

Purpose marketing should be more than a money-making scheme

 By [Laurent Marty](#)

30 Jan 2023

This era will one day be seen as the advent of the "Great Purpose" in branding.



Source: www.unsplash.com

Everywhere you look, in every boardroom, among businesses, marketers, brand managers and advertisers alike, the notion of purpose has become ubiquitous.

Purpose and the bottom line

In South Africa, we as an agency were among the first to relook at everything with the lens of purpose, including our own brand, Joe Public. In fact, our ECD Pepe Marais has been running purpose workshops for close to a decade with some of South Africa's most established brands.

As more brands all over the world have followed the enlightened path of purpose, more financial evidence has piled up to make a financial case for purpose-driven brands, to propel the purpose ideology further. In fact, the message to the C-suite has been to choose the way of purpose and end up making more money; there's the proof.

That assertion, however, is problematic. In this paradigm, purpose is still slave to the bottom line and the reason why many do it. However, wasn't the whole point of purpose to look at the bottom line in a different way and not just purely in financial terms?



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A debate I was involved in at a conference about the Nike *Take the knee* Colin Kaepernick campaign raised a very interesting point. How legitimate was it for a brand like Nike to launch such a campaign? Its commercial success was hailed as the definite proof that Nike had been right all along: the financial argument which was to be the nail in the coffin of all the nay-sayers.

Instead, I argued the contrary. I asked if Nike did the right thing to sell more sneakers. If Nike had perhaps taken a true risk on this occasion, and was willing to lose money, even temporarily, in the name of their lofty ideals, it would have made a more convincing case for Nike being truly purpose-led. And perhaps turn me into a long-term brand fan.

Purpose needs authenticity

The price of purpose is authenticity and taking risks. Purpose isn't the marketing bandwagon you should jump on because it's good for the bottom line. Purpose must come from an authentic place, a deep internal process of reflecting on the profound impact of what we do. It must impact everything a company does, starting with the business, not just communication and marketing.

When Patagonia announced a few weeks ago that they were making earth "their only shareholder (by re-transferring all ownership to two newly created Purpose entities in an effort both to cement the company's values in its operating structure and step up its fight against the climate crisis, I feel they were truly putting their money where their mouth is. This authentic, purposeful action will make me, the consumer, believe in you and make me want to become a staunch advocate for your brand.



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Unfortunately, what we are seeing all over the world are brands abusing purpose, and consumers are becoming more critical of companies' greenwashing attempts. They increasingly see through it. And it's not just consumers, regulators are starting to clamp down on such claims. The world had seen relatively few claims brought against firms for misleading environmental claims, but the Volkswagen emissions scandal, or *Dieselgate*, was a major exception in the autumn of 2015.

For around seven years, VW's advertising had touted its cars as "low-emission, environmentally-friendly" claiming they met emissions standards and would retain a high resale value – this despite having fitted cars with 'defeat devices' that would limit emissions during tests. After five years of wrangling, the Federal Trade Commission finally forced the German carmaker to settle the case with misled consumers for nearly \$10bn.

Purpose is too important to be discredited and contaminated with marketing gimmicks. Agencies who see more briefs delivered under the umbrella of purpose shouldn't be afraid to interrogate them. The long-term health of the brand they are working depends on it.

ABOUT LAURENT MARTY

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