

BRAND ASSOCIATION NETWORK MIX SELF-ASSESSMENT SCORECARD & ACTION PLAN

Does your brand or desired brand platform (brand positioning statement or brand architecture) include the right type of associations to create mental availability and brand preference? Fill out this self-assessment scorecard to evaluate your current or desired brand association mix and identify areas for improvement!

This document is a companion resource to the book '**The Science of Brand Associations: Win Minds, Win Markets**' by Ulli Appelbaum. It allows marketers, brand managers, and strategists to assess the quality of their brand's association network using a structured, science-backed and evidence-based scorecard. Even if you haven't read the book, this guide will give you practical insights and help you identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.

If you want to learn about the science and facts behind these questions, I encourage you to grab your copy of the book today.

THE SCIENCE OF BRAND ASSOCIATIONS

Win Minds, Win Markets



Ulli Appelbaum

Award winning marketing strategist and author of the
"Brand Positioning Workbook: A simple how-to guide to
more compelling brand positionings, faster"

HOW TO USE THIS SCORECARD?

Step 1:

To assess a new brand strategy (brand positioning or brand architecture) list all the associations you want to create and build over the next few years to attract new consumers to your brand. Brand growth can only come by acquiring new consumers so focus on those. Once you have your list of associations, answer the questions in step 2 by focusing on the whole list (the full picture) rather than individual associations.

To assess your current brand, think about the way your brand is brought to life at every touchpoint (advertising, packaging, website, social media, etc.) and answer the questions in step 2. In this case, focus on what consumers actually see and experience rather than on what you intend.

Step 2:

For each question, rate your brand on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Be honest and base your answers on the data you have – ***wishful thinking won't help you grow your brand.***

Step 3:

Add up your total score to evaluate how well balanced your Brand Association Network is. Examine the various sections of the scorecard and use the **overall score interpretation guide** to understand what you are doing well and what areas you need to improve on.

Step 4:

Dive into the dimensions guide to better understand what the score for the different dimensions means and what you can do to better that area.

Step 5:

Create your own action plan to improve the mix of your brand association network.

STEP 1: YOUR DESIRED BRAND ASSOCIATIONS

List all the desired brand associations you want your target consumers to connect with your brand.

- One way to do that is to look at your brand positioning statement or brand architecture and extract all the associations “covered” in this positioning statement or brand architecture. This will help you assess whether you are focusing on the right type of associations. In this case, also make sure that those desired associations are brought to life in your executions.
- Another way to do this -to assess your existing brand activities- is to look at how your brand comes to life at all the major touchpoints and use that as a basis for listing your brand associations.

List them below (or create a mind map).

STEP 2: SELF-ASSESSMENT SCORECARD

For each question, rate your brand from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Be honest and only focus on the explicit associations.

#	Diagnostic Questions	Score (1–5)	Comments
1	Do your desired (or current) brand associations make it clear what category you are playing in?		
2	Do the associations help the brand stand out clearly? (I.e., does the brand have clear and distinctive brand assets that set it apart from competition?)		
3	Are the associations relevant and motivating to consumers? (Do they tap into core category drivers such as needs, wants, or expected benefits for a specific segment?)		
4	Do the associations help the brand feel different enough from competing offerings? Functionally or emotionally?		
5	Do the associations help create a positive consumer attitude towards the brand? (Do they evoke a positive emotional response and enhance brand preference?)		
6	(For well-established brands) Can the Brand Association Network be extended to new Category Entry Points without diluting the brand's core associations?		

STEP 3: OVERALL SCORE INTERPRETATION

Use the table below to better understand how your brand is doing.

Total Score	Interpretation	Recommended Action
27–30	Outstanding – Your brand association network has the right mix of associations.	Continue reinforcing and scaling what works. Ensure all these elements come to life in the execution.
22–26	Strong – Most core areas are present and well managed, but a few dimensions may need refinement.	Review individual scores to spot gaps. Maintain consistency of strong dimensions while reducing the gaps and keep evolving based on consumer trends.
17–21	Moderate – You have some of the right types of associations but also have too many areas of weakness that could undermine your brand’s salience or differentiation and weaken your overall Brand Association Network.	Conduct a focused review. Prioritize improvement in dimensions with the lowest individual scores.
11–16	Weak – Your brand association network may lack relevance, clarity, or emotional power. Your brand is not in a strong position.	Revisit your positioning, brand codes, and consumer relevance. Consider consumer research to realign.
6–10	At Risk – The brand likely struggles with salience, distinctiveness, and relevance.	Strategic overhaul required. Rebuild your association network starting with category relevance and brand distinctiveness.

STEP 4: INTERPRETATION BY DIMENSIONS GUIDE

Dive into the various dimensions that make up a strong brand association network and identify areas of improvement.

Strategy / Assessment Item	Low Score (1-2) Means...	High Score (4-5) Means...	Strategic Implication / Action
1. Category	The brand may not be mentally linked to the right category — consumers might not know when to think of or use the brand.	Consumers easily recognize which category the brand plays in; strong mental linkage to usage situations.	Reinforce category cues and usage contexts in communication and brand assets. Use clear signals (e.g. pack, claims, imagery).
2. Distinctiveness	The brand is generic or blends into competitors; distinctive assets are weak or underutilized.	Brand is easily recognizable and stands out in the market; distinctive assets are strong and consistent.	Audit, define, and consistently activate distinctive brand assets (logos, colors, tone, characters, etc.).
3. Relevance & Motivation	The brand associations feel irrelevant or fail to connect with important consumer needs or desires.	The associations match well with important category drivers and deliver a compelling benefit.	Reconnect with consumers to understand evolving need states. Refocus associations around meaningful, motivating benefits.
4. Differentiation	Brand is easily replaceable or indistinct from competitors; perceived as a commodity.	Brand has a unique emotional tone, benefit promise, or point of view.	Identify and invest in ownable emotional or functional territory. Avoid being stuck in the “sea of sameness.”
5. Emotional Impact	Consumers may recognize the brand but feel indifferent or emotionally disconnected.	The brand evokes warm, positive, or aspirational feelings and emotional stickiness.	Build emotional storytelling and resonance into campaigns. Leverage brand purpose, rituals, or culture if authentic.
6. Expandability	The brand is rigid or limited to narrow situations; lacks permission to stretch.	The brand is elastic but coherent, capable of entering new contexts or occasions.	Use a strong core to stretch strategically. Build “bridging” associations carefully to grow occasions while maintaining coherence.

STEP 4: DEFINE YOUR OWN ACTION PLAN

Create your own action plan to improve the strength of your brand association network.

1. Identify the priority areas of improvement (lowest scores)
2. Define clear actionable objectives for each area
3. Determine concrete steps to achieve each objective
4. Assign responsibility
5. Add a timeline
6. Define how you'll measure progress

BRAND ASSOCIATION NETWORK STRENGTH ACTION PLAN FOR: _____

Focus Area	Objective	Key Action	Owner	Timeline	Success Criteria/KPI