

Hey, we're gonna have fun today talking about global brands. In fact, the specific focus of this episode is "*the promise and perils of a global brand.*" In the content of a previous episode, we mentioned the worldwide brand consultancy [Interbrand](#) and its 2022 rankings of the world's top brands. And that's a good place to start here—the top four brands worldwide: that's Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Google.

And right off the bat, we can see a key bit of the scaffolding available for possibly fulfilling the promise of a brand aspiring to be global. That's *scaffolding*—you know, the framing that supports a tall building going up and up and even further up to our sense of it being a "skyscraper." And a key element of a brand's *scaffolding* is a heavy dose of digital empowerment in supply chains. Truth be told, the emergence of the internet...especially notable in its startling increase of use in the 21st century...has rapidly extended the basic possibilities to an often-breathtaking depth and breadth as to what an innovative brand can do.

Think about Google here. A simple search on Google can quickly return virtually countless possibilities of sources and information that are far, far beyond even the *wildest* imaginations of a researcher just a few decades ago. And how about Apple and the reach of its ecosystem of apps? And, yes, there's Microsoft and its suite of personal software services, super-available with connectivity on a PC or laptop. Then we can't neglect Amazon—reports are that 12 million products are available on Amazon...but that number of products reportedly rises to 350 million when considering Amazon's third-party sellers. That's incredible!

And *then* when you also recall that Amazon, Google, and Microsoft are all competing with one another to provide cloud services...for sure, with these companies, you can see the extraordinary promise of global brands...*in action and fulfilled!* But their market position and superb services didn't come without perils.

For Amazon's amazing hybrid offering of digital inventory, browsing, cart-filling, ordering, paying, and delivery options, it had to build an extraordinary product-handling infrastructure with massive facilities, huge delivery fleets, and lots of drivers reliably delivering packages in a reported 58 countries. Building that infrastructure and the complex processes needed across many bureaucratic jurisdictions can cause even the savviest business veterans to wince. Small wonder that it took Amazon over a decade to turn a profit...yes, their trek was perilous! Truly, Amazon hurdled huge obstacles to become a top global brand!

And where is Tim Cook—the CEO of Apple, the world's most valuable company—what's he doing on this very day that I'm crafting this episode? Well, Cook is personally in China, a market that's become more difficult with a shift in attitude away from economic freedom by its paramount leader Xi. So why should a company as successful as Apple even bother? For a billion reasons...China's population! But also trouble looms with Apple's possible overreliance on China in its supply chain. *Yes...promise, but also perils!*

The famous "granddaddy" of global retail branding over the past 100 years or so sounds very unlikely when you first learn of it. But, yeah, it's that soft drink Coca-Cola...for decades, their brand's distinctive cursive font was often the only reliable sign of "home" for Americans traveling in very remote places. Today, Coke reports that it's in over 200 countries and territories. Now, that's a whole lot of setting up local relationships and infrastructure for the production and delivery of 12 ounces of Coke at a time! And where does Coke rank on Interbrand's list today? #7! Now that's an amazingly durable global brand!

Actually, for a number of companies, the promise of a global brand has been significantly fulfilled over the past five or six decades...that's when World War 2 was over and generally free trade emerged across many nations. Frankly, the U.S. dramatically assisted in that in a historically unique way—by helping Germany and Japan re-build their countries and economies through U.S. time and treasure. In Germany, that manifested under the famous Marshall Plan. Now that's a truly amazing story...one country spending vast resources rebuilding its recently defeated enemy who killed and harshly imprisoned its soldiers!

And that's even more true when we find that a carmaker founded and headquartered in Germany—Mercedes Benz—is on Interbrand's list at #8. But wait, along those same lines, the Japanese firms Toyota and Honda come in on Interbrand's global brand list at #6 and #26, respectively. *Wow...from defeated in*

war to leading the world! But where is Ford? #50...yes, Ford was “fat and happy” for decades by focusing mostly on domestic markets while the Japanese and Germans focused more globally. The fruits are clear.

Let’s mention South Korea’s Samsung for the same reason...it was very focused on international markets, now reportedly assembling and selling in over 70 countries and #5 on Interbrand’s list. But was that easy? Absolutely not—the planning...the grind...the processes of being a top global brand are comprehensive!

Lastly, one other firm—with the golden arches—#11 on Interbrand’s list! Yeah, McDonald’s is reported to be in about 120 countries. But obstacles arise, like religious beliefs in India—McDonald’s does not serve beef there. And, after the 2023 attacks by Hamas, McDonald’s was criticized for an Israeli franchisee offering free meals to Israeli soldiers and hospitals. In response, McDonald’s franchisees in neighboring Middle East nations had sent money to Gaza. And several stores were vandalized in Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt. Who knows where that ends up—but it’s all in the fabric of the perilous world of global brands!

So, some key points of the pros and cons of global brands are really instructive. The pros are almost always glorious in the mind of the storyteller—economies of scale in production, you know, cost savings...exciting new markets...new specializations springing from existing offerings...fresh new recurring revenues...and diversification of risk. But the cons are many and formidable—entrenched local competitors with very loyal customers...global behemoths already in the market, yeah, like Amazon...brand consistency issues ...unfamiliar bureaucracies and regulations...underappreciated supply chain obstacles...and, of course, shifting politics. Honestly, the list is endless. Hey, truly...good luck with your ambition for a global brand!

Some say that sustaining a consistent global brand is almost impossible. And a case for that can be made when looking at the telling story of Christianity. Yes, the history of the early church in the book of Acts revealed many of the problems of the aspiring global brand that Jesus commanded to us: you know, like brand consistency (*law vs. grace*)...the desired targeted constituents (*Jews vs. Gentiles*)...operational requirements (*circumcision vs. simple faith in Christ*)...conflicted relationships...and more, of course!

Still, 2,000 years since the Cross, Interbrand doesn’t seem to consider that the international brand represented by the Cross found in so many places worldwide is even worthy of honorable mention on its list! But, to be fair, even today there is gross lack of consistency as to what the Cross means. At the outset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church—the Patriarch—said to his followers that “sacrifice in the course of carrying out your military duty washes away all sins.” Whoa. And how about the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, both adding to Scripture with their unique heresies?

Still, the conflicts and confusion within Christianity as a global brand are deeper and often more subtle than such obviously mistaken outliers! And the impact of that is far reaching. For example, the entrenched German church largely bought into Hitler’s take on Jews. But frankly, that wasn’t the first time...nor will it be the last time...that famous, high-echelon Christian leaders and laity alike allow themselves to get misled—yes, similar to the seduction in Hitler’s Germany, politics and culture wars focused on propping up kingdoms of this world are often allowed to take primacy over the true gospel of the Kingdom of God.

In fact, *that’s relatively common and recurring...in nations, churches, and denominations!* And seminaries are often of little street-level assistance—their theologians routinely disagree with one another on essential truths! That’s the peril of unthinkingly extolling fallible humans. Frankly, a believer’s safe harbor is this: personally pursuing study of the Word while carefully sifting through the teaching of others, pursuing the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), and actively embracing a persevering obedience to the commandments of Jesus—loving God and loving neighbors via the Great Commission! For taking those paths productively, believers *will* be rewarded. *Let God judge others as to their paths!*

See, for 2,000 years, none of this brand confusion in Christianity has been a surprise to the Lord—yet He still keeps accounts as to just who really is accurately building on the brand of the crucified Christ (1 Cor 3:9-16)! And this is what’s uniquely true for the diligent believer: *the peril is not ours...but the promise is!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Does your workplace company—large or small—pursue markets outside your country, working to extend the brand’s reach? Why or why not? If your workplace enterprise is small, have you considered extending your reach into a neighboring state or district? Why or why not?
2. Centuries ago, ordinary people were routinely not allowed access to the Bible. But today, anyone in a place like America can access a Bible. Do you primarily rely on others for your understanding of the Bible or do you primarily rely on your ultimate, personally-read-and-researched-and-discerned-and-embraced understanding of Scripture? Discuss. Be specific.
3. Do you think acting upon the Great Commission commanded by Jesus is vital in your life...or is doing so optional? Discuss.