

Is It Love?

It can be, says market researcher Judith Ricker '76E, '81E (MM), '91S (MBA), reflecting on what makes an iconic brand.

Interview by Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

When I graduated from the Eastman School, I auditioned for the third chair position in the Rochester Philharmonic and I won it. I played for the RPO for 15 years, and I taught at Hochstein—private lessons, chamber music, the whole bit.

In 1984, my husband, Ramon Ricker, produced a record for the RPO called *My First Concert*, which introduced children to classical music. The RPO didn't have the bandwidth to market it. So I started doing it. I drove all over the place, placing it in toy stores around Rochester, and I found national distributors. It made the *New York Times* list of top Christmas gifts for children. I got interested in what I was doing. I started one class at the Simon School and decided to matriculate.

Any brand is a promise. WHAT ICONIC brands such as Disney, Lego, and Apple have in common is that they keep to that core promise, and yet they evolve. And the really successful ones are excellent at anticipating the future. They get there before people know they want what they have.

Judith Ricker

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Winner of 2012 "Great Minds Silver Innovation Award," Advertising Research Foundation

First job after college: Third Oboist, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra

Hometown: Rochester

On the Eastman School brand: "It prepares you for life as it exists rather than as you would like it to exist."

I worked at Kodak for seven years after I finished my MBA. I think George Eastman was the Steve Jobs of his day. He developed a product that there was a latent desire for and developed a marketing campaign around it: "You push the button, we do the rest." People in the 1970s and early 1980s thought computers were scary and only experts used them, and what Steve Jobs tried to do was to say, "No, no. It's a tool to let you do the things you want to do."

When I was at Kodak, I did the forecast for what was the first commercial digital camera. Kodak, which was partnering with Apple, didn't put its brand on it. It became the Apple QuickTake. I thought that was a big mistake. I think that they lost sight of what that brand promise was. I think Kodak at its core was about memories. It was about capturing something for the ages.

I've been thinking for a long time what makes up "brand passion." There's the emotional content—you love it, you hate it, or you have no feelings for it. There's also what I call harmony, or the notion of personal fit. And there's attachment. I can dislike a brand, not feel that it fits me very well, but still be attached to it because of inertia. In those cases, the brand I'm using is very vulnerable.

Brands have to be careful how they use social media. They need to look at it as another channel, but not as a replacement for other forms of media. Because you really do build brands across media. Television is an important way to build a brand. It just is. Because you can express things that you can't easily express in many other media.

When I'm not doing market research, I do still play oboe. I'm part of a woodwind quintet called Antara Winds. We released a CD in 2010 called *Antara Music*. This is our 30th year. 

