

# Time to unify

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There is an age-old African proverb that says: "It takes a village to raise a child." This simply implies that the success of our future generations depends on the actions of the community in which they are raised. In a world that must now unquestionably be viewed as a global community, the application of this adage on a global scale seems very appropriate.



The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the gaping chasms in society across a number of issues. The way in which the global community tackles impending environmental and humanitarian issues has never been under more scrutiny, and brands and businesses the world over are by no means exempt from this scrutiny. Today's millennial and Gen Z consumer is looking to business to play a major part in the worldwide recovery and are basing more and more purchasing decisions on the value global brands are giving back to the world.

It was not the pandemic that brought this about, but it has drastically accelerated it.

In recent years, consumers have shown enough evidence of deep concern for the welfare of the environment and the wellbeing of disenfranchised cultural groups. According to an Ipsos study in 2019, 40% of Gen Z consumers are likely to boycott brands that behave in a way that don't align with their values and 53% of them have purchased a brand because they want to show support for the issues they represent.

Millennial and Gen Z consumers are expected to account for approximately 60% of all consumers in 2021. Compounded with all that 2020 has given us, big business can ill-afford to ignore this increasingly discerning market.

While the world may be in crisis, consumers have never been in more control. It is now up to brands to accept they play a part in driving positive change and becoming very clear in their intentions as to how they want the world to view their businesses.

**Key take out: Accept that being a good business means doing good.**

## Passions have a crucial role to play

Brands in sport and entertainment have long embraced the power of consumer passions. Coming out of lockdown, these passions emerge with a greater opportunity to unite communities, cultures and even countries.

By merging more traditional passions with an insatiable consumer desire for a better world, sponsors are presented with genuine and sustainable opportunities to acquire or retain loyal fans and lifelong customers.

Sportswear and outdoor company Patagonia is a superb example of a brand that entrenches itself in the hearts of its consumers by unifying them around a common cause. This is borne out of a genuine effort to unify the global community around very real and serious threats facing the environment, such as climate change, deforestation and waste. Since 1985, Patagonia has pledged 1% of their sales to the preservation and restoration of the environment, resulting in over \$90m of donations. In 2019, the company donated a \$10m tax break afforded to them by the Trump administration because they had long been involved in an active battle against the president on his environmental views.

A.S. Roma's social media team have endeared themselves to the global footballing community through their partnership with the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, by announcing their new signings alongside pictures and information of missing children from around the world.

Representatives from the club have said that the presentation videos with social media posts earned over one million views each. More importantly, this initiative has led to two of the missing children being found.

That is purpose.

### **But purpose isn't tactical**

It would be unwise however, for brands to think that this genuine purpose they seek to leverage can be anything other than completely authentic. For as many good case studies that we can highlight, there have been some glaring high profile cases where a disingenuous show of purpose has left their reputation in tatters and some serious damage control to do.

Pepsi's infamous 'Live for Now' campaign that featured superstar celebrity Kendall Jenner was pulled by the brand within 24 hours after completely trivialising the Black Lives Matter movement and the fight against police brutality.

This example is perhaps the best illustration of where many brands get it wrong. If your brand or business is not authentically aligned to the cause, consumers will quickly call out the difference between what you're trying to say and what you're actually doing.

As sponsors of the 2018 Fifa World Cup, Mastercard pledged that 10,000 children would be fed for every goal scored by Neymar or Messi in the tournament. Fans quickly turned on the initiative by questioning why the company would not donate those meals regardless of whether a goal was scored. The company was left with significant reputational damage and ended up being forced to donate the meals anyway.

We live in a world of immediacy, with an online community capable of cancelling your business in seconds. Brands must back up their communication with company action. In the same breath, it must be said that brands no longer have the benefit of being neutral or having no opinion on issues facing society.

Not taking a stand is no longer an option. Patagonia CEO, Yvonne Chouinard once said: "You can't reverse into a mission and values through marketing. The organisations that are struggling with this are probably the ones that are thinking about marketing first. The role of marketing is to authentically elevate that mission and engage people in it, but the purpose needs to be the business."

**Key take-out: Purpose is not skin deep. The desire for meaningful change must be authentic and inspire action.**

### **Shared passions will continue to unite the world**

Sport and entertainment always have and always will continue to hold the potential to transcend race, gender, sexual orientation or political dispositions. The most famous statesman that ever walked the planet famously opined that sport has

the power to change the world.

Sponsors and brands in these sectors have the opportunity to embrace the unifying power that our industry has on a global scale and genuinely make positive change by taking an active, unifying role in the recovery.

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