

# Finding faster growth

Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand



The world has many popular brands but only a select few have the magnetic power of irresistibility. New research from TNS reveals what it takes to join their ranks – and why it is so important to do so.

# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

What do L'Oréal, Stella Artois, Red Bull and Audi have in common? The most obvious answer is that they are all extremely successful: the world's leading personal care brand, one of the fastest growing brands in beer, the world's leading energy drink, and the fastest growing auto brand on earth, according to the BrandZ index<sup>1</sup>.

But that's not all. These brands are not just strong, recognisable and popular; they are irresistibly so. When faced with a choice in their category, consumers are magnetically drawn to them, unable and unwilling to see any alternative. The power these brands exert today makes their success appear almost magical, but the fact is that they have very specific characteristics that make them irresistible

brands. They have been deliberately designed and carefully managed over time to exert such a powerful pull. Rivals in their categories have two choices: either they can focus on becoming irresistible themselves, or they must be prepared to get out of the way. Irresistibility leads inevitably to brand growth.

When faced with a choice in their category, consumers are magnetically drawn to them, unable and unwilling to see any alternative.



<sup>1</sup> BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Brands is part of the WPP brand insight reports, powered by BrandZ data.

# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## The inevitable choice

Brands achieve irresistibility when they become the automatic, instinctive choice for particular needs in particular contexts; a choice that would be very difficult for consumers not to make. They do so by appealing to both of the systems that govern human behaviour: the fast, frugal 'System 1' brain that drives much of our daily decision-making through emotion and intuition; and the slow, resource-intensive 'System 2' brain that operates consciously to rationalise our System 1 choices<sup>2</sup>.

To see how these two systems come together to create irresistibility, picture the woman who has loyally bought the same brand of moisturiser for a decade, despite dozens of alternatives she hasn't even considered. She is happy to pay a premium, and if her moisturiser brand is not available in one shop she will go elsewhere. It is a brand she can't resist largely because it helps her to feel she is the woman she

wants to be: strong and confident, ready to take on the world. But ask her why she chooses it and she'll provide rational reasons about its effect on her skin, its texture, the practical packaging and so on.

In this way, irresistible brands are able to align with consumers' deeper priorities and motivations whilst generating an immediate, often automatic response whenever a choice is made. They are chosen using very little conscious thought, but the choice is still a deeply satisfying one, aligning with deeper motivations and easily rationalised. How could the consumer have chosen any other brand? Why would they want to? The brand has become synonymous with the need itself.

Brands achieve irresistibility when they become the automatic, instinctive choice for particular needs in particular contexts.



<sup>2</sup> To find out more about the 'System 1' and 'System 2' brain see [The secret life of the brain](#)

# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## Why irresistible brands are rare

Irresistible brands' strength comes from their perfect fit with needs that are specific to particular consumers and particular circumstances. They require marketers to fully understand the nature of the need-states they're targeting and single-mindedly work to satisfy these with great discipline across time and touchpoints, despite the many temptations to compromise. When TNS set out to quantify the level of irresistibility that different brands have achieved, it quickly became clear that truly irresistible brands are rare creatures indeed. This requirement for a deep and systematic understanding of needs and a disciplined approach to aligning the brand with them helps to explain why.

Like a powerful magnet, irresistible brands pull large numbers of consumers towards them, but there will be some for whom they do not exert the same level of attraction. For irresistible brands this is an active choice; they have identified the needs that they appeal to and they have built their brand propositions and business models single-mindedly around them. These brands differentiate like they mean it – and they know that the benefits of irresistibility far outweigh the risk of turning some consumers away.

Like a powerful magnet, irresistible brands pull large numbers of consumers towards them.



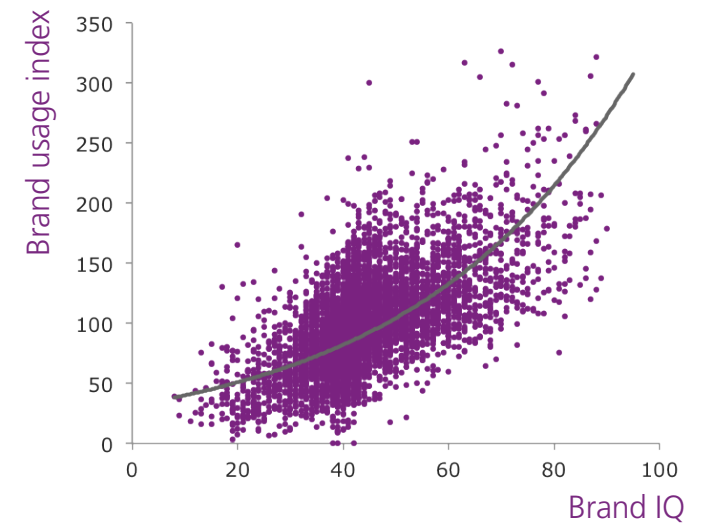
# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## Scoring irresistibility

To quantify the benefits of irresistibility, TNS compiled data from recent NeedScope studies, which map the functional, social and emotive connections that brands have with consumers across different need-states. For over 1,000 brands, we calculated an Irresistibility Quotient or IQ, for each brand within each need-state, with a score of 100 reflecting perfect alignment with the need-state. We then plotted these IQ scores against brand usage in the need-state to reveal how irresistibility impacts behaviour.

An IQ below 50 delivers no impact on behaviour. At this level a brand is resistible. Real benefits start to emerge when IQ reaches 60 and develop significantly above this level. Brands with an IQ of 70 increase their chance of usage in that need-state by 70%. And once their IQ rises higher than this, they start to become truly irresistible. An IQ of 80 within a need-state delivers twice the share of an IQ of 50.

Irresistible brands are in select company. When we look at the number of brands close to becoming fully irresistible, we can see just how challenging the journey is: only 16% achieve an IQ of 70 or more, whilst only 4% exceed 80.



Brands with high IQ are used more often

We can see just how challenging the journey is: only 16% achieve an IQ of 70 or more, whilst only 4% exceed 80.

# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## The irresistibility playbook

Becoming irresistible requires courage, leadership and decisiveness, but our analysis proves that it also requires brands to consciously incorporate specific characteristics and behaviours. Irresistibility isn't just an attitude or an internal culture; it's a precise playbook that must be applied with determination and discipline if a brand is to achieve the required dominance of both instinctive and considered decision-making. Every experience that a person has of a brand, every touchpoint that either aligns or fails to align with his or her expectations, will affect the position that brand holds within the consumer's brain. And as such it will help determine how irresistible the brand truly is.

Here, revealed for the first time, are the 8 apps that combine to deliver irresistibility for brands. Every brand scoring over 70 in the NeedScope analysis shares every one of these and no brand achieves a score of 70 or more without them.

Know-how Momentum  
Differentiation Emotion Symbolism  
Nexus Alignment Unity



# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## App 1: Know-how

### Is your brand a credible expert?

Credible know-how is a basic hygiene factor for any would-be irresistible brand. The System 2 brain requires conscious proof that this particular brand knows what it is doing, if it is to convince consumers that it is the best possible solution to a particular need. The proof will take different forms depending on the category involved. For pharmaceuticals, it may require demonstrable scientific credibility; for fashion brands, it's consistently speaking the language of the latest trends. Know-how can be earned over time by product excellence (think Bang & Olufsen), instantly achieved through technological breakthroughs (Dyson) or consciously developed by association with category experts and opinion leaders (Nike sponsoring world-class sports stars).

## App 2: Momentum

### Can you stay ahead of the game?

Irresistible brands cannot afford to stand still. They evolve in ways that keep consumers interested and engaged; they respond to the world around them and show that they can anticipate and lead change rather than following it. Maintaining momentum whilst remaining true to the characteristics that made them irresistible in the first place, is one of the most demanding challenges for these brands, and judging the pace of momentum required is often crucial. For Coca-Cola, gradual evolution over the course of a century has delivered exactly the cadence required; for Samsung, in a category defined by constant change, a wave of high-quality innovation across the full spectrum of consumer electronics has been required to deliver real momentum.



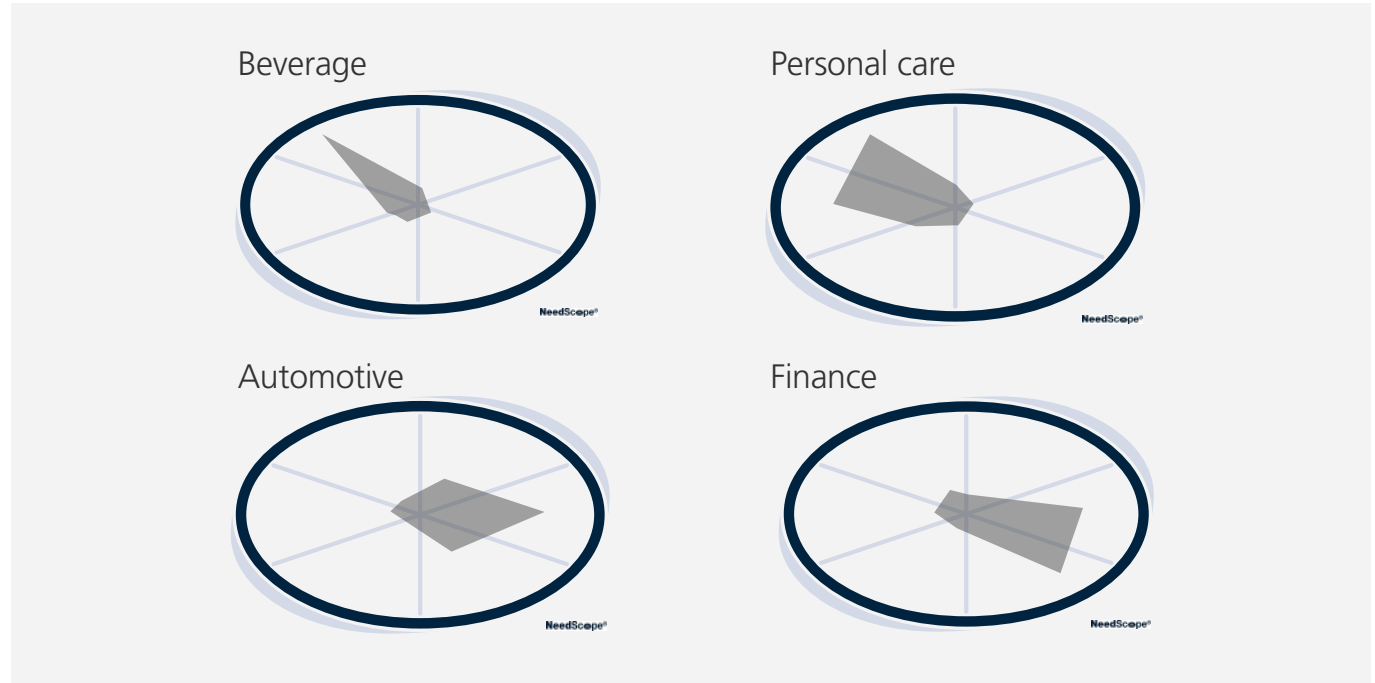
# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## App 3: Differentiation

### Do you have the courage to stand for something?

Irresistible brands don't just need a point of difference; they need a point of difference that really matters to consumers, and the courage to focus on this point of difference even when it means rejection by some. In Dove's case, a differentiated and decisive brand positioning around 'Inner Beauty' has enabled it to claim ownership of product qualities such as moisturising, in a way that others find difficult to challenge.

In the NeedScope map (see panel), such differentiation is seen in sharp footprints skewing to particular archetypes that fit with consumers' need-states. All irresistible brands have such a footprint. They offer precisely what their consumers are looking for.



Sharp brand footprints are a sign of clear differentiation



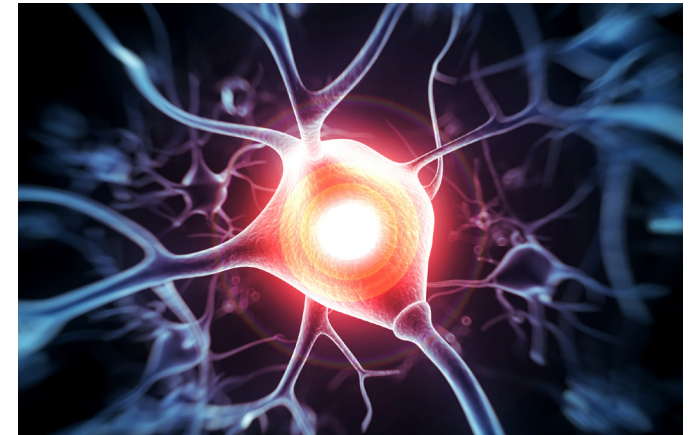
# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## App 4: Emotion

### Do you know what your emotive meaning is?

Emotion gives irresistible brands unique meaning and purpose in the eyes of their consumers, and an instinctive attraction that goes beyond considered, rational reasons for purchase. All irresistible brands have a strong emotive fit with consumers in a particular need-state, and it is this that connects them so effectively with the System 1 brain. Mastery of emotion lies behind the magic that irresistible brands appear to conjure over a category.

It's a common misconception of marketers that emotion only applies to particular categories such as fragrance or beer. Irresistible brands don't make this mistake. They know that the white laboratories and lab coats that a pharmaceutical brand uses in TV advertising address an emotive need for reassurance and control; that the symbols of tradition and power used by financial institutions deliberately conjure emotions of confidence and stability. They know what their emotive meaning needs to be.



Irresistible brands have a strong emotive fit with consumers in a particular need-state, and it is this that connects them so effectively with the System 1 brain.

# Mastery of emotion lies behind the magic that irresistible brands appear to conjure over a category.



Share this [f](#) [t](#) [in](#)



In Focus

# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## App 5: Symbolism

### Do you have your own emotive language?

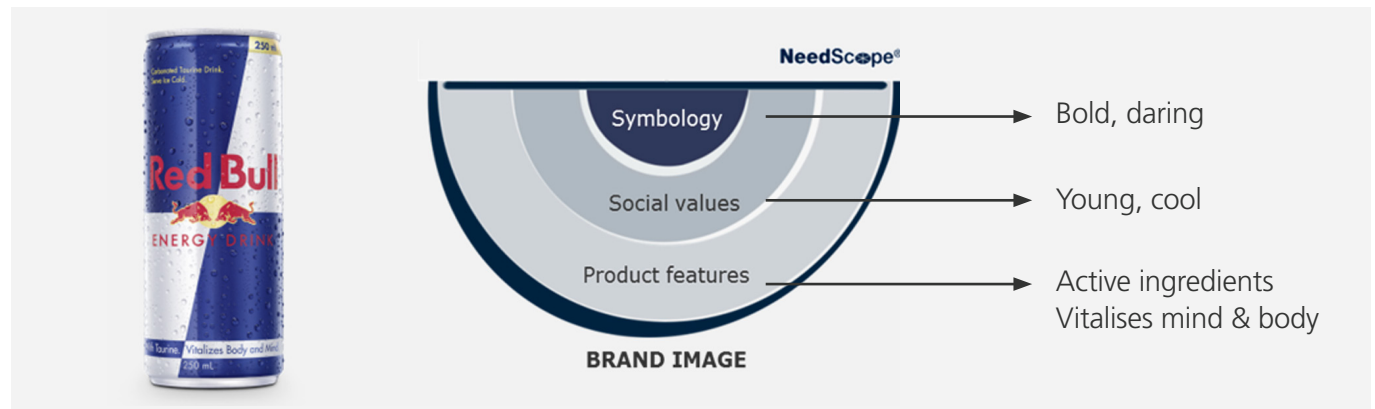
Symbolism is the language of emotion and a key set of triggers for decisions by our fast, intuitive brain. Irresistible brands understand the symbolic meaning in everything: product design, packaging and service delivery, logos, fonts, tone of voice and music. All of these elements use instinctively understood colours, shapes and images to evoke particular emotions. Their perfectly aligned symbolism constitutes a brand mnemonic – and a secret language for talking directly to consumers' decision-drivers. In the fragrance category, perfume brands rarely use words to describe their products, but differentiate themselves through particular symbols that evoke certain emotions, irresistible to particular women: the shape of a Chanel bottle, the colour of the liquid within, the number five itself, and the dreamy, glamorous nature of the photography surrounding it.

## App 6: Nexus

### Is your brand well connected?

Brands satisfy three levels of conscious and unconscious consumer need: functional, social and emotive. When a brand connects strongly and naturally across these layers with an underlying emotive linkage, it has high Nexus (see diagram). Brands like this are more

convincing and irresistible as the emotions that they stir are strongly reflected in their function and social identity. Consumers visiting the Red Bull website immediately see the bold, adventurous brand promise ladders through all layers of the brand. The social identity is young and cool, the product has many active ingredients and promises to vitalise body and mind by giving you wings.

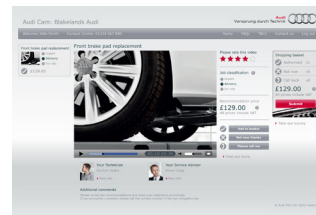
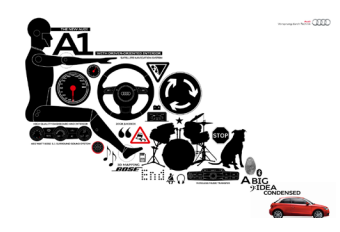


# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## App 7: Alignment

### Is your brand consistent across touchpoints?

Aligning look, message and emotion across every different touchpoint is one of the greatest challenges for would-be irresistible brands. However, achieving and maintaining alignment delivers returns not only in enhanced irresistibility, but in maximised value for all marketing budgets. Audi's emotive promise of refinement and class and emotively linked product promise of cutting-edge technology and design, informs every aspect of its identity: from brand logo to sponsorship strategy, customer service, websites and retail showrooms that are temples to design and technology.



# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## App 8: Unity

### Could your brand remain recognisable across products and categories?

Irresistible brands provide owners with a powerful asset that can often be leveraged across new product lines and categories, stretching their appeal and utilising their full value. Irresistible brands can successfully incorporate master brands, sub brands and variants, retaining an inherent unity of brand architecture when doing so. If the unity of brand architecture, and the emotion-led response that it generates, is lost then the irresistibility of the brand is weakened – and the variants that weaken this unity are unlikely to succeed.

Virgin has proved an irresistible brand in categories broadly related to entertainment, where its maverick emotive positioning has strong resonance; when it stretched into cola this brand unity was temporarily lost. In contrast, Johnnie Walker has maintained impressive unity of brand architecture across a range of variants that enable it to appeal at many different price points.



Irresistible brands can successfully incorporate master brands, sub brands and variants, retaining an inherent unity of brand architecture when doing so.



# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

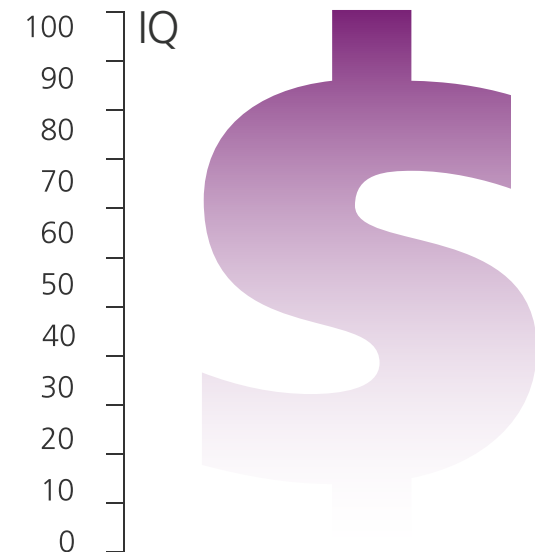
## Can you afford to be resistible?

Aspiring to irresistibility makes many demands of marketers – but the risks involved in leaving irresistibility to others are far greater. A glance further down the NeedScope IQ index shows what happens to those failing to stake out clear, emotively coherent positions that can make them an inevitable choice for consumers. For brands with an IQ under 50, market share starts to erode quickly; those with an IQ of 20 or below are less than half as likely to be chosen than the average for their category. When such brands come up against a rival with more of the characteristics of irresistibility, there is usually only one result.

Many try to address such threats by copying the spending or energetic activity of successful brands, but without the discipline and coherence of true irresistibility, much of this effort could be wasted.

Irresistible brands don't have to be big - although they inevitably grow - and they don't have to be expensive - although irresistibility allows brands to charge a premium over their competitors. What characterises them above all is their understanding of the complex, emotive position they occupy within consumers' brains and the determined courage with which they use the 8 apps of irresistibility to become and stay that way. Those apps provide a powerful framework for any brand with the ambition of becoming irresistible. And that is an ambition that every brand should have.

## Irresistibility = Growth



# Revealed: what it takes to be an irresistible brand

## What is NeedScope

NeedScope is the leading global research system designed to help companies create and manage irresistible and profitable brands. It provides a deep understanding of human needs and brand perception through a proven psychological framework and unique projective tools. It reveals how to build irresistible brands that attract new customers, grow the value of existing ones and drive innovation. NeedScope has informed brands in 80 markets and many categories in over 8,000 studies.

## About the authors

**Roz Calder** is founding director of NeedScope International, which is now part of TNS' Brand and Communication practice area. She is responsible for the development, marketing and global application of NeedScope with a particular focus on brand activation.

Throughout her career in market research Roz has worked with major global companies to help them build and manage powerful brands. She has spent the past 20 years developing and growing the company she co-founded in 1994, turning NeedScope into a leading global research system for brand management.

**Michael Cook** is founding director of NeedScope International, which is now part of TNS' Brand and Communication practice area. His role building and developing NeedScope focuses on the continual innovation of the system to expand its capabilities and applications.

For over 30 years Michael has successfully combined his background in psychology with his passion for brands. Since co-founding NeedScope in 1994, he has driven its development and marketplace application, working closely with marketers in leading global companies, applying NeedScope to managing global brand portfolios.

### About In Focus

In Focus is part of a regular series of articles that takes an in-depth look at a particular subject, region or demographic in more detail. All articles are written by TNS consultants and based on their expertise gathered through working on client assignments in over 80 markets globally, with additional insights gained through TNS proprietary studies such as Digital Life, Mobile Life and The Commitment Economy.

### About TNS

TNS advises clients on specific growth strategies around new market entry, innovation, brand switching and stakeholder management, based on long-established expertise and market-leading solutions. With a presence in over 80 countries, TNS has more conversations with the world's consumers than anyone else and understands individual human behaviours and attitudes across every cultural, economic and political region of the world.

TNS is part of Kantar, the data investment management division of WPP and one of the world's largest insight, information and consultancy groups.

Please visit [www.tnsglobal.com](http://www.tnsglobal.com) for more information.

### Get in touch

If you would like to talk to us about anything you have read in this report, please get in touch via [enquiries@tnsglobal.com](mailto:enquiries@tnsglobal.com) or via Twitter [@tns\\_global](https://twitter.com/tns_global)

## You may be interested in...

[May I have your attention please? >](#)

[The secret life of the brain >](#)



Share this [!\[\]\(17b19d9027a58fae6f8db6b53cbe3a65\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(fe60ef800d726fdb6b633dbc5ad940c2\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(1438d3490ce89ac23f2b379fe4e29a4f\_img.jpg\)](#)

In Focus

