

In this time of crisis, brands should do, rather than say

By [John Davenport](#)

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To state the very obvious, our society is going through a hugely traumatic event at the moment. Society as a whole and people as individuals are hurting. Brands can either ignore this, or not.



Photo by [Carl Heyerdahl](#) on [Unsplash](#).

And it's a big call, because brands that ignore what is happening and stay silent may pay a high price. Because when this is all over, and sooner than we think it probably will be, they may find that other brands, who had the courage to reach out to consumers when they were scared, confused and hungry for information, have formed bonds with those customers that it will be hard to break.



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Do, rather than say

One of the main reasons that brands will be tempted to stay silent is because they are scared of saying the wrong thing. And this is indeed a risk. But it is one that is relatively easily avoided.

Which is why brands should probably try and DO right now, rather than SAY.

Actually, helping consumers because one genuinely cares about one's customers is not only the smart thing to do, it is the right thing to do.

A meaningful brand will have no difficulty doing this. Because they know what their consumers want and play a real role in their lives.

The problem is that according to our (Havas) research well over 70% of brands are not meaningful. They over-promise and under-deliver, eroding their relationship with the consumer until it's non-existent.

Being meaningful is all about being honest. And the truth is that people are under enormous economic pressure, that anxiety is at fever-pitch and nobody really knows what is going to happen. A courageous, meaningful brand will acknowledge this and then look for ways to practically HELP the consumer during this profoundly difficult time.



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Meaningful brands

There are many examples of brands that have done this.

The energy brand, Total, will be cutting the purchase price of multiple essential items in their retail outlets — that's helping.

Instead of trying to sell cars, Skoda has launched a campaign that showed people how to disinfect high-touch areas inside the car, and make people a little bit safer.

Budweiser wanted to bring hope and reassurance to Americans who were feeling scared and isolated, so they created a 60-second spot that rallies Americans and motivates people to pull together in pursuit of a common goal.

Hyundai cancelled its regular glossy car commercials and flighted a series of spots reminding their customers that if they

lost their job during this crisis, they could probably call on the Hyundai Assurance Job Loss Protection Program that defers payments for people who have been retrenched.

SA Tourism produced a beautiful spot around the message “Don’t travel now, so that you can travel later” as they helped spread the word that self-isolation is the only way forward through this pandemic.

We won’t point out the brands that have got it wrong during this period, and have been hammered in social media as a result, but there is a surprising amount of them. The three things that get these brands into trouble seem to be:

1. Using this crisis as a time to sell.
2. Pretending to be concerned when they aren’t.
3. Deafly ignoring the fact that poorer people have very different, and more serious, problems than having to stay at home and be driven crazy by the kids in a five-bedroom house with Netflix, food from that new Checkers delivery app and a house-keeper who is confined to house arrest with you...

The brand's 'best self'

When a brand is truly meaningful, we like to say that it is tapping into the brand’s “best self” and behaving accordingly. So, while things are very hard at the moment, we would argue that the worst thing a brand can do is disappear. When things

are going well, we, as brands, are in people's faces 24/7, so now that people are going through a moment of profound crisis, it is wrong to just disappear like the fairest of fair-weather friends. People need help. They need information, reassurance and help. And if we can give them a tiny bit of that, we must.

Which is why at this point in time, brands should primarily DO rather than SAY.

ABOUT JOHN DAVENPORT

John Davenport is the Chief Creative Officer at Havas Southern Africa.
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