

DEAR BRANDS, YOU CAN DO BETTER.

Wow, 2020 has been a heck of a ride up until this point. It's been unexpected, eye-opening, emotional, tender, disruptive and core-shaking. So much has been put into question. So much has been upturned.

Over the course of the past 12 weeks, so many assumptions and presumptions have been made and made again, leaving me exhausted and dizzy with trying to make sense of it all in so short a time. From politics to supply chains, from global crisis to local challenges, from business survival to emotional trauma.

These days have been especially hard, as the pandemic-stricken global community is hit with yet another social uprising. I say „yet another“ with compassion and understanding for the cause. I also say it because inequality in its many forms seems to be this century's trigger button – and is fast approaching a yearly pattern.

Like clockwork, brands are quick to join the conversation. If the attention economy has taught brands anything and social platforms have made infinitely easier, it's ride the wave.

As of two weeks ago, that wave is #BlackLivesMatter. Rewind several weeks before that, it was #StayHomeStaySafe.

Full disclosure here, I work in the communications and marketing industry. And up until a few days ago, I thought of myself as an aware individual and professional. But I see now, I was not aware. I was delusional. We all were.

I develop strategies for a living. Strategies that direct brands toward sustainable, actionable brand impact. Strategies that have always included a distinctive call to real brand action, in real life. I have always told myself „I don't do marketing“. I was convinced my work creates options for brands to bring value to economy and society.

Last week, I watched as my Instagram feed was swallowed by hundreds of black squares. I watched brands release carefully prepared, white typed statements on black backgrounds (metaphor intended). In a different setting, I watched a campaign evolve to its next phase, claiming to be an initiative. During the lockdown, I listened to a client bemoan the lack of marketing follow-through of an initiative they had docked onto late into the pandemic.

And then, this morning, I realized it was a pattern: Throughout my career, I've watched brands believe that marketing it meant bringing it to life, mistaking marketing for actionable impact.



How can brands, who have so much klout, influence and possibilities, not realize that just talking about it won't solve anything? **If anyone in this day and age has the power to rattle and redefine, it is our economic drivers – businesses.**

Visit any website and you read mission statements about changing the world, being the best at something, making lives better. Call me naive, I believe them all. But I also know from experience that good intentions get lost along the way – in the name of profit, share value or market share.

I'm a business professional, so I understand the need to make money in order to pay employees, continue research on important products, drive economy for millions and millions of people etc.

I am also a consumer. And what I am missing sorely today and every day is real contribution and impact. And I am not the only one. There is a reason, many a brand's all white board got slammed after posting a Black Lives Matter call to action. It's well-meant, no doubt. **But without follow-through or proof points, it's just an empty shell.**

Put simply: Along the journey of capitalism and globalization, our focus for profit and „more“ has prostituted marketing. Staying competitive in a fierce market can put pressure on any company. I get it. Talking the talk and not walking the walk is actually watering down credibility for positive impact in the future, though.

I am advocating a marketing revolution, a pivot to action. I want to work for companies that actually act on what they are saying when taking up important causes and initiatives. I want briefings that, when inquiring about proof points, they will already be there (or at least part of an actionable, committed plan). I want more meaning in my own work. I want someone to take a strategy I've developed with care and consideration, and make it actionable as well as economical.

Brands already bring us together in so many ways. What if that togetherness didn't revolve solely around profit and consumption? What if brands became the activists themselves?

Some already do. What's stopping the others?

I'm over black squares and empty calls to action coming from so many brands. Maybe call to action needs to be redefined. Maybe marketing does, too. One thing I know for sure, though: **We can do better.**



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