

# Your Blueprint for Brand Architecture

**A**SK various marketing sorts what brand architecture (BA) is, and you'll get no shortage of responses: "BA is the execution of positioning;" "BA is what brand extensions need to follow;" "BA is a buzz word for product

strategy;" "BA is like a building blueprint." Could brand architecture really be all those things? The truth is, while people throw this term around freely, they don't necessarily know what it means.

And that truth, unfortunately, comes at a bad time. Given today's proliferation of category and line extensions, BA has never been more important. For the record: BA is the organizing structure for a company and its brands and, by extension, a brand and its products. BA is brought alive through each and every SKU. BA, effectively translated, should make decisions easier, not harder. It should make the brand experience fulfilling, not frustrating.

If you want to see how well BA is working in the field, take a look at a grocery shelf. It isn't a pretty picture. Sensory overload and a glut of choices make shopping these days just plain stressful. The mess on store shelves is not the fault of our colleagues in package design. It is the brand owners' responsibility to provide an underlying strategy and to make sure that what's in, and on, the product makes sense and contributes to a greater whole. That's what BA is supposed to be about.

One company that gets it is the global brand Barilla. Its pasta products are all in a clean and uncluttered blue package with the Barilla oval logo. Below the cellophane window is the subtle-but-important "No. 1 in Italy" benefit reinforcement.

Next, it's on to the type of pasta. Barilla's portfolio of pasta shapes is clearly justified, based on past and predicted usage. A straightforward descriptor (no need for a subbrand or fanciful name) designates each variety, supported by two visuals. There's a see-through panel through which consumers can literally view the pasta itself, and then a photo of the end result: a pasta-filled fork. To simplify matters further, in the U.S., Barilla prints a preparation time right below the pasta's name.

And that's it. It's in perfect sync with our pasta logic. We don't have to work to find our pasta. In fact, we don't even need to know the language to understand the brand or the product—the ultimate torture test for any brand with global aspirations.

With this schematic, Barilla also illustrates the three critical strategic underpinnings of an effective BA:

- *Insight guides communications.*

Some brand owners rely on bells and whistles, form market structure studies to needs analysis. Others innately know what really matters to their consumers. Either way, advertising should communicate the right messages in the right order and manner. Packaging mirrors the purchase-decision thought process. Every communication reflects the brand owners' intimate understanding of their brand.

- *Relevance drives offerings.*

Every product has a reason that suits and enhances the brand. No offerings overlap. If a product doesn't make sense, it's eliminated. When a product is missing, it's obvious.

- *Simplicity rules decisions.* Smart BA practitioners follow the less-is-more mantra: There aren't a lot of messages; those that exist will more directly drive purchase. The use of subbrands, endorser brands, branded features and ingredients should be justified and minimized. All product names—be they branded or otherwise—are straightforward.

It's our hope that true brand architecture, effectively translated, becomes common practice. Consumers will welcome being able to buy what they want effortlessly. And companies will benefit by giving their brands and products every opportunity to succeed.



By Mary T. Morgan

**BA should make the brand experience fulfilling.**

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