Shifting focus from success to significance

By Mike Saunders   16 Nov 2016

I remember sitting in a conference in Morocco listening to the Ogilvy MD, Matthieu Plassard, as he shared that marketing in Africa was less about selling products and more about solving problems.

He highlighted that in a world where the share of wallet is limited, brands need to drive lifestyle solutions instead of products aimed at disposable income. Matthieu's comment echoed the sentiment I have been hearing from underground conversations in marketing circles. Building solutions for people is fast becoming the most valuable marketing tool that marketers can spend their time doing. Brand love won't come from lifestyle alignment and it won't come from fancy content.

Image via 123RF

Future brands will build their strength in the consumer's mind by solving real issues for their consumers. Brands whose product don't specifically solve a problem will need to look for ways to build value into peoples lives. We have seen that brands whose product solves problems for people naturally gain brand loyalty. MPESA in Kenya is a great example in Africa – the global tech world helped solve communication desires with networks like Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram. The brands that shine in the world are backed by products that solve actual issues for people.

Thomas Kolster suggests that brands could gain better traction with consumers by using advertising methods to solve environmental and social issues. He cites how Coca-Cola ran a campaign to build brand love in Bangladesh by building an arcade machine that runs on plastic bottles, helping solve the litter crisis Bangladesh is facing. The campaign was very well received, and Thomas highlights this as a great way to solve social issues with advertising, citing its only negative was that the campaign only lasted six weeks.

According to Thomas, people hate advertising, and that is the premise of his case – to encourage brands to solve the world's problems instead of selling stuff. Brand and business who find that sweet spot of solving world issues and driving brand loyalty will find that they build a unique loyalty from consumers and a large amount of goodwill for their brand. Another great example is how Volvo developed a spray paint for cyclists who commute to work. Life Paint helps make cyclists more visible in an attempt to reduce road accidents involving bicycle commuters.

While I completely agree with Matthieu and Thomas, I would like to suggest that there is another reason we see this shift to solving from selling. Advertising agencies are getting tired of selling more product for their clients. Firstly, advertising executives who have had successful careers are now reflecting on their life's work and are looking for ways to leave a legacy and to switch from success-driven life (extracting as much as possible from life) to significance driven lives (injecting as much as possible into society and people). Secondly, as agencies attract more millennial talent, these millennials are shaping the creative execution and thinking towards activities, social issues and environmental solutions. These issues are front of mind for millennials, and they are looking for a way to feel like their job helps them make a difference to the injustice they see in the world.

Both the swell of millennials in agencies and the change of heart in the executive leadership should start to change the way agencies work. I believe that over time the most successful agencies will be those that find a way to be significant, to help brands leave a significant legacy in the hearts of consumers. Ultimately, success in the future will come from how we solve today's problems for people.

ABOUT MIKE SAUNDERS

Mike Saunders, CEO of Digitlab, is a renowned Digital Business and CRM Consulting expert acclaimed for his unique ability to blend technological expertise with insightful business strategy. His leadership in digital consulting, combined with his roles as an international keynote speaker and author, has solidified his reputation as a visionary in the digital realm.
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