

Does your brand have a purpose?

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Inspired by some great case studies, marketers have become increasingly excited about the need to define and maintain a high-level corporate purpose. But in a field where authenticity is all-important, others say this is a game few brands can successfully play. Our expert panel tackled both sides of the argument – Paul Wynne at Siegel and Gale provides the summary.

Stop drinking the Kool Aid (Phil Davies – Siegel and Gale)

- Companies need to ask themselves the fundamental questions: ‘What are we delivering?’ and ‘What is the value we are adding?’ This can be accessed through the company’s values, behaviour and voice. Purpose alone is not going to get you there and having a wonderfully elegantly written phrase which sounds great isn’t going to get you that far if you’re business is not actually motivated.
- Companies need to make sure their statement is something they believe in, and act on it. Otherwise they’re exposed very quickly.
- No amount of design and marketing on its own will create a meaningful purpose that staff and customers can believe in.

Some examples of where it went wrong:

Johnson & Johnson says ‘*we put the needs and well-being of the people we serve first, and to act justly, ethically and with integrity*’. But 98% of their profits go offshore highlighting that their tax strategy does not support this claim.

Starbucks says they ‘*Inspire and nurture the human spirit, one person, one company, and one neighbour at a time*’. Starbucks owes billions in taxes so they are hardly looking after their neighbours. It really feels quite hollow.

Main take-aways:

- You need to have true purpose behind your statement. It’s very easy to say but in fact doing it, and proving it, is much more difficult.
- Purpose needs to communicate amazing language, but it also needs to come from the heart. ‘What the heart feels today we will understand tomorrow’

“Your purpose needs to be something that comes to life but it’s so rare to get that and requires a lot of consensus but also a lot of bravery from a company. And a personal one which needs to be activated.”

To be or not to be? (Richard Buchanan- The Clearing)

Ask yourself the big question: What is the problem we are solving for customers day to day?

- When we create a promise or a mission or a vision, we need to be clear about what that means. Purpose is the reason to exist beyond profit, for a positive impact. Promise is a commitment, but you must direct your people. Vision is an unobtainable goal. Think beyond the ‘why’ and embrace the ‘how’. For example, a ‘dress down Friday’ highlights that the dress code is probably pointless.

- What's more important is a motivating proposition that sits behind your organisation that attracts the best talent and they can engage with it.
- People need a clear motivating reason to go to work and they need clarity about their role in the world of work, accompanied by a motivating reason to engage with the business.
- Important organisations understand why they do what they do and are not seduced by purpose.
- Use the approach that best fits your business
- Brands that people admire most are the ones with the noblest purpose.

It's not rocket science. Or is it? (Andy Cridland: BlackRock)

- Why is purpose relevant?
- "We exist in a world where clients and consumers have way more choice in terms of brands they choose, books, media they consume and how they consume, and where"
- The result of choice is no matter how much promoting you do, or how loud you speak, choice is still there. Consumers now have the ability to ignore us too – Netflix, Spotify.
- Purpose drives the ability to turn someone's head by having an emotional connection with an audience.
- Low levels of loyalty and trust. Because we live in a world with more choice, and more options, consumers are now going to pursue businesses and brands that are committed to a higher purpose.
- For example, Converse. Converse develop products with artists, musicians, and the way they go about is inspiring. They don't explicitly sell to you as a consumer - you can feel it. They believe that Converse should be a brand that people can take and use to express their own creative personality.
- Another example is Gillette "The best a man can get" to "The best a man can be". The purpose of the new ad was to rid the world of toxic masculinity. Whether they were successful divides opinion, or perhaps that's all they wanted to achieve?
- How do you make purpose work for your organisation? Be authentic. Be realistic. It doesn't happen overnight - you need to put in the work around brand building. Purpose does not start with marketing, it must start on the inside of an organisation. The focus should be on people. Put the people's need first.
- And if you are not thinking about things in long term then then you are doing your organisation a disservice.
- Consider language and what's right for your organisation.
- Purpose should not be confused with CSR.