
FIRST THE
TROUSERS
THEN THE
SHOES

BRAND CONSULTING

12 Evidence-Based Rules for Growth

“Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought”



Albert von Szent-Gyorgy

1937 Nobel Prize Winner, credited with discovering vitamin C

1. “The 10 principles for successful brand by Professor Kevin Lane Keller
2. “The 7 principles of marketing” from the Ehrenberg Bass Institute,
3. Kantar’s “Blue Print For Brand Growth”,
4. Ipsos
5. The 3Fs framework from research firm System One
6. The analysis from Prof. dr. Koen Pauwels and Oliver Koll “Why Brands Grow: The Power Of Differentiation And Penetration””

Strong brands grow by building rich Brand Association networks: memories, emotions, assets, experiences and contexts that help people think of them *first* and *positively* in buying moments.

Rule 1 — Penetration as the Primary Growth Lever

Rule: Grow by increasing the number of people who think of your brand in relevant buying moments (mental availability) and can easily access it (physical availability).

Why: Penetration drives volume. Most sales come from light and non-buyers.

Association Implication: Build broad, easily accessed Brand Association Networks that capture the core category drivers (needs, benefits, emotions, occasions, etc.).

Small brands: Focus on building salience and overcoming obscurity.

Large brands: Maintain salience across a wider range of usage occasions, need states, etc.

Rule 2 — Build Meaningful and Relevant Associations

Rule: Anchor your brand in emotionally and functionally relevant associations that meet people's needs.

Why: According to Kantar, brands that are *meaningfully different* drive more share, margin, and loyalty.

Association Implication: Build emotionally resonant and need-aligned Brand Association Networks.

In growing categories: Emphasize emerging needs and novel benefits.

In mature categories: Reinforce established needs with emotional clarity.

Rule 3 — Differentiation Matters (Especially for Small and Challenger Brands)

Rule: Create Brand Associations Networks that set your brand apart from others—not just in features, but in personality, tone, values, or community.

Why: Pauwels & Koll show differentiation drives penetration, especially in emerging markets and for smaller brands.

Association Implication: Highlight unique brand associations that shift perception and spark reconsideration.

Small brands: Lead with differentiation to disrupt habits.

Large brands: Use distinctiveness more than differentiation; familiarity and trust matter more than novelty.

Rule 4 — Distinctive Brand Assets Are Mental Shortcuts

Rule: Use logos, shapes, colors, mascots, and taglines consistently to anchor Brand Association Networks.

Why: These cues enhance mental availability.

Association Implication: These assets become retrieval cues in consumer memory.

Small brands: Invest in creating strong DBAs across all touchpoints & be patient.

Large brands: Maintain and harvest your DBAs across all touchpoints

Rule 5 — Be First to Mind in Buying Moments

Rule: Fight for top-of-mind recall within relevant usage and purchase contexts.

Why: First-remembered brands are far more likely to be chosen if they have the right associations.

Association Implication: Create strong and rich Brand Association Networks.

Small brands: Focus to carve mental space.

Large brands: Broaden your Brand Association Network to be recalled across more moments and buying occasions.

Rule 6 — Consistency Builds Mental Strength

Rule: Repeat key associations consistently over time to embed them.

Why: Brand Association Networks decay without reinforcement; consistency reinforces fluency.

Association Implication: Strengthen core brand associations through repeated, coherent messaging.

Small brands: Start with a focused, tight story.

Large brands: Evolve messaging carefully without eroding equity.

Rule 7 — Refresh Memory Structures Without Breaking Them

Rule: Keep the brand interesting and contemporary, but familiar.

Why: Ehrenberg-Bass emphasizes the “fresh consistency” paradox.

Association Implication: Layer new associations onto existing ones; don't overwrite. Bring to life current associations in a fresh and interesting way.

In growing categories: Lead with innovation but keep recognizability.

In mature categories: Emphasize reliability and relevance.

Rule 8 — Emotion Amplifies Memory and Preference

Rule: Drive positive feelings toward your brand.

Why: Emotional response correlates with market share and pricing power.

Association Implication: Use storytelling, music, visuals, and tone to forge emotional brand associations.

All brands: Emotional clarity sharpens brand meaning and recall.

Rule 9 — Align Associations to Usage Contexts and Needs

Rule: Associate your brand with specific situations, needs, and rituals.

Why: Occasion-based relevance boosts salience and preference.

Association Implication: Expand and diversify context-bound associations.

Small brands: Specialize in a few high-impact occasions.

Large brands: Dominate across many occasions.

Rule 10 — Avoid Negative Associations

Rule: Prevent reasons not to buy—bad experiences form strong negative associations.

Why: Satisfaction and perceived value are retention levers.

Association Implication: Remove friction and signal trustworthiness to avoid negative memory formation.

Large brands: Monitor and manage reputation carefully.

Small brands: Avoid overpromising and underdelivering.

Rule 11 — Use Fame, Feelings & Fluency as Brand Health Indicators

Rule: Monitor your brand's fame (mental availability), feelings (emotional valence), and fluency (ease of recognition).

Why: System1's research finds the 3Fs predict in-market performance.

Association Implication: Your brand's strength lies in how quickly and positively it is processed.

Rule 12 — Invest for the Long Term in Brand Association Networks

Rule: Building strong brand associations is cumulative and takes sustained investment.

Why: Long-term support maintains salience.

Association Implication: You're building a mental architecture, not just winning clicks. Be patient.

Summary — The Growth Matrix

Growth Principle	Focus for Small Brands	Focus for Large Brands	Growing Categories	Mature Categories
Penetration	Build salience, reach light/non-buyers	Reinforce salience broadly	Grab new buyers	Maintain relevance
Differentiation	Critical for consideration	Less critical; focus on trust	Drive new habits	Subtly refresh
Distinctiveness	Establish quickly	Guard vigilantly	Signal novelty	Reassure & anchor
Consistency	Build mental structure	Preserve equity	Create anchors	Prevent erosion
Emotional Depth	Spark connection	Amplify familiarity	Evoke excitement	Signal trust
Occasion Relevance	Own a niche occasion	Expand into new ones	Capture new rituals	Dominate existing ones
Asset Use	Embed quickly	Deploy broadly	Build presence	Maintain recall
Satisfaction	Avoid negatives	Leverage base loyalty	Ensure delight	Prevent churn