



By Richard D. Czerniawski

TURN SOCIAL MARKETING INSIDE-OUT

I'm all for societal marketing but not for social marketing. What's the difference? As I explained in a recent DISPATCHES' article, societal marketing is all about doing what's right for the customer and society. To repeat what I stated in that earlier article, if, for example, we have "negative" ingredients in our products that could harm the environment or children or animals, we should do everything in our power to replace those ingredients with non-harmful ones. We should never do what is expedient or boosts profit margins that adversely impact any aspect of society.

On the other hand, social marketing is exploiting a social cause to promote your brand or business. The operational words are "exploit" and "promote." It's a pandering attempt to endear target-customers to your brand. It's self-serving, manipulative and political. Social marketing tends to be episodic, a blip on the radar designed to boost sales versus transform or evolve the brand and its meaning. It's not authentic. The exception, of course, is if the cause is in the DNA of the brand, and few measure-up to this standard.

Societal marketing is good for everyone concerned. However, social marketing is likely to create problems for your brand and organization. While research suggests that many adults support companies and brands taking a public stance on social matters, the majority do not. And, again, if it is not in your DNA, then it is not the real purpose of your business. The "economic" purpose of the organization is to earn profits and maximize shareholder value. While rather myopic it is the yardstick we use to measure and judge the value of public companies.

Those "adults" who support our taking a public stance on social issues, as Bill Weintraub, former CMO of Coors Brewing Company, put it to me, "what they really want is for companies to speak out in support of their personal, individual values (consistent with what that particular consumer wants/believes). They are not looking for companies to speak out in a way that is inconsistent with their personal view or desire." All of this means is that your view on social matters is likely to run afoul of their perspective, and the view of many of your current customers. When you abandon what your brand stands for to speak-up for a social cause it is unlikely that you will capture more customers than you lose. Additionally, one needs to appreciate where company employees, your Board of Directors, and stockholders stand on a particular issue. Taking a public stance is likely to turn off many of these people you count on who don't believe what you are doing.

If you truly care about a social issue and want to change the world, start with yourself and your own family. Your organization is part of your family. So, if you deeply care about a social issue, turn it inside-out. Action, not talk, is the method we should employ. Namely, if you believe women should receive equal pay for equal work (which I certainly hope you do) then dammit, pay them accordingly. If you believe women or, for that matter, anyone should not be subjected to any form of harassment (which I trust you do) then institute, police and manage accordingly. If you are for racial equality (which I believe should be part of your fiber), then don't let color hold anyone back, or religious creed or political beliefs, etc.

Stand-up for "societal marketing." Stand down from "social marketing" that exploits the cause du jour in an attempt to "promote" your brand and company. However, stand-up for advancing social causes within your family, your organization, to turn it inside-out.

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