



What's In Your Word-Cloud?

*When clouds speak louder than words
 about your brand.*

By Suzanne Tulien, Principal & Co-founder, The Brand Ascension Group

Serendipity. A curious word that actually phonetically sounds as frivolous as its meaning. I love that word. And I love when I actually get to experience it. It happened a few months ago, when we received a call from a gentleman named Terry Barber. He had found us on the internet, as he was searching for potential partner alliances to further his passionate cause. He came across one of our many articles published on BrandChannel.com. You see, Terry is the Chief Inspiration Officer at **Inspiration Blvd., LLC** and author of *The Inspiration Factor*. He had been researching the concept of 'INSPIRATION'; specifically as it relates to the evolution of successful organization brands, and the impact it has on their entire stakeholder population (employees, vendors, customers, volunteers, donors, etc.).

After several conversations, we were both clear how his research on inspiring companies and our work on internal brand definition and implementation seemed to go hand in hand. And as we continue to find ways to partner we are discovering how impactful this could be when companies turn 'internal' in their efforts to inspire their own employees, be consistently on-brand, and strategically evolve beyond just the efforts to increase bottom line numbers.

In this article space, I will only be able to offer a few examples, however, when you are ready for more, there is a white paper that is a must read on the survey approach and results regarding inspiration and organizational growth. You will learn that the focus on inspiration, when consciously committed to at the strategic, and deliberate (or purposeful) level, could create a paradigm shift in how good companies become great companies in the 21st century. Times are a changing...and it is a very good thing.

I am going to dive right into this 'Word-cloud' concept he used in his data gathering technique so that I can get to a quick exercise for you and your leadership teams, and employees for that matter, to complete and reveal some very interesting things about your brand.

Terry and his team have developed a survey tool called the **Inspiration Index™**. (Download whitepaper at www.inspirationblvd.com/most-inspiring).

An intriguing finding very much worth mentioning about this report is that the gains in stock prices of the public companies on the list of Most Inspiring Companies outperformed the S&P 500 Index, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, and the NASDAQ Composite between April 2009 - April 2010.

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719.265.1707
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 Carol@BrandAscension.com

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He asked a population of about 1,700 people from a variety of demographics to answer two simple, open-ended and qualitative questions: “Who is the most inspiring company in America?” And, “What makes them inspiring to you?” Sounds too simple, doesn’t it? Not a leading question; it doesn’t list any companies to consider; just asks the question. The results of the collection of answers led to a final list of the top **25 Most Inspiring Companies**. And, within the qualitative data, they were able to glean a plethora of common terms (words) that the participants used to describe a particular company. The collection of words in their answers formed an overall computer generated ‘Word-Cloud’ (see graphic A & B). The graphic emphasizes the key words (enlarged) that were used most by the participants which and had the most passion around them, the graphically smaller words were less prominent in the answer, but were common denominators in the qualitative data collected.

Graphic A

It is a quick and fascinating look into a brand’s external perceptions from customers and/or prospects from the sole reference point of ‘INSPIRATION.’ And it is interesting to note that words which would describe key products and services of these Most Inspiring Company examples are generally NOT listed in the final outputs of the Word-Clouds! Rather, most of the terms



are descriptions of behaviors, actions, and customer experiences. For example, if you looked at Graphic A, would you be able to identify the company? Probably not, because the word-cloud doesn’t elude to its primary product or service offering. Graphic A represents Southwest Airlines.

Graphic B

Word-cloud Graphic B only has one clue in it regarding a product of this business. If you guessed Tom’s Shoes you are correct. But before we move on, notice the prominent key terms in both examples. These terms represent the brand essence of the overall organization in the mind of the consumer. Way cool.



This article is not about details of the survey itself (but would highly recommend you study the whitepaper and realize an extremely untapped resource in organizational performance), but rather the **concept of ‘Word-Clouds’ as a tool to better understand your employee culture, your customer culture, and all stakeholders** of the brand for that matter. Hence, our exposure to this Inspiration Index got me thinking about a great activity that could shed some interesting light on your business, your brand, and how you want to be perceived. We recommend that you and your employee teams consider completing this activity I’ve outlined below – then come together and discuss your outputs, the gaps, the commonalities, and the opportunities this observation will provide in your efforts to elevate your business brand well into the future.

Internal Company Activity: “What’s In Your Word-Cloud?”

Time to Allot for Activity: 45 minutes

Props: Two separate flip charts on easels and a variety of colored markers

1. Assemble two groups of employees (up to 5 per team)
2. Assign group ‘A’ the ‘Employee Perceptions Team’
3. Assign group ‘B’ the ‘Customer Perceptions Team’

4. Take 5 minutes to introduce the concept of Word-Clouds (larger, more prominent perception words represent stronger feelings and more common agreement collectively; smaller words are common, but less strong in terms of consistent perceptions). Show them the graphic word-cloud examples in this article.
5. Give the groups 15 minutes to develop a word-cloud that represents their audiences' (employees or customers) perceptions of your brand today.
6. When time is up – each group gets 3 minutes to present their finished word-cloud and explain the words they chose based on what they know of the audience's perceptions of the brand to the rest of the group.
7. **Debrief:**
 - a. Notice the commonalities in terms, or the discrepancies in terms for each word-cloud.
 - b. Discuss where the gaps are, and where terms are congruent. What terms are missing? What words are there which might be unexpected?
 - c. Decide how the terms that were chosen are congruent with your brand's values, mission, brand promise, brand style.
 - d. Decide on **key terms** that you want further enhanced for the brand and how you might go about creating actions, behaviors, and processes that would help create and affirm those ultimate perceptions in your service delivery, product quality, and overall branded way-of-being.
 - e. Assign a small team to work on ways to take action the outputs of step 'd'.

We think you will be surprised as to what comes out of this exercise, and how it may or may not reflect the desired perceptions for your brand. But what we're sure of is that it will provide some key insights into what you and your employee teams 'think you know' about the respective perceptions.

After this exercise, it would be particularly interesting to compose an actual customer and employee survey that would provide you with some authentic data from the real audiences. Then, compare and contrast. This is an exercise that would undoubtedly produce some **golden nuggets** of critical information for every business to utilize in their strategic growth strategies. Oh, and by the way, what is your brand doing to **inspire your stakeholders** to populate your most-desired 'Word-Cloud'?

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About the Author:

Suzanne Tulien is Principal and co-Founder of The Brand Ascension Group, a multi-faceted consulting and training firm specializing in building brand perception from the inside out. BA Group partners with organizations to assist them in get laser-focused on defining their brand DNA and achieving sustainable brand success from the INSIDE OUT. They do this by guiding them to define, create, and build powerful brand experiences that engage, captivate and inspire customers, employees and all stakeholders. She is author of The 6 Myths of Small Business Branding, and co-author of Brand DNA. She is also on the Expert Panel of YoungEntrepreneur.com.



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