

Everything I Know About Dating I Learned in Business School

*How to succeed in dating
by using basic business practices*



Common Product Packaging for Dating

Professional business type	Non-materialistic type	Well-dressed artistic type	Dedicated sports fan	IMAGE
Athletic & Healthy Gym Groupie or Jogger, Ready for the World	Natural	Urban	Suburban, Rural or Regular-Old Neighborhood Folks	THEME
Casual yet conservative	The Hippies of this Era	Casual yet non-conservative	Team colors	STYLE
Why, do I stand out?	I don't dress up because I'm not into that shit, so take it or leave it	I like Tunisian folklore music, and that makes me very, very interesting.	I haven't a clue how to dress because no one who had a clue ever passed it on to me	MESSAGE
I like my computer ... a lot	I dig Stevie Nicks	Do I have money & a good income? Can't you tell, baby?	I love my team...dammit!	SUBTEXT

Packaging Case Study: Madonna

Superstar Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone was born in Rochester, Michigan, in 1958. Young Madonna liked to sing and dance, and her aspirations to “be famous” were no different than millions of other girls around the world. But Madonna succeeded where others failed, and Madonna’s enterprises have fueled popular trends in fashion, music, dance, sex, gender orientation, yoga, and women still going to the gym past the age of 40. Also, because of her power, fame, and sexual adventurousness, Madonna apparently can get any man, or woman, that she wants (with exception of Spanish actor Antonio Banderas, who was looking for a really All-American girl when he decided to leave his faithful Spanish wife). She could therefore be considered a role model for all of us.

Over the years she has become closely associated with many cultural expressions, including “Material Girl,” “Boy Toy,” “Trend-Following Chameleon,” and “Shape-Shifting Provocateur.” There is no doubt that she finds a new product trend and claims it as her own.

How did Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone become the one-word super-nova known as Madonna? She did it through a superior packaging strategy.

The Chronology of Madonna

Year 1978 - Madonna Ciccone left a dancing scholarship and dropped out of college.

Year 1982 - Madonna scores her first club scene hit, "Everybody." She follows those with Top 40 hits "Holiday," "Lucky Star," and "Borderline." Her raunchy, haltered-topped, blond-dyed, mid-rift exposed look becomes imitated by teenage girls around the globe. Madonna is officially packaged as a "bad girl."

Years 1984-1987 - Realizing it's good to be bad, Madonna releases her next album. Madonna appears at a music awards show dressed in a white bridal gown singing her new song, "Like a Virgin." Madonna commences to slink across the stage, seduce the audience, and hump the floor in a decidedly non-virginal manner. Madonna is now a cutting-edge, slightly scandalous, very well-known pop act. In 1985 she gets real naughty by marrying bad boy, Sean Penn. Madonna sees that Latin music will eventually make it into mainstream pop, and records the song, "La Isla Bonita," laying the foundation for her future "Spanish-flavored" packaging. She has also created a secondary persona in which she casts herself as the horny and materialistic reincarnation of Marilyn Monroe. This means that Madonna can dress down as well as up without confusing her fans, and at times is seen on stage wearing glamorous evening gowns. She is now packaged as a "very bad girl with expensive tastes."

Year 1989 - Trying to prove that she can make the public forget all of her bad films (Vision Quest, Goose and Tom-Tom, Shanghai Surprise, Who's that Girl?), she goes for the jugular vein of controversy with her "Like a Prayer" video, in which a scanty Madonna dances in front of burning crosses, kisses a non-Italian saint, and spouts stigmata. The Pope, Vatican, and Pepsi are pissed. Madonna stays in the spotlight, ending the eighties and starting the nineties as an apostle of hedonism. She is now packaged as a "very, very bad girl, but one who is becoming self-empowered." Madonna's got balls.

Years 1990-1992 - Continuing to advance her product positioning philosophy of "any press is good press," Madonna decides that the '90's are a time of erotic freedom, and as Columbus supposedly discovered the "new world", she has discovered sex. Madonna let's the world share in her new image as sexual liberator by releasing an album ("Erotica"), book ("Sex"), video ("Justify My

Love”), and clothing designer (Galliano and his pointed leather bondage bras) on the theme. She also becomes buddies with well-known New York divas Debbie Mazar, Sandra Bernhard, and Rosie O’Donnell (with whom she appears in a hit movie about women in baseball). Sandra is not only tough and funny, she’s also bisexual, which is perfect for Madonna’s new product message of sexual exploration. She openly advocates girl-on-girl pleasure in her videos, and positions herself as now possibly bisexual, though no one knows for sure. The mystery is enticing, and we watch her closely to see if there’s a closet from which she’ll emerge. Eventually the public tires of the lack of clarity, as the Artist Formerly Known as Prince and Michael Jackson have done this bit to death. Madonna slowly moves on to other packaging, leaving her new best friends to their own devices. As Madonna moves from friend to friend and image to image, one emerging theme is that if you talk badly about Madonna in public your ass is in hot water, as ostracization from the Magnificent One will close a lot of doors on you permanently. Even tough talking no-nonsense celebs are very careful about what they say on the “private life” of the Material Girl. This, at least, intrigues us.

Years 1991-1992 - Madonna studies the improvisational and unique dance movements of New York City’s “Vogueing” gay and transvestite community, and incorporates their manner of dress, speaking, and formality into her repertoire. Most of these dancers are poor, Black, and Hispanic, and spend a large amount of time and energy grooming themselves to perfection as part of the “vogue.” Having mastered these movements, Madonna packages herself as semi-Hispanic, and recruits several voguers to appear in the video of her new song, appropriately entitled, “Vogue.” In the video, Madonna not only sings about attitude, she dedicates the song to classic movie stars who she says had it, thus raising herself to their level and reinforcing her ongoing positioning as the new Marilyn Monroe. The entire concert road tour connected to the song is filmed, including non-performance parts such as backstage preparation, practices, Madonna’s love life with aging sex symbol Warren Beatty, her relationship with her dancers, the moments when she gets pissed, etc. She releases the edited tape as a documentary called “Truth or Dare”, which is praised by the critics, and fascinates the public. Madonna comes across as a talented, driven, in-control, bitchy, hard-working genius. After the tour in 1996, Madonna has a baby by her choreographer, who is Hispanic.

Years 1993-1995 - Customer over saturation has occurred. We are really damn tired of looking at Madonna. We know it, she knows it, and she disappears for a long enough time that we forget it. Her unplanned positioning at the time was “very annoying and overexposed not-as-baaaaad-as-she-thinks girl.”

Year 1996 - Madonna is Evita Peron, famous Latin First Lady of a fallen Argentinean dictatorship. The rags-to-riches-to-rags tale, whose story arc includes love and worship of Evita by her millions of countrymen, is a perfect Madonna packaging vehicle. It solidifies her queen-like status in the mind of the everyman. At some point we realize that Madonna is no longer possibly bi-sexual, especially since entertainers are coming out of the closet in droves as 100% gay. Obviously, Madonna can no longer claim the competitive advantage of being “cutting-edge” on this issue.

Years around 1997 & 1998 - Where does a real Queen live? England. ‘Let’s see what all this Queen stuff is really about,’ Madonna says. Madonna is now a respectable mother, and can’t seriously raise a child and still be portrayed as a teenage tramp, especially since she’s far from being a teenager anymore. Time to Get Out of Dodge. Madonna moves to England, where she falls in love with the country, realizes that they have a cutting-edge music scene which greatly influences the rest of the world, and decides that she is now English. Her accent changes, her vocabulary changes, and for the word ‘schedule’ she now says the British “shed-u-al” instead of the American “sked-u-al.” Everything is now “quite” this and “quite” that, and she starts delving into the world of techno/ambient-dance music, the current rage across Europe. Madonna becomes a techno/ambient music Queen, and packages her new album and videos to reflect that. Now over 40, Madonna has proven that she still is “with it,” and appeals to club-going music lovers of all ages, especially the age where you do a lot of Ecstasy.

Year 2000 - Madonna marries a British film director in a Scottish castle in her version of a “Material Girl’s fairy-tale”. Despite the fact that she had his child before the wedding, she is now packaged as a “deep & spiritual person of substance.” Madonna can move in and out of British society and nobility with ease, as well as drop down into the local dance joint to shake her still firm booty. Few people remember where she was born, and by the way she talks it’s hard to believe they care (or have the nerve to remind her). She has now arrived as a maturing premium brand.

Conclusion: Two key product marketing principles can be learned from Madonna's career. The first is that over time you need to adjust your product's positioning and packaging as much as required to keep your customer's interest, as long as you don't change it radically in a short period of time. In fact, you can go from "boy toy" to "queen" in the span of a few years.

The second is that even though sex sells, it can be overdone. Don't worry, though. It's unlikely that you will have that problem.

Beware of Trademarks

Some people confuse "trademarks" with proper packaging. They say, "The Artist Formerly and Currently Known as Prince has a trademark look, Mariah Cary has a trademark look, and biologically-enhanced 'actress' Pamela Sue Andersen has a trademark look. They're glamorous. They're famous. I can have a trademark look too."

Not a very good idea. These people truly are products, like Spic & Span, Mop & Glo, iPods, Godiva, Prada, Gucci, and Polo shirts. They are packaged and sold to millions of people, and their personal styles reflect that mass market impact. Like many consumer products, their promoters want the audience to be able to quickly identify them via a certain symbol, value, or style. You may argue that Prince isn't mass market, but that can't be completely true since far more than one thousand people purchase his albums. You, on the other hand, are not a mass market product and are targeting a lot less than one thousand people. For that reason, creating a trademark look that appeals to the masses is a wasted, and particularly embarrassing, effort.

Case Study

I knew a woman who only dressed in purple. Purple boots, purple pants, purple sweaters, and purple hats, all at the same time. Then she'd accessorize them with purple belts, purple purses, purple knapsacks, and purple coats.

The first time you saw her you were like, "Wow. She really knows how to coordinate her look. Who is that woman? What's her name?"

But it got old pretty fast. After a while you were like, "Do you have anything else to wear?" I mean, sometimes when she was wearing a purple down parka she looked just like a big walking grape. You're kind of like, "Girl, what have you been smoking?"