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10 Ways Your Brand Can Be Meaningful

People are moving from the age of conspicuous consumption to the age of meaning. Increasingly people want to feel they're part of something that makes the world a better place on many levels. Governments, institutions, and companies find themselves under new scrutiny by employees, customers, citizens, partners, investors, and communities. Those who fail to realign their thinking and behavior in the pursuit of meaning will be quickly overtaken by those who do. Emotive Brand has compiled this list to inspire CMOs and brand owners, and to show them what it takes to generate meaningful, profitable, and enduring connections with the people vital to their brands' success.

1. Be Empathetic

What it means holistically: Put on the shoes of others. Walk the path they trod every day. Taste what they eat. Read what they read. Amuse yourself as they do. Get a sense of their worries. Hold their dreams in your hands. Forget yourself. Be another. Understand.

What it means for brand owners: Meaning flows when you connect to the values, beliefs, interests, and aspirations of the people vital to your success. The people vital to your success are not only your employees and customers, but everyone in the broad spectrum of people who make your business viable, including investors, suppliers, distributors, partners, regulators, community leaders, reporters, bloggers, and so on.

Lots of different shoes to walk in, to be sure. But one thing unites them all: their humanity. And this is, we believe, the level at which meaningful brands succeed. They seek to connect with a wide array of disparate people at a common level. They don't aim for the lowest common denominator; rather, they target the highest possible denominator. They see a world in which everyone is seeking meaning. They step out of themselves and carefully consider the human need.

They then look inside to identify what they value, what they believe, what interests them, and what they aspire to do, and explore how to align that with the human desire for meaning. They then change the way they reach out to people in every respect. Their intent, attitude, and actions evolve. Their interactions become more profound and the intent behind them becomes more and more clear.

This emotive evolution wraps meaning around what was: the mission, vision and values; the strategies; the products; the services; the marketing; the customer service; the advertising; the brand; and, perhaps most important, the way employees act, react, and interact with their peers and the outside world.

2. Be Good

What it means holistically: Think of everything you do now. Now think of what else you could do for those who need what you have: time, money, resources, connections, values. Don't think marketing. Don't think corporate social responsibility. Think about other people.



What it means to brand owners: Don't wait for an image survey to tell you that your brand is losing ground to the competition because you're seen as "uninvolved in" and "uncaring about" social issues. At the same time, don't set being "involved" and "caring" as pure business objectives. People will see right through that.

Simply recognize that there are things you care about beside your business. What tweaks your conscience? Passing by a homeless person on your way to work? Running into an old friend who is debilitated by a disease? Seeing victims of natural disasters on the TV?

Now consider how your business could marshal time, money, resources and connections to help address these examples of human and environmental need. But don't do it under the banner of "marketing" or "corporate social responsibility." Just do it. Involve your people, partners, and customers in the effort.

Don't hide the fact you're doing good, but certainly don't arrogantly advertise how "good" you are just for doing it.

3. Be Humble

What it means holistically: Take a step back. Think. Are you perhaps thinking too much of yourself? Are you constantly telling people how amazing you are? Do you actually know the small space you occupy in other people's lives? Realize it. And then reach out with due modesty.

What it means to brand owners: It's natural for brands to be proud of what they do and how they do it. And who knows better about everything it takes to make the brand's outstanding products and/or services than the brand itself?

But being meaningful is about stepping back from that culture of exaggeration, pride, and arrogance. It is about communicating in context, answering, "Why is this good" rather than proclaiming, "This is good!" and focusing on being amazing rather than preaching about it.

Humility is a great door-opener in a world where overhyped promises have ruled the day.

Take a look at your Web site, advertising, presentations, and promotional literature. Step out of your brand for the moment and actually read and listen to what your brand is saying. Identify the attitude, the tone of voice, and the intent of the speaker. Is your brand having a sincere, authentic and honest dialog with the world? Is this a dialog that people will find meaningful?

4. Be Authentic

What it means holistically: Get real. Let go of pretense. Be open, transparent, and clear. Lose the agenda. Speak one-to-one.

What it means to brand owners: In their efforts to manage and control their image and reputation, brands drew curtains around most of what they did to get their products or services into the hands of people. But somewhere along the way people woke up and saw what was going on. They started to care about how what they bought was brought to them. And they started to add more layers to their purchasing decisions. They started to care more, to be more thoughtful, and to better align their values and actions.

It is difficult for brands to be meaningful in this renaissance of consciousness because of the heritage of marketing, which relies on creating illusions to stimulate demand. But meaningful brands let go of believing they can control everything. Mirrors are replaced with open doors. Business practices are changed.

Meaningful brands don't brag about their values and how well they are adapting to the new reality. They simply report what they are doing with total transparency. These actions do the speaking. Naked in the clear light of transparency, authentically meaningful brands glow as they attract attention, garner respect, and earn loyalty.

5. Be True

What it means holistically: Be scrupulous, honest, and truehearted. Behave reliably. Be dependable, reliable, unswerving. Be worthy. Stay fast and firm to what you believe. Be loyal to people, ideals, and beliefs.

What it means to brand owners: Define the true and honest meaning behind your business. Bring that meaning to life. Help everyone understand it. Make it something people want to be partners in.

Your meaning is tied to what you do to make this world a better place. It's not a campaign. It's not a slogan. It's not part-time, seasonal or optional. It's what you do to earn respect, admiration, and trust. In every interaction. At every moment of truth. At every opportunity. Without fail.

6. Evolve

What it means holistically: Acknowledge you're going to change one way or another and opt for a positive evolution of your attitudes, manners, and behavior. Move beyond rationalization and incorporate the emotional. Move from just being to being meaningful.

What it means to brand owners: The decision to pursue meaning as the driving force of your business is quite revolutionary. However, the process from that moment on is truly evolutionary. The pursuit of meaning consolidates what's already there in the abstract into something more tangible, more understood, more usable. With an agreed meaning, a brand starts to evolve into a meaningful brand.

Through meaning, a brand evolves the way it reaches out to people. It's about evolving your attitudes, manners, and behaviors to better convey your brand's meaning and intent. Doing this changes the way people respond back to the brand.

- Employees discover new meaning in what they do. Result: motivated, aligned employees.
- Customers discover new meaning in what they buy. Result: loyal advocates.
- Partners, suppliers, and distributors discover new meaning in being connected to the brand. Result: a well-oiled machine.
- Communities discover new meaning in having the brand as a neighbor. Result: market presence.
- Investors discover new meaning in what the brand has to offer. Result: solid funding.

7. Elate

What it means holistically: Make people smile. Delight them. Make their day. Show them how much you can do and how much you care. Open doors for them. Take away their worries. Help them see something new. Show them more of themselves.

What it means for brand owners:

Being meaningful isn't about having happy, smiley employees and customers dancing in the aisles. It is about making small, yet significant gestures that bring small smiles of satisfaction to people. But these gestures can't be forced. Rather, they must flow naturally from a brand culture committed to delighting people.

Meaningful brands revolve around the interests, needs, beliefs, and aspirations of people. They continuously identify opportunities to reach out to people in helpful ways. They lessen the pain and hassle of doing something. They make something fun in a new and interesting way. They show people new ideas, new possibilities, new dreams.

They share what they know so people can grow.



8. Evoke

What it means holistically: Get people to feel something new, something good, something worthwhile, and something memorable. Surprise them. Provoke them. Inspire them. Activate them. Change them. Excite them.

What it means to brand owners: It behooves your brand to move people to a new level of consciousness--about your brand, their own lives, and the connection between the two.

Emotional bonds are the bedrock of meaningful relationships. By evoking focused, empathetic, and heartfelt feelings, you give people compelling reasons to put your brand ahead of the competition. You stay the employer of choice. The most powerful feelings link what is good about your brand's products and services to the interests, needs, beliefs, and aspirations of people.

9. Engage

What it means holistically: Lessen the distance. Make contact. Create a level playing field. Reach out. Respond back. Offer a hand. Ask. Answer. Debate. Refute. Agree.

What it means to brand owners: Too many brands have built unnecessary walls around themselves. They make people play telephone tag and search, search, search for whatever they want or need. They don't ask, they don't listen, they don't discuss, they don't react, and they don't debate. Perhaps worst of all, they fail to engage people emotionally.

Meaningful brands act in a way that actively engages people, both literally and emotionally, through meaningfully emotive interactions. People not only know and learn more, but they are drawn closer to the brand. These bonding feelings radically change the way they care about, think about, talk about, and act on behalf of the brand.

As happily engaged customers, employees, partners, suppliers, distributors, investors and communities, people are more active proponents of the brand.

10. Expand

What it means holistically: Take in more. Grow. Pursue new paths. Climb new mountains. Swim new seas. Cross new deserts. Plow new fields. Harvest the bounty.

What it means to brand owners: You are on the road to meaning. You roll down the windows and let fresh air replace the old, stagnant ways of the past. You put down the convertible top and see the big sky above. You step on the gas and feel how much easier it is now to move forward. You turn on the radio and hear people saying how you've changed, for the better. And you stop and introduce yourself to people who, in the past, you simple drove past.

All because you took the path to emotive branding.