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## Columbia Business School International Faculty Profile

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Bernd Schmitt, the Robert D. Calkins Professor of International Business and Executive Director of the Center for Global Brand Leadership

Amina Runyan-Shefa MBA '06

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***Bernd Schmitt** is the Robert D. Calkins Professor of International Business in the Marketing Division and executive director of the Center for Global Brand Leadership. He is widely recognized for his major contributions to branding, marketing and management through his unique focus on the customer experience. He teaches the course Managing Brands, Identity and Experiences and won an award for innovation in the classroom for the course Corporate Creativity. He has held visiting appointments in China, Germany and Poland. Professor Schmitt has authored or coauthored such best-selling trade books as Experiential Marketing and Customer Experience Management, which have been translated into 15 languages. He has also published more than 50 articles in marketing, management and psychology journals.*

**Where were you raised?**

I was raised in Heidelberg, Germany, an old university town, and I spent all of my youth in Germany. I got a scholarship from Heidelberg to study at Cornell for a year, and then I came back to Cornell later on for a PhD. All of this happened by chance; it was not really planned. I ran into a friend at Lake Geneva who was doing an exchange program abroad at the time and suggested that I do the same.

**What made you interested in branding and, in particular, international branding?**

I am interested in lots of things in business—branding, service, creativity, innovative strategy, etc. I currently teach a course—Managing Brands, Identity and Experience—but I've taught lots of other courses. I taught Marketing Strategy, Nonprofit Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Advertising, Creativity—all sorts of things. But this current course happens to be quite successful—you know, it's an elective, but it's usually oversubscribed. I think students think that it's an interesting course and an exciting course, and I like to teach it because branding, the way I look at it, combines analytical and strategic concepts with creativity. That's a unique aspect of the course. In most MBA programs we don't focus enough on creativity and creating new things rather than analyzing the existing thing. In my course, I try to strive for a combination of these sorts of things.

In terms of international, I do a lot of things on a global scale: I travel a lot, and I research and consult in different countries. This all started at Columbia in 1990–1991 when I got a call from a colleague who asked me to teach a course in Beijing, and the early '90s was a very interesting time to be in China. So I immediately said yes.

**What is your targeted area of research?**

In terms of academic research, generally I'm interested in language issues in a cross-cultural context. For example, I'm interested in how Chinese classifiers determine the representation of information in the mind. I could spend another hour going into the details of that, but basically I like to look at the structural differences between the Chinese and Japanese languages and certain Western languages.

I also do research for my books—more popular books, trade books for managers. That research is very much focused on the notion of customer experience. For example, places like Starbucks aren't just selling coffee; they're selling the entire experience of going there. Or, take Apple: they're selling the iPod *and* how you can use it as a part of your overall lifestyle. So, the experience, movement and focus on this are what my books are about; that, you could say, is another area of my research. My books have been translated into 15 languages, and I give a lot of speeches on them worldwide. And there you have quite some impact because you have a few thousand people listening to get some tools that they can use in their practices. I also started my own experience consulting practice. In the last couple years, we've done projects on topics like "customer delight" for European cellular service providers or integrating the customer experience at all touch points for a cosmetics product in Korea.

**What brand is particularly fascinating to you these days?**

I think Google is a great brand because they don't do any branding. In fact, I gave a speech the other day in Europe in which I argued that the future is that great brands won't do branding the way we know it. I find that it's no longer interesting to run an advertising campaign that's funny. So, what Google is doing is very different—it's very much a network approach. They rely on word of mouth. There are some guerilla tactics, but, for the most part, they don't really spend that much on branding. And I find that a really interesting brand to follow. I also thought that the iPod was a great idea. And again, I'm not talking about just the branding—the silhouette campaign, which was superb, by the way. But they also paid such attention to the product design components—the color of the cables, which no other manufacturer would have ever paid attention to because they think of the cables as purely functional. And then, how Steve Jobs behaved at the launch—it was all very coordinated to make iPod a great experience.

**Is there a country that you're particularly fascinated with these days?**

I go to lots of places every year and certain places year after year. Every year, I'm in Korea, Japan, China, the UK and Germany at least a couple of times. I find Japan an intriguing place because you need to know a lot about it in order to really enjoy it and to truly understand it. I have a lot of Japanese friends, and my wife is Japanese. So, that is a

country I know a lot about—and a lot about its intricacies, like that they spend as much on entertaining clients as American companies spend on lawyers. I think that's interesting. I don't know if that's true, but it's definitely a good line.