



Brands Must Now Compete for Share of Trust

FRACTURED TRUST UPENDS POWER OF BRAND COMMUNICATIONS

Perhaps at no other time in the history of modern marketing have we been faced with such an incredible accumulation of contiguous scandals, recalls, startling revelations, bankruptcies, forced corporate marriages, mistruths, half-truths, misconduct, behavioral inconsistencies and general evidence of bad business behavior.

From disreputable members of the clergy to chemical leaching plastic water bottles, lead-covered toys, and fallen sports legends, consumers are bombarded with evidence that leaders, corporations, brands, institutions and communications cannot be implicitly trusted. People are learning rapidly that corporate messaging can be suspect and that buoyant reports of happy trails ahead may be masking a sudden fall from grace.

Trust is a part of brand currency...

Is it possible that these living examples of missteps, misdeeds and bad judgments could create a crisis in confidence about the truth and propriety of messages consumers are so routinely courted with by brands? We know that brand

relationships, the successful ones, mirror the same characteristics of our best personal friendships. Respect, honor, reciprocity and yes, trust, all come into play. Brand trust is built on a sense of belief, faith, confidence and expectation. Over time this delicate equity can foster reliance and loyalty.

If trust is indeed fractured, what is the outcome?

What is the consumer's response to a famine of trust? They turn inward. They move away from engagement and begin to rely more on sources of influence and recommendation that are ever closer to them. Marketing speak, push style communications and paid assertions of benefit and outcome – all are diminished and then eventually ignored. The end result of this migration is declining ROI in the credibility and power of traditional brand communications. Once consumers no longer believe in the marketing message or the source or the medium they simply opt out.



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Trust and belief refuse to be marginalized as verbiage inserted in the next communications brief objective line. Jonathan Baskin, AdAge columnist said it well: “Traditional branding theology suggests we can apply emotions to things. That approach doesn’t hold much water with consumers who live in a media-sphere that is constant and pervasive, that draws its content from events, not declarations, and from experience, not imagination. So it’s not enough (anymore) to announce that your company is ‘bullish on America’ or that consumers should ‘Whoo hoo.’ That stuff not only seems irrelevant but somewhat dishonest.”

Assertions vs. actions...

At its core, trust is finally earned through demonstration. Actions truly do speak louder than words. Deeds are more meaningful than pronouncements. Now the cachet and value of trust as an important component of brand DNA is rising to the surface as a definer of future success and growth. So what is the path to competing successfully for increased share of trust?

Consumers can no longer be regarded as sources of transactions. Disney once remarked that he didn’t build his remarkable theme parks to make money. Rather he made money to build, enhance and develop the inspiring and entertaining experiences he offered in his theme parks.

- The more trusted forms of engagement and communication will be closer to the person they are intended to reach.

- Authentic, relevant brand experiences built off a reflection of the consumer’s own passions and interests will rise in value and benefit.
- Media platforms that are transparent and organically permit two-way conversation will take precedence over interruptive, push-style vehicles.
- The brand’s ability to identify a higher strategic mission that helps enable the consumer’s personal interests and passions is paramount.

Trust is in many ways an emotional take on what’s in front of us. We gauge behaviors, nuances, images, expressions, tone, manner, history, perception, current hall-talk, relevance, graciousness, deference and other pieces of evidence to determine if something is trustworthy.

So operating in a manner that places a premium on trust is essential. And in the end it means that we marketers regard our customers with the same level of love, care and respect we have for our own families. Trust must now be factored in as an essential element in the brand development toolbox because it is linked strategically to the kinds of communication investments you should make. If ever you were looking for a reason to more fully develop your trust drivers – public relations and social media strategies – now is the time.

