

Brands that harnessed the power of purpose in 2020

By [Angela Northover](#)

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It's no secret that 2020 was one of the most challenging years in modern history. According to the Global Web Index' Connecting the Dots 2021 Report, the Covid-19 pandemic was a baptism by fire for many brands, testing purpose-driven commitments to the limit in a time when consumers needed them the most.



Angela Northover, head of content at Eclipse Communications

It forced brands to think and act differently, adapting to the changing consumer landscape to remain relevant, leading with action and social responsibility. Brands needed to impart a sense of empathy, authenticity and transparency in all they did, and be attuned to why they exist and who they serve. Consumers care now more than ever, and so should brands.

Reflecting on a challenging year

From the global Covid-19 outbreak and bushfires in Australia to the Black Lives Matter crisis, 2020 saw its share of tribulations. In South Africa, there was a sharp focus on gender-based violence awareness and driving education accessibility during the lockdown. Brands that demonstrated sensitivity to these issues have won customers' votes of confidence and increased its share of voice.

What the numbers say

Global Web Index' Connecting the Dots 2021 Report reveals that brands exhibiting a commitment to social responsibility will attract the consumer of the now and future. Its research indicated that 56% of people surveyed wanted brands to focus on supporting people during the pandemic, and while the challenge will continue in 2021, it points to a permanent change in corporate social responsibility.

Brands looking to grow need to align with consumer values in ways that are genuine and sustainable. Consumers want to see initiatives that transcend the odd donation or empty platitude and want to engage with brands that care and offer meaningful support.



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Deloitte's 2021 Global Marketing Trends Report affirms that consumers expect more from brands they buy into, with almost four in five respondents surveyed able to cite a time a brand responded positively to the pandemic, and one in five strongly agree that it led to increased brand loyalty on their part.

The report adds that more than 25% of respondents who noticed brands acting in their own self-interest, walked away from those brands. Further, 58% could recall at least one brand that quickly pivoted to respond to their needs, with 82% saying this led to them doing more business with the brand.

Brands leading with purpose

Pfizer South Africa

Underpinned by its brand position of Breakthroughs that change patients' lives, Pfizer South Africa's investment in Unjani Clinics have provided underserved local communities with the basic human right of affordable and accessible primary healthcare. Pfizer South Africa initiated the creation of six primary healthcare facilities, in turn creating jobs for local community members, empowering women nurses and entrepreneurs and enabling an affordable and accessible healthcare solution.

Carling Black Label

During the national lockdown and the banning of alcohol sales, LifeLine received as many as 12,000 calls in March 2020 reporting instances of gender-based violence. A month later, the surge of calls increased by 500% to 80,000. Carling Black Label, hot on the heels of its highly successful #NoExcuse campaign, realised that many may not be able to call for help, initiated The Bravest Thing campaign where users sent the word "Brave" to 0800 150 150 on WhatsApp and could start chatting to a bot. The bot would divert them based on their needs, which included dispatching emergency services or chatting to a counsellor.



New WhatsApp line launched to help address spike in gender-based violence

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PepsiCo

Addressing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6 on the access to clean water and sanitation for all, PepsiCo Foundation pledged R6 million towards the provision of affordable washing units in homes, handwashing stations and water-saving flush toilets to South African communities in need. With an initial goal of reaching 25 million people

across the African continent by 2025, the Foundation has set a new target of reaching 100 million people by 2030 and remains focused on near-term efforts on water distribution, sanitation and hygiene.

Isuzu Motors South Africa

Responding to farmers in need, Isuzu Motors South Africa, together with Farmers Assist South Africa, provided aid to farmers and farming communities in areas adversely affected by drought - transporting critical fodder, farming essentials and food - and thus ensuring ongoing food security for South Africa.

Discovery Health and Vodacom

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa, Discovery Health and Vodacom implemented a virtual healthcare platform, which offered South Africans free access to reliable Covid-19-related information, risk screening and, when necessary, free online medical consultations.

Burger King

Understanding the plight of the dwindling restaurant industry during the lockdown, Burger King UK unexpectedly urged customers to 'Order from McDonalds' on its social media platforms. Further, the post encouraged fans to order from other chains such as KFC, Subway, and others - signalling that purchasing meals from these franchises would help them retain business during these trying times. To date, the single post garnered around 172,000 likes on Twitter.

Airbnb and Telstra

Following the devastating Australian bushfires that tapered off in early 2020, Airbnb heeded the call of those displaced, activating its Open Homes Programme in New South Wales and Victoria. The initiative allowed hosts to offer accommodation to displaced residents and emergency services personnel deployed to assist with the fires.

Further, the telecommunications company, Telstra, wrote off volunteer firefighters' mobile phone bills for December 2019 and January 2020 to provide free services and ease the burden on those battling the fires. It provided relief packages to those in need, free payphones in affected areas, pre-paid handsets and implemented its Satellite Cells on Wheels innovation to boost coverage where needed.

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