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I write about great brands and their strategies.

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Three Ways To Tidy Up Your Brand

Do your ads say so much that they end up not really communicating anything? Do you use so many brand and product names that you and your customers can't keep track? Does your brand try to be all things to all people but you end up being nothing to anyone?

If you answered "yes" to any (or all) of these, you might benefit from the advice of a Japanese professional cleaning consultant. [Marie Kondo](#) wrote the bestselling book [The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing](#) and has helped legion of disciples with her home-organization methods. Her advice also suggests three ways to tidy up your brand.

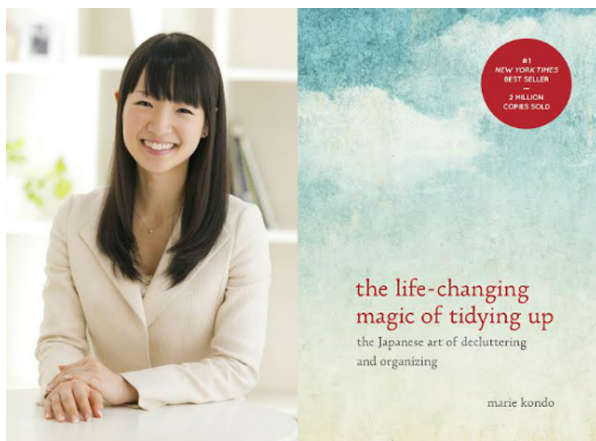


Photo courtesy: tidyingup.com

You may be like many other brand managers and business leaders who are not realizing the full potential of their brands because of a cluttered identity, the proliferation of brands, or an overly ambitious brand strategy. Kondo's tenets of simplicity, discarding first, and letting go can get

help you put your brand in order in a way that will unleash its power to increase margins, inspire loyalty, and fuel a sustainable business.

Simplify your visual identity and communications. Kondo explains that “*Hardly anyone is aware of how many items he or she owns*” and advises laying out all your things in a room when you start tidying it up so you can take stock of what you have relative to what you really want and need.

Do the same with all the elements of your brand’s visual identity — collect all your logos/logo versions/logo treatments/logo lock-ups, taglines/themelines/sluglines/sign-offs, icons, graphics, colors, fonts, textures, etc. You’ll probably be shocked at how many elements exist — and it’s likely a lot of unauthorized ones that you’re not even aware of are being used too. Identify the elements that represent and express your brand the best — keep those and discard the others that are left over from past identity iterations or are used to appease some gratuitous purpose.

Follow a similar approach with your ads and other marketing communications. Lay out your last campaign and ask yourself if all that was said and shown was essential to the message and purpose. Did you add more visuals or copy because each stakeholder needed to put their stamp on it, or because you thought they would add more dimension or interest, or perhaps simply because you could?

Less is more when it comes to your brand visuals and communications.

Streamline your brand portfolio. Thanks to new product introductions, line extensions, acquisitions, and new channels and accounts, it’s easy for one company to accumulate a lot of brands. Then if you add more brand names from feature branding, ingredient branding, co-branding, sub-branding, etc., you end up with a bloated portfolio of brands.

Unlike discarding clothes that no longer fit and un-read books, rationalizing a brand portfolio usually requires rigorous analysis and careful transition strategies. But a few of Kondo’s basic principles apply.

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Kondo's advice is to start with discarding. "*Start by discarding, all at once, intensely and completely,*" she says. In the same way, start the work on your brand portfolio by emptying it out and then adding back only those brands that are critical to your business. Then merge the rest with those most valuable brands, or drop or divest them.

"Once you have done that, it's easy to decide where things should go," Kondo then adds. Apply an organizing logic to your brand portfolio by assigning a clear role and priority to each brand. Designate if a brand drives differentiation or profitability, or if its role is to attract or retain a specific high-value customer segment or key account, or if it is intended to increase the proprietary nature or salience of a new technology or feature.

Kondo concludes, "*To truly cherish the things that are important to you, you must first discard those that have outlived their purpose.*" Similarly, to truly build the brands that are important to your business, you can't afford to waste your time, money, and energy on marginal ones. By applying a minimalist approach to your portfolio, you will free up resources to make your remaining brands stronger.

Focus your brand strategy. If you're like most brand leaders, you experience a strong pull to try to appeal to many different customer segments and/or to promote many different brand attributes and differentiators. You end up diluting your efforts and your messages.

The defense against these temptations is practicing the discipline of "no." Kondo writes, "*Keep only those things that speak to your heart...Discard everything that does not spark joy.*" In brand-building, this means deciding which customers you truly want and which ones you are willing to let go — even fire, if necessary. Different customers represent different value to your business — it doesn't make sense to treat them all the same.

It also means deciding which values, attributes, and features are essential to your brand purpose and identity and focusing only on those. Of all the things you *could* say or do, your priority should be only on those that you *should*. To

build a consistent, cohesive brand that has integrity and impact, you need to say “no” far more than “yes.”

Tidying up your home involves, Kondo says, “*Letting go of things that don’t spark joy and experiencing the happiness of being surrounded by only the things that you love.*” Tidying up your brand involves removing the clutter, waste, and sprawl that are holding it back.

Denise Lee Yohn is a brand-building expert, speaker and author of [What Great Brands Do](#) and [Extraordinary Experiences](#).

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