

## **The Psycho-Aesthetics<sup>®</sup> Martini**

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How do you make the perfect Psycho-Aesthetics<sup>®</sup> martini? Mix equal parts of Norman, Maslow and Deutsch, stir slowly (don't shake), and serve to discerning consumers to quench their thirst for great design.

Like its distilled counterpart, the Psycho-Aesthetics martini is a spirit of sorts. It is, in fact, a spirit of design that when expertly blended delights and captivates its subject. A sum-of-all-parts concept, it is an approach that lives in that space of creating meaningful impressions of a design's intended benefit and the assured delivery of that benefit. This simple concept is one that designers at RKS have been using for years to make meaningful connections with consumers and subsequently to build positive brand associations and icons for clients.

"Some years ago, while seeing a presentation of Bill Moggridge's work, it dawned on me that our designs have the ability to express a product's function in new and delightful ways." His was the simple design of a floor heater with a form and vents fashioned into waves that appeared to infer motion and air flow.

This concept of expressing a product's function through design made its presence felt when RKS was designing audio speakers for JBL. As the form developed, the speakers began to look like they sounded great. Seems simple

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enough – all speaker designs should look like they sound great. But do they?

In reviewing the ongoing contributions of the design field, we found that celebrated designs sometimes fail to translate into commercial success. How could that be? The likely culprit, we reasoned, is a “disconnect” between consumer expectations and the final manifestation of the product’s design (although I don’t believe this was the case with Moggridge’s design). “I believe, in fact, that we have educated the consumer to be very discerning – and at times doubtful – of great aesthetics in design.” The telephone that catches your eye on the shelf but has poor quality when you get it home, for example, has affected a disconnect from your initial impression of the design.

This goes much deeper into the consumer’s mindset. It is analogous to a floor heater whose body language tells you it’s going to blow heat from across the room and yet is capable of barely reaching halfway.

“Simply put, Psycho-Aesthetics is not about the best design – it’s about meaningful design. Taken a step further, it’s not about the design at all – it’s about our undeniable need for positive affirmation and how we fulfill this need.” It’s about how we interact with stimuli, how we retain images in our minds and how those impressions can create expectations and predispositions for us as consumers.

### **Martini With a Twist**

This brings us back to our martini example and its first ingredient: one part Norman. For years, former Apple and Hewlett-Packard executive Dr. Don Norman has led the charge in the movement for human-centered development in technology. According to Norman, “the human-centered

approach puts people's needs first, technology second. It focuses upon human activities. It makes the technology invisible, embedded within activity-specific information appliances. Simple, powerful, enjoyable." Norman's philosophy provides a key element in the Psycho-Aesthetics approach.

The second ingredient in the Psycho-Aesthetics martini is none other than Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Everything we purchase can be assigned a rung on Maslow's ladder based on the reasons behind the purchase. Let's say you needed a new car. The most basic reason to buy a new car is to get to and from work safely, to transport purchases to and from home, and to use for family outings. If you satisfied this need by buying a minivan, you would be fulfilling an essential need only, requiring very little experiential interaction. If you bought a utility van, you might use it for work, which would move your experiential interaction to a medium level. Continuing up Maslow's Hierarchy, the purchase of a new VW Beetle would give you more satisfaction and further express your personality.

On that same level, but of greater experiential activity, would be the purchase of an SUV because you could drive it on the beach or unpaved roads while enjoying a recreational activity. Higher still on Maslow's pyramid would be the purchase of a sports car such as a Mazda Miata or Pontiac Firebird. With these vehicles, the need is more to assuage a creative, aesthetic, and entertainment craving. On the highest rung of the Maslow ladder with the highest level of experiential activity would be the purchase of a Porsche, Ferrari or Lamborghini. These expensive autos are symbols of performance, dynamism and empowerment for the self-actualized owner who makes the statement, "look at me."

“This plotting of hierarchical needs against experiential levels helps us create a competitive map to better understand the marketplace.” This is where things get interesting. It isn’t enough to just address the attributes; in order to engage consumers we must walk them through the product.

This brings us to martini ingredient number three: the need to understand how we engage stimuli. RKS has worked closely with Dr. Robert Deutsch, a renowned cognitive anthropologist and communications consultant for DDB Worldwide. Through extended discussions with Dr. Bob, we connected the dots between Psycho-Aesthetics and the experiential story telling of a “hero’s journey.” Dr. Bob has taught us that your brain asks three simple questions with regard to visual stimuli: Is it like me? Does it like me? Can it make me more? This starts immediately after birth and continues through life. Armed with a Psycho-Aesthetics specification to guide us, we can now take the consumer through an experience that parallels a hero’s journey.

The journey begins with the consumer seeing the new product for the first time. If the design is inviting, the consumer will want to interact with the product, tentatively at first, but then encouraged by the mentor (in this context, the design itself) to touch it. The consumer/hero thus crosses over the first threshold of his journey, where he encounters tests of usability and begins to ask, “Can it make me more?” This encourages the consumer/hero to explore it further, where his discovery and understanding of the product are enough for him to take the second step, namely the reward of owning it.

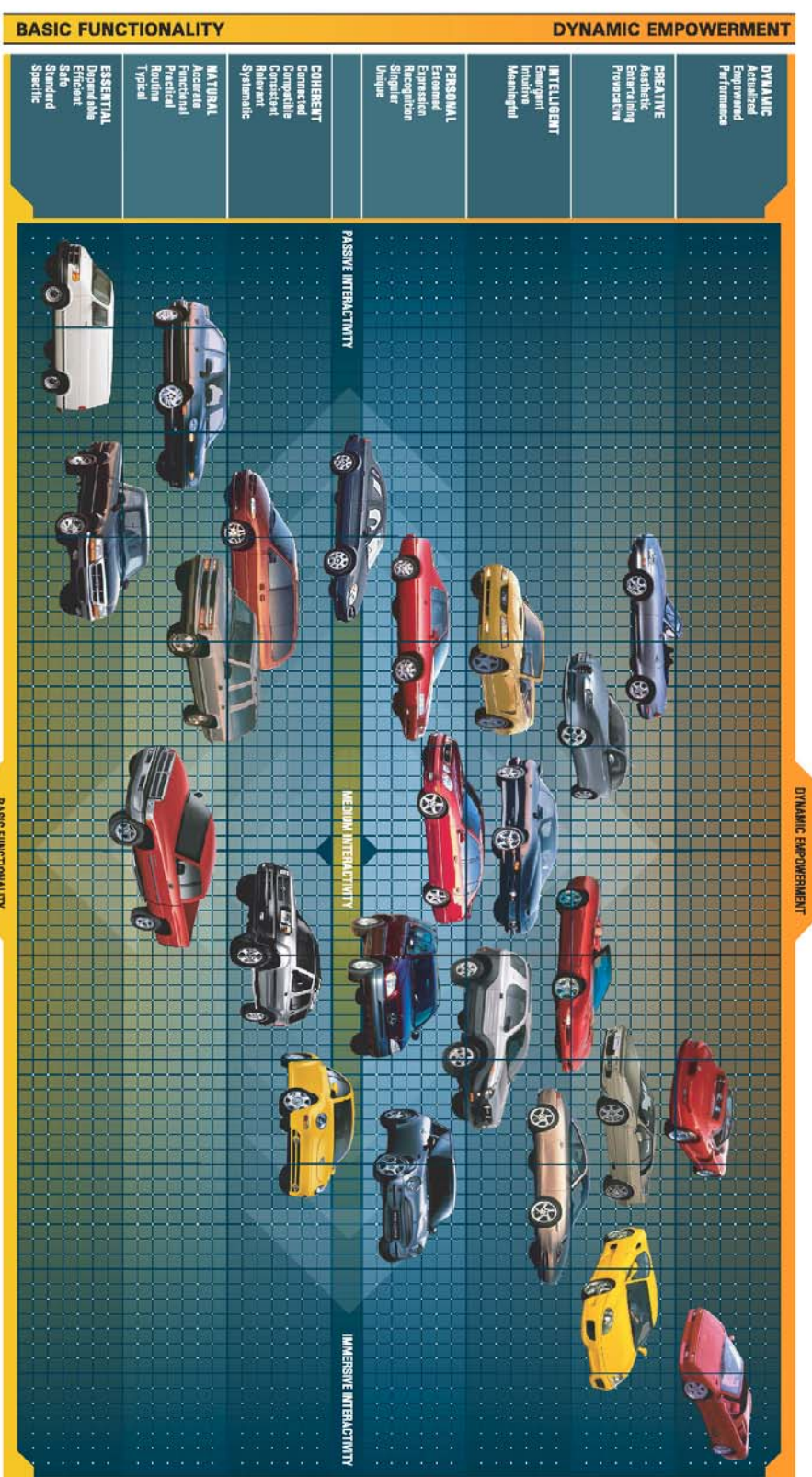
The hero’s journey finally ends beyond the purchase, where he crosses the third threshold on the road back to where he

shares the treasure with others and is fulfilled. "Through the completion of these three steps, the consumer builds a positive association with this product and with other products that take him on similar journeys. This in turn creates a favorable brand association between companies that provide such products and consumers who attain such positive affirmation."

We use these ingredients with every product we develop, so we can be sure not only to design something that looks great, but also to provide our clients with products that will exceed their expectations and, more importantly, the expectations of those who buy and use their products. By delivering on the visual promise that the product makes on that first step of the hero's journey, we know our Psycho-Aesthetics martini will taste just right.

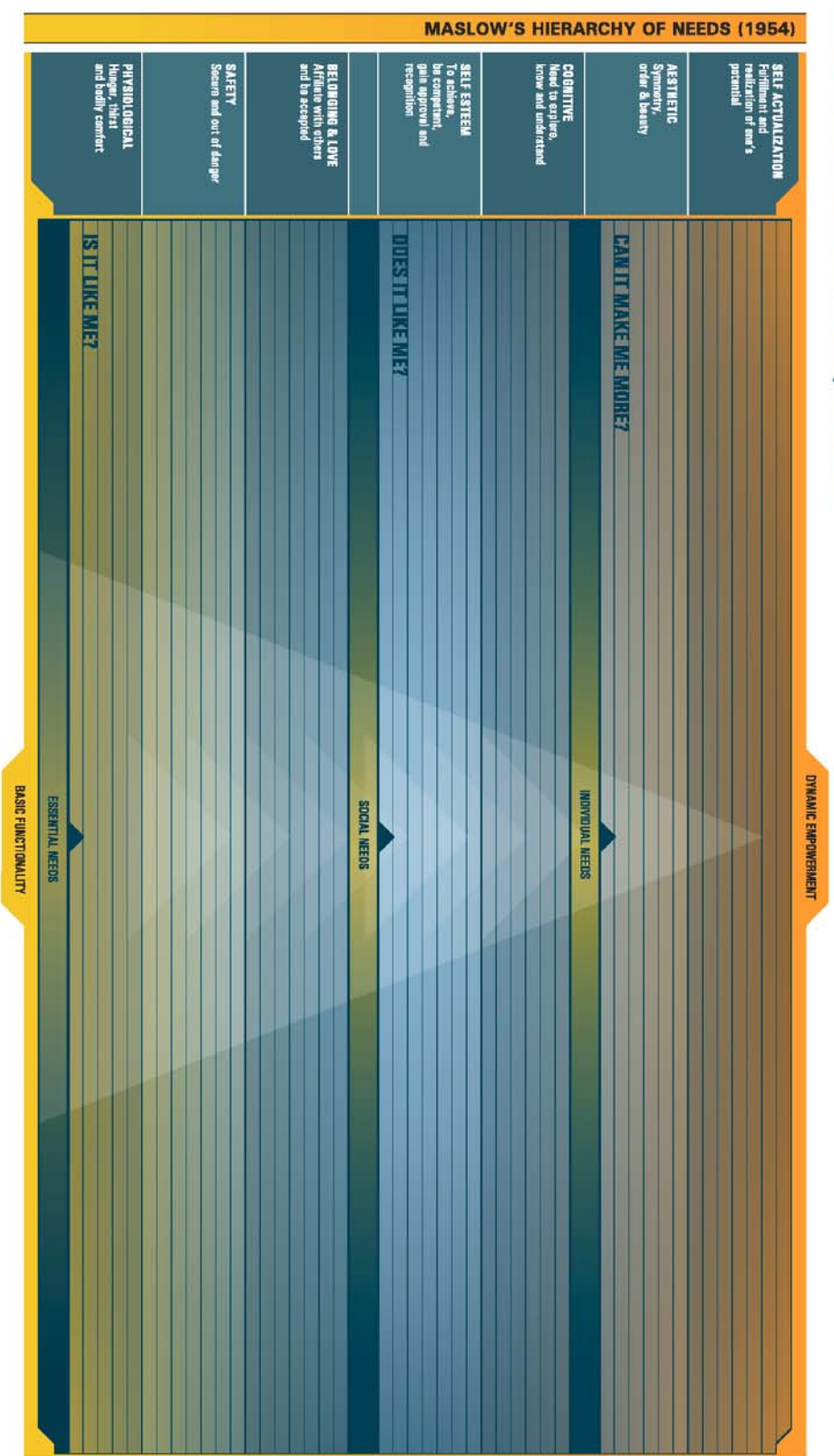
# PSYCHO AESTHETICS MAP

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs vs Consumer Experience



# PSYCHO AESTHETICS SCIENCE

Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



# PSYCHO AESTHETICS THE HERO'S JOURNEY

The Consumer/Brand Experience

## THE BRANDING EVENT

