

Transparency, authenticity and bravery – developing trends

By [Giles Shepherd](#)

6 Feb 2017

Certainly the greatest double-edged sword of the 21st century is the information economy. The brilliance of being able to disseminate information instantly and globally, bringing with it brand marketing ability at extremely low cost and engagement of the consumer like never before, also means all the hiding places have disappeared.



Giles Shepherd

The weaknesses that all brands have, to one degree or another, hang out like the proverbial dogs balls for all to see, and people just love to share their negative experiences. This presented a whole list of new rules for brands, but it is also the driver of some very interesting new trends.

Transparency

Because people have so much more information, they are using it for their personal advantage in every facet of their lives. Whereas 20 years ago we might not have known that an ache or pain we regularly experienced could be linked to the white bread sandwich we ate for lunch, now we not only know the possibility, we demand to know exactly what the ingredients are in the foods we consume. And woe betides the brand that either hides this information - or worse, lies about it. The backlash will be instant, extensive and global.

But the advantage being taken by the sensible brands in this area is playing on the 'health economy'. 'Take out' used to

relate to the burger and chips you got to wolf down in front on the Friday night movie. Now it refers more to removing the 'bad' things: trans fats, refined sugar, glutens, preservatives and even carbs. An entire economy has developed around premium priced goods that trade on having less in them than they used to.

Authenticity

But coupled with this is an ever-growing demand for authentic brands, with authentic stories and authentic experiences. The meteoric rise of the craft industries globally proves that brands that have interest value, with stories to tell, are receiving interest - and customers. It was reported in December that 7% fewer bars closed their doors in the UK than the previous year - attributed to craft gins and beers. Consumers are flocking to experience drinks that have an authentic story to tell, that do not conform to the mass-produced, mass-taste-appeal generics. Often (certainly in South Africa), they are prepared to pay more for them. And the craft arena is growing - craft tonics are appearing aplenty, to support the category. However, the consumer is able to determine whether the story is real - some big conglomerates have attempted to invent craft beers, gins and the like, with manufactured stories. They're not working. The consumer wants a brewery and a distillery to visit.

And this is where the 'anti-digital' authentic experience is coming to the fore. More and more people are seeking out experiences with brands that are not screen-based, no matter how '3D'. People are flocking to buy physical records - real LP's - and a turntable to play them on. And it's not just the oldies seeking nostalgia - it's the youngsters who grew up on iTunes. Possibly the finest example of how an online brand has brought back a physical experience, whilst making use of its digital platform, is Amazon with its new 'Go' store. Customers can go to a physical store, interact with products and leave with them - but they do not have to check out. As they leave the store the app on their phone registers what they have taken and charges their Amazon account.

Bravery

The days of standard, conventional 'safe' brand communication are long gone - yet a lot of brands seek safe haven in these tactics, especially in tough financial times. Often this translates not only to conventional media, but also to the 'safety' of product and price advertising.

However it is the brave brands that are getting the positive attention. The standard media schedule with product messages that want to sell the services of the brand rather than the story of the brand, is not enough. Brands need to understand where their consumers are and what matters to them, they need to be relevant, interested and involved.

NetFlorist gets it right by using the right brand of humour in a relevant way, consistently applied and with extensions into brand experiences that matter to the consumer.

Overall, brands need to be brave enough to build the story, with inventive and engaging tactics, and trust that today's savvy consumer will 'get' the product. Brands must sell the 'why', not the 'what'.

Finally, the trend of internal engagement, making sure the brand is 'sold' internally before it is taken internally, is as strong today as it ever was (if not stronger). Any brand that expects to promote and sell a brand experience to a consumer that has not been actively bought into by the staff that must sell it, is fooling itself. It's become a hygiene factor, and will only become more important.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Giles Shepherd is Group Chief Executive of The Brand Alive Group.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>