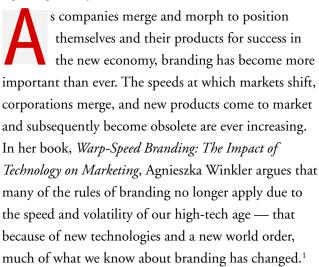# Brand Architecture: A Method to the Madness

GM has 33 brand names. BMW has one. Both are valid brand architectures. Answering the question "What to brand?" is a complex challenge for companies of every size. The key is to create clarity — the trick is to leverage the brand without diluting it.

By Amy Campbell

As companies merge and morph to position themselves and their products for success in the new economy, branding has become more important than ever. The speeds at which markets shift, corporations merge, and new products come to market and subsequently become obsolete are ever increasing. In her book, *Warp-Speed Branding: The Impact of Technology on Marketing*, Agnieszka Winkler argues that many of the rules of branding no longer apply due to the speed and volatility of our high-tech age — that because of new technologies and a new world order, much of what we know about branding has changed.[1]

While the dynamics of our high-speed economy are indeed causing corporations and brand managers to rethink who, what, when, where and why they brand, much of the tried-and-true lessons of positioning for *shelf space* still apply to companies positioning in *cyberspace*. Sure, brand awareness can be created faster than ever, but brand loyalty is still a result of careful market analysis and long-term strategic planning.

Traditional Branding Systems

Makers of soaps, soft drinks and automobiles (among others) have pioneered and perfected over many years the systems and strategies for managing the promotion and identities of products and product lines.

These branding systems, or architectures, can take various forms that emphasize the corporate name and image, de-emphasize the corporate name, create new brands apart from the company brand, or combine these approaches. There is a method to the madness of each. The chart on page 2 serves to summarize some common branding systems popularized by consumer products manufacturers. High-tech and service-based companies (which traditionally have used and understood branding in a somewhat limited way) as well as professional service firms can still learn much from the experiences of the sellers of soaps and cereals.

Branding Technology and Service Companies

In the high-tech economy, creating a strong corporate brand has become extremely important as companies often position themselves as much for the *stock market* as the *market space*. Companies seek to build awareness and loyalty not only with consumers (or business-to-business customers) but also with Wall Street, venture capitalists, potential new hires, the workforce, strategic partners, supply chain members and the media. In the age of converging technologies and merger mania, sometimes the company itself is the product, hoping to be acquired at a high valuation.

Whether or not merging is on their horizon, high-tech and professional services companies should