

# Putting People First

10 Years of WFA's Project Reconnect







# Putting people first

Eighty percent of companies believe they deliver great experiences according to Bain & Company. But only 8% of consumers agree. People wouldn't care if 77% of brands disappeared tomorrow, say Havas. How can brands be so out of kilter with the customers they are there to serve?

For the last 10 years, Project Reconnect has been WFA's platform to reconnect brands and consumers. We've been exploring how brands can remain relevant and meaningful in today's fast-changing, hyper-connected, ultra-distracting world.

Every day at WFA, we see how brands are blamed for many of society's problems. The press, policy-makers and NGOs instinctively point fingers at marketing for making kids overweight, driving minors to drink, pushing us into debt, robbing us of our privacy, and even being behind everything that is wrong today with the Internet.

We hear that the inexorable demand created by marketers in an age of 'peak stuff' is fundamentally at odds with our hopes for a sustainable future.

It all adds up to a big trust problem.

This is not a good place to be. For while some buying decisions are purely about cost and

convenience, trust is the currency of interactions. "If a brand wants to transcend to a place where there is meaningful human or lasting connection, they absolutely need trust," says **Oxford professor and trust expert, Rachel Botsman**.

I grew up loving TV ads. I often found them more entertaining than the programmes themselves. But figures suggest that it's not just me who has fallen out of love with ads.

Trust in advertising, at least in developed markets, is shaky. In the UK, favourability to advertising has hit an all-time low at just 25%.

People find that advertising has invaded every nook and cranny of our lives; they find it ubiquitous, annoying and intrusive. We are seeing up to 10,000 ads a day. 11% of the global internet population is already blocking ads online and this figure is growing by 30% year on year.

As audiences have fragmented, brands have rushed to create more content and quantity has trumped quality. People feel bombarded. Creativity has diminished and the image of marketing has suffered.

But there is hope. Technology provides us with greater possibilities than brands have ever had to create meaningful, mutually reciprocated, valued connections. And in

a polarised world, brands are increasingly being expected to take a stand on issues that matter.

That's what Project Reconnect has been all about. It's very simply about trying to identify what makes for great brand marketing in a digital age.

It's not about purpose – although that is part of it. It's rather about trying to accelerate the transition from the analogue era. We want to help marketers deliver well-crafted, meaningful brand messages in a seamless and integrated digital-first environment.

And a really big part of that is about adopting an industry-wide mindset that fundamentally puts people first; respecting their space rather than simply seeing them as consumers.

We hope some of what we've learned over the past decade will help marketers on this journey. And we hope you'll join us as *Project Reconnect* becomes *Better Marketing* – because ultimately that's what we're all aspiring to. – **Will Gilroy, Director of Policy and Communications, WFA**



**"For 10 years, WFA's Project Reconnect has been challenging the status quo in the marketing industry – holding a mirror up to our activities and questioning how the industry needs to evolve in order to better serve society. It's a rallying cry to put people first and, critically, the only way we will be able to make marketing noble again." – Marc Mathieu, CMO Samsung Electronics America**



# 10 Years of Learnings from Project Reconnect



In marketing we call that integration, but it's not just about communications integration, it's increasingly about consistency of language, assets and behaviour, something that's hugely challenging when we're all moving so fast.

The future of brands, and thus marketing, depends on consistently striving for Better Marketing. Holding our customers and creativity tightly, whilst enjoying the new-found freedom of expression we now all have, will be critical. – **Jon Wilkins, Executive Chairman, Karmarama**

WFA's *Project Reconnect* has been one of the most important initiatives we have been involved in. That's because ultimately we're all in the people game.

Understanding, motivating and engaging customers is the number one priority for everyone involved in marketing.

Today, there are so many distractions; whether it be budget fragmentation or the proliferation and digitisation of channels, simultaneously creating huge distractions and opportunities for us in equal measure. However, all these new opportunities need to be constantly framed by putting people first.

From the customers' point of view, with so much choice, people are increasingly looking for brands they trust, who stand for something over and above what they make or provide and they are looking for creative storytelling that is differentiated and consistent across their experience.

**“No other field has more capability than marketing to impact the company's brand, its reputation as well as bringing about social impact.” – Raja Rajamannar, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer and President, Healthcare Business, Mastercard**



**“For many years, brands have been all about Me. I'm a brand – let me tell you all about Me. We want to shift that to brands who are all about You, and all about the world, are about being a force for good and a force for growth.” – Marc Pritchard, Chief Brand Officer, P&G**



# Marketing has a trust problem

## Brands under attack

A brand was always meant to be a trust mark; a guarantee of quality, a hallmark of a great product and a responsible corporate citizen. But evidence suggests this is increasingly being called into question.

Havas's Meaningful Brands research conducted with more than 350,000 people in 31 countries suggests that people wouldn't care if 77% of the brands they use simply disappeared.

Worse still, brands are being blamed for society's problems. Critics say they fuel excessive consumerism, they make us drink and eat too much, they drive demand in a way that leaves people discontented and unfulfilled and the planet's resources depleted.

**“I think the biggest challenge we have in our industry right now is trust. Trust, over time, is eroding. A brand without trust is a product. Advertising without trust is just noise. We’ve got to find a way of rebuilding trust.” – Keith Weed, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Unilever**



While also a successful publicity stunt, Domino's 2018 campaign points to how brands can continue to ingratiate themselves into public life

## Visibly participate in society's struggle with itself

But if we turn back the clock to the patrician brands of the past, we see different sorts of behaviours. Brands built towns and took an active interest in the well-being of their workers.

There was a time in some countries such as the UK when the incorporation of a company required a declaration of purpose. 'To sell product x' was not enough. The company needed to explicitly state its chartered purpose and the benefit it provided for the community. Only then would it be given licence to operate.

Many want brands to hark back to this premise. They want brands to play an important and visible role in helping to address social issues.

Or, in the case of Domino's Pizza, to fix potholes in every single American state, because local authorities lacked the funds or the wherewithal to do it themselves.





**“I think marketing could play a big role in driving some of the social changes we face, coming to terms with more secure urban living, a more sustainable future and not just about ‘is my product safe and high quality?’ I think that to visibly participate in that part of society’s struggle with itself would completely transform the image of marketing as an activity.” – Robert Madelin, Former Director General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology at the European Commission**

Havas’ research tells us that 75% of people expect brands to make more of a contribution to our well-being and quality of life, yet only 40% believe brands are doing so.

Edelman’s 2019 Trust Barometer reveals that people have low confidence that societal institutions will help them navigate a turbulent world, so they are turning to a critical relationship: their employer.

76% of respondents want CEOs to take the lead on change instead of waiting for government to impose it. And 73% believe a company can take actions that both increase profits and improve economic and social conditions in the community where it operates.

Some have taken big steps to make this happen. Unilever’s outgoing CEO Paul Polman has perhaps been the most vocal about the need for business growth to go hand in hand with positive social and environmental impact.

Today, the company behind Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty and Lifebuoy’s sanitation programmes owns a portfolio of sustainable brands that are growing 50% faster than the rest of the business.

Havas reports that brands seen as meaningful and viewed as making the world a better place have seen their wallet share multiply by nine and see a 24-point greater purchase intent. Google, PayPal, Mercedes-Benz, WhatsApp, YouTube, Johnson & Johnson, Gillette, BMW, Microsoft

and Danone were the top 10 performing brands. And regulators are calling for the same.

**Robert Madelin, former EU Director General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology** told WFA way back in 2008 that for companies “to visibly participate in society’s struggle with itself” could completely “transform the image of marketing as an activity.”

Marketers recognise that brands need to stand for more than functional delivery of products and services.

In WFA’s Global Brand Purpose survey, 88% agreed that purpose will be increasingly important to building brands and 87% agreed that it was important for brands to have a sense of purpose. 74% also believed that having a sense of purpose is critical to hiring the best talent.



‘The Jump Pump’: In 2014, Unilever’s Lifebuoy soap brand partnered with the government and UNICEF to help improve the hygiene behaviours of schoolchildren in India



# Purpose starts with the basics

Purpose has been one of the mantras of the marketing industry for the past decade. While there are detractors, most marketers tend to agree that a brand can benefit from standing for something, having a north star or guiding principle.

There are many examples of brands that have used the power of purpose to energise their customers, ignite passion in their employees, attract talent and drive growth for investors.

Think of the Body Shop and its motto “enrich, not exploit”, Nike’s mission to expand human potential or Patagonia’s environmental activism. And purpose need not be about saving the planet. Southwest Airlines describes itself as a customer service company with airplanes.

But there are also countless examples of companies that have got purpose wrong and marketers would do well to remember that trust is built on some basics.

In 2013, WFA teamed up with Edelman to better understand the reasons why customers trust brands. The most important attributes that build trust for consumers are brands that listen to customer needs and feedback, delivering high quality products and services and brands and companies that treat employees well.



In 2018, outdoor brand Patagonia created ‘Patagonia Action Works’, a platform to connect activists with local environmental organisations



**“The most important thing that a company needs to have to compete today is a very clear and deliberate sense of purpose. Your purpose or your vision will set the parameters for which fights you want to lead on, which fights you want to fly as a flock and which fights you’re going to avoid.” – Antonio Lucio, former Chief Marketing Officer at HP and current CMO at Facebook**



## Most important company attributes that build trust for consumers

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 01. Listens to customer needs and feedback   | 09. Works to protect/ improve environment  |
| 02. High quality products or services.       | 10. Addresses society's needs              |
| 03. Treats employees well                    | 11. Positively impacts the local community |
| 04. Places customers ahead of profits        | 12. Innovator of new products              |
| 05. Takes actions to address issue or crisis | 13. Highly regarded, top leadership        |
| 06. Has ethical business practices           | 14. Delivers consistent financial returns  |
| 07. Has transparent and open business        | 15. Ranks on a global list                 |
| 08. Communicates frequently and honestly     | 16. Partners with third parties            |

■ Operational    ■ Societal



**“No one responds well to a person that talks big and acts small. And I think it’s the same for brands. If we commit to a purpose, we need to ensure our actions really follow through.” –Jane Wakely, CMO Mars Pet Nutrition**

It’s first of all about how the company conducts itself. A great deal of trust is built on how a company works with its immediate stakeholders, including the employees and local community.

Not least because, as **RBS’s CMO, David Wheldon** points out “advocacy is an evolution of advertising. You need happy colleagues and happy customers because they recommend you to new people.”

**Mastercard’s Raja Rajamannar** agrees: “Brand is not the private territory of marketing. Everyone in the company is a brand ambassador. If marketing truly has to bring a significant impact, you have to carry the whole company with you.”

And any effort to develop a higher social aspiration or purpose will be instantly undermined if other actions are seen to be at odds with what the company says it stands for.

The bottom-line is don’t aspire to save the planet if you’re not paying your taxes, listening to customer feedback or treating your employees well.

“Greenwashing is the worst thing we can do”, says **Unilever’s Keith Weed**. “Consumers will see through it right away, particularly millennials. Millennials have a bullshit detector like you’ve never seen.”

# 7 steps to getting purpose right

**PICK THE RIGHT ISSUE** / Do the hard work up front to identify what issue you want to lead on. It needs to be deeply aligned with the business and brand. It needs to be something that the business is in a credible position to address. People need to be able to see and believe that it makes sense for you to take the lead on it.

**START INTERNALLY** / Inspire your workforce to be a part of what you are creating. If you are operating from a place of genuine impassioned purpose, and people believe in it, they will be your best advocates.

**BE AUTHENTIC** / Do it because you really believe in it. Don't do it as a one-off campaign because people, and millennials in particular, will smell the bullshit. Commit for the long term.

**DON'T TELL THE STORY, BE THE STORY** / Intentionally integrate purpose into the core of your company, ensure that you live it across all your brand operations. Only once you've done this should you share your purpose with the outside world.

**TAKE A STAND** / You can't please everyone all the time. Focus your purpose on one issue, one message, one cause, one effort. You might take some flak along the way, but if you're true to your purpose people will forgive you. And a good dose of humility will always help.

**PEOPLE MAKE THE DIFFERENCE** / Stop thinking of people as consumers, targets, demographics or dollar signs. Real people are those that actually make stuff happen. If you put yourself out there from a place of authenticity, chances are there will be people out there who personally connect with your purpose and want to support it.

**BE MORE CREATIVE** / People are bombarded with up to 10,000 brand messages a day. Every space is a crowded one. Like it or not, the brand must connect, must be attractive, must feel elevated. Brand aesthetic, tone and voice are important, if you want to stand out from the crowd. Obvious maybe, but it really does matter.

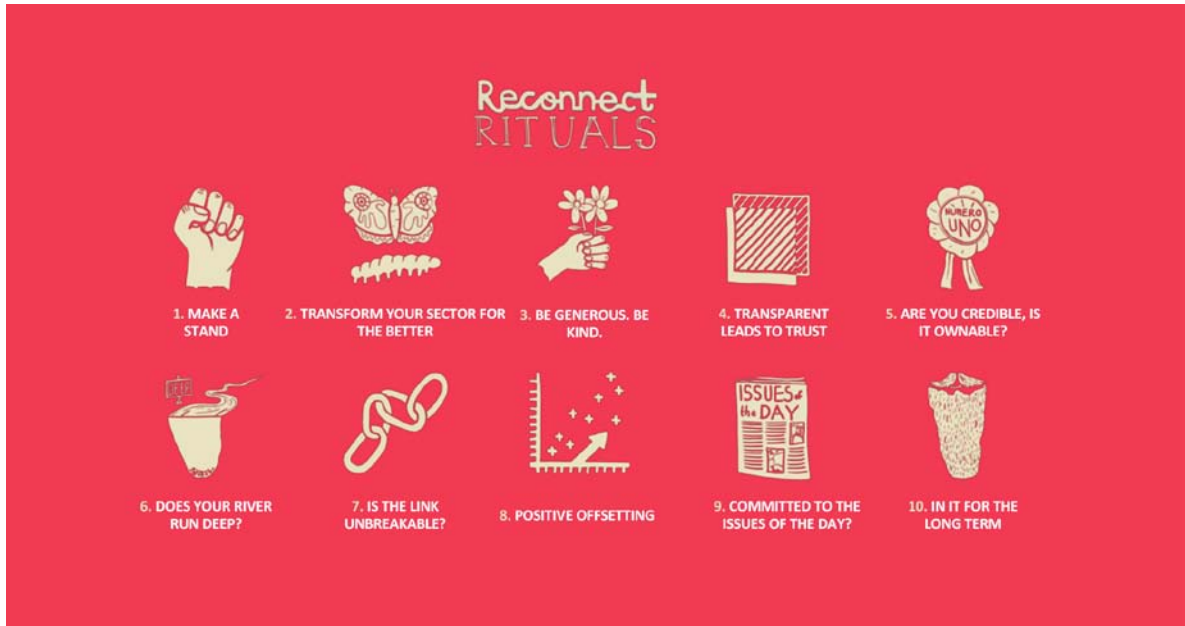


**“The best purpose is one that is very close to what you deliver to your consumers. In our case, we’ve made it very clear that we have a vision for a world of zero emissions and zero fatalities.”**

**– Roel de Vries, Corporate VP, Global Head of Marketing, Communications, Customer Experience and Brand, Nissan Motor Corporation**



P&G's 2-minute film 'The Talk' raises awareness of how racism affects American people



Reconnect Rituals – 10 key ingredients

## The Reconnect Rituals / how to get social purpose right

At the WFA Global Marketer Week in Tokyo in 2018, the Project Reconnect team, led by Karmarama and Contagious, explored 10 key ingredients to getting social purpose right.

The Reconnect Rituals dictate that social purpose must run right through the organisation as well as right through the customer experience. They ask brands to be generous and kind, transparent, committed to issues that really matter. Companies need to be in it for the long haul. Short-termism is the enemy of social purpose, as it lacks authenticity and commitment. So embed it in your KPIs!

That long-term commitment is something advocated by **Marc Pritchard at P&G**: “One piece of work that I’m really proud of is called ‘The Talk’. We took some heat for it but we stuck with it because it was important for us to create conversations. Because conversations lead to understanding, understanding leads to empathy, and empathy leads to action.”

# Purpose, principles and participation

In 2014, WFA partnered with We Are Social's Simon Kemp, to identify what marketers around the world thought made for great brand marketing. We talked to industry influencers and their networks through social media over the course of three months.

In our conversations, the same handful of brands came up again and again. But what is it about brands like Red Bull, Nike and Dove that marketers respect so much?

Three new Ps of successful marketing became recurrent themes:

**PURPOSE** / Don't just make better things.  
Make things better.

**PRINCIPLES** / Use your brand values to  
deliver meaningful value.

**PARTICIPATION** / Don't interrupt people;  
engage and involve them.



Red Bull broke five Guinness World Records when it sent Baumgartner to make a free-fall jump 24 miles above the earth

## 1 Their value proposition extends beyond their products

When Felix Baumgartner jumped out of his space capsule high over the deserts of New Mexico, there wasn't a can of Red Bull in sight. Red Bull's intention wasn't merely to raise awareness; and 36 million people didn't turn to YouTube to watch an 'ad'.

Instead, the brand – with Felix's help – set out to challenge the world's perceptions of what's humanly possible.

Red Bull strives to produce content that people go out of their way to engage with and share – an approach borne out by the 8.4 million subscribers on the brand's YouTube channel. Red Bull doesn't just offer the world an energy drink; it inspires people everywhere to explore their own limits and achieve something more.

It is a great example of a brand that has built a purpose that captures hearts and minds; people don't just buy Red Bull, they buy into everything it stands for.

It demonstrates that brand purpose does not need to be worthy or about saving the world; brands that offer people hope, an idea, or inspire them to improve themselves, will also earn a place in people's hearts.

## 2 They're not just differentiated; they make a real difference

Many of the industry's leading practitioners indicated a strong preference for brands with a 'conscience'. The most commonly cited example was TOMS, a brand whose core 'one-for-one' proposition ensures someone in the developing world benefits every time someone buys their products.



TOMS was one of the first brands to pioneer the buy-one-give-one model

What's most interesting is the way this brand proposition has allowed TOMS to transcend product categories. The brand has extended beyond its initial one-for-one shoe program, where it donated a pair of shoes to a child in Argentina for every pair bought in stores, to offering sight-saving treatments, clean water and materials and training needed to help provide a safe birth.

The brand's more recent development, TOMS High Road Backpack, helps provide training to school staff and crisis counsellors to help prevent and respond to bullying.

TOMS doesn't just sell products; it sells a promise – a promise that we can still indulge in little luxuries, because we're also helping other people lead a better life.

Another brand that kept on coming up was GoldieBlox, which has a mission of encouraging more girls to consider careers in areas such as engineering. As a result, the brand isn't just making and selling great toys; it's helping young girls to build a brighter future.

Other examples in this area include The Body Shop, Ben & Jerry's and Honest Tea, all of which have made standing up for the things they believe in a core component of their marketing.

### 3 They don't interrupt people; they involve them

Nike is a brand that never seems to lose favour in the marketing community, and no conference seems complete without at least one swoosh-branded case study, almost always a participative activity.

Whether it's running events such as the Human Race or getting people off the couch to play in three-a-side soccer tournaments, Nike has a strong track record in creating marketing activities that actively involve its audiences.

These activities work well because they actively add value to the audience, rather than asking them to add value to the brand first. Indeed, Nike has done such a good job that people are even willing to pay to take part in its events.

Red Bull has championed this participative approach to its comms too, with events such as Flugtag now a regular fixture in the brand's global approach.

More and more brands are using crowd-sourcing to influence product development too, with Dell's 'Ideastorm', Starbucks's 'My Starbucks Idea' and Lay's 'Do Us A Flavor' all popular examples of activities that brought the audience into the heart of the brand.

More recent examples include Lego Forma: Add a Splash of Creativity to Your Day, Coke x Adobe x You and GoPro's contest-driven content, such as Photo of the Day.

The most extreme examples of this approach appear on crowd-funding platforms like Kickstarter and Indiegogo, where people can actively contribute to the very birth of a brand.



In 2018, Nike received both praise and criticism for supporting Colin Kaepernick, American football player who protested police brutality towards black people by kneeling during the national anthem

### 4 They engage our emotions

When it comes to specific communications activities, the industry's leading practitioners repeatedly offered two examples of brands that have swapped eyeballs for heartstrings.

Dove began its Campaign for Real Beauty years back with its oft-celebrated 'Photoshopped billboard' Evolution film. Recent iterations have moved from shock tactics to a more emotional style, with the brand's Real Beauty Sketches film playing more on empathy than outrage.

In a similar vein, P&G's 'Thank you Mom' films have moved audiences to tears with touching stories of Olympians' growing pains.

Both approaches work because they resonate with audiences' own experiences; they harness empathy to engage our emotions, ensuring a more profound connection.

That may seem obvious, but that's what's so interesting; most marketers seem to understand this logic yet few actually take the time to understand our audiences well enough to be able to deliver such powerful, empathetic marketing.

"When you work in a sector where everything is expressed in numbers, you need a differentiator. For Nissan, that means harnessing emotions to create a new level of engagement among consumers," says **Roel de Vries, Nissan's Corporate VP, Global Head of Marketing, Communications, Customer Experience and Brand.**

**5 They help people to help themselves**  
**Google's Michael Burke** asserts that "learning something is the top motivator when it comes to driving engagement," and this is borne out in many of the examples of great marketing that people shared with us.

One of the most powerful demonstrations of this is American Express's OPEN Forum and 'Small Business Saturday' initiatives which help small business owners.

By providing SMEs with advice, support, and a network of peers, AmEx has moved from being a mere payments facilitator to an added-value business partner.

In addition to widely publicised events such as Small Business Saturday, AmEx also offers small businesses advice on areas such as how to manage a Facebook page (complete with \$100 of free Facebook adverts), how to construct compelling customer offers, and provides attractive POS materials and promotional assets.

The practitioners we spoke with also cited examples like Hubspot, a marketing services brand that provides a wealth of free materials to help marketers adopt and optimise an inbound marketing strategy.



Founded by American Express in 2010, Small Business Saturday is held each year on the Saturday after Thanksgiving

If we embrace the new 3Ps of purpose, principles and participation then good brands can be like good friends.

**Marc Mathieu, CMO Samsung Electronics America, says:** "You expect people – at least your friends – to be truthful and transparent with you. And you expect this of brands too. You also expect generosity. More than ever brands need to be generous with their content and services, and even their knowledge. Brands will also have to remember the importance of empathy if they are going to forge real relationships. And let's not forget fun. No one wants a boring friend."

But, critically, being purposeful is no longer a 'nice to have'. In January 2018, **Laurence D Fink, CEO of Blackrock**, the world's biggest investor told companies to "contribute to society or risk losing our support".

It's once again becoming part of a company's licence to operate.



# Putting people (not consumers) first

**“How do we become better marketers? I think that by becoming more empathetic people, by listening to others with an intent to make their lives better. If we do that, I believe that we will win every time.”**  
– Ukonwa Ojo, CMO Consumer Beauty, Coty



**“There is no algorithm for creativity, there is no rule book on how to do it better than anyone else. But there are lots of great people who know how to make connections with people – that is what this sector has always been about and will always be about.”** – David Wheldon, CMO RBS

## Brand Nirvana: closing the human experience gap

### We're obsessed with the customer.

The customer is always right. Customer is king. Customer journey. It all comes from a good place, but here's an idea. If we're talking about trying to reconnect brands with their customers, perhaps the best way to do that is stop thinking about them as customers at all.

The truth is, people don't necessarily want to be spoken to like that – they want to be engaged with as the living, breathing, well-rounded human beings they are. And perhaps our relentless focus on the “c” word is getting in the way.

We need to get this right. Project Reconnect exists because in a world dominated by technology, a proliferation of choice and diminishing trust in business, brands need to work harder than ever to earn the loyalty of consumers. It is no easy task but we believe we've found a solution.

Our research has found that people consider emotional drivers as important as practical ones when it comes to the buying process. If we upgrade ‘customer experience’ to ‘human experience’ or HX, brands can start to build stronger, more emotional bonds with people

that enable them to play a bigger role in their day-to-day lives. In return, brands can reach a state of nirvana – where they become almost irreplaceable in the hearts and minds of consumers.

With a little help from our friends at Accenture, we've identified eight steps to reach this altered state.

# Steps to Brand Nirvana

## 01. Human purpose

An authentic mission, built around the consumer’s needs

## 02. Enlightened employees

Alignment on mission behind the lines and empowered employees

## 03. Connected creativity

A well-connected strategy that acts as a seamless loop across the whole business

## 04. Reciprocal relationships

An inclusive consumer bond that gives them something in return for their custom

## 05. Committed service

An empathetic approach to customer service that handles complaints with honesty

## 06. Diversified distribution

A reach that goes beyond the product category, keeping the brand front of mind

## 07. Continuous innovation

A dedication to creating and iterating the best products or services

## 08. Full transcendence

A state in which brands can command love, loyalty and irrational preference.

“As we’re all too aware, the relationship between consumers and brands is evolving. If we don’t act now, we risk it disappearing. But perhaps this simple mindset change, putting humans back in the frame, can help us to build an even better connection.” – **Jon Wilkins, Executive Chairman, Karmarama**



Brand Nirvana by Jon Wilkins, Executive Chairman, Karmarama

# Marketing, a champion for diversity



**“What would make marketing better? Really raising the game on diversity, inclusion, progressive gender portrayals will make a real difference. Without doing that we are missing so many voices that can make a difference to our industry. It’s a huge focus for me and for Diageo, and I want to see it be a massive focus for our industry.”**

**– Syl Saller, Chief Marketing and Innovation Officer, Diageo**

This report would be far from complete without mention of the need for the marketing industry to embrace diversity in all its forms, whether it be gender, ethnic, religious, education or class.

So much so that WFA has developed a separate Guide to Progressive Gender Portrayals in Advertising which showcases how thought-leaders such as Diageo, Johnson & Johnson, P&G and Unilever are taking steps to use the power of marketing to be a force for good.

WFA is a founding member of the UN Women-led Unstereotype Alliance and a big supporter of local initiatives like the ANA-led #SeeHer and similar projects led by our members in the UK, Brazil, Turkey and Belgium. Together, we are working hard to ensure marketing can be a positive force for driving positive gender portrayals across the industry, whether it be in terms of ensuring gender balance across internal and external teams or by portraying positive gender portrayals through brand marketing communications.



Gaëlle Enganamouit for “Made of Black”, Guinness Cameroon (Diageo), 2017

# Avoiding pitfalls

**“Corporate culture is the future of marketing, much more so than advertising. Because it’s not what you say, it’s what you do.” –Claudia Willvonseder, VP IKEA Switzerland**



In 2010, WFA teamed up with Firefly Millward Brown to ask parents and teens in Brazil, China, the UK and US about what they expect from brand marketing online through Millward Brown’s online Ideablog.

No matter where they were from, many consumer complaints had a lot in common, notably people’s irritation at the perception they are bombarded with advertising online and concerns about what companies are doing with people’s data.

We identified 13 rules for digital marketers designed to ensure brand digital activity respects the boundaries of what is acceptable. But three major strategic considerations came out.

**1** Online, everything a company does or is seen to do is marketing. Brand image will be determined as much by what you do as what you say. The CMO needs to lean on their knowledge of the customer to ensure the whole organisation is culturally aligned with what people want and expect.

**Claudia Willvonseder, VP IKEA Switzerland** agrees. She told us that “corporate culture is the future of marketing, much more so than advertising. Marketers should influence the company and the culture from the inside. Because it’s not what you say it’s what you do. We are not in our vertical marketing box. It’s all about using human insights, understanding and trends to inform the whole business and live it, in all your touchpoints and in all your discussions. That’s marketing.”

“Our job as marketers is to understand and serve our consumer. Our consumer is our boss. Where is our consumer, how are they acting, how are they behaving? It’s a very simple guide for how we need to show up in the world and how we need to innovate to be relevant to them,” says **Jane Wakely, CMO Mars Pet Nutrition.**

**2** Advertisers must be invited into customer’s digital lives. Contacts need to be consented to and the customer wants to feel in control of the conversation. People want to be asked their consent and given knowledge of how their data will be used, including how long their data will be stored for.

“The key thing is you need to be very transparent with the consumer. Get their explicit permission. Don’t do anything sneakily, you have to respect the privacy of the consumer. When you say

customer is the king or the queen, you respect their wishes,” says **Mastercard’s Raja Rajamannar.**

“Millennials hate marketing in its classic sense. How do they feel at ease with us talking with them? I think more than ever creative and creative tone of voice and the way we interact is important in that,” says **Ian Wilson, Senior Director Global Digital and Marketing Development, Heineken.**

**3** There is a time and place for commercial messages. Don’t pester; brands need to show respect and be willingly ignored. What’s unacceptable offline is also unacceptable online.

“Consumers don’t like ads. For them it is an interruption of their experience. It’s an annoyance and irritation for them. Story-telling is dead. It’s all about story-making. Give consumers experiences, they make stories out of those experiences and they tell their stories to their networks. It’s the old concept of word of mouth initiated by experiences and propagated through social and digital media,” says **Mastercard’s Raja Rajamannar.**

In 2015, we again joined forces with We Are Social to uncover the worst types of marketing. We identified the seven key ways that brand marketing is most likely to annoy consumers.

The findings are based on analysis of 670,000 English language Twitter mentions making negative reference to advertising in the six months between August 2014 and February 2015. A random sample of 5,000 tweets were analysed to identify key concerns.

The research found that there were more than two million negative tweets about advertising in the past year in all languages. There were however more than three million positive comments about advertising during the same period.

Just over half the tweets were original statements but 37% were retweets, meaning Twitter users have retweeted negative comments almost 750,000 times. One in ten tweets were replies, usually agreeing with the negative sentiments of the original tweet.

TV adverts caused the greatest number of negative comments, followed by online and radio. Adverts on music streaming service Pandora appeared to annoy our sample the most but YouTube and Spotify interruptions were close behind.

**From the research, we picked out the seven most common triggers of consumer backlash:**

## 7 Deadly Sins of Marketing

- 1. Ad malaise** / A very large number of tweets expressed a generic dislike of ads or commercials. More extrapolated tweets referenced the ubiquity and overall frequency of ads, the length of the ad break or the context in which the ad appeared.
- 2. Interruption** / Consumers recognize that ads help pay for content, but they expect marketers to make an effort to make their marketing less irritating. The tweets analysed showed that interruption was most annoying during high intensity content such as action and drama shows or live sporting events. Marketers need to make more of an effort to add value to the context in which they appear rather than simply interrupting it.
- 3. Incongruity** / Too many brands are choosing the wrong moment and the wrong audience for their messages. It might be the right time but the wrong place or the right time but the wrong audience. Tweets complained about inappropriate ads, including those that appeared when they watched TV with their parents. Constant retargeting was also heavily criticised.
- 4. Deception** / The truth will set you free. Claims that consumers feel to be exaggerated really rile people; they expect brands to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Brands will gain credibility if they are honest and don't airbrush the challenges they know they face and consumers know they face. "Tell the truth: you'll find it liberating," says Sir John Hegarty.
- 5. Overkill** / Too many ad breaks and often ad breaks that are too long. Frequent interruption to a particular piece of content or media channel can create irritation with all commercials, regardless of how often any individual message appears. This is combined with a rage against high frequency advertising.
- 6. Getting personal** / Online targeting that's meant to be clever but is actually annoying. Deficient algorithms might be the industry's biggest challenge: ads inappropriate to the content alongside which they feature, consumers clumsily targeted without heed for personal circumstances and sensitivities.
- 7. Dearth in quality** / Too many ads are just poor. Brands need to prioritise quality over quantity, meaningful engagement over frequency of exposure and work harder to test whether the ads are engaging before they expose them to consumers.

# Be brave!

## Conclusion / Paul Kemp-Robertson, Co-Founder, Contagious



Project Reconnect is designed to reconcile a fundamental tension that influences (some would say, infects) the way the marketing industry operates. Namely; the tension between acknowledging the impact of creativity and authorising it.

Evidence proves consistently that standout creative ideas kick the living crap out of run-of-the-mill ideas. Effectiveness studies by the IPA in the UK show that award-winning ads are six times more effective, due to their ‘fame effect’ acting as a multiplier.

In other words, brave, standout creativity works longer and harder because people are more willing to watch it and more likely to share it – unlike routine advertising messages, which wear out more quickly.

Companies that won the title of Cannes Lions Creative Marketer of the Year outperformed the S&P 500 by a factor of 3.5, with annual share price growth of 26.1% vs 7.5% on the S&P from 1999 to 2015.

Most marketers are happy to acknowledge that creative ideas are this industry’s currency, its lifeblood, its magic dust. Marketers’ jobs depend on cutting through the jaded, cognitive immunity of consumers with brilliant, original ideas that capture their attention.

The root of the problem, however, is that, as humans, we are hard-wired to hate uncertainty and avoid risk. It’s why our ancestors ran away from hot lava and angry mammoths. And why even though we all know that the ultimate goal of brand builders should be to get the most creative work possible, we constantly get in our own way. We are the problem.

How? Scientific studies suggest that human brains aren’t wired to embrace the unpredictability of creativity. A famous case is the implicit association test – The Bias Against Creativity – run by Cornell University that found that business people – including marketers – associate the uncertainty surrounding new ideas with words like Poison, Vomit and Agony!

The researchers at Cornell argue that marketers may say they want creativity, but when confronted with actual fresh and ‘divergent’ ideas, our brains subconsciously rebel against us. We retreat to the safe haven of predictability.

This explains why advertising is an industry where the status quo reigns supreme, and why so much content stays within customary guardrails: ‘Washes Whiter’, ‘Drives Faster’, ‘Tastes Better’, ‘Bite & Smile’ – insert your own cliché, or category convention here.

Project Reconnect has always striven to jolt us out of our comfort zones, to create a forum for awkward, honest questions with the aim of championing the power and performance of brave, world-class creativity.

Be brave and let the Better Marketing commence!

**“Let’s all be a little bolder, a little braver. Let’s recognise that a lot of what holds us back is not our companies losing millions of pounds or dollars. The risks are in our head. If we can overcome those, we can do bolder things and we can get greater growth.”**  
– Syl Saller, Chief Marketing and Innovation Officer, Diageo



# Acknowledgements

Project Reconnect would not have been possible without the brilliant advice and input from so many smart and inspirational marketing leaders. These are the Better Marketers and we at WFA have an enormous debt of thanks to Jon Wilkins, Paul Kemp-Robertson, David Wheldon, Marc Mathieu, Martin Riley, Stephen Kehoe, Simon Kemp, Mikko Kotila, Siim Sainas, Russell Parsons, John Kearon, all the clever people at Edelman and Firefly Millward Brown and, critically, the brilliant CMOs and senior marketers who have contributed over the past ten years.

## Imagery sourced from Contagious I/O

- Domino's, 2018 Campaign, page 4
- Unilever, Lifebuoy Soap, 'The Jump Pump', page 5
- Patagonia, 'Patagonia Action Works', page 6
- P&G, 'The Talk', page 8
- Red Bull, Baumgartner free-fall jump, page 10
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March 2019