

THE HUB

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"Helios House is showing us that, in a more brand-conscious world, where we all want the best of everything, that people might actually want a better gas station." - Ann Hand, SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT OF GLOBAL BRAND MARKETING AND INNOVATION, BP (pls see p.22)



For Ann Hand of BP, brand identity means making the retail experience “a little better.”

When Ann Hand graduated from college, she was offered a job as a marketing rep, which she thought was going to put her in advertising. So, Ann got in her car and drove from Indiana to Fairfax, Virginia, where her new employer pointed at a gas station out front and told her she was going to work there for the next few months—and that if she was lucky she’d get a handful of them to run.

After Ann picked herself up off the ground, she got into it and loved it. Why? “Because everything happens at a gas station,” says Ann. “There’s just something about the people that hooked me.”

Before long, Ann was running eight gas stations in inner-city Philadelphia—an experience that has remained near-and-dear to her heart, even as she took on other roles that sometimes took her away from her retail roots.

Today, Ann is one of the highest-ranking female executives at BP. Her title is senior vice-president of global brand-marketing and innovation—a title and job description that she, herself, created.

Ann is, in effect, BP’s chief marketing officer, but she rejected that particular trapping because, she says, she wanted to make sure that marketing got “the strongest seat at the table” and wanted to “avoid taking a title that could get in the way.”

Most important, Ann recently launched a two-part plan, named after the company’s logo—the *Helios*—to change the way people think about gas stations. One part is *Helios Power*—an advertising campaign. The other part is *Helios House*—the world’s first sustainable gas station.



e Green Team

What is the thinking behind BP's new marketing campaign?

It starts with the highest idea, which is that we have 25,000 retail stations around the world, which have 13 million customers a day. We're on the heels of McDonald's, in terms of site count. The number of customers we serve per day is within range of some of the biggest retailers in the world.

And yet, when we thought about how to make the most powerful impression on our customers, our retail stations and the people who run them just felt like a very untapped set of resources.

How did that inform your current strategy?

I am determined to try to crack the code on gas stations because getting gas has turned into a dreaded experience. People go to gas stations out of necessity and they're locked there for three minutes, quite unhappily. They usually aren't thrilled about the price of the gas, they aren't expecting the friendliest of service, or the highest quality of food.

It just felt like it was a worthy cause to try to get after the guest experience at these sites and to do something with them—rather than just accepting it and the self-fulfilling prophecy that buying gas is a bad customer experience. So, we are trying to take a couple of bold steps to change perceptions.

How does your ad campaign accomplish that?

It captures the spirit of BP. Competitive advertising tends to either be about the macho-aggressive performance of the fuel, or it will tend to show a really beautiful gas station with flowers and an artificial experience.

But that's not real life because these 25,000 sites we have around the world—some are old, some are new, some are large and have all these extra services, while some just offer fuel. So, we went after the things that could be true about all of our sites—that they could give friendly service and be clean and that they could celebrate all of that under the banner of the BP

logo, the *Helios*, which separates us from the rest.

The campaign features bold colors, animation and tries to get people to choose “the green team,” on an emotional basis. Our hope is that people will be willing to drive an extra block or cut across a little bit of extra traffic to choose BP stations because they like what we stand for.

Why did you choose “a little better” as your tag line?

It happened to be our internal brand essence. It was a lucky moment. We couldn't have designed it to happen—to come up with an equivalent of Nike's “Just Do It,” which means something externally to consumers but also means a lot internally, to Nike's employees.

Our equivalent phrase internally is that we can't promise that our gas stations are going to be a lot better, but we do think it's a worthy cause to try to make them a little better. In a category where people expect so little, a little better might just mean a lot.

We gave that to Ogilvy, our ad agency, and it just so happens that the winning idea actually turned it into the external tagline. Which, to us, is wonderful because it really catches on, both internally and externally, with more momentum.

Why did you go with animation in the ads?

It didn't begin with the idea that we wanted animation. The first images that Ogilvy showed us used a strong color palette and really simple images. We were also looking for something that could be global and used very few words, so it could translate easily into different languages.

We had these strong, colorful, simple images, which originally were for a print campaign. When we started to explore how we would bring that to life on TV, it just felt like animation was the obvious way to go. Then we started working with an animation partner who really understood the concept and it started to catch on.

Was part of the plan to appeal to kids?

There was definitely a part of us that was going after a softer, more emotional message, in addition to a functional one. My personal opinion — and I've worked for other oil companies — is that BP is the most artful and purposeful of the major oil brands.

That softer sensibility is something we haven't used enough of in our marketing. Of course, the knock on it is that it's going to appeal more to women, and we knew that. But we weren't trying to exclude anyone. We were trying to find something that might resonate with a wider audience more than the more macho performance-oriented advertising of some of our competitors.

You actually created backstories for the characters in the ads.

Yes. There's Abby Sunshine, who is always spirited and happy. Sal is always thirsty and a little bit laid back. Frankie Clearwater is the intellectual and Michael Stockwell is the driver, who is up for anything.

In other ads, we have Bert, who is our dashing male character. His actual occupation is that he's an

actor, so it's a little tongue-in-cheek that he's the actor in our TV commercial.

We have a family in the third spot — the Lighthouse family — who are trying to show what it feels like to try to travel with kids on long road trips. All of the characters can talk about the environment in a way that is engaging, and not at all polarizing.

How important is the advertising to the strategy?

If we're really going to try to change a retail experience, the advertising is critical — most of all to our partners who own 80 percent of the BP sites. We absolutely tested it with consumers to make sure they liked it, as well. But the main customer group, in my mind, is the partners and the staff who run those 25,000 sites.

We were asking the question — would these ads inspire them to want to clean up their sites a little more, or give a little better service? Would it just make them feel proud to operate a BP site and be affiliated with BP?

Of course we had the higher goal of also driving consumer loyalty, but we are really using the

Green Gas

BP HAS TAKEN WHAT USED TO BE “a gritty cut-rate” gas station and turned it into “what it calls a laboratory for environmentally sensitive building technologies.” Located in Los Angeles, and bordering on Beverly Hills, the station’s “roof is surfaced with 90 solar panels, and a rainwater collection system irrigates the landscaping...”

“... Built mostly with recycled materials, including bits of glass mixed into the pavement, which sparkle,” the station also features “video screens at the pumps” featuring “energy-saving tips.”

Such advice, such as reminders of the relationship between tire pressure and fuel economy, are also

printed on recycled paper that’s “embedded with flower seeds — the idea is that you will plant the paper.”

“Everything here is about re-use,” says Ann Hand, BP’s top marketing executive. The BP station has, in fact, been certified by the U.S. Green Building Council as “green” — making “it the first gas station to receive the designation.”

Of course, the building is green but the “unleaded gas it sells is not.” Ann Hand hopes that will change, saying that BP “may eventually sell biodiesel and other alternative fuels there.”

(SOURCE: Jerry Garrett, *The New York Times*, 3/11/07)

advertising to inspire the people who work at our sites to want to give better service.

How do you make good on the promise of the advertising at the pump?

The hardest thing is trying to inspire the staff and our partners and get them on board emotionally. The traditional way is to try to do that is through franchising contracts, legal means and mystery shoppers. You try to use financial incentives to get your thousands of sites and operators around the world to want to scrub their toilets and have their people smile at the counter.

That's such a "stick" approach. We're trying to use a "carrot" with this ad campaign and come at it in a different way. If they don't want to buy in and believe, you can't actually go out with a customer promise knowing that you can't deliver on it. I can't think of any single block that's more important than the people who run those sites. That's what's been so wonderful for us—the partner reaction to this campaign has just been superb.

Why did you create *Helios House*?

We created *Helios House* (see sidebar) because we needed a beacon—again, to really inspire the troops at the 25,000 BP stations around the world. I didn't go out looking for the big, giant beautiful site. I intentionally took a site that was dirty, old and run-down. It was much in need of a little bit of loving care and the idea was to re-wrap it in an eco-friendly way and turn it into a lab.

What I love about *Helios House* is that the easiest thing would have been to have picked a big corner somewhere, knocked off whatever was there, cleared it out, and started from scratch. But we worked within the constraint that it was the ultimate act of sustainability to work with the footprint of the site that was there.

The site's highest point, in addition to being a lab, is to just be a little greener than it was yesterday. The whole idea was that we would help consumers realize that being green doesn't have to be polarizing. It can be fun and it can be self-gratifying to take small steps. Being green doesn't require big lifestyle trade-offs.

What have you learned so far?

For one thing, *Helios House* has blown up a paradigm I had about the recruitment model for retail.

We went after recruiting people very differently for *Helios House*. We posted on Craigslist that we were hiring people who are ethically minded and interested in the environment.

We did not say it was a gas station.

We had 268 applicants, called in about 40 for interviews and only two or three left after hearing it was a gas station. The rest stayed and wanted to hear more. We really aren't paying this "green team" that much more than we pay at our other petrol stations.

But they are just so proud to be affiliated with this site that is trying to take steps to stay greener. They love that, in addition to running the register, and having to, yes—clean the bathrooms—they get to talk to consumers about the environment. Not in a preachy way, but actually in a fun way. They try to make those three minutes you're stuck there a little more exciting.

Have you learned anything from consumers because of *Helios House*?

We've blown up the paradigm that no one's ever going to drive two more miles for a gas station. That has really surprised us. *Helios House* is showing us that, in a more brand-conscious world, where we all want the best of everything, that people might actually want a better gas station.

To what extent is *Helios House* a prototype of the BP station of the future?

It's not. If I were trying to design the site of the future, I'm sure it would have turned out looking like a big mushroom! When you try to design the future, you get caught up in red tape and you can't move fast enough. The beauty of *Helios House* is that we just said—look, we're just taking one site, and we're going to try to learn from this one site to try to improve all of these sites.

If it works, why not replicate it?

Because what I want to do is fix the 25,000 stations we have versus building 4,000 new ones. There's no doubt that elements of *Helios House* could be retrofitted onto existing sites. When we are building new sites we'll also try to apply what we've learned from *Helios House*.

But I wouldn't want to give the impression that all of a sudden BP sites are all going to have this

beautiful, big, stainless steel canopy. It's a bit of a work of art and that would be unrealistic.

Do you think BP will ever be as cool as Apple or Starbucks?

You know, I am just amazed that we have become brand conscious about things I never thought we would be. We care what business hotel we stay at, and what fitness gym we belong to. We care about what PC we use. We often use different PCs for personal use than for professional because it somehow says something about us.

So, yeah, I think it's inevitable that at some point people are going to be aware of the brand choices they make in every category. I wouldn't have taken this job if I didn't think it was worth it to try to make the point that the same thing applies to gas stations.

But a gas station doesn't really lend itself to being a "badge" the way some other brands do.

People might start branding up their cars with our logo. Maybe it's because every time they buy gas at BP they get carbon offsets against their fuel purchases. There are all kinds of ways to create that kind of identification. It's fun—but it's also the hard part of marketing.

In the U.K., we have a great program called "target neutral," where our retail consumers can go online and actually buy carbon offsets for their fuel purchases at BP. Then their offsets are automatically deducted through a loyalty card. So, we do have things like that, which try to make your brand affiliation stick after you've left the station. To do that at scale—that's the challenge.

You also have considerable hostility to overcome.

Well, high gas prices, for certain. And then, yes, there's a bit of the stigma of being an oil company. I've said this publicly many times—this is the last oil company I'll work for because I don't think I could beat the fact that I'm with the one that is quite authentic in terms of our brand values and our position on the environment.

So, for me, as a marketer, that gives me something fantastic to work with. It's something that personally

motivates me. If I were trying to project "green," but didn't think it was core to the company and the way we did it, then it wouldn't feel right.

It is hard to be in the category called "oil companies," but it doesn't occur to me that I should therefore not do the right thing. It's just one more obstacle that makes the fight a little more interesting.

How much of a difference do you think you can make?

It's hard to think about how to take a low-involvement category and be the group that tries to break out and make it high involvement. That's quite a big hill to climb—maybe an impossible hill to climb. But that's my job.

What also motivates me is—having run sites myself—I believe that our partners deserve it. They play such important roles in their communities. These are business people who give a lot back to their towns. Twenty years ago, their corners were looked at with a lot of positive imagery. These people ran the gas station where they knew your name and it was actually a beacon of service.

I think about that—and maybe I'm a bit too romantic—but gas stations once had a positive image of service. The notion of just accepting that somehow we've just gotten into this place where we're part of an industry that has negative perceptions and that we're just going to sit here and take it—doesn't feel right.

Our business partners are such high quality that if you give them something good enough—like *Helios Power*, the advertising campaign—they'll take it and run with it.

Helios Power has scored the highest execution percentage we've ever had with our partners in any promotion since BP and Amoco came together. That just tells me we are on the right track and moving in the right direction. ■



ANN HAND, as senior vice-president of global brand-marketing and innovation, is the driving force behind re-framing the **BP** consumer brand. Before joining BP, Ann held marketing, finance and operation positions at Mobil Oil and McDonald's Corporation.