

A Culture that Demands Authenticity.

It is an interesting era we are in—the age of information. It's also been called the age of mis-information. But whatever the case, the general public knows their own power and seeks insight into what's really going on. The chest beating slogans of the past no longer penetrate our modern minds. We must be shown not told. Demonstrating your claim and backing it up with action is mandatory.

The origin of this mind shift is in the changing nature of our world. A large segment of our population now lives at a level of luxury that is unique in history. There is much more physical comfort available to a common person which raises our level of expectations in many areas:

- Demanding an experience rather than a mere product.
- Talented employees choose a position based partly on how they feel about a company's values and standing in the local or world community.
- Choosing brands that demonstrate corporate social and environmental responsibility.
- Quick, emotional responses to any message with a whiff of falsehood.
- News organizations and individuals gain esteem by uncovering and broadcasting misrepresentations and outright lies.

In communication strategies for organizations, authenticity often gives way to simpler, quicker, more superficial solutions. It's certainly easier to find a message that will appear to satisfy the target audience in the short-term rather than dig deeper and ask a few hard questions. Many times the corporate culture disallows that digging. Unfortunately, the digging is left up to a growing number of journalists, consumer advocates and individuals who experience the brand.

It's not that organizations lack an awareness of this problem. But there is a strong desire to avoid the problem. There are more immediate issues that need attention. Most people who have a bad habit plan on changing that behavior tomorrow or next week or after the holiday. It's the same with changing corporate habits—easier to procrastinate than roll up your sleeves.

We empathize with that inertia and have found a few motivators we thought we could share:

- 1) 93% of American consumers operate in everyday life with varying degrees of sustainability consciousness. Research clearly reveals that a cultural shift is taking place in terms of consumer awareness, acceptance and practices that relate to sustainability. See full article at <http://www.hartman-group.com/products/reportSustainability2007.html>
- 2) The series, Food and the Environment: A Consumer Perspective, identified that at least attitudinally, 52% of Americans in 1997 were seeking to purchase “earth-sustainable food products.” See full article at <http://www.hartman-group.com/products/reportfood1.html>
- 3) The focus on wellness is pervasive. Over half of all consumers are proactive about their health and wellness, focusing on lowering their health risks and preventing disease. See full article at

<http://www.hartman-group.com/products/natsens/issueIV-08.html>

- 4) A few examples of campaigns that produced not only long term goodwill with their audience but an immediate and tangible return for their efforts:
- Coca-Cola: In 1997, Coca-Cola donated 15 cents to Mothers Against Drunk Driving for every case of Coca-Cola bought during a 6-week promotion in more than 400 Wal-Mart stores. Coke sales in these stores increased 490% during the promotion.
 - TUMS: In 2003, through its “TUMS Helps Put Out More Fires Than You Think” campaign, TUMS pledged to donate 10 cents to the First Responder Institute for every bottle of TUMS sold. In addition to donating \$238,000 to the Institute, which in turn funded 60 fire departments throughout the United States, TUMS saw a 30% increase in the number of displays shipped to stores and a 16% increase in sales volume.
 - American Express: In 1983, after American Express pledged to donate a penny to the restoration of the Statue of Liberty for every transaction made by its cardholders, use of American Express cards increased by 28% and new users increased by 17%. See full article at <http://www.causemarketingforum.com/page.asp?ID=345>
- 5) More than two-thirds of Americans say they consider a company’s business practices when deciding what to buy. At the same time, there is a substantial increase in the number of American workers who want their employers to support a social cause or issue. Part of 2007 Cone Consumer Environmental Survey by Opinion Research Corporation.
- 6) Many Americans say that good corporate citizenship makes them more willing to do business with a company. Corporate citizenship can influence consumer opinion and behavior, and essentially turn consumers into brand champions. Respondents indicated that good corporate citizenship by a company or brand would inspire them to (in ranking order):
1. Be willing to try the company’s products for the first time
 2. Welcome the company into my community
 3. Recommend the company’s products and services to friends and family
 4. Improve overall trust for the company, its people and products
 5. Improve overall opinion of the company’s reputation

See full article at <http://www.causemarketingforum.com/page.asp?ID=369>

A few things to consider now that your motivated.

- Does everyone who touches your organization receive a consistent and accurate impression of your brand?
- How long has it been since your company’s values and vision have been defined? Do they reflect the true soul of the company?
- How are you meeting the high-priority needs of your audience, employees and shareholders? How can you confirm that belief?

- Is upper management interested or can you get them interested in pursuing authenticity?
An effective, authentic communication strategy that makes it off the conference table and into reality will require involvement from the top down.
- Why is the world a better place with your brand in it?

Shari Burk, Brand strategist at Pivot Lab, is helping to lead the way for organizations to respond to the shifting mindset of their audience. Let us know if we can be of further assistance. You can contact her at shari@pivotlab.com or e-mail info@pivotlab.com