

Brand purpose to take lead in brand strategy

 By [Travis Spence](#)

24 Jan 2012

A critical juncture in brand marketing has arrived. It is led by the internet and the technology changes this brings, along with consumers - who, as we all know, have changed forever.



Brands can no longer rely solely on gaining consumers at pre-purchase with TV commercials and POS promotions to guarantee success. Products and brands aren't differentiated merely on functional or even emotional propositions anymore, and, as proven, if customer opinions decline, you can shout all you want with your advertising and sponsorships: no one will buy.

Authentic brand value

We are moving into the era of calculated, monitored and measured authentic brand value... delivered by positive brand experiences or brand engagements in both the online and offline environments, where advertising and PR just merely amplify these experiences.

Consumers are looking to brands that add real tangible value to their lives; clients are looking to us (as their agencies) to deliver real money-making value to their marketing strategies and their business as a whole (internally and externally); and employees are looking to us to deliver real motivations to their role within that organisation and the brand/s it serves.

The brand now needs not only to represent its product but the people behind the product and why they do what they do for that product's success.

Driving factors

The factors driving this desire for value are numerous and varied, depending on who you are talking to and too lengthy to go into here, so I have tried to narrow it down to what I think are the main influences driving the value era:

1. Rising expectations

The global recession and its aftermath have destroyed people's trust in companies and brands to the core. Consumers are wiser and will continue to rise up against the unethical or the undoing of corporate greed.

2. The rise of Gen Y and Gen Z

These generations are the future markets. They are optimistic, entrepreneurial and are the most socially connected generation ever. They bring a new mind-set. They want to do well by 'doing good' and see themselves with a mandate to affect positive social change.

3. Competitive and government pressures

Legal requirements and competitive pressures are forcing businesses to disclose everything, from carbon footprint to labour practices. Governments, increasingly in emerging markets such as South Africa, are relying on business and brands to deliver the social and economic good that they can't or won't deliver.

4. The race for resources

We all know that we are facing looming shortages of various crucial resources but demand for them continues to increase exponentially. Businesses and brands, therefore, have a moral responsibility to ensure the sustainability of these resources for future generations.

5. Connected conversations

Social media has fundamentally changed the way we communicate and engage. Consumers are talking to each other before talking to the brand, and trusting total strangers. Friendtelligence is driving choice; brands, therefore have to drive positive talkability, both in the online and offline world (equally well), to have any chance of success.

Marketers are asking

Critically, brands have moved towards trying to own more formalised, value-adding brand communities. In a marketing world, where content, digital assets, brand activations and share of voice (online and offline) is now the norm, marketers are asking themselves:

- How do they give their brand the competitive buzz?
- Where do they start?
- What should they be focusing on - is it digital, is it social media?
- Where does advertising fit into this new world?
- Is my brand CI still relevant to all my markets?
- How do I measure this, and
- How do I get the power of communities (starting internally) to rally positive conversations around my brand?

While we can go into a diatribe about each of the factors and questions mentioned above, I believe a solution exists for marketers and should be the starting point for every single brand.

The answer is brand purpose.

Powerfully defined

Brand purpose has been powerfully defined as the company's definitive position it is trying to make in the world. It is based on what a company believes in and what difference it can make in the lives of the people it is trying to serve.

A lot of companies know what they do and how they do it, but not many know why they do it. The why is what will differentiate you from the competition and result in a sustainable advantage. It's the answers that marketers need to know to enable them to build platforms on which to attract sustainable value-adding brand communities.

It's no surprise that sector leading brands all have a clearly defined purpose on which to build value-adding brand communities:

- Ritz Carlton: ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen
- Apple: to become the brand that is indispensable to anyone willing to develop his/her mind-power
- Pritt: to bond parents, teachers and children through character-building creativity
- Nike: to bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world

Help employees and shareholders understand

The importance of building a brand on *purpose*, rather than on a promise or a proposition, is not just to help your audience understand what the brand stands for, but perhaps more critical to help employees and shareholders understand "why we are here" and to signify their intrinsic value to the organisation and its reputation as a brand...

Once they understand this, they can deliver (with confidence) the optimum brand experience that delivers brand value.

In summary, brand purpose is a very important trend we see not only for 2012 but well into the future. Not only will

consumers win in the long term but the world will benefit, too. Therefore, brand purpose and the process of getting it right should be on the agenda for every organisation and led by the top but built bottom-up.

Our thinking on brand purpose:

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