Chapeau !

The truth is, as Michael Weigel, planning director of Wieden & Kennedy in Amsterdam told me that other day, "not many people in the real world care much about brands". Advertising people care about brands because it's their job to care – they're constantly thinking about how brands can gain more presence in consumers' lives.

But consumers spend most of their lives worrying about things like work, eating, collecting their kids from school and paying bills. When they talk, they talk about news and gossip and culture. Brands are like wallpaper or the distant sound of traffic: present but not central.

After this conversation, and with time to kill before my train, I followed Michael's advice and went to drink a glass of red wine beside the fire in the cozy bar of The Dylan Hotel (Keizersgracht 384). As I walked in out of the icy rain, the porter took my hat and coat (the Dylan is that sort of place). Glancing at my dripping fedora hat, he said: "Oh, I see your hat is a real Stetson." Bing! Brand name! Probably neither of us knew where we first heard of the brand, but we both knew why I was wearing it: the Stetson is the hat of cowboys, of Indiana Jones. It is, as its website correctly states, a legend. When a brand emerges from the background hum to become an icon, people begin to care about it. But achieving that transition is very difficult indeed.

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