

Oasis: Brand Manifesto Proposal

Alastair Allday / 10th June 2011

The problem

Oasis has an image problem. It doesn't have a bad image -- it simply doesn't have an image at all. I surveyed eleven women aged 20 - 50. They all gave very different reasons why Oasis wasn't "their" kind of shop.

- "Too posh." (a 20 year old student in Hackney)
- "Too chavvy." (a 24 year old girl with a double-barrelled surname)
- "For older people." (a 25 year old in a 9 to 5 in the city)
- "For teenage girls who don't know what they want." (a 35 year old lecturer)
- "It was a cool place ten years ago, but it isn't now." (a 48 year old nurse)
- "They do nice party dresses, but I don't wear dresses like that." (a girl, *in a dress, at a party*).

These reasons are very conflicting. However, they all have one thing in common -- **everyone I spoke to saw Oasis as a place where "other" women shopped. Not them.**

Why don't people shop at Oasis?

Our clothes are a statement about ourselves. Yet the people I spoke to saw Oasis as a brand that doesn't make a statement at all. **Because the brand lacks identity, the clothes lack identity.** Wearing them means nothing. Who wants that?

All the people I interviewed imagined a different kind of woman shops at Oasis. They are either older or younger, richer or poorer, more or less fashionable. But whoever they are, she is never them.

Every woman sees her own uniqueness -- no one sees herself as bland or unexciting or lacking in individuality. So wearing Oasis makes a statement no one would ever make.

Quality doesn't cut it. **Clothes only feel great when they make you feel great about yourself.** The Oasis brand manifesto must make women feel positive about the statement they're making about themselves.

It's not about price. It's about the statement.

I'd assumed Oasis would have a middle of the road pricing problem -- too expensive to compete with the disposable fashion of H&M or New Look, not expensive enough to be in the same league as Jigsaw, Karen Millen, or Reiss -- missing out both types of shopper. I assumed any branding exercise would need to give Oasis a more exclusive image, so it could compete with more expensive "boutique" stores. However, I quickly discovered that this isn't the case.

Average price. Better than average branding.

Many shops with a similar price bracket, but a stronger brand, are doing well. The reinvention of Topshop is an obvious example, but I was more interested in Mango. The clothes are of a similar price. The style is similar. But the brand is much, much stronger.

The Oasis website leads straight to a catalogue -- it might as well be Littlewood's. Style shoots look and feel high street -- 90s high street¹. Meanwhile, Mango gives you a lookbook and a selection of different glamorous and heavily stylised photo and video shoots featuring models and celebrities². It looks modern. It looks contemporary. It feels stylish. It has an image. In effect, it's telling you what the brand is about.

Mango is selling a lifestyle -- Mango woman is laid back, glamorous, seductive and international. The Oasis online shop is just virtual clothes on a rack.

In store, the situation was the same. I visited two stores, one in London, the other in Sussex. It was the provincial store that was most interesting. There were posters, not clothes, in the window. Inside, clothes were stacked high near the front. The "new arrivals" and "premium" clothes were nowhere to be seen. Clothes were presented without presentation -- without comment -- without an image. Even the mannequins looked bored.

People associate a lack of strong branding with poor quality. Compared to similarly priced stores such as Topshop, which makes more effective use of light and space, Oasis gives the impression of being more downmarket than it actually is.

¹ e.g. <http://www.oasis-stores.com/fcp/content/poolside-party/information>

² e.g. http://shop.mango.com/flash.faces?s=catalogo.boardingpass&state=she_006_IN

The digital challenge

Online and offline, Oasis is trying to let the clothes sell themselves. This won't work. As digital becomes an ever more important marketing channel, your brand name becomes increasingly detached from any attempts to control its image -- the "conversation" on social media forums such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr becomes more important than your own marketing, and on aggregator sites such as asos.com and shopstyle.com, you have no control over presentation at all -- trading, literally, on your name alone.

Oasis needs to act now to secure its brand image -- the march towards digital will only further erode its market share -- Oasis' online presence is markedly less contemporary than its competitors. **Creating and exploiting new digital channels to distribute the brand manifesto and get people talking about it will be vital to the manifesto's success.**

So how can Oasis change their image?

Mango is a fantastic example of a brand that's used both traditional and digital media to quickly and effectively position itself as a brand with a distinct style -- price isn't a consideration. Price is still broadly in line with Oasis pricing. It's the image that's different.

Successful brands aren't in the business of selling clothes, they're selling glamour and adventure. I don't know if the people who buy Ralph Lauren play polo and have ponies, but I do know that they want to -- they're aspirational -- and Ralph Lauren plays into that image. **Oasis needs a style -- a lifestyle. That's where the brand manifesto comes in.**

Brand manifesto objectives.

A brand manifesto will set the tone for future Oasis campaigns. It needs to build on existing positive perceptions, reverse negative perceptions, and introduce new ideas about the brand to a target audience.

1. Challenge negative perceptions of the brand:

- Oasis is a place where "other people shop" -- never you. We can easily turn this weakness into a strength. Mid-market can be good. **If literally *anyone* can shop there, why not you?**

- Oasis isn't exclusive, it's democratic. It's a place you can feel at ease, whatever your budget. Oasis is a friend you can trust. From stylish bargains for the fashion conscious to a special treat for the bargain hunter. **"Everyone shops here." This message challenges negative perceptions of the brand.**

2. Build on our strengths:

- **Without exception, everyone I interviewed either repeated or agreed with the statement that Oasis was a good place to buy "party dresses".** This is a great starting point.
- Parties are fun. Oasis is fun. Good nights out, great holidays, amazing friends, romantic dates. Oasis dresses are all about the occasion -- and Oasis is the place you shop when you want clothes for a memorable occasion. "Make it memorable in Oasis". **We tend to rose-tint our happiest memories, re-telling the good times over and over again. By linking the brand to the ability to create new, enjoyable memories, we're making a powerful appeal that's both emotional and universal.** Who doesn't want to have fun?

3. Create new positive perceptions:

- Existing style guidelines claim Oasis Girl is 27, but the majority of people who shop at Oasis are older. Maybe it's because the store has stayed the same over the last decade as its customer base has aged -- or maybe it's because Oasis isn't "cool" any more. But the fact is Oasis is seen as pedestrian and unexciting.
- **We need to inject the brand with glamour and youth -- not teenage girls, but vital, confident, desirable, independent women who wear Oasis in daring and romantic situations.** It's important to make Oasis a place to buy clothes for "special" occasions, not just the usual Friday night after work.
- A blind date. A last minute weekend in Paris. An overnight bag, stepping off the train. **Oasis girl is mysterious, adventurous, and full of life.**

The concept

1. "Made to Party"

If the clothes lack identity because the brand lacks identity, we should give the clothes an identity and the brand will follow.

- It can take years to change perceptions about a brand. Immediately changing people's perceptions about the clothes, however, is a much easier task. Indie shops, retro shops, market stalls etc will often give the things they sell a history on the label -- personalising the experience.
- **The manifesto -- and subsequent campaigns -- should imbue the clothes themselves with an adventure-seeking, party-loving attitude.** These are clothes that demand to be worn to exciting and exotic destinations. These are clothes that feel at home in a nightclub or at a cocktail party. These are clothes that are made to have fun. You don't want to go out tonight? Fine. The dress is going without you.

2. A piece of paradise.

- *In grey and rainy England, in the dull routine of the 9-to-5, Oasis stores are a literal oasis of warmth and vibrancy. Shopping should be an experience. Bright and appealing, Oasis clothes give a splash of colour to an otherwise black and white life.*
- Oasis clothes are fun. So shopping for them should be fun, too. Oasis girl loves to shop - - it makes her happy. She can't wait to get to the store, because she knows she can't wait to find out where her new purchases will take her. She's transported to a different world -- a place far away from the 9-to-5. **This is shopping as pure escapism. Oasis clothes are a passport to somewhere else – somewhere better.**

3. Clothes that can take you anywhere

- Oasis clothes are fun. But what is fun? Fun is adventure, excitement, mystery and romance. You can literally go anywhere in an Oasis dress. **The brand is democratic -- worn everywhere, by everyone. No matter where you end up, you'll always look good in Oasis.**

- When you buy Oasis clothes, you're buying into the adventure -- the idea that tonight, anything could happen. That a date could lead to much more. A holiday will lead to a romance. A smile from a stranger -- an invitation to dinner. Oasis woman isn't just fun-loving and desirable, she's confident and spontaneous too.

A successful brand manifesto will combine these three elements to create a style guide for all future marketing at Oasis.

The Oasis brand manifesto will be a statement of intent. It will be a promise to whoever buys the clothes: this is how you will feel.

The brand manifesto will answer:

- What is the brand?
- What does it stand for?
- Who are we?

Seductive. Confident. Romantic. Spontaneous. Oasis girl is in love with life and the clothes she wears make sure the world knows it.

A recipe for success.

- Challenge negative perceptions with a democratic "everywoman" image.
- Build on the "party dress" image with a sense of playfulness and fun.
- Add a sense of adventure and a touch of glamour.
- Start targeting 27 year olds again.
- *Create a manifesto that does these things.*

Alastaire Allday

Senior Copywriter, Allday Creative

<http://alldaycreative.com>