

Climbing on the brandwagon

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For today's brands to survive in tomorrow's world, a revolution of marketing strategy thought is required. What worked yesterday simply won't cut it tomorrow. The risk for brands in today's cluttered market is not that they won't be heard; it is that they will be met with indifference.



It is my opinion that the following two trends will cause a cataclysmic change in the market place:

1. Lighthouse branding:

Brands are ruthlessly competing for the light and it is those who have soul that end up in the spotlight. Having a specific sense of what their soul looks like and stands for, and being able to communicate that in everything they do, is what successful brands do best.

These brands wear their soul on their sleeve and it translates and is carried throughout every fiber of their expression. It is evident in the staff they hire, the way they answer the phone, and how they greet you at the check-out counter.

Brand messaging should consistently illuminate your brand. It is far more than just consistency of CI or omnipresence - it is about consistency of expression. This is not a new thought; it was coined by Eat Big Fish, the UK-based challenger brand strategy firm. It was just years ahead of its time.

Consumers are so critical these days that any inconsistency in your brand expression will alienate them. If the car that you have aspired to, and now drive, fails to deliver on after sales service you simply won't tolerate it.

Watch this space : shortly 'brand managers' titles will change to 'expression managers'.

2. Loyalty generators:

Loyalty is the lifeblood of any brand. It is generated by being relevant and keeping in constant dialogue with consumers. This proposal sets out a plan on how to maintain dialogue with consumers by leveraging digital, social and mobile media.

Guiding principals

- Brands are sustained by the loyalty of a core group of consumers. The larger the base of loyal consumers, the more sustainable the brand.
- Brands generate loyalty by remaining relevant through effective positioning, communication, event activation, and packaging - essentially the P's of marketing; and by maintaining dialogue (interactive communication with consumers). Most dialogue is actually a monologue - it is one-way communication through media such as advertising, activation and promotion; however, through research, sometimes brands receive a lag response from consumers

The challenge

Significant marketing resources are spent in an attempt to generate loyalty, yet so little of it is spent on generating genuine, interactive dialogue. In an attempt to grow brands, marketers overlook the fundamental principle that there can be no real relationship without authentic dialogue.

This is not to say that all resources should be spent on conversing with consumers such that they can dictate what the brand should do; on the contrary, brands should not only reflect consumers need states but also their aspirations. Brands should navigate consumers and not the other way round.

The solution

There has been significant innovation and adoption of technology, more so social networking technology, which allows brands to dialogue with consumers more frequently, across multiple media, and it's now cheaper than ever before.

The core of the solution is to invest in a dialogue platform that leverages advancements in social networking technology to open up communication channels with consumers. This dialogue platform sits in-between a brand's communication platforms, such as promotions, advertising and experiential activation, and the consumer. It's a space or nexus where interaction is planned, information is shared, insights gained and loyalty is generated.

These two macro trends will become the brand drivers of tomorrow; the trajectory of consumers today, and society as a whole, makes their prevalence inevitable. Ignore them at your peril or engage with them for success.

A word of caution though: the rules change, the media of influence lose their power, and the thought leaders of today will have no idea tomorrow. The people who understand have been on the fringes for years and they are planning a massive welcome party. Reminds me of Polokwane in 2007.

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