

Whitney

foundation of beliefs in the betterment of mankind.

Nedbank, a South Africa-based bank, built a solar-powered sign that powers local schools. In its "Save the Bees" campaign, Burt's Bees – for every tweet and lip balm sold, planted 1,000 wildflowers to provide new bee habitats, amounting to more than 1.5 billion wildflowers in 2016 alone. UTEC, the Universidad de Ingeniera and Tecnologia in Peru created a sign in 2013 that collects condensation from the air and converts it to drinkable water so anyone from any village can come up to the sign, turn on a spigot and return home with potable water.

Imagine what could be accomplished if Starbucks, McDonald's, Exxon, or Walmart put their creativity where their profits are to stand for something other than profit – instead to use profits and their ubiquitous presence in society to express belief, take on a cause, make a difference that is visible and vocal and something the average person can both understand and benefit from, as well.

The power of promotion is, at its best, all about the power of belief.

In his fascinating book *The Belief Economy: How to Give a Damn, Stop Selling, and Create Buy-In*, David Baldwin, founder of Baldwin&, named Ad Age's Small Agency of the Year and one of the most honored figures in the promotion industry, describes the "Belief Economy." Baldwin says the time is ripe for a totally different, belief-based economy – based on companies that convey their beliefs on their sleeves – in increasingly divergent forms of corporate promotion aimed at a young public that cares more about belief than "selling."

Promotion is, above all, about reaching a particular audience. Baldwin said we are in a "Belief Economy" primarily because of millennials (born 1980-1995) and Generation Z, also known as iGen (born 1996-2010).

Baldwin: "Millennials are not merely interested in a product but in what the brand selling the product

stands for and is contributing to the world. A brand's values and impact are even more important to iGen and research strongly indicates both generations' purchasing decisions are influenced by that knowledge...this much is abundantly clear: Brands must have a clearly defined belief system or risk facing backlash, or worse, irrelevance."

Due to, but not exclusively, the power of social media, as Baldwin says: "Millennials and iGen are civic-minded groups. They want to have a powerful impact on the world and they expect brands they invest in to share the mission."

The internet and social media has fostered an increasing sense of connectedness and community in which it is easier than ever to find out what a brand stands for and to connect people who share common values.

Baldwin cites an intriguing futuristic book entitled *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, by William Strauss and Neil Howe. Strauss and Howe, in their bird's-eye-view of the generations, break down cultural change into four different phases that repeat across history – High, Awakening, Unraveling, Crisis.

Where are we in this context? Baldwin: "What you're seeing right now is an undoing of the Great Society that was formed in the 1960s. An Unraveling right into a Crisis."

In the promotion world, the Baby Boomers of the 1950s were "consumers."

What we are experiencing now is a complete reversal from the "consumerism" promotion that characterized most of the 20th century. Baldwin: "The word 'consumer' dehumanizes people, reduces them to faceless numbers who exist solely to spend. The notion could not be further from the objective behind creative advertising, marketing and messaging... You should genuinely want to make them happy, make them laugh, and make them engaged, not just make them 'consume.'"

Baldwin recommends that brands – companies – replace consumerism with collaboration and foster a healthy attitude towards taking risks. Baldwin: "Don't resist change – lean into it. On the other side of fear is opportunity..."

Sacrifice is the essence of opportunity."

Keep your message simple. Baldwin: "A company's message should be direct and focused, not wide and unfocused. There is tremendous power in a simple thought."

Audience. "Millennials and iGen are more motivated by the purpose and impact of their actions and the experiences they take part in than by the money they're making... Millennials want a Mission to Fulfill them; iGen want to fulfill a Mission."

Above all, authenticity matters. Baldwin: "When a brand has an authentic belief system that squarely connects with people beyond the 'what' and into the 'why' of its product, and it lives at a values level inside the company, that's the sweet spot. If a brand can genuinely demonstrate the positive impact it makes beyond simply selling a product, it can attract passionate followers, advocates and collaborators. That's the name of the game in the Belief Economy...Essentially, a brand is behavior."

As John Replegle, the former CEO of Burt's Bees, current CEO of Seventh Generation, recommends, this idea is a major proponent of "connected capitalism." Replegle summarizes the priorities and values of millennials and iGen that translates into "buy-in" behavior: (1) Abundance without waste: more experiences with few resources. (2) Truly as you are: welcoming imperfection as honest and beautiful. (3) Get closer: connecting with people behind the brand promise. (4) All of it: expecting freedom from binaries and finish lines. (5) Do some good: have a positive impact on the everyday world.

According to Baldwin, the message is ever more important: "The reason you give a damn becomes your point of difference."

And making the most of risk can actually prove to be effective and efficient. Reverse the old paradigm about caution. Baldwin: "When you play it safe, you may actually end up wasting money." It pays to be creative.

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