

The legitimacy of authenticity

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

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There is always one speaker at Design Indaba that you fall in love with. Not just because of their inspiring or beautiful work, but because of them. Their authenticity. Their essential humanity that comes across.

This year it was renowned South African photographer David Goldblatt. He spoke simply, but with a sincerity that connected emotionally with us, the audience. He spoke about his work. He didn't make any grand gestures or flaunt ego. He was real, he was honest.

As The Brand Union Africa ([@TBUAfrica](#)) tweeted after his talk: "#DavidGoldblatt as the embodiment of authenticity, a theme that has echoed throughout the conference #DesignIndaba."

That is of course why Design Indaba gets it (mostly) right each and every year, because it searches out those speakers who are authentic.

It isn't just a trend, it is reality. In this new connected transparently digital world of ours, brands are desperately trying to be seen as authentic and sincere in the eyes of their consumers.

But, hey, here's a newsflash: authenticity can't be faked. You may fool some of the people some of the time, but definitely not all of the time.

Brands need to be seen as open and collaborative and sincere in solving problems when that is what they are doing to get their brand message across.

But don't hide the fact that you are still trying to sell stuff. Be honest about your intentions.

Being true to your brand

Authenticity may be defined as a major "trend", but it can't just be relegated as a trend in our endless trends lists because it means you have to be real and behave in a certain way that cannot be faked or just as part of yet another marketing and brand strategy.

Authenticity isn't obviously, always about changing the world and CSI programmes. It is also about being true to your brand and its values and being real.

It is too easy to get found out these days. There seems to be a 'special' breed of troll that hunts down and trashes brands online that are less than honest about their product origins, development or brand messaging.

The trend towards authenticity can be described more as a movement, a return to old-fashioned values in this increasingly technology-self-centred world.

Authenticity is not a fad, it isn't used to sound cool, to impress.

As Design Indaba became more about sustainable design conversations in the past five years or so and less about just making products and advertising them in cool ways or designing fancy logos, the movement towards reducing waste in product design and designing responsibly for a better world gained momentum and this year the message in all its eloquence was that of authenticity.

It's a beautiful word, let's use it more often and 'do' it more often - for our beautiful world.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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