

What's Your Favorite Non-Bank Brand? - ABA Bank Marketing



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Most folks think about brand without even realizing it. We just know what we like, and once we know where to find it, we keep coming back for more.

So building a great bank brand is just a matter of knowing what people like, and providing it consistently. Sounds easy, right? Wrong. How many people do you know who actually *like* doing their banking chores? We talk about improving the online and mobile experience—and enriching the in-person relationships at the branches—and we should. Both are critically important goals. But in the end, these efforts are mostly about ameliorating pain points.

Can we imagine something better? Is there a way to get consumers actively excited about banking? How do non-bank brands do it?

Let's ask the experts.

Sadly, adding exclamation points to your marketing copy isn't enough to excite the customer. As Tom Hersberger president and CEO of [Cross Financial Group](#) and a faculty member at the [ABA Bank Marketing School](#), tells us, "A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is—it's what the consumers tell each other it is."

Brand experts are consumers too—and when they see something that works, they pay attention. So we decided to ask some of our esteemed brand pros (and bankers with excellent taste) about their favorite non-bank brands. Our hope was that by looking at what works outside the realm of financial services, we'd see themes emerge that may apply to banks in surprising ways.

So pull up a chair, kick your shoes off, and chew on these nine big ideas that came up when bank marketers talked about their favorite brands. You may learn as much about yourself as you do about branding.

1. We're impressed by companies that shatter paradigms and pioneer watershed change.

Chris Nichols, chief strategy officer, [CenterState Bank](#): My favorite brand, by far, is Tesla. They have done something that few other brands ever have. Not only have they convinced me to identify with their product, but

they have changed how I think about a major factor in my life that I had previously never thought about. I went from a consumer that loved the 8-cylinder engine to hating the inefficiencies of a combustion engine. Tesla made me rethink, and ultimately change my views on transportation, energy, a networked auto and the environment. I often point out that Tesla did all this with very little relative marketing expenditure. They did this with just a fantastically intelligent product.

2. We want someone to have our back when things go wrong.

Tom Hershberger: One of my favorite non-bank brands is [Speck](#) smartphone cases because the quality of their product is excellent and they back up their product warranty with wonderful support and rapid replacement. I have the same affection for Columbia Footwear for the same reason. I have purchased products from both companies, in part, because of their warranties, and in both cases they came through for me when there was a product failure during usage. The price of the products was not an important consideration. When I am making a purchase decision, trust is extremely important. Product quality and warranties help take the risk out of a decision and reinforce the trust you have in the brand. When they deliver on their promises when you have a problem—or as a result of a product failure—the trust level can be elevated even higher. When you know they have your back, it's much easier to make the purchase decision.

Dan Wallace, SVP, [Austin Atlantic Capital](#): My favorite brand is LL Bean. The quality of their products is superior to the competition and priced well. In addition, they stand behind the brand for the life of the product with a hassle-free return policy that never ends. For a company that has grown so large, they still feel like a family run business, which is rare nowadays.

Debbie Wood, general manager, [Jack Henry & Assoc](#): Hands down, American Express (although technically I guess we could still call them a bank brand). When my purse was stolen while I was out of town, they wowed me with amazing personalized service. They offered to get my car and home rekeyed, asked if they could send me cash, offered to help get my prescriptions refilled, and sent a replacement card in under 24 hours. Now over 25 years later, I happily pay the fee every year.

3. We crave comfort, consistency, and convenience.

Mike Sells, owner/CEO, the [Sells Agency](#): My favorite non-bank brand is QuikTrip—the Tulsa-based chain of convenience stores—because of the way they push past what are considered the “ordinary rules” of their industry. They were one of the first convenience store chains to be open 24-hours; they are re-defining “convenience store food” with high-quality, fresh offerings, and they are proving that you can hire millennials (85% of their workforce) and motivate them to provide outstanding customer service. Unfortunately for me QT hasn't expanded into my home state, but they are in many areas that I frequently travel and I will go out of my way to get to a QT.

Cassandra Giovanni, marketing project leader, [Savings Institute Bank & Trust](#): My favorite brand would have to be Starbucks. There's just something about a warm cup of fancy coffee on a Saturday morning that makes the week ahead a little bit easier—because I'm looking forward to my next Starbucks' treat. I think the brand has done a great job being cool and hip, which is probably why I tried my first Starbucks, but it's the quality of the product that keeps me coming back. Every time I get a Starbucks coffee it's on point—and as someone who can't have caffeine I'm confident they'll get my drink right, which is super important to me.

4. We're humans, and we respond to human appeal.

Jim Gibbons, president, [Gibbons-Peck Marketing Communication](#): I really like Trader Joe's. They have this uncanny way of combining organic, healthy, unusual, and a great price strategy. Their store brands are awesome (I particularly like the sugar-free chocolate-covered Almonds, frozen pie crusts, and Italian Roast coffee). And their people strategy is just INSANE. How do they find that army of high-energy, people-loving lunatics, with great comic timing?

Also, if I may...[Saddleback Leather](#). They are great at working a business model that merges manufacturing and distribution. Their positioning is very personal and story-oriented. Each piece has a story. And then, the overall brand has a great quality story. All wrapped around romance of the owners, Dave and Suzette and their family. But the marketing technology (web presence, use of video, email marketing, lead nurturing, and re-targeting) delivers all this, consistently, to the target audience (me), in a technically advanced but nonintrusive way.

Finally (sorry), the Pittsburgh Steelers. They have a very consistent, yet simple, brand pallet and trade dress. They have strong, blue-collar brand values (they only have their logo on one side of their helmet, to save money, and to honor their tradition). They have a "product tradition" of building from within, coaching players up, fielding effective teams with relatively few high-priced superstars, making something out of nothing. And they may be the best brand in the world at building a brand community—Steeler Nation—a fan base that is informed, opinionated, and ubiquitous (they tend to take over stadiums as far away as San Diego and Seattle, because they are everywhere). The team represents the gritty-survivor quality of the city.

5. We're amazed by one customer-centric juggernaut in particular.

Tim Pannell, president and CEO, [Financial Marketing Solutions](#): Amazon is my favorite because they have designed the entire customer experience starting with the customer and working back to the balance sheet (the opposite of most banks). They have all the products you need, an easy interface, one-touch purchasing, recommendations based upon predictive modeling of historical data, and they are rated the number one customer experience company in the United States.

John Tschohl, president, [Service Quality Institute](#): I believe Amazon delivers the best customer service in the world. They have a better grasp of speed than any other firm in the world. The customer experience is consistently a "10." They are easy to do business with. 24/7. Technology is built to add a customer experience and speed. Price is the best you can get. When they make a mistake, everyone understands service recovery. Everyone is empowered. If you go to *contact us* and ask them to call you they will call in ONE SECOND. They have it all. Speed, price, convenience.

6. ...And if we ever did like the mall, we don't anymore. Making a trip to a brick-and-mortar store better pay off big.

Mike Mooney, sales leader, [Reverse Mortgage Funding](#): My favorite brand is Amazon because of their product variety, pricing, and customer service, which allow me to be efficient and avoid long trips to the dreaded shopping mall. I appreciate their customer service and look forward to the smiling boxes that magically show up at my door from the UPS driver...I bet most people don't want to go to the bank branch either.

Joe Sullivan, CEO, [Market Insights](#): I drive up I-5 and pass by the REI store on my way home and get excited just seeing the outside of the store. They speak to the aspiring outdoorsy guy I want to be who moved here from Chicago seven years ago.

The experience of walking from the parking garage to the front entrance is literally, a hike through nature, with this elaborate set of trails through a heavily wooded path...The place is filled with passionate people, who get geeked out (a Seattle term) about technology, clothing, ski boots, and canoes. And they will take you to this huge wall, and show you this huge trail map, and tell you the best hike to take in Washington, or in Seattle proper. In a nutshell, they epitomize the idea of hiring people who are 1000% passionate about what they do.

Siya Vansia, VP, Marketing, [ConnectOne Bank](#): My favorite brand is [Warby Parker](#), an eyewear company that disrupted the then-monopolized industry of eyewear...while also being a socially conscious business. They started as an online-based company, developing a unique client experience around glasses through digital channels, and then expanded to brick and mortar. I think their brand really aligns with what they are trying to accomplish, and it's clear that they are obsessively meticulous about creating a consistent, cohesive experience, both online and off. Their goal is to make buying glasses fun, easy and convenient while also giving back—and this is built into their brand and into every channel. They've gone beyond just being an eyewear company, and really built a lifestyle brand. For example, they've integrated literature into their brand—their stores are lined with books, they email recommendations based on your tastes, and many of their glasses are even named after popular literary characters.

7. We're warming up to the idea of conscientious consumption.

Joe Sullivan: I need to say Whole Foods Market. Why? They have a mission. I believe in healthy living and eating. I believe in sustainability. And they are consistent with my values. I love to go to the store for the experience—to try foods, learn about recipes, and feel like I am around people who think and feel like I do. When I shop at Whole Foods I feel like I am being good to my body, my soul and the planet.

Randy Schultz, VP, [Weber Marketing Group](#): I'd have to say one of my new favorite brands is [LSTN](#). They are a stereo headphone company (headphones made out of real wood) who has taken the buy one/give one initiative to the same level as Tom's, with a twist. So far the LSTN team has been able to travel around the world with Starkey Hearing Foundation to help over 20,000 people hear in the U.S., Peru, Kenya, Uganda, China, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. You see, when you buy a pair of headphones from them, they donate a hearing aid to people with hearing loss and impairment. I see absolutely no reason we, as financial institutions in this country can't make that same kind of impact by pairing with good businesses...to do good.

8. When a product isn't very sexy, elegant design goes a long way toward capturing our attention.

Josh Mabus, president, [Mabus Agency](#): Shell Oil is one of my favorite brands for several reasons. First, as a parity brand, it stands out visually among its competitors. The “pecten” logo is highly visible, simple and recognizable. When you see a glowing Shell sign, you can generally rest assured that a visit will yield quality fuel, a pleasant experience and clean bathrooms. Also, the icon is very literal, and proves the point that you can be “on the nose” yet creative. As a minimalist, it is exciting to see a brand that doesn't require a wordmark to be understood. Beyond all of this is the incredible longevity of the brand. The logo was introduced in 1900 and has changed little—evolving into a very recognizable iteration in 1948 and changing little since then to the current mark in 1999. That's a run anyone would be proud of!

Langdon Andrews, VP, [Pannos Marketing](#): My favorite non-bank brand is [Nest](#) for three reasons. First, they are selling the most mundane of products—smoke / co2 detectors and security cameras—yet their sophisticated but simple presentation gives them the ability to charge an amazing premium versus their competitors. Second, they

redefined their market space by taking the latest technology and using it to meet needs that consumers didn't even know they had. Lastly, we often show our website clients the Nest website to illustrate how they can use images to powerfully communicate their brand and what it is their selling.



9. We respect brands that get it right by keeping it simple.

Steven Reider, president, [Bancography](#): I'll choose Southwest Airlines. Always puts the customer first; relentlessly fulfills a promise of simplicity and transparency from reservation to check-in to boarding to flight. Focuses on those few key attributes that are of paramount importance to the customer. And has wonderfully maintained key brand elements over the years, including the peanuts and the Love theme (a clever play on the name of their home airport that's incorporated in the logo and even the stock symbol). True alignment of brand promise and execution.

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