

A technique for producing a more civil society through brands

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Much has been said about what a negative force brands can be in a modern capitalistic society. Despite a mountain of criticism, little has been done by brand marketers to plot a course toward creating more responsible management of the specific messages brands promote to society.

Some great books have been written about curbing negative behaviour on subjects such as advertising to children or on corporate social responsibility, but little has been written about how brands can be used as a force for good to help shape powerful ideas that build a better society.

We could spend a lot of time asking why marketing professionals have not said more about guiding the messages we promote to help shape a better society. But let us assume that it is because the whole field of branding is still only a developing science and that the trade has had very simple beginnings: a history that had little influence on society, values and norms.

This paper is not principally concerned with topics that relate to CSR or organisations that promote a progressive product set at their core such as the Fairtrade Association, Ecover or the Body Shop. CSR is a valuable tool in helping us progress as a society and so are groups that advocate for marginalised groups, animal welfare and the environment. But these important organisations represent a small sub-set of the total

number of brands worldwide. We want to address the full universe of brands and see how nearly every brand can be used to contribute to creating a more civil society.

That said this paper will concentrate on brand messages and their ability to regulate and transform the wider social discourse on values, morals and the behaviours they encourage. In particular, it will concentrate on a technique that can help us use brands to promote messages that progress us toward a better society.

The paper takes a small step toward outlining how we can use brands as a force for good in society as well as fulfilling their traditional roles of creating favouritism for the products we promote. It proposes the idea that we must not limit ourselves to doing fewer of the ‘wrong’ things, to simply curb our negative behaviour. We must take a more active role in ensuring the messages we broadcast in the market are positively steering the course of a set of values that society embraces and uses to guide their actions.

We should begin this effort by taking some time to question why brands should be taken seriously as an instrument of influence for society. Then we can lay out a process for thinking about how we want to manage the messages we promote in order to build a more civil society.

You are not
silver, gold,
or platinum.
You are you.



The call for responsibility

We must acknowledge our responsibility to actively manage how brands are used in greater society because brands are powerful. This power has grown well beyond the confines of helping us sell product through notions of quality and differentiation. When you say that someone drives a Volvo or uses an Apple computer, you are making value statements about how a person chooses to live their life.

The church and the state used to be the only legitimate institutions that decided which values to promote to people for the purpose of modifying behaviour. Today, brands are being used as badges and as platforms from which to promote ideas that we feel are important to us as individuals and as a society. Marketers have traditionally used this behaviour modifier to help customers choose one product over another. More recently, brands have been used to engage wider conversations about how we should think about ourselves as a society and make adjustments to what we find important.

Two breakthrough cases to support this claim are Citibank's 'Live Richly' positioning and more recently Dove's 'Campaign for Real Beauty'. We can spend a lot of time arguing whether these campaigns were simply 'clever' marketing ideas designed to push product or whether they were trying to

modify society's thinking and behaviour. One thing is certain, these campaigns have stirred a wide and very public debate on the subjects at hand.

Citibank's 'Live Richly' campaign questions notions of achievement as they relate to living a balanced, contented and happy life. Dove's current campaign questions our superficial and homogeneous notions of what we find to be attractive in ourselves and in our fellow human beings. No matter what the intention, Dove and Citibank have proved that brands are capable of steering the debate on society's values on a global scale.

Not only are brands capable of modifying the greater discussion on human values, they are able to do so at great speed. Thanks to the success of capitalism, the financial clout that it has amassed and the technological innovations that it uses to propagate itself further, brands disseminate value-laden messages with incredible speed and consistency. Note the speed at which the now famous 'Dove Evolution' video travelled or how quickly news of Super-Bowl commercials is spread. New communication avenues such as social marketing are adding novel, more involved dimensions to the wider discourse.

Brands are also used to unify people's views – to create standards by which to judge things in our lives. Decades ago, these messages were focused on

creating a common view of 'high quality' by which to judge a product. Today, common benchmarks for liberty (Apple, Harley Davidson, Marlboro), achievement (Citibank, Mont Blanc, Sony), family and security (Volvo, Disney, J&J) and other values are promoted through brands.

Benjamin Barber's modern classic, *Jihad versus McWorld*, all too coldly measures the power of capitalism over its opposing social construct: tribalism. Barber lays out an argument that demonstrates how capitalistic companies will lay waste to backward tribal mindsets and pesky national borders. He asserts that the ideology of capitalism is the polytheism of brands now available on a global scale. It is this ability to create wider shared views that gives brands their social power and influence. Good or bad, brands have become a powerful mechanism for building a more homogeneous view of what we value in our lives: a view that is increasingly global. Importantly, this mechanism does not respect traditional lines drawn up by states and religions and is rarely impeded by them. The infectious power of brands easily transcends other social constructs. From Starbucks in Saudi Arabia to Pizza Hut in Papua New Guinea: global brands are everywhere and they have an increasingly consistent story to tell.

The process

So, now onto the process. It's simple and does not need a marketing guru to implement. I have outlined the steps quite quickly, but as you will see, each step requires considerable attention. It will also become obvious that none of the steps can be skipped as each builds on the next and interesting ethical questions need to be considered during each stage. The process also nicely coincides with established methods of building strong brands: brand processes that focus on driving customer preference.

The central principle – and if you were to argue with this paper, the argument should be constructed around this idea

– is that brands should offer a transparent view into the cultures of companies that create them. A window, if you will, that allows customers to confidently endorse the beliefs and actions of one company over those of another.

Achieving greater transparency will: [1] help companies fulfil their promises more fully, build greater credibility, and become more efficient agents for influence, [2] give customers the ability to vote with more perfect information when buying brands that are closely aligned to their own values and [3] encourage the preference for and adoption of more civilised values across society through the power of established awareness-building techniques in the hands of marketers.

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY PROGRESSIVE VALUES INTERNALLY

The first step in any brand development process is to identify the values and narratives that will drive the success of the brand. In the past, this exercise was driven solely by attempting to identify customers' needs. Over time, we have learned that building successful brands also requires an identification of the values that exist within the people that are working in the company and those that drive the leadership of the company. This realisation spawned the field of vision-led management and brand engagement, where companies use the values identified in the brand to align the behaviour of their staff. The entire field of management consulting would never have existed if it were not for the evolution of brands from a quality mark to the promotion of more complex and meaningful values that can be held by customers and company alike.

Conventional brand theory holds that if people in a company believe in a certain set of values, then these employees will be better able to promote those values than people who are, in essence, faking it. It's a question of substance over style and credibility is difficult to build but

many brands including Virgin, J&J and many others have proven it is possible and worthwhile.

The challenge of choosing the right values for a brand is a complex task. Prioritising the values that should lead both the culture of the organisation and serve as the bond between a customer and company is difficult enough. Add to this the task of selecting the right way to promote these values into a sensible and progressive narrative for employees and customers to believe in, only complicates the matter further.

It is not so much a task of selecting progressive or regressive values. Google's worthy "don't do evil" promise is a binary approach for controlling the awesome power at their disposal. But this promise does not inform what employees should do or the stories that we want to communicate about the Google brand.

We need a careful selection and prioritisation of human values like accomplishment, freedom and excitement as well as a sensible and progressive narrative that will fulfil practical needs like differentiation and the need to promote a better society to fulfil a company's public role. Without the value selection, we don't have a base from which to form different stories. Without a compelling narrative, values like achievement can be misconstrued to portray a 'winning at all costs' approach.

Obviously, some narratives can contribute toward a progressive and more civil society and other narratives may drag us back from this goal. Sometimes companies live by values that they identify for brand communications and sometimes they try to fake them in order to make it appear that they are something they really are not.

Logically, the first step in using a brand to create a more civil society is to identify values that we marketers feel are both a true reflection of the values held inside a company and those

that will contribute to creating a more civil society.

Historically, many brands have been about faking it, or at least approximating a set of values for the market.

Conversely, there are many books that discuss the power of cult-like brands such as Walmart, P&G, IBM, Nordstrom, and SC Johnson. But you do not need to have a cult-like brand with heroic world-changing narratives in order to contribute to the development of a more civilized society.

Johnson & Johnson is an excellent example of a company that identified progressive values in their credo over 60 years ago. These values are very much alive today and were put to the test with the Tylenol Cyanide incident in the 80's: fortunately J&J's values rang true.

One might think that J&J is an easy example since their products help humankind in a direct way. Sony is another excellent example of a brand that adopted a story to help construct a more civil society. Their mission in the early 50's was 'To become the company most known for changing the worldwide poor-quality image of Japan and Japanese products'. No other brand contributed more to the elevation of the post-war Japanese image than Sony did. They did it through their products, through their internal culture and through the messages they promoted. They did it through their brand.

So, the first step is all about identifying the values and narratives we need to focus our brand on, what we want to achieve for our internal culture and what we want to achieve for society at large. These values and narratives need to be promoted in a balanced way and there is no magic formula to help us understand what the right balance should be. They also need to reflect the unique mix of stories that create differentiation for the company's public image and their own internal cultural development. In our experience as an agency, we find this balance heightens

the impact of a brand strategy – it does not provide limits, but requires significant concentration, risk-taking and the asking of, at times, interesting ethical questions.

STEP TWO: ALIGNING THE INTERNAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE COMPANY

Once we have identified the fine balance of values and narratives that both reflect the inner values of the company and those that will contribute to the development of the more civil society, then the second step in our process is to ensure the brand values are uniformly felt inside the company.

Sometimes, this unifying effort is a small step and sometimes it is a giant leap. Practically, if there is a leap involved, some smaller steps need to be taken to bring all possible stakeholders along. If we marketers have done our job properly, then the newly identified values should be representative of the values that are already inside the leaders of the company.

Some gap will always exist between the real visionaries of the company and the wider employee base. If a wide gap exists between the leaders/visionaries of the company, chances are that the company is already experiencing some difficulty. This situation requires a change in wider behaviour to prevent the company from getting stuck and falling behind competitors with more productive company cultures. Logically, this change effort will take more time and will require many smaller steps of consensus building for a new shared set of values and behaviours to emerge.

While the goal of unifying the internal culture under a progressive narrative is the aim of this stage, we need to consider three different scenarios that present their own challenges to this task and deserve to be examined one by one.

Situation 1: Progressive culture inside, mixed messages outside

The first group of companies to examine are those that do not have well defined values known to everyone, but actually possess a uniform culture that contributes to creating a better society. For example, we worked with a Russian pharmaceutical company that was making a push to develop their brand. The management team was staffed by highly intelligent and driven individuals who mostly hailed from consulting backgrounds and ivy-league schools. They conducted their own best practice research of pharmaceutical industry brand communications and determined that their brand should promote values revolving around care, family and security. After several interviews and workshops with them to identify their own culture, we discovered that notions of care were not what drove their behaviour. To clarify, they would be upset if their products hurt anyone, but, when compared to their customers (doctors and pharmacists), care-related values did not get them out of bed in the morning.

Our investigations into their culture revealed that they valued notions of wisdom and excitement/adventure more than any other. Using these values, we helped them identify that they were, in fact, creating a fast-paced culture that focused on building a learning organisation. Many components of this learning organisation already existed, but never received due recognition, so remained secondary to other narratives promoted inside the company.

Together, we determined that they should be listening to the people that care most (doctors, healthcare management) in order to put their collective wisdom to the test and solve exciting problems in ways that have never been tried before. Naturally, many of these behaviours were already exhibited throughout the company but, there were also competing messages

like 'care' that denied a level of focus that they found in their new brand platform.

The company R&D team took to the new values with gusto and saw the newly identified values and narrative as a liberating force for change. Instead of deciding which new drug would best promote notions of care (again a value that was more or less faked) for their pipeline, they essentially took the brief on which drugs would best benefit the population of patients from their customers (doctors and hospital boards) and developed the drugs that offered the biggest challenge to them intellectually, along with other important business criteria, like profit.

We identified a balanced set of values for the company and made a hero out of management's desire to always find a cleverer way of doing things. Sometimes this clever approach needed a low-cost solution, sometimes it needed a more effective delivery format and sometimes it needed a different way to educate doctors. They recognised that this approach was more risky, but a risk-seeking attitude was directly in line with their adventure-related values. In truth, their historical decisions were more governed by this inherent attitude toward excitement than they had previously admitted. As we often find, the true values of the company are used to make decisions, regardless of whether they are clearly defined or not. All other justifications tend to be post-rationalisations for the decisions already made. Our Russian client was no exception.

The company's customers were extremely impressed with the new focus since it made them feel listened to, it made their care-related values feel appreciated. Doctors especially warmed to the new messages coming from R&D and sales since they felt it was a genuine and practical approach for a pharmaceutical manufacturer to adopt.

The programme has been a tremendous success, both in terms of

adoption of the newly identified values and as a financial success. Practically, doctors found that they had better drugs and delivery formats for their patients and that they were able to better serve the population through more effective treatments – not just those that help drive profit for the manufacturer.

It's worth noting that the programme mentioned here was a success because we took an honest look at the company culture, picked the best of their behaviours and values, codified them into an easy format and then helped everyone understand them so they could act on them. Before we began working with them, the management team had identified progressive narratives that would promote the development of a more civil society and were willing to try and fake them. But, it was not until we had identified the genuine values found in the dominant culture that they were able to capitalise on their potential and make a more meaningful impact on society.

Companies in the situation described here are the easiest to get on track to promoting more progressive brand messages since there is very little 'holding them back'. A progressive narrative system already exists and is just waiting to be capitalised on in order to reach its true potential. Once these kinds of companies have a clear view of their own values and narratives, they usually act on them immediately, quite consistently and with great success.

Situation 2: Regressive culture inside, progressive messages outside

The second situation is more difficult to address. In this second case, a company has a uniform culture that promotes regressive narratives internally, but progressive narratives externally. Predictably, these companies have rather troublesome internal cultures filled with conflict. People in these cultures tend to believe that they can either fool the customer into

believing a rosier picture of the company exists or they feel that promoting progressive positive narratives outside will somehow lead to a positive culture change inside. Modern brand management thinking dismisses both beliefs and highlights the importance of this second step in our process.

Only now are the majority of companies accepting that branding is about more than external communications and good market research. Companies in this second situation have not acknowledged this relatively new idea or are still struggling to find the best way to address it in their own organisations.

The key to helping these organisations is in finding the progressive narratives that may not be the dominant pattern for these cultures, but are often displayed in the 'bright-sparks': the new blood that people look to for creating change. In these cases, we need to focus on progressive emergent narratives and hope to crowd out regressive narratives that dominate the current culture. What we are describing here is the principle of working with the best narratives that the current culture has to offer and limiting the attention given to the dominant regressive narratives that currently control the culture.

For instance, a previous client of ours is an archetypal example of this second category of company. Their internal culture was highly individualistic, consisting of many fiefdoms, each struggling for power and control. They valued notions of individual achievement, social recognition and they continually entrenched themselves into the meticulous detail of every subject in an effort to retain control over rivals both inside the company and outside.

The company went through a re-branding exercise that was driven by market research. They identified customer anxieties relating to new technologies and formed a rather

benevolent-sounding brand narrative that promoted a progressive and civilising narrative. However, they skipped the second stage of the process and did not work to align the internal culture to the new narrative in any meaningful way.

This result is more common than one might think. Companies that have regressive and non-civilising cultures usually recognise their own culture quite clearly, in response, they often dismiss their dominant culture as unworthy of building upon and try to create new cultures from scratch. Of course, cultures are like cities. You cannot destroy a city and build a new one if the city is in decline. When a company's culture is displaying regressive patterns of behaviour, we must work within that culture to identify what values need to be preserved, what new/emergent values need to be fostered and what old values and behaviours need to be left behind.

Having ignored the current dominant culture the result, in this case and in many cases we have seen, was a highly cynical reaction from the marketplace and from the employees. The re-launch efforts have performed poorly and the company's management acted in accordance with the dominant culture: firing those seen as most responsible for the effort and abandoning any future plans for change.

The process of changing the dominant patterns and values that make up a company's culture are remarkably similar to the efforts made in revitalising a city and we can learn many lessons from such books as Malcolm Gladwell's 'The Tipping Point'. The key to identifying values and narratives that will work in these cultures is one of balance. We need to appreciate how difficult it can be to change cultures and therefore make the first steps as easy, effective and long lasting as possible. As an agency, we have found the identification of progressive narratives inside existing cultures a key part of the process.

Even if they do not represent the dominant values and norms, there is always an emergent set of values that can be identified and nurtured. As stated above, these emergent values are usually found within new employees with fresh outlooks or members of the old guard that have carved themselves out a protected niche in the company. Every change initiative is difficult, so identifying emergent progressive narratives from which we can build is a crucial step toward creating a more civilised internal culture. In the end, we must do everything we can to build on the existing city since building a new one is rarely a practical option.

Happily, consumers are increasingly aware of companies that fake it and are voting with their patronage when they have the opportunity. So, companies that try to portray an image that is not in line with their internal culture face increasing difficulty as access to information continues to improve. It's hard to tell, since it is early days in brand development, but it would seem that the availability of information has put us onto a virtuous cycle. Only time will tell if this is a long-term trend.

Situation 3: Regressive culture inside, regressive messages outside

The third situation that companies find themselves in is the most difficult for marketers to modify and address. This group of companies have successful brands that promote regressive values to the market. These brands are not faking it. They have created an open window into the culture of the company through the brand they promote to the market.

Perhaps this is the area where marketers have the greatest responsibility and the greatest challenge. Companies that thrive in this territory are rewarded for the messages they promote, though they often tap into a vulnerable area of the human psyche and play on primal insecurities.

We can argue that these companies need to be cajoled into change, but we

must appreciate how difficult it will be to change successful companies in this situation. As marketers we may never have the legitimacy to challenge existing cultural patterns without support from everyone in senior management.

There are probably two ways to change the messages that these companies promote. The first is to support selective projects that promote progressive narratives. For example, Nike largely promotes a winning at all costs narrative, but some of their communications also raise important questions around race, age and gender inequality. By being selective about the projects marketers support, a bias can be established and emergent narratives can drive a more prominent face for the brand.

The second, and more severe, option is to refuse to work with these companies and instead work with their direct competitors in order to make them stronger to ensure that only progressive messages dominate the category.

Certainly I have laid out an ideal that not all companies and agencies will adopt immediately since considerable change to current practice is required. If we as marketers believe that we can build a more civil society with the brands we create, then we must make every effort to ensure the progressive narratives win out over the regressive narratives. This process of modification and attrition will take time and many step-changes will be required.

We can take comfort in analogical situations to prove that people who develop brands are capable of making choices similar to the ones I have described here. Thirty years ago no agency would have refused to work with a big tobacco company, just the opposite in fact, those kinds of jobs were dreams come true. While tobacco companies can still find agencies to help them market their products, over half of agencies now have policies that prevent them from working with tobacco companies. Further, many marketers we know have turned down

opportunities to work with clients that advertise to children, manufacture unhealthy foods, have histories of irresponsible social policy or that operate gambling services.

STEP THREE: PROMOTE EXTERNALLY

The final two steps in the technique are all about externalising the messages that we identify. The process from here should look familiar and follows long-established practices in developing successful brands. In the third step, we want to promote the right balance of values so that our brands will both be accepted by the market and promote progressive narratives that help build a better society.

Naturally, if we are to go through the effort of establishing progressive narratives, we want to ensure they are a success in the marketplace. For success to happen, the progressive stories need to be both relevant and differentiating. Sometimes the challenge in promoting progressive narratives externally is battling against past behaviours to achieve relevance for our

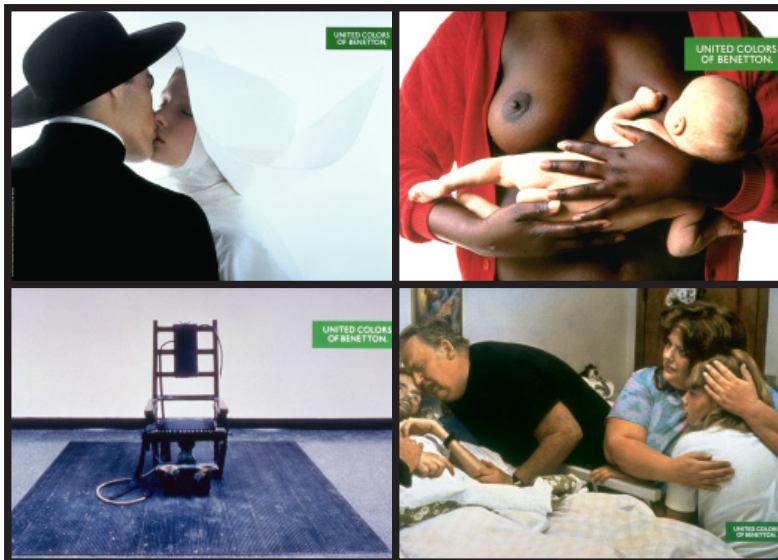
progressive narrative set that contributes to the development of a more civil society.

However, the tide is turning. For example, banks have traditionally traded in regressive or neutral territory. Now, HSBC, one of the world's most successful banks is promoting notions of tolerance for different perspectives in society. The positioning is relatively new, but has been confidently rolled out across dozens of markets.

Another challenge is to reduce the risk of market rejection of the messages being promoted. The more bold the message, the more risk we undertake. Big, bold and often audacious goals like those held by Walmart, Mary Kay, Sony and HP are often too bold for their customers to accept at the beginning of the conversation. As one of our consultants likes to say: 'If I want to become an Olympic athlete, the first thing I tell people is that I have started going to the gym'.

Companies with bold values and goals need to tailor the narratives that they promote in order to ensure the market accepts them. A good example is Apple's mission: 'Man is the creator of change in this world. He should be above systems and structures, not subordinate to them'. Not surprisingly, you will not find this statement on product literature or on ads. Usually, very powerful value-statements like this can be translated into functional messages like 'ease of use', which served as the focus at the launch of the iMac.

However, Steve Jobs took the bold decision, similar to Dove recently, to come out and express Apple's big idea with the infamous 1984 commercial. The 1984 ad, which cast IBM in the place of an Orwellian big brother and Apple in the role of the rebellion leader, was as risky as it was bold. Most companies are unprepared to take such risks in the market. While Apple succeeded in building excitement and interest for its brand in 1984, remarkably without launching any



customers. For example, Virgin and IKEA have an easier time of promoting progressive social messages than do Mont Blanc or Morgan Stanley. The heritage of the brand is a company's most marketable asset, but as we can see the collection of values, conduct and stories that make up its heritage are not always well aligned with a

products that year, there have been brands that have overstepped the mark. One such brand is Benetton.

In 1982, Benetton began working with creative director Oliviero Toscani to create new corporate ads for campaigns. Toscani used the brand to promote images considered taboo by wider society. Through Toscani's vision, Benetton raised the level of conversation around taboos related to race, poverty, religion, refugees, Aids, capital punishment, war, corruption and a few others. He began by offering abstract images that were playful with the topics he addressed. The campaigns were shocking and created a public stir when launched, but the messages did not have an intended recipient, nor did they visualise a realistic situation: they were clever parodies designed to open a dialogue on social justice themes.

Luciano Benetton said 'The purpose of advertising is not to sell more. It's to do with institutional publicity, whose aim is to communicate the company's values.... We need to convey a single strong image, which can be shared anywhere in the world.' Oliviero Toscani, the creative director said 'I am not here to sell pullovers, but to promote an image... Benetton's advertising draws public attention to universal themes like racial integration, the protection of the environment, Aids, etc.'

However, during the 90's, Toscani became more controversial in his choice of topics and the way in which he promoted them. He began employing realism in his photographic style, depicting boatfuls of refugees, bloodied military uniforms and dying Aids sufferers. The market reacted harshly and Benetton began losing sales. The decision to axe Toscani came after images of the electric chair and death-row prisoners were portrayed in ads in America. Many American groups banded together to boycott Benetton shops and sales suffered dramatically. Toscani responded by saying: 'Some people get angry at my work because actually

they get angry at themselves. They don't want to deal with the image that I proposed.'

Was Benetton being sensationalistic to get more sales? Did they choose to fight for social justice despite sustaining damage to their brand and their bottom line? These were the subjects of much debate as the messages from the clothing brand cut deeper into taboos and provoked stronger and stronger reactions from the market. However, it was clear that the Benetton company had a choice to make: tone the message down or face closing shop.

Of course, brands like Benetton and creative directors like Toscani are rare. No one would want to live in a society where every brand is pushing a message like Benetton chose to promote. Whether one agrees with Toscani's messages and their medium is not at issue here. Benetton clearly demonstrates that brands can be used to further the debate on society's values and draw attention to certain issues. But these debates are still regulated by the current norms in society and these norms dictate how far the debate can be pushed. Once a brand steps too far outside these norms, the messages will be rejected by society and the brand will cease to be a viable mouthpiece for any issues. The brand will lose credibility and evoke cynicism from the market.

Perhaps the ultimate test for a company is its management's reaction to a crisis. IKEA has been labelled the 'Teflon Brand' since none of its negative PR seems to stick to the image of the company. The company has weathered allegations of Nazi support, child labour, deforestation and suburban blight, yet the brand equity remains high. The secret can be found in the company's reaction to these potentially devastating blows during the crisis itself. In each situation, IKEA has responded openly and with reference back to its egalitarian-based values. When charged with Nazi support, the founder owned up and asked the public to move on. When charged with buying carpets from



Eat



Sleep

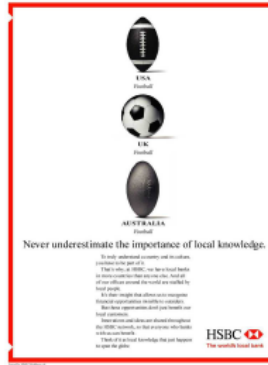


Drink



Bank

Eat, Sleep, Drink, Bank



Football (USA) Football (UK) Football (Australia). Never underestimate the importance of local knowledge



How the world sees you depends on how you see the world

manufacturers that used child labour, the company responded with a full and open investigation, admitted the allegations were true, put a halt to the activity and spearheaded a UN-backed initiative to stamp out the use of child labour in carpet manufacture. It can be argued that the company acted in accordance with its values and offered a clear and open view into the situation.

STEP FOUR: CONTINUALLY IMPROVE & RAISE THE GAME

The final step is concerned about keeping the brand relevant over time. Competition will quite naturally ensure that the narratives we tell need to be improved and made more meaningful and complex. HSBC provides an excellent recent example of how to both begin the process of entering into a more progressive and civil conversation and how to then move the brand into a more interesting and meaningful narrative set.

In 2002, HSBC began promoting the slogan 'The world's local bank'. The creative effort centred on examining the misunderstanding that can occur when using the same rituals and symbols delivered in different countries. While the creative work was well received, the central 'Glocal' message is an old and much tread-upon theme. However, this initial positioning was designed to begin the journey into a far more interesting and meaningful narrative celebrating

tolerance among the world's culture and peoples.

Without this initial campaign, the secondary message would probably not have been accepted by customers.

As a result of careful planning, HSBC is at least two steps ahead of the competition with their latest promotions. Any other global bank would struggle to occupy the same narrative space as HSBC does now. With further evolution, HSBC can shore up their differentiation further.

This evolution makes ultimate sense for the brand and, handled properly, will deliver real value to shareholders, staff and customers. The messages that HSBC continue to deploy not only encourage a more civil society, they build real value in the market, increase staff retention and customer loyalty.

Body Shop, on the other hand, illustrates how a brand with a once powerful narrative has now been marginalised through the lack of a programme to develop additional meaning and equity beyond the initial promise.

Many brands that now compete on a product level with Body Shop have asserted similar ecological claims to those that made the Body Shop a success. Body Shop was not able to find a way to protect its advantage in

the market or evolve it to create a level of differentiation that was harder to imitate.

Is that all?

We have left many questions unanswered in this paper. What about seemingly vacuous fashion and luxury brands? What about niche brands? What about multi-brand organisations like Unilever and Procter & Gamble? What about shareholder pressure? What about companies that only promote functional benefits? What about smaller companies?

The hope for this paper was to build enough of a foundation on the subject that would enable some debate toward answering these questions, but expansion of these ideas will need to be answered in subsequent papers and on our blog.

In the end, we want to relay the idea that there is nothing differentiating about using regressive narratives in marketing messages. In fact, regressive narratives are historically the dominant story in many markets associated with the basics of the economy.

The process of creating a great brand is similar to using a crucible. We begin the values identification process with a wide view of the company's culture, the needs of the customers they serve and other environmental factors. Slowly, less relevant and undifferentiating values are burned away and we end up with a distilled essence for the brand comprised of a series of value-laden statements. As marketers, we employ a series of tests to create this crucible effect so that only the purest form of the brand remains.

The process outlined here requires we marketers to increase our game and work harder to convince company boards to take the extra steps that will initially be perceived as being risky. It is helpful to think of these additional steps or tests as heating up the crucible and creating a purer, more differentiating brand. Recognising that brands have a

powerful and transformational effect on the wider discussion on society's values, we need to consider this additional dimension and use it to continue differentiating our brands. Current trends demonstrate that consumers make choices about the products they buy using value-based judgements. There is no reason to suppose that this trend will not continue and we can all benefit by moving society toward a more civil trajectory.

Further reading:

www.civilbranding.com

Benjamin R Barber:
Jihad versus McWorld

Frank Barrett: Creating Appreciative Learning Cultures

Alain de Botton: Status Anxiety

Malcolm Gladwell: The Tipping Point

Jane Jacobs: Systems of Survival

Amin Maalouf: In the Name of Identity

G. Marlies, M. Kaldor & H. Anheier:
Global Civil Society Yearbook 2005/6

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