

Why your brand needs a purpose

Issued by [M&C Saatchi Abel](#)

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Marketing and advertising insights from the World Retail Congress...

"If you're not in fashion, you're nobody."

- Lord Chesterfield

No, it isn't a line from *Ab Fab*, but from Lord Chesterfield, some 260 years back. Chesterfield's statement clearly defines the ultimate aim of marketing and advertising: that of keeping brands constantly current, in favour, preferred, hopefully even loved... and essentially, 'in fashion'.

When attending the recent World Retail Congress in Paris, where we heard from the likes of John Lewis, Tesco, Coke, Printemps and Louis Vuitton, what struck me is that there is something fundamental to brands that have the ability to constantly stay 'in fashion'.

Does being in fashion require constantly being on top of and adopting the latest trends (and maybe creating a few of your own)? Does it require religiously following culture? I believe it's only a part of it.

Wanted and chosen

Brands that stay in fashion have one thing in common: a clear and powerful purpose which consistently allows them to present themselves in authentic and unique ways that keeps their brands wanted and chosen.

Take Disney, for example. With its unique ability to 'suspend reality', the brand has taken one of its most compelling propositions, Cinderella, into retail spaces around the world with their Bibidi Bopidi Boutique. Here, little girls can live out the ultimate fantasy of being transformed into Cinderella. Wannabe princesses can be pampered, made up and dressed into real-life Cinderellas. Clearly this suspension of reality is working - the waiting list for the Harrods boutique is six months (even with prices of up to R18,000 a go).

Delivering value

Staying in fashion also demands delivering value.

Discount food retailer Lidl, for example, understood that product and price alone don't equal value (unless of course you are consistently the cheapest in your category - a rare feat). Struggling with their 'cheap' image in Sweden, they set out to get back in fashion by convincing people that Lidl isn't a compromise.

They secretly opened a pop-up gourmet restaurant called Dill (a convenient play on their name) headed up by leading chefs using food exclusively from Lidl. It was an instant success. This little secret wasn't made public until the hit pop-up shut its doors.

The 'e-factor'

Johnnie Rush, from the Home Shopping Network, talked about the 'e-factor', evoking an emotion that leads to a sale. Brands that are 'in fashion' acknowledge consumer needs and mindsets, and are able to offer their consumers social currency - experiences and stories that move beyond the transactional.

Ann Cairne, head of insight for Mastercard echoed this idea - one of the biggest macro global trends that they are seeing in global spend is the shift away from commodities to experiences.

A great example of a brand that has acknowledged this shift is Shoes of Prey, an Australian (and soon to be global) retailer. Modern consumers desire personalisation and customisation, and Shoes of Prey has tapped into this by giving shoppers the ability to design their very own, one-of-a-kind, pair of shoes (both online and at David Jones).

Disney has taken this even further with its D-Tech-Me studios that print 3D replicas of their customers as Star Troopers, Super Heroes or Princesses. And every week, lululemon stores and showrooms push their products aside, unroll yoga mats and turn their spaces into instant yoga studios.

Local relevance

While these are global shifts, they are increasingly relevant locally. As South African consumers become ever more value-conscious, seeking out brands and services that deliver meaningful, tangible impact, brand owners are going to need to push beyond simply dialing up the decibels on their ad spend.

The real challenge is finding a unique, authentic way in which to present your brand. Great product and price are becoming passport factors: you need to understand why your customers should put you at the top of their list. And that's called 'purpose'.

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