

Best brand on Earth? Starts with a G ...

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RESEARCH FIRM Millward Brown recently took its annual look at which “brand”—that is, the stuff of a product or service’s intangible relationship with consumers—contributes the most to its overall value. As you’d expect, luxe marketing creations such as Louis Vuitton, Porsche, Hermès, Gucci and Cartier, affordable to so few, top the list. But No. 6 comes as a surprise. The opposite of luxe, this one is found in more than 40 varieties, is used by million upon millions and retails for just a few bucks in most grocery stores.

It’s Tide, the Procter & Gamble laundry detergent, which has performed a feat of marketing

derring-do by balancing numerous extensions with a consistent brand approach. “It’s managed to create a bond with its consumers that’s like that of Chanel,” said Joanna Seddon, exec VP who runs the firm’s Optimor unit. “It’s extraordinary.”

The same could be said for Google. Despite doing no visible consumer advertising, the search giant repeats as this year’s most powerful brand in the third installment of Millward Brown’s Brand Z in partnership with The Financial Times. The rankings are based on public financial data and Millward Brown’s proprietary brand-equity database that looks at 10 years of data on consumer relationships with 50,000 brands.

That database, Millward Brown said, is a main difference between BrandZ and rival Interbrand’s annual study that puts Coca-Cola atop the heap. One other difference is that Millward Brown only looks at consumer brands, while Interbrand considers corporate ones as well. The importance of these studies lies in the fact that they’re the most comprehensive attempts to assign a dollar value to a brand. Some would argue that’s impossible, that the very definition of a brand doesn’t lend itself to this sort of quantification.

Good results relieve web watchers

■ Google’s first-quarter net income rose 31% to \$3.1 billion, or \$4.12 a share, vs. \$1 billion, or \$3.18 a share, a year ago. Revenue, which was 51% international, was up 42% to \$5.19 billion for first quarter over the period last year.

In the overall ranking of brand value, the top five was the same as last year, with Google followed by GE, Microsoft, Coca-Cola and China Mobile. The rest of the top 10 was shuffled a bit as Apple, McDonald’s and Nokia entered.

Nokia has continued to do well with entry-level phones in many countries, even as it’s known for cutting-edge handsets as well. McDonald’s has gone from a mere purveyor of fat to a broader menu of (relatively) healthful snacks that appeal to moms. And Apple, hot off owning the portable-music-player category, has turned its attention to mobile phones with the successful launch of the iPhone.

“It’s the brand proposition that’s bigger than the products,” Ms. Seddon said. “It’s not about a phone, it’s not about an MP3 player, and it’s not about a computer. It’s about empowering individual creativity and self-expression.”

Other brands that surged were Amazon and IBM; a host of Chinese banks lifted by IPOs and an overall bullish economic outlook for the region; and mobile operators like Movistar, Orange and Vodafone. None saw more movement, however, than BlackBerry. Having pushed into the consumer markets and overcome a lawsuit that threatened its very existence, BlackBerry saw its brand value nearly quadruple.

The brands with the most momentum—in Millward Brown’s definition, a short-term outlook—were largely those luxury brands, driven by potential growth in China. The only brand that wasn’t of that set was China’s Merchant Bank.

Not surprisingly, mobile operators were the hottest category in terms of brand growth in 2007, followed by technology, personal care and fast food. The worst-performing categories were motor fuel, cars, water, retail and financial institutions, so many of which have been wracked by the global credit crisis and its fallout.

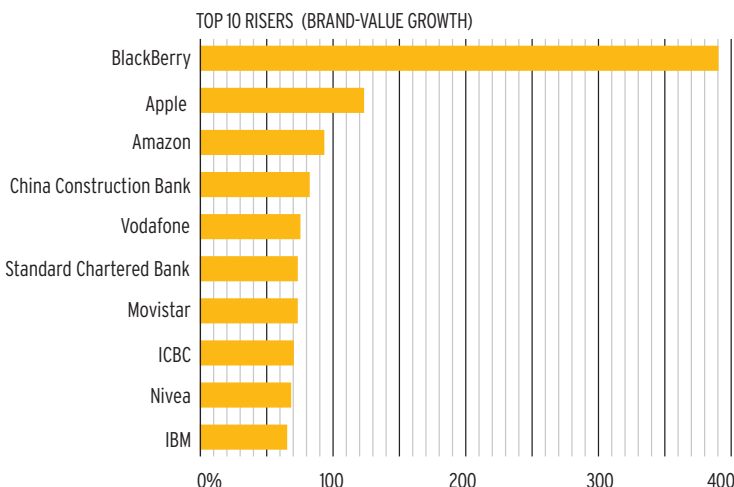
Brand bling

TOP 10 BY VALUE IN NORTH AMERICA

- Google
- GE
- Microsoft
- Coca-Cola
- IBM
- Apple
- McDonald’s
- Marlboro
- Wal-Mart
- Bank of America

GROWTH SPURTS

A number of brands, including BlackBerry and Apple, have seen their stars rise



GLOBAL TOP 10 BY VALUE (RANKING CHANGE)

Google	(0)
GE	(0)
Microsoft	(0)
Coca-Cola	(0)
China Mobile	(0)
IBM	(+3)
Apple	(+9)
McDonald’s	(+3)
Nokia	(+3)
Marlboro	(-4)

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