

Brands that *Do*

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OGILVYRED

Is it the “Great Age of the Brand,” as business guru Tom Peters has declared, or is it the “Twilight of the Brands,” as James Surowiecki heralded this past year in *The New Yorker*? These divergent views reflect the paradox of brand-building today. What a brand is and what it means in a world of fragmentation, consumer control, and content overload is in a state of challenge, questioning, and turbulence.

The *Meaningful Brand Index*—a global metric of brand strength—recently reported that most people wouldn’t care if 70 percent of brands disappeared overnight. That should terrify all of us as marketers and businesspeople. However, consider this more deeply: 70 percent of brands are so meaningless to consumers that they may as well not be there. They are *brands that don’t matter*—just names on products or services.

Behavior brands use action to create meaningful experiences.

The larger, more strategic issue is this: Consumers are sending a very clear message that challenges every part of a business—from finance to operations to marketing. Consumers are telling us to stop making empty promises and start acting in new and different ways. In other words, we should be building *brands that do things that matter to their customers*.

There is an important lesson companies and brands can learn here. To succeed in today’s environment, most companies need to rethink how they build and care for their brands. Some, however, are on the frontier of not just a new way of branding, but a new way of behaving, as well.

Historically, brands have relied on disseminating their own messaging and communications in the hope that audiences would listen and act on what they heard. However, some brands have figured out a new

way, and we can learn from them.

Why now? The rhetoric of brands acting, not talking, is not new: Jeremy Bullmore talked about brand behavior in the 1980s. Nor is the technology that enables this behavior new. It’s been around from the beginning of the digital transformation.

While neither the tech nor the rhetoric is new, the maturation of both—plus a heavy dose of marketing ennui—has brought us to a tipping point. We are definitely in the Age of the Customer, a time when brands have fully embraced the fact that they don’t create themselves. Customers have significant impact on how brands are built, and brands cannot abstain from ongoing interaction with them. Realizing this is one thing. Adapting to it requires a shift in thinking and, ultimately, behavior, that hasn’t happened yet. We call that shift *behavior branding*.

Behavior branding asks brands to *do*, not just *say*. It demands that brands stop *asserting* beliefs and start *demonstrating* value.

What are ‘brands that do’? Behavior brands do things; they use action to create meaningful experiences and engagement with their customers, and to express their point-of-view and place in the world. Behavior brands are ‘makers’—they create value and are useful. Behavior brands make brands matter once again.

In Faris Yakob’s book, *Paid Attention: Innovative Advertising for a Digital World*, he calls on brands to “Do Things, Tell People,” with action as the foundation of content creation and sharing. If brands *do things that matter to people*, and then *tell the story of that action*, they will ignite compelling content and sharing of that content. In a world of infinite content, this makes behavior branding an engine of relevant content creation and organic sharing.

By making your brand behave in more deliberate and authentic ways, you prove your worth, and invite participation. You create a distinctive point-of-view and track record that is less vulnerable to being copied by competitors.

I LOHAS, a late-entrant brand of bottled water from Coca-Cola, went from last place to the top water brand in Japan in all channels in six months. I LOHAS made a behavior—crushing the bottle to signify your

commitment to the environment—the center of its marketing with astonishing results. New packaging that significantly reduced environmental impact; street-art projects constructed from recycled, crushed bottles; and a documentary film that evangelized the idea of light packaging as a beautiful object, inspired a transformative content/social strategy that conquered the Japanese water market.

Behavior brands shift emphasis. In Thailand, Nestlé understood, more than anything, that mothers were becoming overwhelmed by juggling a multitude of responsibilities. So, becoming a mother's extra pair of hands to help her along the way became Nestlé's key goal.

The brand launched the Good Food, Good Life Community—a network of mothers and experts providing access to knowledge, solutions, and advice through communities based on women's immediate and evolving needs. Mothers use it to find help and advice, whether they're concerned about nutrition or health or wellness advice, or simply focused on finding a great meal to cook for the family.

They're rewarded for sharing, discussing, and collaborating. From the brand's perspective, Nestlé has created a new level of engagement by listening to their concerns and then behaving in a way that helps, connects, and rewards.

How behavior brands behave. We've learned through research and practice that the way a company or brand behaves and acts—as well as what it does and what it makes—has far greater influence on someone's interest and involvement than any individual product or service it sells. This makes sense. Products and services proliferate and are often interchangeable. They mostly all meet consumers' needs, yet marketers still seek that elusive 'differentiation' that will distinguish their brand from others. Particularly in technology, these differences disappear almost as soon as they are identified. Today, a brand is useful, meaningful, and engaging—or it is moving toward irrelevance.

From fixed brand strategy statements to dynamic brand behavior blueprints. In today's dynamic communications world, many of us are still using static, longstanding tools such as traditional positioning statements with reasons to believe, rational differentiators, and personality words grafted onto a brand. While there has been a move to more customer-centric, integrated communications planning, it rarely includes actions or behaviors at its heart.

While brands will continue to need a North Star—a unique DNA expressed in brand ideas and platforms—we are calling for a shift in emphasis

from strategy words on a page to translation and activation of brand ideas into actions and behaviors, both internally and externally. Developing a brand behavior blueprint with the customer at the center, instead of simply an integrated communications plan, would ensure that brands do things that mattered to their customers and the world.

From owned/earned and activated by paid media, to deep content, seamless experiences, activated by action. The paid, owned and earned model is accepted practice today, along with the assumption that paid media can amplify and activate owned and earned. To deliver the shift to 'Do Things, Tell People,' brand behaviors and actions are the engines of amplification for deep, relevant content of all kinds.

From offering messages or declarations to being useful. This shift from traditional communications messaging to content that has utility means that every time we engage with a person, we should create some kind of value for them that makes our brand matter in their lives.

From position like a marketer to acts like a person. The language of 'marketer' and 'consumer' does little to inspire authentic behavior from a brand or a company. Brands often search for new 'positionings' to 'target audiences' that will transform their brand malaise. It is easy to make these shifts on paper, but when was the last time any of us experienced a shift to a new, real, authentic relationship with a product or company? People want human relationships, not corporate ones.

From philosophy around innovation to innovation in all you do. Many companies claim to be innovative, but Uniqlo is an example of a brand built on innovative behavior. From product innovation (Heattech, AIRism, Light Down) to innovative consumer engagement (lifestyle enhancement apps) to the CEO's obsession with finding new ways to deliver value, actions have built a brand that matters.

From stunts and media attention to authentic actions. Red Bull's stunts have indeed resulted in significant attention, but authentic actions that connect with your customers have more real, long-lasting impact. Citi Bike, Citi Pond, and Citi Field have daily impact on the fabric and life of New York City, for example.

From after-the-fact learning to experimentation. The majority of brand-health studies are annual or biannual. By the time the report is provided, the ability to act or impact has passed. Real-time market tracking and continuous learning across a range of activities generate greater insight and inspire more accurate brand action.

A NEW GENERATION OF ACTION

There is evidence of a new type of consumer whose behavior forms a common cultural mindset. We've elected to call them Gen B, the Behavior Generation, even though they span different ages and classes. It's enormously important to understand not just what they do, but *why* they behave as they do.

We see behavioral change sweeping across culture and category. Consumers are becoming more self-directed about health and exercise by wearing fitness trackers. They're traveling to volunteer for nonprofits, creating a whole new category of 'eco-tourism.' They're funding good ideas through Kickstarter. Materialism has given way to experience as a form of social currency, and doing/engaging/acting is the new badge. What you have, who you are, and how you express your values is defined through action and impact—whether through your social footprint, sharing, or networking.

While baby boomers have been deemed change-makers at every turn, millennials have also emerged as engines of action. They have taken personal responsibility to tackle issues they care about and let their lives be guided by their values rather than external measures. Teach For America has exploded among graduates. Working for an NGO is a sign of success and values, not an inability to get a real job. Business school graduates now predominantly choose startups over traditional investment banking and consulting firms. Startups have values and purpose and allow for personal action and impact.

Gen B respects doers, not talkers. They want to see values connected to actual behaviors, and they engage with brands they see as acting according to their values. Realizing the need to interact with Gen B in ways that leave them rewarded, behavior brands have provided superior value in creative ways that go beyond the product experience. Coke's call to 'Open Happiness' inspired a social and digital movement of actions that create happiness, such as planting trees, paying a stranger's toll, and hanging swings anywhere.

BEYOND PURPOSE

The rise in importance of concepts like corporate purpose, shared values, and collective value has inspired company after company to seek 'higher order' meaning. Discovering what they stand for and why their employees should come to work every day—particularly for millennials who value life over work—is an urgent quest.

This is now a strategic business-driver that informs decisions and actions. It's not window dressing like the corporate social-responsibility programs of the

past. Purpose and values are more credibly brought to life through behavior, action, and creation than they are through generic internal statements of values or gratuitous nonprofit activities. In fact, tangible action can be a vivid, credible demonstration of a company's purpose or product's value proposition to its customers.

If most people don't care if more than 70 percent of brands disappeared, brands need to create real value in order to matter. These days, articulating purpose alone is not enough—at the heart of brand behavior lie human truths. We need to articulate a new social contract between customers, communities and companies. Brands, through their actions and values, can become guardians of audience sensibility and values. In short, we need to think about how brands can be useful and contribute to our world.

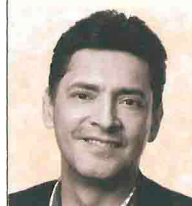
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In a better world—a world in which behavior branding is the norm—there will be clearer and more authentic relationships between companies and their customers. Brands will consistently deliver on consumer expectations—with less friction and far fewer misfires. Consumers will have a clearer understanding of what they're going to get. They'll be able to find what they need more easily and quickly. They will have a more equal, more nuanced relationship with brands.

At least, that's our vision. We think we're on the right track since brands are already taking ever-more steps toward acting out their essences. In fact, a behavior-brand world fulfills the promise of marketing as a service, rendering advertising as something consumers need—something that confers real benefits—instead of just interruptions. ■



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