

Bose:

A Brand Audit

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Bose:**A Brand Audit****Brand Inventory****Identification of brand elements.***History.*

Dr. Amar Bose, an MIT doctoral student and classical music enthusiast, founded Bose Corporation in 1964 after he was unable to find loudspeakers that delivered the natural sound he desired. The American privately held company went on to create some of the most innovative sound technologies for home and office, plus automobile systems in 1982, and eventually expanded into headsets, supplying airplane pilots and the military with its patented Noise Cancelling technology (Our Achievements, n.d.). The core brand identity has been one of an experimental engineering college where the pursuit of concepts has ranged from creating quality sound in small speakers to car suspension systems (Kirsner, 2013).

For his significant contributions to improving overall quality of sound technology, Dr. Bose was honored as “Inventor of the Year” in 1987 and was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in 2008. The company has continued to drive innovation and remains a benchmark for sleek, modern speaker systems utilizing Bluetooth and wireless technologies (Our Achievements, n.d.).

The company is focused on delivering innovation technologies such as active sound management, energy efficiency, and custom equalization, as well as automobile suspensions for smooth and stable rides. Through its automotive division, the brand has supplied sound systems and created successful brand associations to luxury companies such as Audi, Cadillac,

Infiniti, Porsche, and Maserati, as well as to non-luxury companies such as Nissan and GMC (Our Story, n.d.).

Trademarks.

Besides its Noise Cancelling technology, Bose has added extensive patents and trademarks in sound innovation, including its first revolutionary item the 901® Direct/Reflecting® speaker, Syncom® (a computer to measure and guarantee consistent sound quality), Lifestyle® systems (small yet elegant surround sound), Acoustic Wave® (big sound in a small system), and SoundDock® (revolutionary sound for iPods) (Home page, n.d.).

Bose has also tackled innovations above and beyond personal speaker systems and headsets. The company has used its engineering power to create technology that controls overall sound levels, such as AudioPilot® noise compensation circuitry, the ADAPTiQ® audio calibration system, and the Bose Ride system to reduce shocks and vibrations for the trucking industry.

Logos, slogans, and packaging.

Bose has remained consistent with its main logo and tagline, “Better sound through research®,” which are the clear identifiers of its technology. Bose packaging clearly displays the products, with quick callouts for the patented technology and its benefits. The same easily recognizable logo is consistently displayed on all products, whether it be ear buds or automobile speakers.



Identification of inherent attributes in product.

Communications.

Bose emphasizes the following attributes in all its products and descriptions: convenience, lifelike, all-in-one systems, elegant, easy-to-use, clarity, powerful, delivers big sound.

Through a mix of traditional and new media, with a newly launched m-commerce focus, Bose advertising is spread across the different market segments it attracts, to professionals in the music industry to personal home use. Bose's slogan of "better sound through research®" is highlighted in the campaigns by informing the consumer of the proprietary and innovative technology available as well as showing how it makes the consumer's life easier and better. Within its retail stores, Bose boosts expert advice and even offers customer support at home with apps to guide the user through the troubleshooting process or with at-home installs (Our Story, n.d.).

Pricing.

Bose systems vary widely in price as a result of the company's extensive product lines. The A20® Aviation Headset built specifically for pilots retails at \$1,095.95, yet its personal use Bluetooth® Headsets sell for \$149.95. The around-ear and on-ear QuietComfort® fitted shapes range from \$149.95 and up to \$399.95. Bose Bluetooth SoundLink®, SoundTouch™, and SoundDock® systems—offering the latest in wireless streaming—range from \$199.95 to \$699.95. Proprietary Wave® systems offer powerful performance, versatility, and portability from as low as \$349.95 and up to \$1,099.95. Complete home theaters run upwards of \$2,099.95, and HDTVs with built-in home theater cost \$4,999.00.

Distribution policies.

Although Bose employed personal selling in the 1980's, word-of-mouth is what ultimately helped spread the brand's high-quality image. The company quickly gained market share and profits, especially as it became heavily associated with the surge of Apple products and demand (Kharif, 2006).

Bose has several layers of its own retail stores in the United States and worldwide, with knowledgeable staff and personalized attention. The Showcase stores highlight the latest

technologies and full product mix, the Factory stores pre-owned and value priced items, and the Personal Audio stores and Airport Kiosks limited offerings for its on-the-go customers. The products are also available on Bose's own e-commerce site, with full product details, installation suggestions, and customer support. Bose has also opened its channels of distribution to large electronic retailers such as Best Buy, mass market merchandisers in Target and Walmart, and online e-commerce sites like Amazon.

Other marketing activity.

Bose's sponsorship history—outside of direct connections with sound technology and experience enhancement—has largely been nonexistent. However, recent partnerships with the NFL, golfer Rory McIlroy, and the Olympics have since changed the overall marketing strategy. A three-year corporate sponsorship contract with the NFL gives Bose and its products, such as headphones, home audio, and theater systems, the sole distinction of being the official audio-electronics partner of the league (Lefton, 2011). Likewise, a four-year deal with Rory McIlroy—leveraging any positive secondary associations there is of the internationally recognized athlete—helps Bose achieve significant global brand salience (Schupak, 2013).

Analysis of points of difference and points of parity.

By virtue of the relatively mature market in which it competes, Bose has but few points of difference whereto it can effectively position itself.

A platform of innovation and continual research are at the center of Bose's core brand promise in providing a superior sound experience for consumers. Unrivaled in its total investment in company-wide product development (resources in expert personnel [i.e., engineers] notwithstanding), Bose is committed to the professional advancement of in-home and on-the-go audio speaker solutions (Kirsner, 2013). According to Keller (2008), "The product itself is at the

heart of brand equity, because it is the primary influence on what consumers experience with a brand, what they hear about a brand from others, and what the firm can tell customers about the brand in their communications” (p. 64). This emphasis on the product is a keen focus of Bose’s brand building activities, and not something altogether easy or quick to copy.

Value added benefits in the overall functionality of its products make Bose the signature audio-electronics leader. Inventions such as the proprietary StayHear® tips, for example, give consumers a soft, secure, in-ear fit that can be enjoyed during even the most strenuous of workouts (Headphones, n.d.). Other featured headphone technology includes Bose’s pioneering take on the noise cancelling movement—a distinguishable point of difference given the company’s enviable first-to-market status—now currently infiltrating the market (Drell, 2011). The Acoustic Noise Cancelling® line provides some of the most advanced means of noise reduction publicly available. Finally, original product concepts in the Wave® music system and other unique patented extensions are industry progressive, setting the tone for major subsequent development within the competitive frame.

Brand attributes of versatility (full, powerful sound easily transportable), control (seamless interconnectivity among systems), and convenience (simple, clutter-free operation) have earned Bose high-praise and the esteemed distinction of being the Apple of the audio world (Singh, 2013). These attributes are further substantiated by the company’s exclusive contracts with the United States military and NASA as well as its partnerships with luxury automobile brands Alfa Romeo, Audi, Cadillac, Infiniti, and Porsche. A record consistent of innovation at the highest level has afforded Bose an image of unparalleled expertise in its field based on strongly cherished consumer perception and general public consensus. Indeed, from its earliest days as a Massachusetts start-up to a deliberately circumscribed United States private operation

(with its headquarters still located in the Bay State), Bose's abiding commitment to their product and craft never waned—but neither did its decidedly American feel and intimate relationship with consumers.

Adhering to its roots and core brand focus, Bose, unlike some audio companies, has defied portrayal as a domineering corporate entity and instead has erected an element of expected refined excellence in its place (Kharif, 2006). Their long-standing pledge to consumers is evident in their unique approach to service and support. A relic most likely of the old distribution process, where personal selling cultivated lasting consumer relationships, Bose has historically been perceived as a trusting and reliable brand (Bangerman, 2006). This long-standing loyalty, an extension of Bose's strategic ambition to become the worldwide preeminent sound manufacturer, helps amass brand equity. Of course, the ability to overwhelmingly deliver on all performance criteria necessary in a product category is always a significant competitive advantage for any brand.

However, innovation itself is now largely becoming a point of parity within the audio-electronics market. Wholesale improvements toward sound quality have lessened the achievement gap (or at least what has commonly been thought possible in terms of technological benchmarks) between established luxury brands and new market entries. With these improvements comes a new consumer expectation of performance. In fact, products-to-market must meet a perceived minimum threshold level internalized by consumers to even be included in the purchase decision process (Keller, 2008). Where superior sound quality was once an amenity it is now an absolute necessity.

Differentiation may exist, of course, in how these innovative features are conceived and ultimately applied. For example, Beats by Dre headphones amplify almost-undetected guttural

lows in a song's bassline at the expense of the more tonal mids (Mangalindan, 2013). Bose, as previously discussed, continues to develop its noise cancelling technology as a means to hone in on subtle musical niceties. A delicate balance between external competing noise and the chosen musical input can be selected using QuietComfort®'s unique Aware mode. Alternatively, listeners can choose to block out the immediate environment with full-on reduction power (Noise Cancelling Headphones, n.d.).

Each of these examples is no doubt derivative of the market segment being targeted. Beats Electronics' typical demographic profile is predominantly young males, age 18-24, who are considerably fashion-conscious. These men, perhaps athletes themselves, enjoy sports and are likely to come from ethnic or minority backgrounds. They prefer to listen to rap, hip-hop, and pop (bass heavy music) over other available genres. In contrast, Bose's usual audience is much older, roughly 40 years of age, who are cultured and well-traveled. They are looking simply for no-nonsense proven quality, and have disposable income to afford as much. One feature common among these brands and the larger luxury headphone market in particular, however, is the integration with mobile media. Headphones produced by Bose, Beats, and Skullcandy are now equipped with microphones standard so individuals interrupted by a call can talk hands-free. A miniature control gives consumers ready access to set volume, pause tracks, and answer telephone calls.

Let us not forget that parameters—barriers to entry—for competition in this market ought to pair brands with similar ability and potential. And so, in addition to these technological advances, members in the luxury audio-electronics group all dutifully participate in a premium pricing strategy. Direct competitors Beats, Denon, Harmon/Kardon, Kilpsch, JBL, Sennheiser, Skullcandy, and Sonos are some of the most expensive brands available. Not only are they

similarly priced and expertly valuated from a top (corporate) level, but each company's offerings at the product (deliverable) level are comparatively estimated across categories in areas as divergent as audio home theaters and car systems. In effect, product lines between brands are nearly identical.

Furthermore, the time-to-market for audio products and electronics in general is shortening. Audio-electronics is a fast-moving industry that sometimes exhibits an act-first, think-later mentality given choice risk-benefit analyses of being first-to-market (Cohen, Eliashberg, & Ho, 1996). As such, compromises in the development process may occur that affect overall product quality. The shelf life for particular audio-electronics models therefore is considerably short. Brands, then, must not only be innovative to compete but also extremely efficient and quick—yet another (negatively correlated, at that) expectation of the consumer.

Finally, endorsements are becoming par for long-term marketing strategy. Although Bose leverages partnerships to much less of an extent, it is something that they must now actively pursue and immerse themselves in or else risk losing additional market share to savvy contenders Beats and Skullcandy. The latter two companies have landed chart-topping musicians Niki Minaj, Justin Bieber, and Lady Gaga just to name a few. Athletes include such superstars as Kobe Bryant, Kevin Durant, Colin Kaepernick, LeBron James, and Derrick Rose.

Brand Exploratory

Analysis of prior research studies.

Research studies suggest that Bose's strong reputation in audio and video equipment manufacturing may help diversify its long-term product offerings beyond just sound systems (Bose Corporation Company Profile, 2013). In leveraging their technological expertise, the creation of new and innovative products across a variety of product categories becomes

possible. Indeed, recent introductions to the Bose brand portfolio include, perhaps surprisingly, patented trucking technology. The Bose Ride system, which purports to remove road disturbances experienced by drivers with intelligent counteracting force, is one such development that relied heavily on prior original research and existing corporate knowledge structures (Bose Corporation Company Profile, 2013).

However, experts warn that such forays into loosely-tied indirect markets may eventually be blocked via coordinated gap attacks by stout international competition (Bose Corporation Company Profile, 2013). Given the nature of the larger consumer electronics market, wherein rapid technological achievement is a key industry trademark, it would seem to behoove Bose to best global rivals by being first-to-market. Of course, what premium-priced products released to market must also exhibit superior functionality and performance. Lack of scale is certainly a weakness unique to the audio and video equipment manufacturer since they are so comparatively small in light of their publicly-held counterparts.

Despite changes in market sensitivity, which is more or less a naturally explained phenomenon detailing the state of the economy, one of Bose's largest threats is in the emergence of counterfeit goods internationally (Bose Corporation Company Profile, 2013). The risk, of course, is in the loss of potential revenue and the long-term endangerment—perhaps even irreparable harm—of the brand. Of all the source countries for counterfeit goods in 2012 China ranked the highest, accounting for 72% of all Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) seizures (Bose Corporation Company Profile, 2013).

The ability to turn a profit in the audio and video equipment market, though not impossible, only seems to continue to shrink. With research and development costs (as well as other overhead) as expensive as ever, and with consumer demand and retailer pressure combining to

call for lower manufacturer prices, companies have been forced to find alternative ways to save and still provide value. While many will reduce manufacturing and procurement costs, a simple yet safer switch in the distribution strategy, in specific, and within the marketing mix, more generally, may be most effective (Advertising & Video Equipment Manufacturing Research Industry Profile, 2013). Limiting product supply to retailers and relying heavily on web-based sales, where executive management can control what is said to the consumer about the brand, is more naturally flattering to Bose's premium model. Not to mention that e-commerce sales have increased dramatically since broadband. With improved SSL certificate technology available, and private data concerns somewhat alleviated, consumers may be more willing to conduct initial online product research prior to purchase.

Identification of market reality inconsistencies.

Bose, though considered one of the top brands in their market, has seen situations where the quality of their product has come into question. Two perceptions exist in the industry: One that portrays Bose as makers of high-end electronic equipment and another that portrays Bose as a company who uses marketing tactics to disguise, if not exaggerate, the quality of their products. The second camp maintains that Bose's sound quality is not winning of audiophile standards. In fact, many believe that one could buy a similarly performing competitor brand at the same or an even lower price (Gideon, 2007). A similarly critical review scathed Bose for its exorbitant mark-up (Robbins, 2007). The piece argued that the \$1,500-\$2,000 price point was not at all fair to consumers and was really an affront to the statutes of ethical business.

Another complication for Bose is that it has not yet been THX certified. A lot of its major competitors in the industry have been able to charge premium prices for their products simply because of this distinction. Litigation and law suits have also affected, to some extent, the image

of Bose (Willis, 2002). And finally, having lost ground to trendy headphones newcomer Beats by Dre, Bose's once-revered positioning is in need of some help.

Identification of customer, purchase, use, and disposal patterns.

The typical consumer base for Bose is aged 27-41. Although they have multiple price points, Bose products tend to be purchased by consumers who hold affluent jobs and rent/own an apartment or home. Males are much more inclined to purchase Bose items due to their technological nature. Males are also usually the segment most marketed to for this reason.

Bose items are often purchased during the holidays, as a once a year gift, because of their premium cost. Consumers who holiday shop tend to spend more money than they would during normal visits. They also enjoy a significant number of discounts and promotions around this time.

Bose products are used moderately based on the type of item that is being purchased. For example, an HDTV with built-in home theater is moderately used for home entertainment purposes as well as sports and special events. Bose items usually have good useful life. Most last 4-6 years, depending on the product. Bose has been marketed as a high-end manufacturer, providing sleek and updated technology.

Brand Recommendations

Recommendations for Bose's repositioning are as follows:

- 1. Develop relevant sponsorships that have a direct, positive, and measurable effect on brand equity**
 - a. The Arts
 - i. Theatre
 1. What: Sponsorship of NYU's Tisch School performance arts production schedule
 2. Why: Today's students are tomorrow's stars; they need the appropriate tools and proper foundation for success

3. Association: Bose is the ultimate medium by which great entertainment is experienced
 4. Benefit: Local community building providing the framework for future goodwill. Name recognition among a much-needed younger demographic.
- ii. Music
1. Educational Advocate
 - a. What: Become a featured supported of VH1's Save the Music Foundation
 - b. Why: Music is the life blood of creativity and self-expression. It is, of course, the very reason Bose exists.
 - c. Association: Founder Dr. Amar Bose found great pleasure in natural sound. It was his love of live music that inspired him to make audio production his life's work.
 - d. Benefit: Corporate outreach initiative demonstrating Bose's leadership abilities to affect change
 2. Philanthropic Investor
 - a. What: Finance the purchase rights to rename the Berklee Performance Center in Boston the Bose-Berklee Performance Center
 - b. Why: Berklee is the largest independent college of contemporary music in the world. Its graduates have a proven track record of achievement.
 - c. Association: Excellence in music and excellence in sound go hand-in-hand; a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship
 - d. Benefit: The partnership expands Bose's reach among a much-needed younger demographic while paying homage to its local Massachusetts roots
- iii. Design
1. Educational Advocate
 - a. What: Sponsor a design contest for students in the University of Cincinnati's industrial design program
 - b. Why: Product design is a prominent brand element
 - c. Association: Bose is a believer and proponent of the adage "form follows function"
 - d. Benefit: Conceptual designs submitted may provide fodder or inspiration for future projects. Crowdsourcing creates a dialogue with the consumer public, eliciting a sense of personal investment and feelings of loyalty.
- b. Sport
- i. IndyCar
 1. What: Official communications supplier to pit crews
 2. Why: Pit strategy is both an art and a science that demands the utmost precision and coordination
 3. Association: Bose's proprietary technology is unequivocally flawless, because it has to be

4. Benefit: IndyCar, the premiere racing sport in the world, has a decidedly global reach. A demographic more in line with Bose's target market than, say, Nascar's, IndyCar is an image of international luxury. This sponsorship is particularly relevant given Bose's previous suspension research. Innovation, technology, and performance are three primarily inherent shared brand associations. Bose would do well in eventually considering full-team sponsorship.
- ii. NFL
 1. What: Official communications supplier of coaches and quarterbacks
 2. Why: Success on the field depends on a sound game plan
 3. Association: The ability to perform under demanding circumstances is something Bose does well consistently
 4. Benefit: Targets a lower-end demographic, serious about sports, who may be contemplating a premium sound system for an unrivaled game day experience at home
- c. Transportation
 - i. Automobiles
 1. What: Partnership with the all-electric Tesla
 2. Why: Proof that you don't need to sacrifice performance for design. Tesla is not only a stylish addition to the alternative energy automobile market, but also one of the safest
 3. Association: Bose is a company that considers innovation the whole way through, in the earliest stages of design to production to final product
 4. Benefit: Highlights Bose's commitment to a more sustainable future
 - ii. Airplanes
 1. What: Official in-flight communications supplier of recently merged American Airlines
 2. Why: Flight is a generally anxious travel activity for most passengers
 3. Association: Bose's patented noise cancelling technology can relieve you from your hectic surroundings
 4. Benefit: Complimentary branded headphones given to first-class passengers is a clever way of reaching the desired target market directly

2. Leverage existing knowledge structures and available resources to enter a largely untapped client services market

- a. Home Custom Installation
 - i. What: Bose expert consultants determine initial optimal acoustic layout, furnish set-up, and service units for the lifetime of their existence

- ii. Why: Consumers are seeking and expecting unprecedented levels of personalization in high-involvement purchases. A service now exists to meet their needs efficiently and effectively.
 - b. Business Communications
 - i. What: A subscription based service targeted to large publicly-held companies that aligns a level of communication support options with overarching corporate goals
 - ii. Why: Globalization dictates the need for simple, maintenance-free systems that can be controlled centrally and in a remote fashion
 - c. New Construction Development
 - i. What: Entire condominiums, service-plazas, and boutique malls to be outfitted with superior Bose sound
 - ii. Why: Ingredient marketing. The branded experience will pervade the cultural consciousness and, as a result of this long-term exposure, may well aid in recall during moments of purchase consideration.
- 3. Seek new communication channels and complementary tactics in support of a distinctive, responsive, and continually-evolving marketing mix**
 - a. Concerted IMC Program
 - i. What: Consistency of message supplemented by a layering of different media with one distinct purpose: Persuasion.
 - ii. Why: Marketing initiatives by competing brands have resulted in a fragmentation of market share across the audio equipment industry. Bose would do well to address their lack of presence among the 18-24 demographic to secure their position as market leader among the premium audio-electronics market.
 - iii. How: “If it’s good enough for” campaign. Depictions of almost absurd product usage occasions—highlighting some of Bose’s high profile sponsorships—that suggest the company’s ability to deliver on its core brand promise of exceptional sound performance.
 - 1. “If it’s good enough for IndyCar (at 200+ mph) . . .”
 - 2. “If it’s good enough for American Airlines (at 36,000 feet) . . .”

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