

The importance of building shared values

 By [Ben Wagner](#)

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In a highly-connected world where social media savvy-consumers expect greater transparency from the companies whose brands they use, the absence of shared values is becoming an imposing threat to companies' triple bottom lines*.

At this year's [Cannes International Festival of Creativity](#), a number of comments from the esteemed speaker lineup, again highlighted the prominence that business leaders and marketing practitioners are giving the development of shared values. The reason why is neatly summed-up by David Clark, founder of the David Clark Cause - "Brands aren't judged by what they promise, but by what they do".

Similarly, in his summation of an interview between the chief marketing officers of Gap, Coca-Cola and IBM; Ogilvy chairman-CEO, Miles Young, highlights brands that have a "point of view about the world" versus those who don't - you can easily see this translating into consumer bonding and ultimately market share.

Brand purpose

If consumers aren't able to relate to a brand's purpose, and don't share its values towards people, profits and planet, its performance and sustainability will be impacted.

Certainly, the notion of building shared values isn't new. There are many global examples of brands that have embraced the development of shared values. A great example is Nike. In the late 90s the brand came under massive scrutiny about its labour practices, particularly relating to child labour in Indonesia. Controversial movie-maker, Michael Moore amplified this scrutiny in an expose "The Big One", culminating in an interview during which he took Nike CEO, Phil Knight, to task about the working conditions that many contracted employees were enduring.

Realising that its business practices were impacting on consumer perception of its brand values, and that this could seriously jeopardise its future prospects, the company undertook to outline its policies in a transparent and clear manner.

Nike has also created the Nike Better World platform through which it supports initiatives such as advocating exercise to address obesity in the youth, and "the girl effect" which supports young adolescent women in poverty stricken areas around the globe.

Reshaped values

Although the company still has murky areas around labour practices to overcome, it is clear that the brand has reshaped its

values so that they are common to, and more easily shared with, its present and future consumers. This has ultimately reflected the way it operates and changed the way in which consumers now relate to and see the Nike brand.

There are also examples of leading advertisers who have cut against the grain to lead the charge of responsible marketing. One who stands out is Alex Bogusky who once represented the likes of big brands such as Burger King and Coca Cola but who, now part of a new breed of brand activists, has launched The Real Bears campaign, (www.therealbears.org), which in a twist of irony, slams the soda industry for the many lies given around the consumption of soda drinks.

Here at home, Native and For Love of Water (FLOW) implemented a digital campaign, "[Close the Tap](#)", to inspire people to use water conservatively and wisely. Using Arduino technology, we created a real-life running tap connected to Twitter and video streamed it live. We called on consumers to tweet their pledge to save water and share it on Facebook. With every tweet, the tap tightened a little until the target of 10,000 tweets was reached and the tap closed.

The campaign reflects many of the ideals that are core to our business and highlighted the power of social media to effect social change. With examples like this beginning to grow, and in a world seemingly beset with social, environmental, economic and political crises, building shared values has never been more relevant or important.

Return to roots

Another great example is the launch of the new Chevrolet Utility earlier this year, where we created a purpose-driven campaign that placed the car at the heart of real world change. Enter the UTE-FORCE - a team of the country's most varied and skilled experts, from carpenters and plumbers to electricians and industrial designers. With a fleet of legendary all new Chevrolet Utilities at their disposal, this team is travelling around the country for a year, completing missions for communities who need it most. The campaign kicked off with building a cricket pitch for Cowan High School in Port Elizabeth and encouraged participation through mission suggestions and volunteering, reaching over 19,000 unique website visitors halfway through the year - with Facebook "Likes" doubling from 21,825 to 41,327 fans, and a Twitter reach of more than 28,244 followers on [#UTEFORCE](#).

It is evident that agencies need to return to their roots as change agents to activate the building of shared values on behalf of their clients to ensure the relevance of these businesses in future. As developers of the brand promise, the creation of shared values must become part of an agency's mandate.

Ultimately, marketers and their agencies should view this challenge as an opportunity for creating optimism and hope for future generations, which quite frankly is the only way forward.

**The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) is an accounting framework that incorporates three dimensions of performance: social, environmental and financial. The TBL dimensions are also commonly called the 3Ps: people, planet and profits. By focusing on comprehensive investment results - that is, with respect to performance along the interrelated dimensions of profits, people and the planet - triple bottom line reporting can be an important tool to support sustainability goals.*

ABOUT BEN WAGNER

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