolution does not only mean having more options to choose from—media evolution also means creating ways to be quick and react in a blink before being moved out of the game. Brands now understand this.

As the playing field evolves, messages to consumers need to be more refined and emotionally engaging. The delivery



**Figure 1.1.** *Omnipresence*—the new keyword for a brand.

of a brand needs to be more personal. The delivery has to have an emotional rhythm that speaks to consumers. A more creative way to do this has to be in the works. New, creative delivery methods are to brands like cement is to a foundation. Not reacting to this new (marketing) world order exposes brand managers and networks alike to losing consumers' attention.

The consequences of slow evolution are simply concluded in one fact: consumers are less passive and more demanding regarding what suits their personal needs. A consumer no longer travels to content. Content must travel to the consumer. Therefore, *omnipresence* is the new keyword for a brand (Figure 1.1). A brand no longer holds center stage: it fluidly finds its way inside the social media world of consumers; it becomes part of a series drama; it is part of a song consumers cannot keep out of their heads.



**Figure 1.2.** Create outstanding branding content by cultivating brand participation and creative content simultaneously.

### **Branded Entertainment Stems from a Seed ... Timing Is Everything**

When we think about marrying content with a brand, we rarely wonder who came to the party first. Was it an idea for content that came first and the brand was found later? Or was it the brand that was looking to expand into the content? Some would ask: why does that even matter? The truth is it does matter because how you start a creative process determines whether you finish it successfully. The key to creating outstanding branding content is to cultivate the brand and the content simultaneously (Figure 1.2).

There is a certain similarity in pairing branding with content creation to the germination of a tree sprouted from a seed. In creating content, the idea for the content (assuming there is a need) is the “seed” in this process. This seed should be grafted in its infancy to the story of a brand. Here, “infancy” is not the first creative impulse or the launch of a narrative arc. It is the moment when an idea that may potentially be targeted for a branded deal enters the picture. The key is to identify the moment and immediately begin looking for brands to partner with rather than to leave the

brand out as a placeholder to be filled later. Because each brand has a story to be told, the unfolding of the story has to happen along with the development of the idea. To create a successful foundation for Branded Entertainment, the story of the brand within the content needs to unfold organically and alongside the content itself—the story must feel natural to the consumer; otherwise the message risks being ignored.

This creative mesh must continue refining itself and serving as the stage where the brand's story will live. The brand can then be like an actual character within the content: it has a purpose, a message, and a destination. The idea can then transform into engaging content as the development process unfolds. The trick is that both the content and the brand need to be set on "START" about the same time.

The opposite of this would be for a brand to participate in or be inserted into some content already in existence. At this point, most likely the brand would merely select from a branch of existing options within the content. Because the content is already fully formed, flexibility is often limited and as a result, a proper fit between brand and content is rare. We see this in sponsorship deals in which the brand associates with the content at the end of its creation, but the content did not have the brand in mind from its inception. The content may have been brought to you by a fine product, but the association between the two usually is not strong enough to leave a lasting impression. Ultimately this weakness will fail both the brand and the content. The failure, however, is more significant for the brand than for the content creators.

Some of the best examples of failing to mesh the brand and content from the beginning concern mass consumption brands. These brands often have tried to create new content with no "star power" or at times have pushed a product based



**Figure 1.3.** The soft-sell strategy: from the “ignition point,” simultaneously develop Branded Entertainment content united with the brand without being obvious.

on a hard-sell approach instead of a soft sell—a sure recipe for disaster. Plucking product within content can be a serious turn off. In the past, cleaning product brands have fallen into this trap. Because their target is to reach a range of consumers as wide and vast as possible, some consumer cleaning product brands (due to their frequency of use and price point) must align with distributors and producers who can make outstanding popular and engaging content and not settle for anything less. If star power can be added to the mix, then instant recognition and an emotional connection are more attainable. Instead, too often, mass consumption brands go for the hard sell by making the product and its consumption too obvious (in your face) where it feels unnatural.

Branded Entertainment means content needs to be united to the brand from the “ignition point,” at the same time, without being obvious (Figure 1.3). This technique is a soft sell strategy. Nowadays, brands are around only for short periods of time. Some even say their time on the shelf is “predestined.” Others say “mutate often” in order to survive.

Destiny, however, can be altered when we understand how to become part of a new game. Be an agent of change, not of extinction. New formulas of brand + content exist. More and more they need to be the *new formula* inside a media strategy.

**A word of caution:** Any type of branded content to be created, short- or long-form, must first and foremost fulfill a gap, a visible need in the viewers' world. Consider this concept to be a "universal law" in the world of Branded Entertainment. Once the new content finds a place within the landscape of consumers, viewers will tend to multiply awareness to others faster than any marketing campaign could. In other words, when consumers feel heard and a brand comes in to fulfill a dream, a wish, or an emotional engagement for a viewer, the viewer will become a carrier of the brand's message. This scenario can be considered to be branded content success.

Remember the movie *You've Got Mail*? Who doesn't remember that this flick jump-started the process of online dating? It brought home the concept of intertwining emotions with good marketing. Even the title was a homerun, linking the brand's core message to a personal sensation evoked in any consumer.

### **Branded Entertainment Is an Independent Island**

Branded Entertainment deals must live in a "Switzerland" of media and brands—the nature of being neutral to all parties no matter what. Earlier the idea of branded content was compared to a seedling that turns into the soul or essence of



a project. If this idea holds true by delivering to viewers what they want while the brand is properly represented, then the deal will be healthy and have a strong foundation for success. This strong foundation needs to grow on independent ground, meaning that the idea ultimately brings together the pillars of media: agencies, networks/media outlets, and producers. The goal of these “newborn” deals, known as Branded Entertainment deals, is to support business inside this trinity and to encourage new ways to assemble deals among them: *freedom with independence!*

What happens if this freedom and independence are not part of the foundation? What happens if instead an idea is born from:

- Pressure to make cheaper content
- Pressure to generate new business because of a shrinking 30-second advertisement world
- A lack of funding to get an idea sold

In these situations, the seedling idea may grow fast, but it may also perish at the first sign of a storm or a drought. What we truly seek in Branded Entertainment is longevity for content that now nurtures a brand inside it. Branded Entertainment is about allowing, not constricting. When freedom is allowed, chances are the lifespan of a concept will last more than a season.

### **Branded Entertainment = Emotional Connection**

Who really knows what Branded Entertainment is? One clue to finding useful sources of information on the subject is to ask experts. These “experts” usually understand what it means to be emotionally connected to something.

Establishing an emotional connection is a goal in itself. When a brand reaches a point that is intertwined to consumers' emotions, we know it has "arrived."

The same principle applies to content. When a show, a series, or a character inhabits the lives of viewers and is recalled or identified as part of who they are, that is when we know a connection has been made.

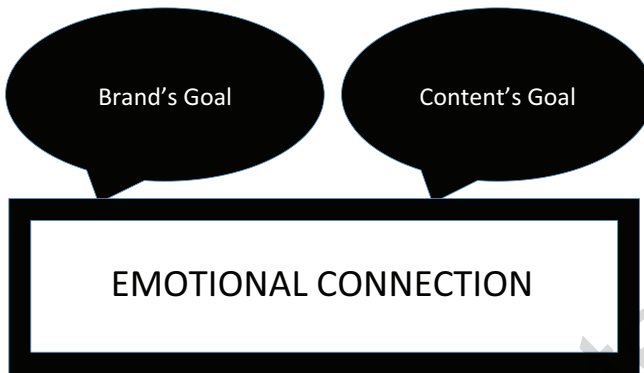
Many in this business ask: how long does it take for a brand to see results in a Branded Entertainment deal? Usually a brand has to execute a full "first season" of content on the air to properly interpret the experience of consumers and the type of emotional attachment felt about the newly created Branded Entertainment content. Basically, after a full season has aired, a brand can start to measure results.

What Branded Entertainment seeks is a long-term emotional connection. If the brand is *in*, then the mission is accomplished. An *in-love* experience, better known as an "emotional bond," creates a monogamous relationship. In these days of "intense affairs," failing to reach monogamous status is a luxury brand managers cannot afford (Figure 1.4).

## **WHAT BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT IS NOT**

### **Branded Entertainment Is Not Product Placement**

To understand Branded Entertainment, product placement, what it is and how it came to be, needs further explanation. The origins of product placement date back to the first days of television. Back then, networks were looking to find solutions for integrating brands that wanted in on the business of reaching the masses. In return, these brands offered cash to fund the big shows.



**Figure 1.4.** Branded Entertainment seeks an emotional connection between the content and the brand that can lead to a long-term “monogamous” relationship.

Long before the idea to generate 30-second commercials came to be, the networks found ways to integrate brands “inside” TV shows. A brand was placed inside the show in a static form. The logo and packaging of the product were visible to viewers who then became exposed and aware of the existence of that brand.

In more advanced examples, brand jingles were catchy enough that they played a role in the euphoria of a TV program audience. Back then, many shows were taped in front of live audiences. Jingles were turned into useful tools to create collective excitement for a network show, thus bringing a brand to recognition. It did not matter if the brand shared any relevance to the content of the show. Detergents were some of the first brands that took advantage of this boom and were the origin of the term “soap operas.”

Later, the emergence of commercials gave birth to the industry of advertising. Now brands could take time to tell

their stories, their way, in a manner that captivated the consumer. After all, the thinking was why have partial retention from viewers *inside* a show when the brand could have full retention *in between* shows?

And so it was. The story continued to evolve with the two industries living side-by-side, growing and making money off each other for over a half century until technology opened the gateway for viewers to be more entertained with fewer interruptions.

With a shrinking viewer pie, lower ratings, and more options for niche channels to choose from, the networks decided to invite big brands into a show to be a partner from within. Brands were willing to put bigger dollars on the table if their media buy was enhanced by some form of brand presence within the content. This partnering was more like an association. Today most people know this type of association as *product placement*—invited back into the fold as a quick response to the diminishing commercial ad viewing patterns.

How, then, is Branded Entertainment differentiated from what we know product placement to be? Can a clear definition distinguishing the two be created? Yes, with three words: *alive*, *organic*, and *seamless* (Figure 1.5).

**Alive.** In a Branded Entertainment model, a brand no longer has a passive status. What makes a brand “alive” are its attributes coming to life within the content, sometimes to the extent of ignoring the brand’s name in its entirety. Whatever that brand’s story stands for, it stands side-by-side and on equal grounds with the content itself. Its “activation in motion” is what makes a brand alive. All this means activating a brand’s purpose and intertwining with the characters and the plot of the content in a way that makes sense,

BRANDED  
ENTERTAINMENT

ALIVE  
ORGANIC  
SEAMLESS

**Figure 1.5.** Branded Entertainment is differentiated from product placement by three words: alive, organic, and seamless.

entertains, and remains true to all. For example, a GPS from a known automotive brand ends up resolving the mystery of a murder within a plot. With no obvious mention of the car brand or a visual shot of the car's logo, the functionality of the GPS creates an immediate emotional engagement for the viewer and the brand's best use of its attributes.

**Organic.** The term “organic” often signifies “no chemical additives.” In the Branded Entertainment industry, “organic” means the brand and the content created are a “natural marriage,” enhancing the nature of power and not force. When something is created with the purpose to unite, power is created. When two things are put together, just because they need to be together, a forceful “marriage” is made. This difference of power versus force is real and makes a difference between short-lived and long-lived deals. In a natural marriage, the content and the brand are part of the same creation. The relationship cannot feel unnatural, forced, or tainted.

The viewer should see and get the message without the message seeming forced in any way. For example, an Android phone becomes the carrier of clues in a reality competition. Each clue can be further figured out by the best use of this mobile device's features.

*Seamless.* When the lines become truly blurred, and defragmenting the brand from the story is impossible, only then can the term “seamless” be applied. Content creators can only succeed in attaining “seamless” when they understand the brand initiatives at a visceral level and have made them part of the content's DNA. As simple as these words sound, time is required to decode the purpose and attributes of a brand. Only when the purpose and the attributes of a brand are understood can content be created with an integrated “chip” that will incorporate these moments seamlessly so the brand and the show seem like one. For example, a home improvement show features some smart ways to remodel a home. The tools and products used in the show are all about “ease of use.” This is the same message the particular home improvement retailer's brand represents. To a viewer, remodeling in simple, smart ways and going to this do-it-yourself retailer to execute an idea seem like one and the same.

### **Branded Entertainment Is Not the “Pac-Man” of the 30-Second Commercial World**

This concept is probably one of the most controversial and argued points in the multimedia industry. A media strategy aims to expose key messages to a particular audience in a particular frequency of time. The strategy embeds a goal and seeks quantitative results. Most of the confusion derives from the flawed understanding that media and

Branded Entertainment work against each other in a zero-sum dynamic.

This erroneous belief stems primarily from budgetary reasons. When monies are taken away from media to be allocated to a branded solution, many consider it to be a cannibalistic decision and fail to see its complimentary value, sort of like Pac-Man eating all the pellets in the video game.

Nowadays it is more accurate to say that budgets are a “work in progress.” At this competitive stage of brands and survival, we are starting to see “vanguardist” brands, or brands at the forefront of the industry, separate their dollars to supply both initiatives: media and entertainment solutions. The key here is to educate the top decision makers. At the brand level, decision makers must clearly understand that a media buy with integrations inside content is a combination intended to enhance the brand experience to the consumer so that brand managers in turn can formulate ways to apply both strategies to execute them as an undivided solution.

Branded Entertainment is more subtle than media. Its compounding effects, when done properly, can only enhance and increase the overall value of a media strategy. Branded Entertainment must be seen as a complement to a media strategy, not as a hungry force unleashed to devour the advertising industry.

### **A Branded Entertainment Solution Is Not a Sub of the Whole—It Is the Whole**

Broadcasters, cable networks, and social media are all looking to take a bigger piece of the pie—the viewers’ attention pie. Unfortunately, viewing patterns are not growing as fast as new options. Branded Entertainment is mistakenly seen as

a solution born to live under soon-to-be-obsolete strategies. Branded Entertainment is not viewed in its totality, so let's review it from a media outlet perspective.

When a network proposes the creation of a new sub-internal division called *Client Solutions*, the solutions are often compromised by internal agendas born from the traditional ad sales and programming departments. The motive is to attract those dollars (now endangered, according to them) back home where they belong. This is not a client-focused strategy—what brands and clients are looking for on a long-term basis.

The problem here is that creative measures are just merely tactics to attach existing content to certain brands with the only true goal being to bring in more ad revenue. This attachment is forced and will be unconsciously rejected by consumers.

The result is a short-term sale. Clients may buy into it for one cycle, but the short lifespan of these ideas comes to a quick end when not properly executed. The result is only a short-term win that does not live up to expectations in a second cycle or season.

This approach remains questionable and short sighted when looked at from the point of view of a traditional ad agency. Why? It starts with the motive.

Ad agencies are a breed in constant mutation. As their core and traditional business model continues to diminish, the idea to bring in entertaining content in the form of a “disguised ad” seems to be a quick solution for survival. In addition, the brands that comprise the agency's roster of clients are less bound by the sort of loyalty that once held those relationships in place. This situation is shrinking ad and creative groups, forcing them to become more fragmented,



more competitive, and ultimately causing their agencies to operate in survival mode. The best long-term business decisions are rarely made when survival is at stake.

Problems arise when a traditional ad agency shortcuts a desperately needed creative process and instead only uses an elongated version of the story of a traditional commercial. Even worse, using this approach can kill an idea before it is born to protect the traditional business model, which is currently in intensive care.

The result? A train headed for a wreck. Practices on Branded Entertainment solutions need to be in the new “book” for these agencies. Agencies are still quite valuable to the new process of developing content for brands.

### **Branded Entertainment Is Not a Longer Version of a 30-Second Ad Campaign**

Branded Entertainment content is created with the intention of *complementing* the efforts of an ad media campaign. The word “complementing,” however, does not mean “to lengthen what already exists.” An ad campaign serves a very specific purpose: it exists to convey a very particular message about a brand and its attributes. Every angle of creativity for the ad campaign only exists to support the effective delivery of that message.

Any attempt to transplant that creativity into entertainment content deflates the impact and can even turn consumers off. Once they feel the sale is “obvious,” the results for a brand could be fatal. Ad agencies and creative shops must be vigilant to not interfere with a complementary idea that serves as an enhancer to an already existing media effort.

## **BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT MUST UNDERSTAND FIRST WHAT MEDIA SEEKS TO ACCOMPLISH**

Emotional engagement is the goal.

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**Figure 1.6.** Emotional engagement is the goal of Branded Entertainment concepts.

Branded Entertainment content must first seek to understand what the media part of a deal wants to accomplish. Then, the creative content should incorporate that understanding into an entirely different creative product that suits a bigger entertainment-driven goal. Emotional engagement is the goal for Branded Entertainment concepts (Figure 1.6).

### **WHY BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT NOW?**

Technological advances are now part of the overall restructuring formula of media consumption. Media outlets can truly identify who and what viewers are consuming. So there is no more guessing and no more wasting of media dollars on consumers who are not a target. Microscopically speaking, brand leaders and networks now know which consumer is the real buying consumer. Ad time between programs is becoming increasingly less relevant to viewers, especially

when new technologies offer an ideal alternative: downloading, fast forwarding, and recording content. In other words, consumers now view content on their own terms when they want it. Ads are being ignored.

Continuous development in technology has given all of the power to consumers. If they don't have to wait, they won't. Immediate gratification is what consumers look for; the tables have turned. Once upon a time, consumers had to look for content. Now content has to travel to consumers. So where does that leave all the media campaigns aimed at living in the "in between-program" world?

Just as technology has evolved in stages, so will brand media campaigns have to alter their basic form and expression, mutating inside a new world of consumerism. This is why *the now* is *now*. The future is here—all blends, all flows as one (or maybe we are going back to the old ways when TV started and brands were the platform stage for content and content would have not existed without brands).

Branded Entertainment's time is *now* because we are dealing with a compounding reality that is not going away. Viewers have more choices of content and more platforms for viewing this content than ever before. Branded Entertainment creates a "back-door solution" to the leaking effect brands are experiencing in regard to the numbers of eyeballs dropping out of mass platforms.

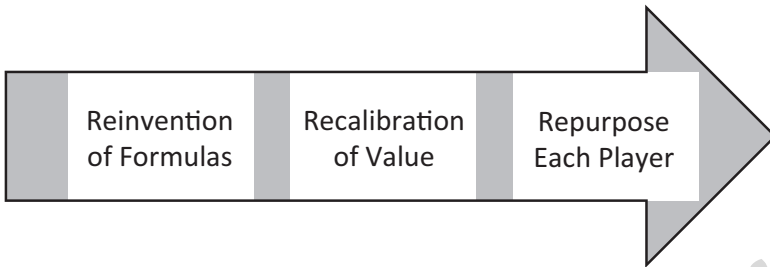
All of the traditional cost-per-thousand investment models are in need of drastic change. The solution does not come out of lowering the price as the eyeball levels equally drop. The emergence of a new solution would recalibrate the investment ratio of brand versus airtime. It would now measure the direct impact a brand has on viewers as the brand is brought to life within engaging content that viewers

cannot live without. This emergence of a new business model invokes the presence of an effective Branded Entertainment team inclusive of agencies and media outlets. (We will explore later how the contribution of an effective, inclusive Branded Entertainment team can support the process without any of the players taking possession of the entire formula.)

### **WHY NOT IMPLEMENT BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT “DOWN THE ROAD?”**

The recent economic downturn has convinced many companies that embracing “anorexia” is a “safe play.” In doing so, the thinking of these companies is that by cutting personnel, the savings generated will lead them out of the present tension. The gamble here is that cutting resources previously charged with finding innovative ways to reach consumers will not result in their brands losing what they had already gained in better times. Unfortunately for many companies, the truth is that by standing still these companies are losing ground. History shows that in times of uncertainty and economic crisis, innovative breakthroughs have occurred time and time again. Necessity is truly the mother of invention. When the status quo gets broken, it opens up a door of opportunity where rebuilding and rethinking are possible and new growth can emerge. By rethinking the possibilities, it is then possible to use tough times to adapt and reformulate new strategies and make them the new standard. This is where Branded Entertainment deals come into the picture. *Important:* Remain vigilant against “corporate anorexia” that leads us all down a path of self-annihilation.

The next wave of evolution is the reinvention of formulas, the recalibration of value, and the repurposing of each player



**Figure 1.7.** The next wave of evolution in Branded Entertainment: working together to reinvent the formulas, recalibrate the values, repurpose the roles of players in the media/consumer game, and to reach new goal and skill levels.

in the media/consumer game (Figure 1.7). We all can manage to stay in the game—by playing together—but our goals and skills need to reach new levels.

Raising skillsets to new levels and reformulating the value of a business are not always the hardest parts of this process. Usually, what takes up more time and effort is the resistance to change. It seems like we are all born with resistance—almost as if resistance is a natural human condition. Corporations behave very much like humans. They like formulas because formulas create processes and systems. They enjoy implementing formulas because little thinking is required. So, when the formulas have to be recalibrated or even recreated, people will automatically be impacted negatively by this shift. In some way, our natural resistance opposes the way to change.

Too much too soon has already happened all around us. No one can deny the tremendous impact technology has had on all of us over the last decade. Even our brains have been

reprogrammed to think differently because our way of processing information has been in a constant state of flux. This is nature's way of letting us know nothing ever stays the same.

Change is now here. There is no point in delaying the obvious. By trying to keep serving an old, dying system, more threat will come out of attempting to survive than accepting change itself. Once this concept is accepted, the *new* will start to emerge and *new ways* will begin to surface, collectively impacting industry and establishing a new standard. Do not be paralyzed by fear. Stop hiding under the excuse of a weak economy. Realize that a new paradigm is always an opportunity for new roles and titles to emerge. New leaders will rise. Be a leader in Branded Entertainment. Do not fight Branded Entertainment just because it is new. Embrace it. Enjoy being out of your comfort zone. Soon enough, you will feel comfortable again.



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