RECOGNISABLY YOU

How distinctive brand assets build recognition and drive brand choice

Gillian Drewett

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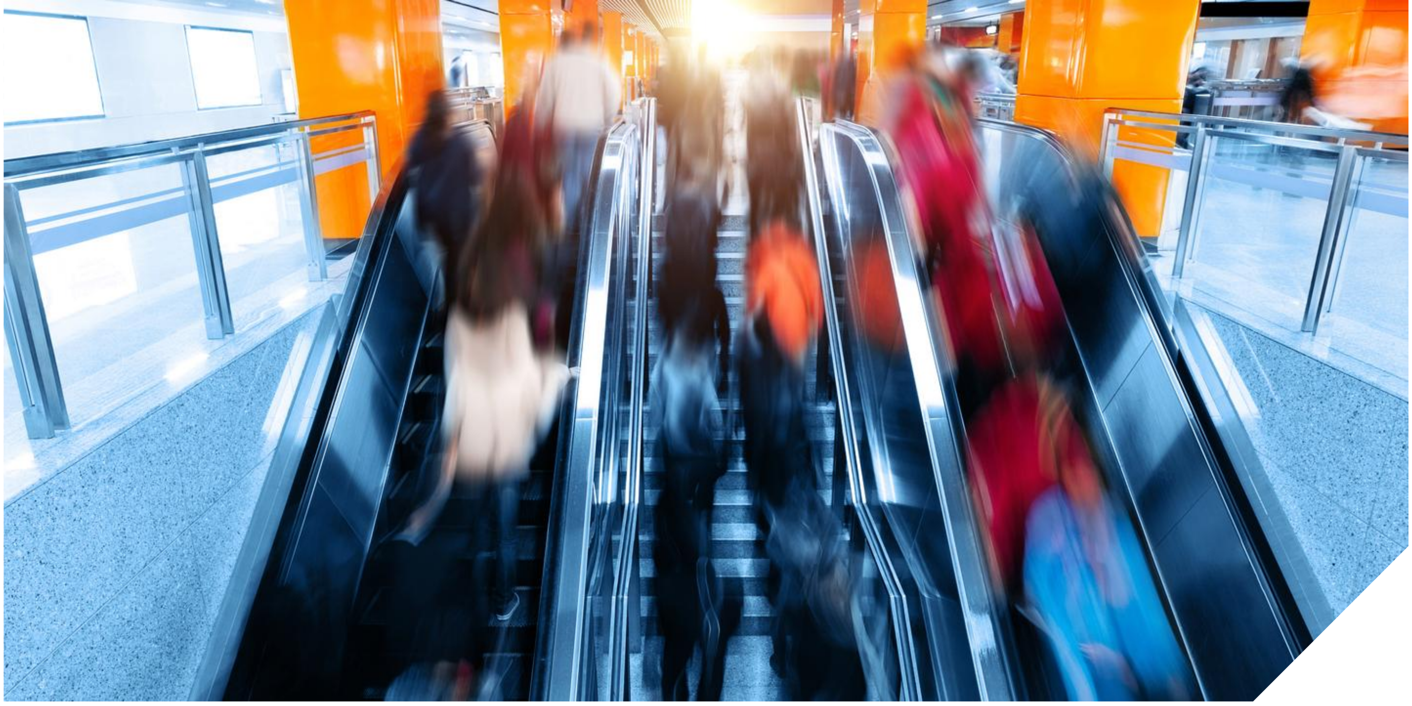

INTRODUCTION

Recently, I came across a single potato chip on a London tube station stair. Without branding or a logo – just its product shape. I instantly recognised it as a Pringle. Any other shape, and I'd know what it wasn't, but not what it was. That's a distinctive asset at work.

A brand's distinctive assets capture attention, trigger memories, and enable recognition and correct attribution, strengthening brand equity by enhancing memory structures that increase purchase likelihood. This is what they do, but what are they, and how can brands use their assets to create the greatest impact?

At Ipsos, we define them as: consistent sensory and semantic cues that signal the brand to people in a unique, fast, intuitive way.

Now, of course, people don't encounter just one brand at a time. We live in a world of constant, varied brand exposure. With multiple channels, infinite scroll and fragmented attention, the places and spaces where brands are discovered are continually evolving – from retail and e-commerce to social media, search and Large Language Models (LLMs). In this environment, distinctive assets ensure a brand stands out and is recognised, making them a critical driver of business success today.

Now, consider the brands that come most readily to mind for you. What makes them instantly recognisable? Throughout this article, you will notice a series of thought starters designed to help you reflect on your brand assets and where they may already be working – or where opportunities still exist.

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PRINCIPLES OF BEING DISTINCTIVE

We know brands exist in consumers' minds as a network of thoughts, feelings, images, associations, colours, sounds, symbols and memories. Distinctive assets play a role in activating these memory structures.

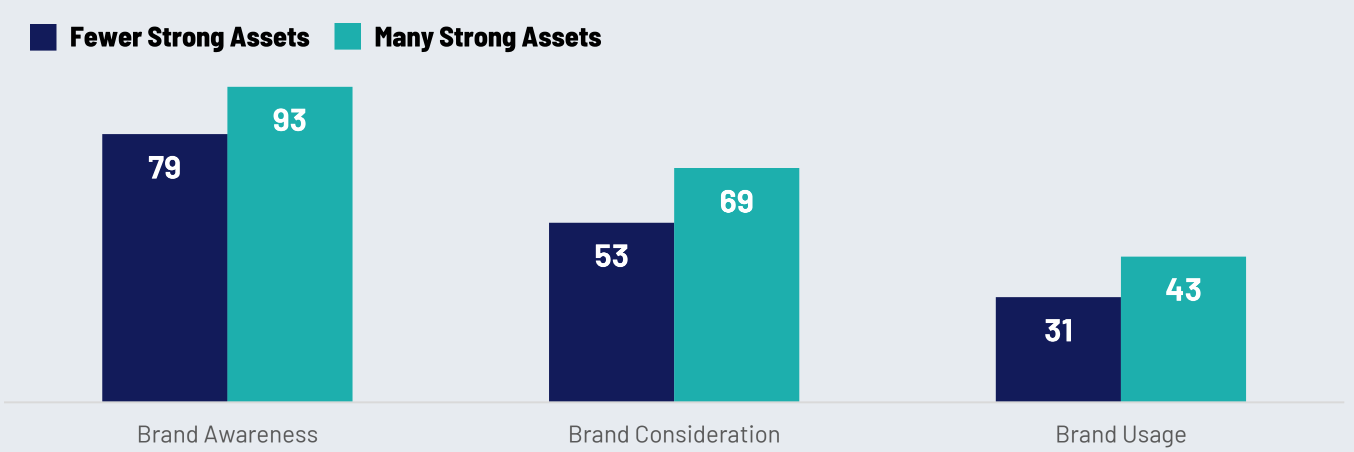
In *The Power of You*, we saw that "distinctive brand assets are more effective than showing or talking about the brand". This is because brand assets trigger these memory structures, bringing the brand to mind at the moment when it matters.

In today's fragmented attention economy, brands must capture and hold attention long enough to trigger choice or create recallable memories. Ipsos' Distinctive Brand Assets database, comprising over 1100 assets from 900+ brands worldwide, shows truly distinctive assets are rare. Our proprietary methodology ranks assets by implicit brand linkage and uniqueness as gold, silver, or bronze. Only 15% achieve gold status, instantly and uniquely associating with the right brand.

1. **Gold:** Assets instantly and uniquely linked to the correct brand, used in isolation.
2. **Silver:** Assets over the average, needing further amplification for stronger association.
3. **Bronze:** Weakly linked assets unlikely to signify the brand alone.

This matters because brands with stronger distinctive asset portfolios significantly outperform weaker distinctive asset portfolios across key brand measures such as awareness, consideration and usage (figure 1). Brands with a higher proportion of strong assets – those classified as Gold or Silver - achieved substantially stronger results than brands with fewer strong assets.

Figure 1: Brands with more strong assets perform better



Source: Ipsos Brand Distinctive Assets database. February 2026

What's more, when comparing brands with the lowest and highest proportions of strong assets we see a substantial gap. Brands with many strong assets are 31% more likely to be considered and 38% more likely to be used (figure 2).

This is the recognition multiplier at work: when people recognise a brand quickly and correctly, they are more likely to notice it, consider it and ultimately choose it.

Distinctive assets are not simply creative devices; they are measurable drivers of brand equity and business performance. However, achieving this level of distinctiveness is rare. Only one in five brands has a sufficiently strong portfolio of distinctive assets to consistently deliver these kinds of effects.

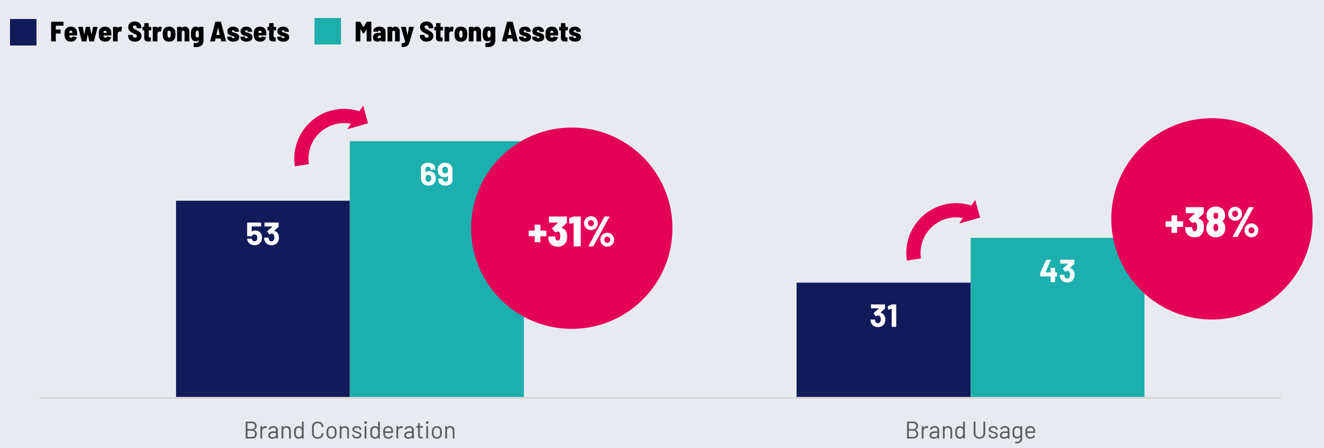
So, while many different types of distinctive assets exist – from logos and colours to characters, packaging and sonic cues – what matters most is not the quantity of assets a brand has, but how effectively they work together to make a brand distinctive and build memory structures over time.

The strongest brands focus on consistently using specific, highly recognisable assets that can be reinforced across channels and contexts. The question then becomes: **how can brands use those assets to create the greatest impact?**

To explore this further, we will focus on four widely used asset types – product, characters, packaging and sonic cues – while recognising that these principles apply across all asset types.

Combining assets amplifies their impact. Linking visual, verbal, and sonic cues, for example, strengthens memory encoding and brand attribution. Consistency is vital too, balancing freshness with familiarity, and introducing new elements alongside established ones. Ultimately it is about being mindful and considered in the consistent use of your brand's assets, with the view to increasing your chances of capturing attention in the moment and being chosen in the future.

Figure 2: Uplift between brands with the lowest and highest proportions of strong assets



Source: Ipsos Brand Distinctive Assets database. February 2026

TURNING DISTINCTIVENESS INTO BRAND RECOGNITION

Brand assets can drive quick recognition in the moment and contribute to brand equity over time by making the brand even easier to recognise, recall and choose across contexts. The Pringle chip's shape acts as a recognition shortcut, identifying the brand without a logo.

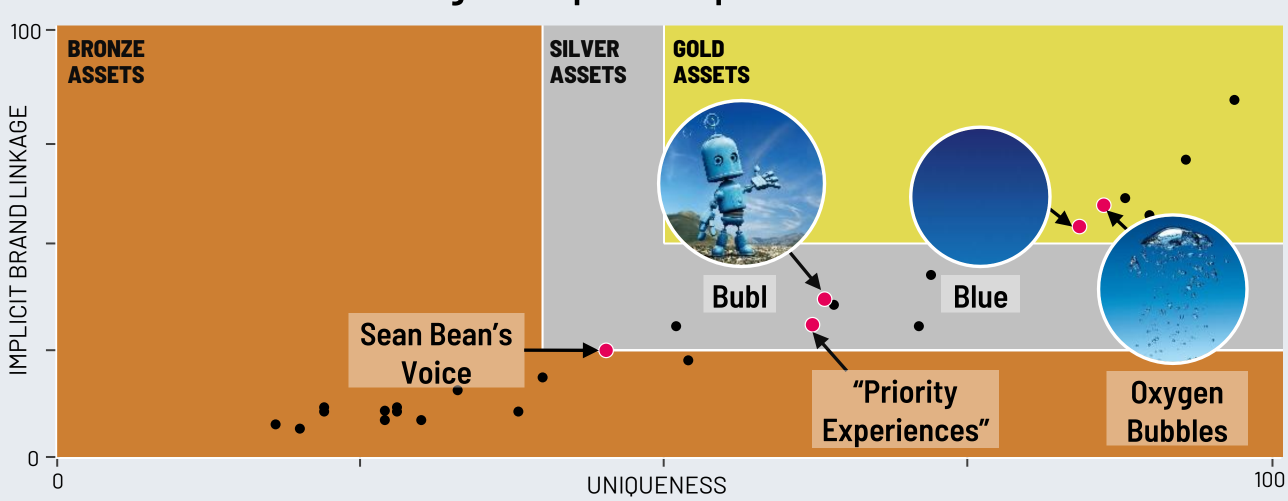
Thought Starter 1: Could your product or pack be recognised without a logo?

Kellogg's Pop-Tarts shows how distinctive assets can evolve over time while remaining strongly linked to the brand. The 'Crazy Good' tagline was introduced in 2004, and twenty years later, the Agents of Crazy Good mascots built on both the tagline and the product itself. By refreshing these assets without losing recognisability, Pop-Tarts keeps the brand distinctive, relevant and connected to the memory links already built.

Thought Starter 2: Would characters suit your brand?

Using assets in combination has significant impact. UK mobile network O2's Bubl robot, introduced in 2020, launched with existing assets, achieved silver status (figure 3). Bubl, a blue robot, was launched alongside existing strong assets including the oxygen bubbles, the blue colour and the Sean Bean voice-over. It illustrated new asset establishment as part of a recognisable and consistent asset portfolio.

Figure 3: Sponsorship awareness



Thought Starter 3: What existing asset would you leverage with a new one?

Grabbing the attention of someone scrolling quickly is a challenge. If that scroller has the sound on, then a sonic cue can capture attention in three seconds or less. And of course, the sonic cue also works when the brand is heard rather than seen.

Netflix's 'tudum' and McDonald's 'ba-da-ba-ba-ba' demonstrate the power of audio to reinforce memory structure. Netflix has even taken the success of their sonic cue a step further and use Tudum to name their *"official companion site to Netflix, helping find and fuel your fandom for the TV shows and movies you love*."

Thought Starter 4: Could sonic assets enhance your brand?

While assets allow the creativity of a brand to shine, using them consistently is critical. It is persistent and recognisable use that builds the mental links required for assets to become truly distinctive. The most effective brands balance freshness with familiarity – introducing new elements alongside established assets.

The brands that win are those with the clearest, most consistently used and most intelligently combined distinctive brand assets.

> **Grabbing the attention of someone scrolling quickly is a challenge. If that scroller has the sound on, then a sonic cue can capture attention in three seconds or less.**

MAKING YOUR BRAND RECOGNISABLE

Distinctive Brand Assets are a brand manager's powerful tool to capture attention, build memory, and support brand choice. Winning brands have clear, consistent, and intelligently combined assets. By knowing your strongest assets, using them deliberately and evolving them carefully, you increase the chances of your brand being recognised in the moment and remembered in the future.

Steps to maximise brand assets:

Evaluate assets:
Identify hero assets, weak spots, and brand linkage opportunities.

Create clear guardrails:
Define distinctive assets and fixed and flexible elements.

Use assets relentlessly:
Apply consistently across channels, track performance.

Brands that are easiest to recognise are often easiest to choose. As a single Pringle chip triggered recognition and purchase intent at a tube station, strong brands build assets with similar impact no matter where they're encountered.

If your logo disappeared tomorrow, **what would people unmistakeably recognise as you?**

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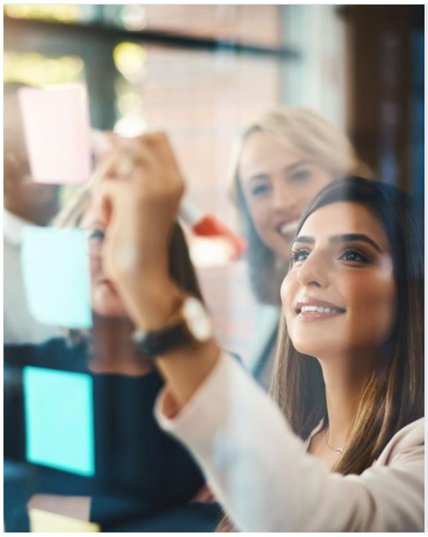
IPSOS' BRAND TOOLKIT INCLUDES:

Brand Health Tracking:

Ipsos offers so much more than just brand tracking – an all-encompassing highly intelligible brand health ecosystem that is grounded in dynamic context of people's realities. We provide true understanding of which aspects of brand experience, image and relationship matter to people when they make purchase decisions and provide guidance on setting the right course for activation across all brand channels and touchpoints.

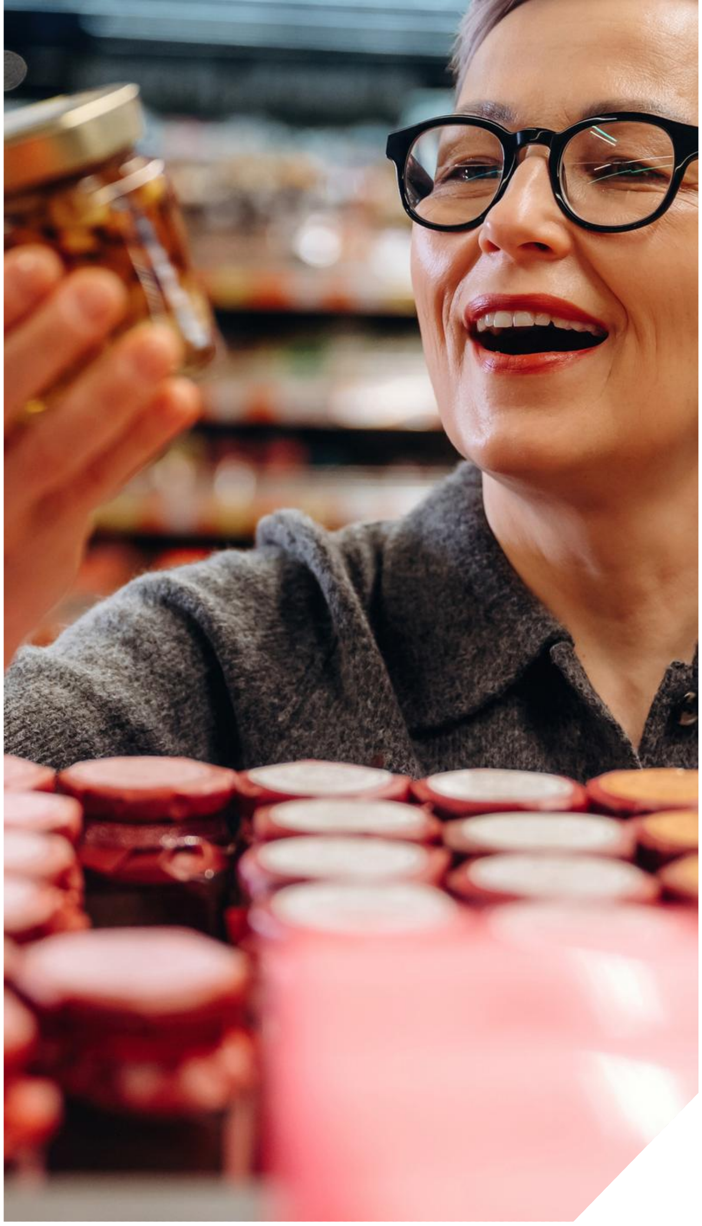
Distinctive Brand Assets:

Unlock the full value of your Distinctive Brand Assets with Ipsos' MultiChoice Reaction Time (MCRT) technique. MCRT measures the implicit strength of associations consumers have with your assets, going beyond what people say to reveal what they truly recognise, quickly and intuitively. These insights help you prioritise the strongest assets, invest where it matters most, and ensure your brand is both instantly recognisable and consistently memorable across marketing communications.



Brand Value Creator:

Brand Value Creator (BVC) is Ipsos' holistic measurement system that measures brand equity in a competitive context, with two dimensions; people›s attitude to brands or how they feel towards brands and situational influences, the in-market elements that shape people's behaviour. A thorough BVC analysis provides a snapshot of current brand strength, and highlights strategic pathways to achieve brand growth, making the system highly actionable and geared towards providing useful, practical insights that provide solutions to real business concerns.

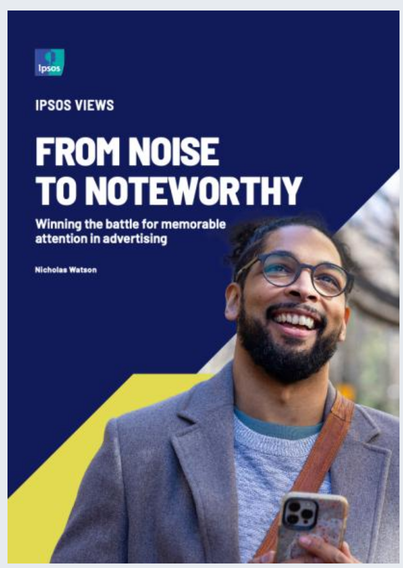


CONTACT US

[Contact us](#) to learn more about how Ipsos can help you with your Brand Health Tracking or evaluating your brands assets.

If you enjoyed this article, you also might be interested in our [Latest Brand Health Papers](#), covering the latest thinking on brands.

Further reading suggestions



[The Battle for Attention](#) (Keys)

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How distinctive brand assets
build recognition and drive brand choice.

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