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**Do as I say, not as I do**

INTERVIEW: ANITA RODDICK

# Do as I Say, Not as I Do

*Big brands get the thumbs down and money doesn't matter. Body Shop founder Anita Roddick urges Asian businesses to think different*

**SOCIAL ACTIVIST AND** environmentalist Anita Roddick and her husband Gordon founded the Body Shop in 1976. Despite Body Shop having 1,968 stores, including 488 in Asia, Roddick styles herself as an anti-marketer's marketer. She says she's "deeply suspicious" about the idea of global brands, and didn't even have a marketing department for the first 18 years. She says the Body Shop, which buys its ingredients from villagers in developing countries and encourages customers to recycle its bottles, was about ideals.

By using Body Shop outlets to support protest movements—from human rights to anti-animal testing—she struck a chord with a new breed of socially-conscious consumers. But not with investors. As the chain continued to expand in the late 1990s, profits declined. Roddick stepped aside as chief executive in 1998 and became chairman; in February, 2002, she gave up that post, too, and now serves as a consultant to the company. Roddick spoke to the REVIEW's Cris Prystay at the Global Brand Forum in Singapore. Excerpts:

**THE BODY SHOP WAS SHAPED BY YOUR VISION AND PERSONALITY. WHEN A BRAND IS SO STRONGLY IDENTIFIED TO THE PERSONALITY OF THE FOUNDER, IS THERE A RISK TO THE CONTINUITY OF THE BRAND, OR BRAND VALUES, WHEN THE FOUNDER LEAVES?**

There is a risk, but it's only a partial risk. Inevitably, an entrepreneur-founder moves on. You get relegated to the history books; this is the story of the founder. I think in terms of humanizing these brands, and keeping the values alive, it's crucial to keep the myths, the founding stories, alive and part of the [company's] culture.

**MANY ASIAN CONGLOMERATES ARE FAMILY-RUN; THE PERSONALITY OF THE FOUNDER, OR HIS HEIR, DEFINES THE COMPANY. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE ASIAN BUSINESSES THAT ARE THINKING ABOUT BRAND-BUILDING?**

If you have anything that sets you apart from anybody else, you've got to take those characteristics and shout them from the rooftops. So many electronics companies are the same, so many skin-care companies are the same; how do you stand apart in visual language, your imagery? How do stand apart in what you promise, how do you stand apart in your behaviour?

We always stood apart in how we acted as a company, and it was not about chequebook charity, and "let's have another Aids campaign" or breast-cancer campaign or whatever. It was [about] how we could challenge and change how we live, and we were obsessed with that relationship with the customer. I think the bravest thing [Asian companies] can do now is to lighten up. It's not to artificially find out what they can be about, and go to a PR agency and say: "What can we do?" Rather, what does the group, the family care



about? Do you care about global warming? Do you care about domestic violence? Then communicate it to every level of the company.

**IS IT IMPORTANT TO CREATE A BRAND, OR BRAND VALUES, THAT WILL OUTLAST THE FOUNDER?**

Yes, and I think that's something you can do. If you can shape the company's belief system, which can't be top down, it's got to be from the grass roots, you're halfway there. And it's got to be not just a hollow add-on. You've got to institutionalize it. If it's a family-run company, the family should have a face, and stand for what matters to that family.

**THE BODY SHOP'S SUCCESS STORY IS WELL KNOWN. BUT WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?**

I would never go to the stockmarket. A creative company gets its lifeblood from experimentation. You want to try things out, you don't want the world looking at you, financial analysts looking at you. You've got to be measured by the product, and you've got to be measured by the relationship with the customers, and not just the share price. And most CEOs I know just work for the share price. They left us alone most of the time, but it was a pressure we didn't need. We wanted to be measured on other things, like job creation, rather than being measured entirely by wealth. ■