

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

STANDING UP FOR SOCIAL ISSUES WITHOUT SPEAKING OUT TO DRIVE GROWTH (AND CHANGE)

We can debate the purpose of business as it varies depending upon the goals and perspectives of various constituencies and individuals. However, make no mistake, a business must generate profit. Profitability is not a negative. It is the lifeblood for sustaining operations, investing in development, creating jobs, raising living standards, promoting human development, among many other blessings. It is essential that we keep this in mind when we consider advocacy of social issues.

Yes, surveys show that many adults support brands taking a public stance on social issues. According to a YouGov 2017 survey, 27% of Boomers (55+), 41% of Gen Xers (35 – 49), and 49% of Millennials (18 – 34) are in favor of brands addressing social issues. While this may be the case, we are witnessing brands standing up and being slammed down for taking a stand. What gives?



Does it make sense to stand up for social issues? I don't purport to be an expert on marketing that surfs on social matters. However, I do have some thoughts on the subject, based on observations, that I'd like to share.

It seems that when brands address social issues, it's a sword that cuts two ways. On the one hand, Gillette gets trounced for coming out against "toxic masculinity." What do they

know about the issue? Is Gillette accusing us men who have been brand loyal since we began shaving in pursuing our ambition to be, in their words, "The best a man can get" of toxic masculinity? Regardless of the issue's importance, we'll consider going elsewhere for our shaving needs if we feel the brand is disparaging us. And so might you!

On the other hand, the Dove brand has done quite nicely in celebrating a woman's natural beauty instead of trying to snow her with the promise that she can transform into the vision of an airbrushed model or celebrity 15 or more years her junior with its products. Not gonna happen! Plus, the women they've targeted know, or should know, that they're already beautiful and that their attractiveness is not dependent on superficial, physical aesthetics.

Politicians seem to know better than marketers how to handle big issues that cut both ways. They'll miss a vote on a controversial issue. And, in a way, all social matters appear to be controversial. That's how they handle it. They know that whichever way they vote, they will win some voters but lose others, which is intolerable to them.

Moreover, their vote gives opponents for their seat, or a higher position in government, ammunition to opposition them. So, for politicians, the chosen course of action is to tell voters what they want to hear and then be absent or merely vote "present" when the issue comes up for a vote. Or vote on the issue and then lie about it. These actions are neither courageous nor authentic, but somehow, they seem to get away with it.

Life is not as easy for marketers in dealing with social issues. You won't get away with telling customers what they want to hear and not delivering the goods. Nor is it appropriate to take the tack of politicians. So, you need to reconcile yourself to the fact that your stance will alienate some in your base of customers regardless of what side of a social issue you take. (By the way, if you consider the percentages of adults who favor brand involvement in social issues, it's clear that the majority do not appear to favor it. You are likely to alienate these customers and risk them switching from your brand.) Perhaps, the best path to take is to avoid *speaking out* on social issues.

However, I believe marketers should make decisions that also consider society's interests. After all, in serving customers, we are serving society. And in serving society, we are serving customers. For example, suppose we have "negative" ingredients in our products that could harm the environment, children, or animals. In that case, we should do everything possible to replace these ingredients with non-harmful ones. We should *never* do what is expedient or boosts margins that adversely impact any aspect of society or its people.

What I'm addressing in this issue of DISPATCHES is not about marketing for the good of society (societal marketing) but connecting to a social issue (cause marketing) to bond with customers. Societal marketing is authentic in servicing people and society; the latter, social or cause marketing, appears self-serving, manipulative, and smacks of being "political."

The role of the marketer is to *create brand loyalty*. Yes, we can do this with our Brand Idea and targeting those customers who believe what we believe, serving customers better than our competition and/or connecting and standing together with customers on a social issue. This last one is tricky and risky. Again, I would refrain from taking this approach unless it was in the brand's and organization's DNA.

The late Anita Roddick, a controversial figure in her own right, is the founder of The Body Shop. She helped to popularize ethical and activist consumerism or, might we say, societal marketing. Ms. Roddick was an environmentalist and human rights activist, as well as a businesswoman. The Body Shop marketed natural beauty products that did not use ingredients requiring animal testing. She and her company are also credited with being one of the first to promote fair trade with developing countries.



Moreover, Ms. Roddick chose truth over hype in marketing her brand. All of this gave her license to engage in social issues related to The Body Shop and its products. For her, it was not a sometimes thing to capitalize on a fad or trend but to take the lead in creating a sea change in the development and marketing of beauty care products and their impact on society. It was in her DNA and the brand she built!

So, here are my conclusions and what I offer for your consideration:

1. ***Do engage in societal marketing*** – Specifically, make decisions and act in the customer's and society's best interests. Never, ever engage in acts that are harmful or untruthful. Avoid hiding negatives or being disingenuous, for example, exclaiming "fat-free" when your product is laden with added "sugar." (How about vodka that's gluten-free?) Don't make claims for which there is no validation, as appears to have been the case in promoting opioids for pain relief with the promise that they were not addictive.
2. ***Avoid marketing on social issues (cause marketing) unless it is in the DNA of your brand and organization*** - Even Unilever, the parent company of the Dove brand, came under fire regarding their campaign for "Real Beauty," since they are also the parent company for Axe (Lynx in some countries), which promised young adolescent males that it would make them irresistible (sex objects) to

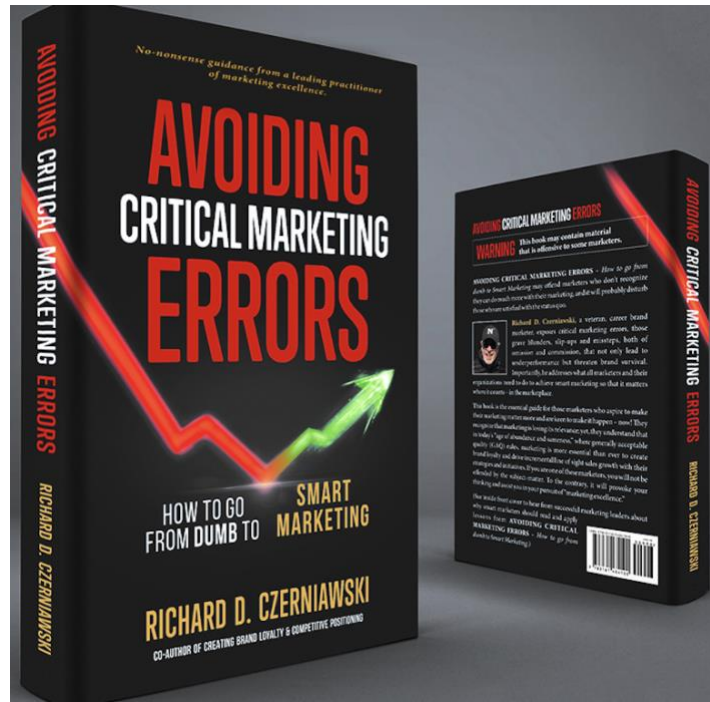
- women. Women permitted Dove to engage in a social issue that needs addressing as long as it was not directly tied to Unilever and, as such, Axe. In the words of Frankenstein, "Dove Good. Axe Bad - For social causes." (Okay, I envisioned that's what Frankenstein might say.)
3. ***Stand up versus speak out on social issues*** – There's a difference between "standing up" and "speaking out." The first leads your brand, what it stands for, and what it does. It's born of advocacy. The second is merely promotional. The first is authentic. It's who you are and your reason for existence. The second is simply attempting to capitalize on a moment in time. Stated another way, "standing up" is being authentic and transformational, whereas "speaking up" is exploitive and transactional.
 4. ***Verify before you promote social issues*** – Test to determine the impact on your business via changing attitudes and intent to purchase (or prescribe or use – depending upon your sector). If it causes defections from your base of loyal users (check the top box and second box ratings!), you should think twice before going forward. It is far more costly to create a new customer than it is to maintain a customer. Moreover, rarely, a radical change (and speaking up on social issues may be considered radical) will bring in more new customers than it loses from the action. If only Bud Light had checked out their partnership with Dylan Mulvaney with their brand loyalists and distributors before proceeding, they could have avoided disaster.
 5. ***Ensure the social issue you address fits your brand perfectly*** – Engaging in social issues should connect customers to your brand's benefits and relevant, meaningful differentiation. A good example is Dawn Dishwashing Brand. Dawn, North America's number 1 dishwashing detergent, is "tough on grease, yet gentle." They demonstrate their value proposition in the spot that follows, where Dawn is used in the care of wildlife that has been despoiled by oil pollution <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Dawn+ad+shoping+wildlife+being+cleaned+of+oit&&view=detail&mid=94764559DCCB88F00A7494764559DCCB88F00A74&&FORM=VRDGAR&ru=%2Fvideos%2Fsearch%3Fq%3DDawn%2520ad%2520shoping%2520wildlife%2520being%2520cleaned%2520of%2520oit%26%26FORM%3DVVVVXX> . Dawn has donated thousands of bottles to aid rescue workers at The Marine Mammal Center and International Bird Rescue in rescuing and releasing more than 75,000 wild animals from oil pollution. Their actions represent standing up for a significant social issue that connects back to the brand's performance.

Engage in societal marketing and stand up for social issues through actions that are relevant to your brand and organization. However, think twice about speaking up unless you are willing to deal with and accept the potential barrage of criticism and highly likely defections from your brand that you are bound to experience.

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Thanks for your interest.

Peace and best wishes,

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