

Serving up tribal strategies

 By Jane Stevenson

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Building reputation goes beyond building brand awareness. It's connected to engagement, sharing, brand ambassadors and, of course, long-term relationships and loyalty.

And this cannot be achieved unless we completely understand and connect with consumers. It can be argued that tribal marketing is the future of marketing and the only way to truly build relation-based loyalty with savvy consumers in today's global marketplace.



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Conventional marketing wisdom segments markets into groups of consumers based on simple demographic segmentation. This works on the premise that people of a similar age, of the same gender, income bracket, social class and ethnic grouping will probably purchase or have a need for similar products. But, this ignores social identity: groups that individuals self-identify as important to them; differentiating *us* from *them*. These groups with common behaviours and interests, even causes, are known as tribes.

The tribal nature of humans brings the complexity of individuals to the fore. In marketing terms, tribes allow marketers to speak to people on a more individual level rather than speaking to a general group. Companies, however, are yet to fully understand the value of investing in research for tribal differentiation.

The world we live in, is fragmented with blurred boundaries. People no longer fit into round holes assumed by marketers, and they do not make rational decisions. Instead, we are guided by our emotions and passions. We want our world to have meaning and our purchases to say something about the values; to tie in with our sense of who we are and the loyalties we have. We are more demanding and more informed than ever before.

Enter, tribal marketing

We belong to a number of tribes simultaneously; this allows us to express different aspects of our personality and beliefs. We have many facets of our personality which are not identified in traditional demographic segmentation. Let's look at an example: Sarah, 26 and Helna, 48 both work in the same office, and in traditional demographics would have been targeted differently. This doesn't take into account that Sarah and Helna share a passion for organic produce, reducing their carbon footprint and buying local goods. These shared passions are connecting factors that place them into the same tribe despite their demographic differences. Through tribal marketing we are able to speak to *who* they are instead of *what* they are enabling marketers to foster deeper, more meaningful engagement allowing a relationship to be built.

The old top-down approach of marketing is not relevant today. As humans, we seek to share and express our passions - we want to be linked to other people like ourselves. We want to belong to a tribe. The challenge for marketers is to create a culture within tribes.

How do we do it?

Firstly, we need to gain insight into the world of the consumer through understanding the experiences they share, how they identify with one another and the collective actions or activities. Once these connections have been established, marketers can develop strategies that inspire content to engage each tribe.

The power of digital

Tribal groups and brand communities are emerging and multiplying at a phenomenal rate. Although not exclusive to the digital sphere, the development of online technologies has proved a breeding ground for these subcultures to congregate and thrive. People share information on online social platforms, seeking out connections and building links with like-minded people. Digital technology is therefore no longer just a communications channel but a source of vital information.

Author of *Tribes*, Seth Godin argues that the internet has ended mass marketing and revived tribes, a human social unit from the past. Built on ideas and values, tribes give ordinary people the power to lead and make changes, to become influencers. "People form tribes with us or without us. The challenge is to work for the tribe to make it something better." The marketers challenge is to create awareness within a tribe and to speak to the interests by grasping the core of tribal marketing - which is to truly understand people.

ABOUT JANE STEVENSON

Named by CEO publication as SA's most influential government businesswoman in the SME sector in 2012, she's big on vision, strategy and effective communication. Start with a successful business strategy and executive coaching consultancy to leading national brands... add the experience of being a Board and EXCO member of the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber; and stir in some fearless Scottish roots and a dedication to building organisational vision. The result? A motivating, passionate team player.

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