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Brands:

A LOT LIKE LOVE

Bob Greenberg, CEO of the R/GA agency in New York, said in an ADWEEK magazine column: “Newly empowered consumers, equipped with all the consideration tools the new marketing era affords them, will vote irrelevant brands ‘off the island’ at a quickening pace. Avoiding this fate will require nothing short of reinvention – of brands, of client organizations and of agencies.”

Brand relevance is — front and center — the most commanding and also perplexing challenge businesses face. It forces all of us to think differently about the roots and fabric of what a brand is, what it stands for and how it interacts with consumers.

Redefining your destiny

The pathway to relevance begins with the soul. Yes, brands have them, perhaps some more distinctly than others. Soul is about a higher calling — a more broadly and humanly defined purpose that goes beyond features and benefits and into issues and events that matter intrinsically

to consumers. What makes life interesting isn't so much about the goals and achievements as it is the journey itself. So what higher purpose can a brand aspire to that reaches beyond the core aspects of the product itself? A diaper brand understands the compelling importance of successful parenting as a predominant theme

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with new mothers and fathers and moves to interact with that driving interest. The food brand sees the passions some people have for creative expression and experimentation in the kitchen and works hard to help them realize the road to tantalizing food adventures. At its core identifying a higher purpose is about moving the focus from navel gaze to consumer-centricity. It's about them, not us. The more we think about them, the more we open the door to reciprocal behavior – earning the right to a mutually beneficial relationship.

You get me, understand me, know me

What is the happy intersection of genuine interest, passion and compatibility? You might say it's a good marriage and right you would be. Not far a-field from this relationship metaphor, the same rules apply to successful brands. If a brand puts itself in league with consumer passions, by defining first its higher purpose, there is a shot at that magic moment when a consumer says quietly to themselves: they get me. We should all be so fortunate when this moment occurs early and often. Relevance is about knowing and maybe even, dare we say, loving the consumer. If we truly love them then the relationship isn't just transactional, it's about creating the kind of meaning that builds connective tissue with what consumers actually care about.

Relevance, meaning and value

Remember the old retail axiom, "the customer is always right." Stretch that a bit further and more globally and it might read – the customer is it, period. Business is no longer about sales and market share, it is about securing and keeping fans.

The onus is on brand stewards to find and mine the touch points of emotional resonance that creates the basis for a real relationship.

For a fashion brand it is recognizing that powerful sense of self, expression of personal style and creativity – as seen through the eyes of those who appreciate fashion and fashion-able-ness.

For an adult beverage brand it's seeing beyond the bottle to embrace the social connections to people, relationships, laughter, memories and personal adventure that the product brand can help facilitate.

Too often we're down in the trench focused on ourselves and our competitors and not enough on finding and mining the love. Either we start investing in this kind of thinking, or as Bob Greenberg says, it's going to be "off the island" and sooner rather than later.