

^{the}internationalist

COMMENTARY

How Can
Marketing Make a
World of Difference
Amid Corona Fears?

by Deborah Malone, Founder of The Internationalist

Given the constant stream of updates, misinformation, media hype, event cancellations, market flux, escalating fear-and even panic—about the worrisome spread of COVID-19, several past marketing situations have come to mind. These examples caused me to think about marketing's ever-evolving responsibilities with its inspirational problem-solving abilities, especially in terms of how we might respond to today's issues:

Unilever's work with Lifebuoy

Unilever's work with Lifebuoy, particularly in markets like India, where hand-washing needed to be creatively encouraged to prevent disease. Diarrhea kills more than one million children annually in developing countries, and Lifebuoy advocates that these deaths can be prevented through hand washing with soap. Every year, 100 million people gather at the world's largest religious festival, *The Maha Kumbh Mela* in India. Lifebuoy saw the event as an opportunity to provide an important message at mealtime: *Did you wash your hands with Lifebuoy?* A heat stamp was created to literally brand that question on every roti—the unleavened bread served at Indian meals and eaten by hand—just when washing with soap is most critical.

Tide Loads of Hope

Tide Loads of Hope began in the wake of hurricane Katrina and has become a greatly appreciated disaster relief program. Tide provides a free laundry service for victims in need through its signature Loads of Hope truck—a welcome, bright orange laundromat on wheels. Clean clothes can make a difference to families struggling to recreate some semblance of normal life and overcome losses from hurricanes, floods, or wildfires.

Whirlpool

Whirlpool also understands the power of clean clothes through their **Care Counts** program in schools. While it's easy to take a working washer and dryer for granted, teachers across the U.S. say that one in five students struggle with access to clean clothes. They also report that these students are more likely to face difficulties with absenteeism as a direct result of their limited clothing options and its relation to self-esteem. High absenteeism is linked to dropout rates and, ultimately, to the inability to find work. To address this issue, Whirlpool created the **Care Counts** laundry program by installing washers and dryers in schools. The results? More than half of participating students were no longer at risk for chronic absenteeism by the end of the school year. Teachers also saw that 95% of program participants showed increased motivation in class and interaction with their peers.

Mastercard Stands Up to Cancer

Seven years ago, Mastercard CMO Raja Rajamannar felt it was critical to “bake purpose into the core of all we do.” However, he admitted it was difficult for a global organization affiliated with more than 40,000 banks to find one purpose or social cause that appeals to all stakeholders. Mastercard found its answer in healthcare after discovering that one out of every two people in the U.S. is affected by cancer during their lifetime, either directly or through their circle of family and friends. Additionally, one in three women is diagnosed with some form of cancer throughout her life.

Yet, Rajamannar asked, “What gave us permission to approach this issue in a way that was genuine, authentic, and not for commercial mileage? We understand payments, technology, and marketing. If we can allow those working to cure cancer to focus on finding the cure and not the administrative end of fundraising, then we are making a difference.” Thus, began Mastercard’s extraordinary partnership with *Stand Up To Cancer*.

These examples are among hundreds that come rushing to mind when companies clearly understand the authenticity of their purpose, the role of marketing and how to meaningfully interact with their customers, while motivating their employees. Such work truly serves to make a world of difference to us all.

As brands transition from the Attention Economy to the Emotion Economy, there is a new priority on elevating human experience and affecting customers’ feelings. **Perhaps one of the most telling signs of the Emotion Economy is the purpose-driven brand or purpose-driven company.** Brands today need to establish their own means for making a difference and contributing to what matters most to their customers. Consumers, more than ever, care about a holistic relationship with brands and businesses.

I have always believed marketers to be among the most inspirational people within organizations. In fact, a simple case study from Peru in 2013 helped me recognize the genius of marketing by highlighting ingenuity that truly touched people’s lives.

Peru’s University of Engineering and Technology (UTEC) designed a billboard that created clean drinking water from atmospheric humidity. The idea came about because UTEC was facing a decline in enrollment. To inspire young people to pursue careers in engineering, the university believed any advertising should show how technology can be used to solve local problems. Lima, Peru is one of the driest places on earth-receiving an annual rainfall of less than one inch, which means that roughly 700,00 people have no access to clean water for drinking or bathing. However, Lima’s Pacific Coast location provides 90% humidity from December to February. As a result, UTEC and their ad agency Mayo DraftFCB created the world’s first billboard to provide drinking water out of thin air to improve the lives of hundreds of families in this arid region of Peru.

In many ways, this was the catalyst for *The Internationalist’s Marketing Makes a World of Difference initiative*. We also noticed a shift in the winners of our case study awards and saw that those cases that did indeed make a world of difference were consistently among the Grand Prix winners. We went on to catalog these exceptional case studies from around the world, provided think tanks with marketers who shared how they arrived at such ideas, and ultimately partnered with the ANA on the **Center for Brand Purpose**. I, proudly, author their Purpose Playbook series, and the first on **Discovering Brand Purpose**, has been downloaded more than 14,000 times. So, the need and interest are

A transition from the Attention Economy to the Emotion Economy



real. The second in the series, Executing Brand Purpose, will appear soon.

A clear purpose becomes more than an identity; it becomes a set of values that inspires those within the organization, while telegraphing its brand principles to the world—namely why it exists, what it can offer or solve, and how it interacts with and supports society.

As values become a bigger driver for decision-making, consumers will choose brands that align with their values and avoid those that don't. Companies that lead with purpose and build around it can achieve continued loyalty, consistency and relevance in the lives of consumers... through all situations and events—even current crises.

In his [Forbes column](#), **Avi Dan** shared suggestions on [how to adapt marketing to an economy shaped by the Corona Virus](#). It's well worth reading.

Yet, elevating human experience may be the best a marketer can do.

Prior to Corona worries, research from the University of Nebraska showed that 40% of America was “demonstrably stressed-out” by current events in a “toxic” election year, while 73% were worried about “fake news being used as a weapon.” According to a 2019 Porter Novelli/Cone Gen Z Purpose Study, 90% of Generation Z is “fed up with the negativity in the U.S.” These young adults expect companies to help the situation, if not take the lead. Goodness knows what those statistics would demonstrate now...

Smart, concerned brands will respond by elevating the human experience to offer uplifting moments of hope, lightness, laughter and encouragement. Joy already powers some companies. Prophet's Brand Relevance Index shows that Pixar, Disney, Spotify and Hershey's score at the top of their “Makes Me Happy” measurement. LEGO, Pinterest, Etsy, Fitbit and TED score highest in the “Most Inspiring” category by succeeding through inspiration and fun, while also creating communities.

The ability to inspire people to be their best selves is valuable in difficult times. AND NO ONE DOES THIS BETTER THAN MARKETERS.

is critical to showcasing brand purpose and telling a meaningful brand story. Marketers have a responsibility to be the voice of the customer. And, today, those customers want to know what a brand is doing to improve the world. In these times, we owe it to worried consumers everywhere to share an authentic story that can make a world of difference.