

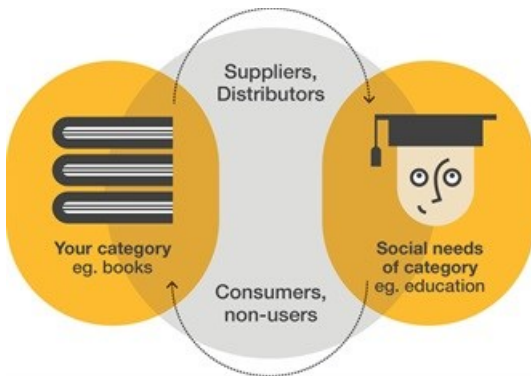
# New white paper on social innovation from Yellowwood

Last week, Yellowwood launched its white paper on 'Social innovation as a platform for business and brands to grow and thrive into the future'. The whitepaper defines the concept as 'A sustainable and profitable way of solving existing systemic challenges or needs in ways that benefit the public or society, regardless of their social class.'

## Gearing business to address systemic social challenges

While businesses retreat and regroup in an attempt to survive in a tough economic climate, one thing is clear: it is no longer 'business as usual.' Consumer behaviour has changed and businesses need to adjust their approach if they want to thrive in the long term.

Increasingly, it is evident that the lines between social and economic flux - and the resultant challenges - are blurred. For savvy marketers, these blurred lines represent an opportunity to partner with government and citizens in order to find sustainable solutions.



Yellowwood Social Innovation Value Cycle

Having explored the concept of social innovation and what it means for local businesses and consumers, Yellowwood has put intellectual and marketing expertise behind unpacking key themes within the social innovation space - as well as ways in which local marketers can incorporate the concept into their strategies and campaigns.

In order to leverage the opportunities within social innovation, marketers need to examine their current approach and gain a new perspective. So how can brands tackling a slowing economy succeed in a complex marketplace?

## 1. Culturally-led solutions

Understanding culture can help marketers anticipate where consumer behaviour may be changing: cultural insights highlight shifts in values, attitudes and behaviours that influence the creation of new opportunities for businesses to initiate fresh conversations that will solve pressing systemic needs. This will help brands prepare and be ready to respond proactively.

In addition, social innovation has not only adapted to the need for cultural understanding - it has also started challenging established ideas of business, innovation and social good. It is an empty space that can transform the way marketers do business and interact with society.

## 2. Moving beyond GDP to measuring social progress

GDP is the benchmark that economies and business chase every year, because it has shaped and defined how a country's success is measured. However, GDP ignores the environment, not taking into account factors like community, happiness and how people in each country experience life.

Michael Green, executive director of the Social Progress Index, argues that only looking at a country's GDP as a benchmark of success in a global economy is a harmful approach.

He offers up an interesting alternative - the Social Progress Index, which does not measure the effort or intention of a country or economy, but rather measures real achievement. For example, the Social Progress Index does not measure the amount of money a country puts into healthcare, but rather the length and quality of the lives of the people in that country. It

does not measure whether governments pass laws against discrimination but rather whether people who live in that country experience discrimination. The key is always the real, human experience.

The fixation on GDP also reveals how business leaders have actually missed the point when it comes to 'purpose'. Too often, we see that businesses treat purpose as a way to simply re-state and affirm their corporate vision, as opposed to making a fundamental change in their operating models. As author and Harvard professor, Michael Porter has argued, "Shared value could reshape capitalism and its relationship to society." This is what businesses and marketers need to take into account, particularly when looking to implement truly customer-centric initiatives.

The Social Progress Index offers a good starting point for marketers to search for areas that need intervention and to identify where their brands can provide solutions - and create shared value.

### **3. From the ground up: boosting the African start-up sector**

One of the strong themes that emerged from Yellowwood's findings was the innovation required within entrepreneurship. Sadly, the many hurdles that African entrepreneurs have to overcome often dampen great aspirations. In South Africa, the government's National Development Plan makes quite clear the great need to develop and nurture entrepreneurial activities on the continent. As the interviews revealed, businesses and marketers can play their part by harnessing social innovation to break down the existing barriers and boost African entrepreneurship.

Kofi Amegashi, executive director at the African Leadership Institute explains, for example, that in big multinational companies, "You walk in as a new employee and everything works. You have a salary and they automatically deduct your PAYE, pension funds, medical aid, UIF, etc. You just fill out a form and everything is sorted. Now when it comes to drawing up an employment contract for a smaller start-up, sourcing all of these basics can be very challenging. Currently, these benefits are created to cater to the needs of larger businesses, and their structures are framed and created to be feasible in larger multinationals."

In his view, entrepreneurs need intervention in the form of an organisation that considers all of the gritty challenges facing start-ups. "Today, we talk entrepreneurship but we are not practically enabling entrepreneurs to succeed."

### **4. Creating white spaces for brands**

Brands need to become 'positive deviants' in their unique spheres of influence. Positive deviance refers to a behavioural and social change approach, based on the belief that, in any context, individuals confronting challenges, constraints and resource deprivations, will employ uncommon but successful behaviours or strategies to enable them to find better solutions.

Critically, these individuals identify solutions where others do not. As a result, they are the key to spreading and sustaining required change.

Yellowwood supports the notion of creating white spaces for brands. Disruption is far more than a noun, a book or a process. It is a way of thinking and acting and a way to look at clients' business and find new opportunities for them. In addition, it is a way of defining how brands should behave and how agencies should do business every day.

### **Guidelines for developing targeted social innovation strategies**

Looking ahead, the opportunity lies in becoming a brand that is a 'champion' and stands firmly against consumer frustrations during difficult times.

With this in mind, the Yellowwood whitepaper provides guidelines to marketers to start developing targeted social innovation strategies.

- Place social innovation at the core of business strategy - it cannot be treated as a separate CSI project or tick-box affair
  - Consider the bigger picture and avoid working in silos - environments are interconnected
  - Always keep the African entrepreneurial agenda in mind - how can your business or brand help start-ups and share its knowledge? Consider mentoring young entrepreneurs
  - Devise operating models that consider the socio-cultural impact of the business
  - Listen to conversations before starting new ones. Marketers should gain a deeper understanding of the context in which key consumer trends arise
  - Instead of trying to 'lead a movement', provide the platform to draw attention to the things that matter the most to consumers
- 
- Always curate knowledge - Stop collecting more and more information and start creating and applying knowledge in ways that make you more relevant.

The whitepaper findings showed that it is critical to recognise that brands and marketers can be profitable and drive social innovation at the same time. Armed with unique cultural insights, a broader world view and business prowess, local marketers can lead the change that communities so desperately need. At the same time, brands will grow stronger and gain much needed relevance in fast-changing markets.

For more information, click [here](#).

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>