

Stop this wordplay

Researcher Forrester has become the latest entity to suggest a change to marketing terminology

Marketers really are morons. While workers in other disciplines build their knowledge base carefully over decades, our industry seems intent on destroying its most fundamental concept in an attempt to replace it with something new.

Take Forrester, the US research giant, and its latest thought piece: 'Adaptive Brand Marketing: Rethinking Your Approach in the Digital Age'. In my opinion, it's a disgraceful publication. It's not that I disagree with many of the points made in the piece; it's the way it recommends the wanton obliteration of some of the central concepts of marketing as a purportedly sensible response to the challenges of digital marketing.

According to the report, the term 'brand managers' should be replaced with 'brand advocates'. What a load of unhelpful bollocks. We have spent 70 years establishing the term 'brand manager' as a commonly accepted and respected function within many organisations. Just as we get there, Forrester wants to knock it all down and replace it with a fluffier, camper alternative.

Imagine if chartered accountants suddenly decided to rename themselves 'personal levy advisers' or firemen rebranded themselves as 'incendiary technicians'. You'd expect an outcry from embarrassed professionals keen to hold onto their identity.

Not so from marketers. *Advertising Age* actually supported Forrester's

suggestion, with an article entitled 'Why it's time to do away with the brand manager'.

Forrester wasn't finished there. Its report also suggested changing the four Ps from product, price, place and promotion to 'permission, proximity, perception and participation'. Can I add a fifth? Pointless.

I train the next generation of MBA students who aspire to a career in marketing. The four Ps and brand management feature quite heavily in my syllabus. I can do without researchers such as Forrester dismantling terms to replace them with inane alternatives.

To be fair, Forrester isn't the first to try to demolish marketing concepts and advance its own approach. In 2004, Kevin Roberts and his acolytes at Saatchi & Saatchi had the temerity to declare that 'brands had run out of

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'juice' and that the 'future beyond branding' was Lovemarks. Again, this seems to me to be total bollocks. There is nothing wrong with the Lovemarks concept, it is an entirely standard approach to branding. The problem, once again, is that it seems marketers have to knock down our established order, in order to attempt to add a little incremental value.

When scientists finally managed to smash two beams of protons together at the Large Hadron Collider in Geneva last week, they were referring to 'protons' some 90 years after Rutherford invented the term. If marketers had been in charge of the Collider, we would have surely have renamed protons a dozen times over by now.

If only marketers could be a bit more disciplined about their discipline. You don't have to destroy everything in order to add something new. Look around at the state of marketing in the UK. Most marketers still can't segment a market or calculate lifetime value. Perhaps one of the reasons for our general ineptitude as marketers is the ever-changing, contradictory terminology that we seem intent on continually abusing and altering.

For the sake of marketing, let's try to add value to our existing discipline, rather than continue this unhelpful emphasis on 'reinvention'.

Mark Ritson, PPA columnist of the year (business media), is an associate professor of marketing and consultant to some of the world's biggest brands

30 seconds on... marketing's impending doom

■ 'Over the next five years, Adaptive Brand Marketing will shift the discussion from the classic four Ps – now table stakes, rather than differentiators – to permission, proximity, perception, and participation.' **Forrester report author Lisa Bradner.**

■ 'Brands and branding are approaching the end game. The discipline has been

buffed by so many smart and eager practitioners that there is little traction left. Refinements on refinements on refinements are now called exciting new developments. Forget it. Everyone is chewing on the same bone, and there is no marrow left.' **Saatchi & Saatchi's Kevin Roberts.**

■ 'Mark [Earls] tears up a lot of what we are secure and



familiar with (fundamental notions such as "brand" and "consumer-orientation", for instance), and, while giving us some of the new building blocks, he asks as many questions about the way forward without these familiar handrails, as he offers answers.' **Foreword to Welcome to the Creative Age, by Mark Earls**

■ 'Several academic authorities have announced nothing less than "the end of marketing"'. While such sentiments are very much in keeping with our degraded, postmodern, pre-millennial times, this volume of essays examines the extent to which the end of marketing is nigh.' **Introduction to Marketing Apocalypse, edited by Stephen Brown.**