

Sefiani

COMMUNICATION THAT MATTERS REPORT

**Building positive reputations
and meaningful connections
in a fast-changing world**



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01. INTRODUCTION

We are living against a complex backdrop of personal, societal and global tension. The rapid-change world of 2021 is bringing a shift in behaviour, power balance and audiences.

More than ever, people are at the centre of everything in our world, motivating change. Accelerated by a global pandemic, technology and digital platforms, our hyper-connected communities have developed an intense sense of individual responsibility, alongside a collective altruism and more empathetic world view.

In this new world, brands are experiencing unprecedented scrutiny: consumer sentiment can make or break a positive reputation. No longer can brands stand only for what they sell, nor remain silent on issues important to their communities. This context provides both risk and opportunity.

But what does this mean in a climate of positive social movements, radical transparency and brand loyalty, as well as cancel culture, mental health pandemics, fake news and

misinformation? Who and what builds a brand's reputation and trust in this environment, and what can lead to a brand's rapid rise or downfall?

We will show that by being true to their brand, standing for something bigger, carefully considering consumer values and taking decisive, purpose-led action, brands can reimagine their audience relationships. The outcome is deeper connections with a community of loyal stakeholders and a stronger brand reputation that can stand tall.

This report was written by Sefiani Communications Group, a leading Australian strategic communications firm, based on our own observations working with global and local corporations and brands, supplemented by in-depth research of papers written by global experts in consumer behaviour, brand communication, trust, sustainability and social license to operate.



02. COMMUNICATIONS IN THE 'NEXT NORMAL'

COVID-19 highlighted that the worlds of corporate and consumer communication, rather than being separate, have never been more intertwined. While this trend was building prior to Covid, it was doing so at different speeds on different organisations. It now sits firmly in the [“next normal”](#)—a term coined by McKinsey based on the assumption of ‘before Covid and after Covid’. Society will not return to the conditions that prevailed in 2019, and this blurring of corporate and consumer worlds is now a reality that will shape the way organisations communicate and connect with audiences.

The pandemic reminded us how interdependent, interconnected and influenced we are. Audiences changed and so the way we communicate as brands must change too—or be left behind.

Next normal, high-expectation audiences are seeking deeper, more personalised experiences. Emotion and empathy in B2B decision making is being recognised as a new generation of executives emerge. While trust in both government and media has eroded, trust as a currency remains critical for brands and leaders. In the next normal, communications must mean something to someone, demonstrate an understanding for the people behind the businesses that purchase, focus on transparency with workplace culture at the heart and have a clear view on brand actions—and the leader’s role—rather than just raising the issue. Success depends on it.



The new audience: Interconnected and influenced

At any hour of the day, on any device, anywhere in the world, people expect to find what they want to inform, entertain and become emotionally connected. Meeting your audience expectations therefore means moving beyond a single target audience and platform, to an interconnected multi-channel approach that focuses on valuable direct-to-consumer conversation. This opportunity for a one-to-one dialogue offers an end-to-end experience in which brands can retain greater control over communication—and their own reputation in the process. Recognising that people are multidimensional, life stages are fluid and pain points specific, brands can tailor communications to their consumer. Ensuring content is always relevant, personalised and serviceable—whether your audience is in browse or search mode—enables a better consumer experience.

Humanising B2B: Unlocking the power of feeling seen

In a world where C-suite decision makers are as likely to read The Australian Financial Review as they are to watch The Project, the lines between B2B and B2C are increasingly blurring. Traditionally, B2B communications focused on understanding businesses and B2C on understanding consumer behaviour. However, it has never been more critical for those leading B2B engagement to take inspiration from their B2C counterparts and fully grasp the motivations of the people who are making the business and buying decisions.

Businesses will buy, but it's their people who decide what and from whom.

As Sonia David and Bill Zengel, ANA Business Marketing Practice discuss in the [2021 WARC Guide: Rethinking B2B Marketing](#), a spectrum of human emotions, from fear of errors in judgement to assurance seeking, happen during the buying journey, “[It’s] just as emotional as it is rational, and the experience is not one-size-fits-all.” In other words, business decisions, while researched and intentional, are also intuitive, or emotional.

What does this mean for brands communicating in the B2B space? While B2B communications tends to lean into rational communications and highlight the functional, the [WARC Guide](#) encourages communicators to show empathy and act as a partner by demonstrating knowledge of the industry and its challenges, and the solutions to help.

In this boundary-bending, personal-meets-professional workplace, the next generation of decision maker is emerging.

A 2020 study of 34,000 executives in 10 markets by research firm [The B2B Institute and GWI](#) found this new brand of executive is defined by their high adoption rates of digital tools and services, coupled with their preference for progressive, purpose-led brands forging new paths. For this gen, humanity is woven into business and creativity and empathy are rewarded, especially brands that share their values of inclusivity, innovation, gender equality and the environment.

SHOW MORE EMPATHY

That's the verdict of leaders from Microsoft and EY (Ernst & Young) who spoke on 'The New Growth Agenda' panel as part of The Drum and Stein IAS' [#B2BWorldFest](#) on how B2B marketing will evolve in 2021.

B2B marketers need to put themselves in the shoes of their partners and try to really understand what their needs and expectations are. If you nail that then you will take B2B to a place where it can accelerate growth.

Ravleen Beeston

Managing Director for UK Sales
MICROSOFT

The pandemic is putting brand purpose to its true test and forcing brands to back up personal words with action. Whether it is B2B or B2C, consumers have high expectations for the businesses they connect with. Brand purpose can't solely come out of the marketing department and has to be something that sits at the core of business discussions.

Ravleen Beeston

Managing Director for UK Sales
MICROSOFT

We need to think about how we tell the story more as marketers in the B2B space. What we do can be less cold and less specific to the B2B environment, and there can be more of a human conversation.

Toni Clayton-Hine

Chief Marketing Officer
EY AMERICAS

Changing channels: The new and fragmented media

In an era of fake news, social media polarisation and disputes over everything from climate change to the COVID-19 vaccine, where we get our news and who we trust is shifting rapidly. Two-thirds of Australians (64%) say they are concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet, reports [The Digital News Report: Australia 2020](#).

For brands, two things are very clear. Firstly, trust matters. As the UN encourages the public to cast “information cynicism” over everything they consume online, the value of a strong reputation that positions your organisation as a credible voice of authority cannot be underestimated. In building a brand’s online authority, earned search (SEO) is now more rewarded than ever. Ensuring this earned media and a brand’s owned channels are in sync builds trust.

Secondly, the ability to communicate with your audiences directly is more important than ever. But the attention economy means information needs to be delivered in a way that is immediately relevant, credible and engaging. While media is fragmented, what needs to be consistent is speaking to your audiences in their own language. Here’s how.

Meme news

For every significant news moment or trending topic, there will be hilarious memes to follow. However, memes can be more than just jokes—memes are often a visual news source. Younger audiences are consuming news in different ways and memes have become a powerful way to tell and share a story. When working with news publications to engage Gen Z and millennial audiences, brands need to remember that traditional articles are only one way to tell a story. The power of memes and highly relatable visual content cannot be underestimated.



Culture-jacking

IKEA Bernie Chair

Images from the Biden inauguration of a frozen Bernie Sanders in his mask and mittens went viral overnight. IKEA capitalised on the popularity of the meme by releasing an ad inviting people around the world to “get the look,” with hints to similar looking products including an IKEA folding chair and set of oven gloves.



Source: IKEA



Reputation building: The unexpected value of internal culture to your brand

If Rene Descartes was philosophising now, his iconic 1637 phrase ‘I think therefore I am’, may read more like this: ‘what I consume is who I am’. Today’s consumers choose brands that align with their personal values. They also have shifting expectations about what a brand is; it’s not just here to provide an item, but to improve the society and community in which it operates, both internally and externally.

As an extension of this, how an organisation treats its employees is crucial. The most telling and immediate community is an organisation’s people. Manifestos, mission statements and any number of culture propaganda aside, internal culture is simple: what happens inside your organisation is reflected outside of it. Where once leaders were able to wield a high degree of control over brand messages, given the proliferation of digital platforms and radical transparency around businesses, this control has been obliterated.

As the [‘glass box thinking’](#) theory explains, replacing the “black box” housing the inner workings of an organisation is a “glass box”, clearly visible, making your internal culture an aspect of your consumer-facing message. A positive workplace culture—when built with authenticity—is a powerful asset that builds reputations and connections.

Ben & Jerry’s

Often known for its activism and purposeful marketing campaigns, Ben & Jerry’s places people at the heart of everything they do. They are an organisation where employees decide what the company should be doing, with cohorts meeting often to advise senior management, operating on the mindset of “the higher you go the less you know.” This has resulted in campaigns that tackle prejudice against people’s sexuality with ice cream flavours such as I Dough, I Dough in Australia, EngageMint Party in Ireland and Apple-y Ever After in the UK.



Source: Ben & Jerry's

Reputation matters: How to build and protect

Reputation is built from your brand's authentic words and consistent purposeful actions working in synergy. The reputation of a brand impacts consumer sentiment, meaning that everything from how an organisation treats its employees, to a CEO's actions and reputation is linked to and affects brand value. As the **2021 WARC** report [How CEO reputation affects brand value](#) found, some of the biggest companies in the world have built their reputation on the reputation of their founders and CEOs. Highly-regarded leaders have the ability to enhance or damage corporate reputation, consumer loyalty, investor trust and more. As the CEO is responsible for articulating the vision and approving the brand strategy, a good personal reputation also reassures stakeholders the business is in safe hands.

To mitigate reputational risk, the CEO and leadership team must recognise any gaps between reputation reality and perception. With the proliferation of information and instant communications in our rapidly changing world, a call-out culture has evolved. [The Sprout Social Index, Edition XII: Call-out Culture](#) found almost one in two (46%) consumers have used social media to call out brands—consumers now can and do personally denounce bad behaviour by brands or leaders to the world.

What this means for communications

- Make your one-to-one dialogue between brand and audience relevant, personalised and serviceable, no matter what platform it lives on.
 - Businesses might buy, but it's their people who decide what and from whom, so understand the motivators of the next generation of B2B decision makers.
 - While media is undoubtedly fragmented and trust in traditional institutions is eroding, brands can fill the gap by creating a consistent and credible voice of authority.
- Internal culture forms an important component of your consumer-facing message—a positive workplace culture is a powerful asset.
 - Reputation is built from your brand and its leaders' authentic words and consistent purposeful actions, working in synergy.



03. CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS: THE AUDIENCE OF NOW

The pandemic drew the spotlight toward our shared experiences but also our differences—we were in the same storm, but not in the same boat. Connecting with audiences, we must understand what drives them, what they love, what their challenges are and what they might need in the future.

While conventional drivers such as price and convenience remain important in buying decisions, as the emerging Generation Z becomes a key consumer group, new evolving drivers, such as “conscious consumerism”, have come to the forefront. Already GenZers have their own unique and defining experiences, namely an unprecedented health crisis and accompanying mental health pandemic. Making meaningful connections with them hinges on speaking their pragmatic, optimistic and altruistic language.



Gen Z consumers are informed, with high demands and even higher expectations.

The growing power of consumer choice

As we watch the world jolt and jerk in different directions across any number of issues, socially conscious values have come into focus. We are re-evaluating what's important, advocating for doing the right thing and rewarding brands willing to make tangible actions. Awareness about the impact of a purchase decision is not a new concept. But the omnipresence of the conscious consumer willing to shun brands if silent on environmental or social matters, is new.

Though in an era of cancel culture (when people withdraw, or 'cancel', support for public figures or companies after they have done or said something they consider objectionable or offensive) and brand boycotting, effective socially-conscious branding can be a risky task. If done authentically and consistently, with values visible in every consumer interaction and every business action, it becomes truly meaningful. Simply piggybacking on social issues for brand benefit on the other hand, can be disastrous.

When it backfires:

At the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, many brands publicly pledged their support for the Black community. As the [Huffington Post](#) reported: “Sharon Chuter, founder of Uoma Beauty, noticed that many brands shared messages of support by posting black squares as part of #BlackOutTuesday and making one-time donations—without actually taking the time to reflect on how they directly contribute to racial injustice. She called on these companies to ‘pull up’ by sharing the number of Black people they employ at a corporate level. Chuter said “taking brands to task was the only way to move the conversation forward.” #PullUpForChange gave brands 72 hours after posting a message of support to release the number of Black employees and then asked customers to refrain from shopping with any brand that did not disclose those numbers publicly. The movement led thousands of brands to acknowledge and address their shortcomings, and be more transparent with their steps to making change.



Source: @pullupforchange

When it works:

LEGO®: Everyone is Awesome

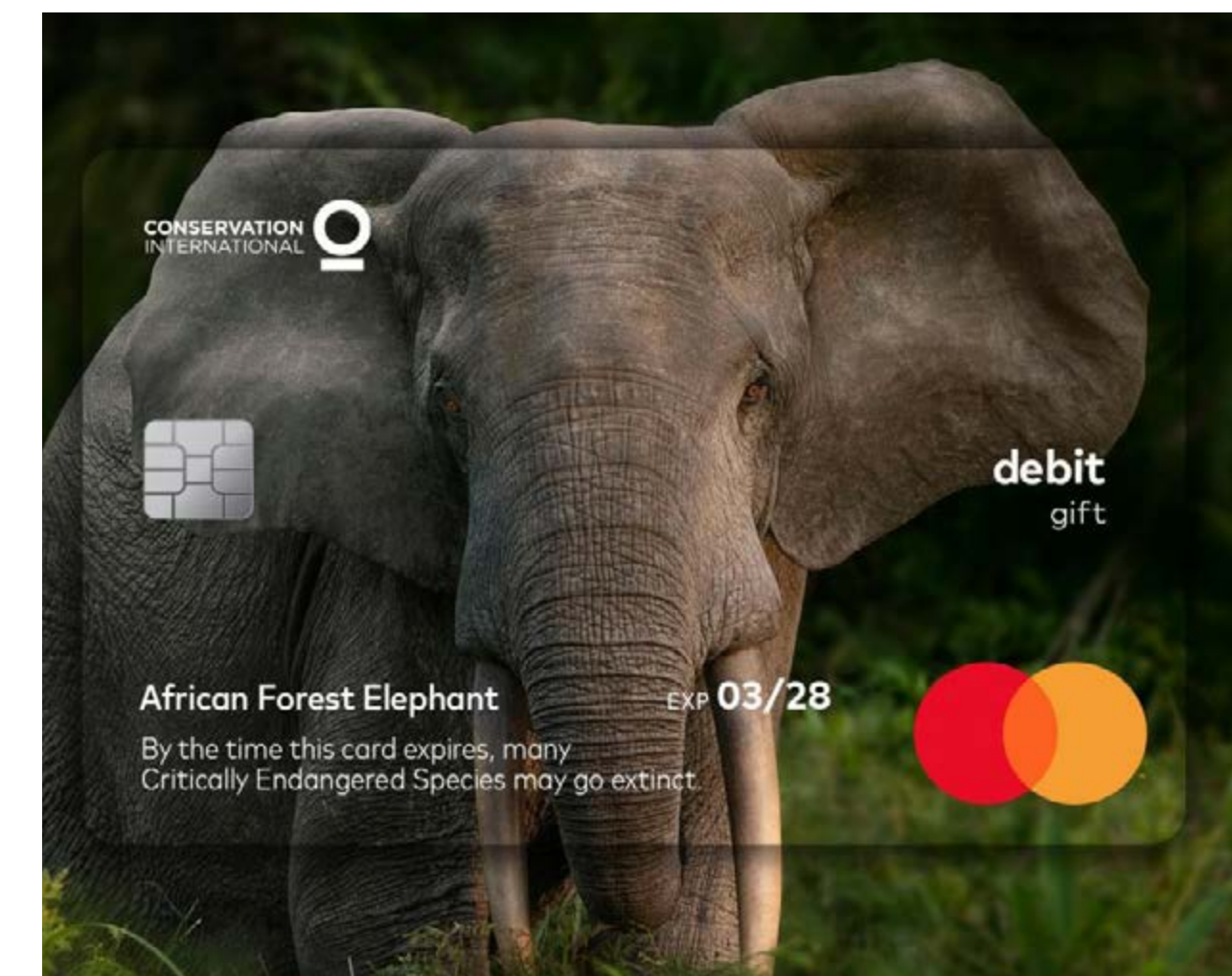
In the leadup to Pride Month 2021, Lego added 11 new minifigures to their collection, all brightly coloured to represent the LGBTIQ+ community. The new characters gave a nod to the colours of the original rainbow flag, black and brown to represent the diversity of the community and pale blue, white and pink for those who are transgender. None of these figures have a set gender (with the exception of a purple drag queen), with the group conveying a strong sense of individuality and inclusivity.



Source: LEGO®

Mastercard: The Wildlife Impact Card

To raise awareness of habitats and critically endangered species, Mastercard partnered with Conservation International to release gift cards with expiration dates that indicate possible extinction dates of various endangered animals. The cards, made from 100% recycled plastic, also give money from each card's purchase to charities focused on this issue, creating both awareness and much needed donations.



Source: Mastercard

Generation COVID and the mental health pandemic

History is a series of moments that define a generation: Baby Boomers and the moon landing, Gen X and the fall of the Berlin Wall, Gen Y (Millennials) and the global financial crisis. For Generation Z (born 1995-2009) and Generation Alpha (born since 2010) it will be COVID-19, reports McCrindle in their 2020 research [Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on the Emerging Generations](#).

According to the report, the age at which we are exposed to a transformative event determines how embedded in our psyche it remains. For Gens Z and Alpha, COVID-19 came at a formative stage of life throwing their plans and dreams into chaos. Combined with financial hardships and a relentless negative news cycle, this has created an environment ripe for mental health challenges—[Headspace](#) reported up to a 40 per cent increase in counselling services for this group during the pandemic—with the long-term impacts unknown.

What does this mean for brands? Understanding the issues and challenges impacting audiences is crucial if brands are to make meaningful connections.

Leading media companies are now helping consumers support their mental health by encouraging calming techniques. Netflix has launched Headspace's Guide to Meditation and Google has announced plans to collaborate with Headspace on a new mindfulness resource for kids.



Source: Netflix

When Naomi Osaka, ranked number two in the Women's Tennis Association and the highest-paid female athlete in the world, recently announced on social media that she was skipping press conferences during the French Open to protect her mental health, she was fined \$15,000. In a public show of support for standing up for her mental health, the company behind meditation and mindfulness app CALM, announced it would pay Osaka's fine (and the fine of any other player opting out of media appearances for mental health reasons during the 2021 Grand Slam) and match it with a \$15,000 donation to charity. As [Forbes](#) said of this action by CALM: "Talk about putting your money where your mission is."



Photo by Darrian Traynor/Getty Images



From 'me' to 'we': A positive outlook

While Gen Z may forever be known as Generation COVID, the thinking is that they will lead the world in pandemic recovery. They are the generation turning 'me' into 'we', defined by an ambitious individualism meets altruistic collectivism—and given their age (currently between six and 24 years old), they are just getting started. As the 2020 [Doom, Gloom and Boom Junkee Media report](#) found “despite everything, young Aussies are a resilient bunch.” Two in three 16-35-year-olds report currently being happy in their lives.

Instead of despair, the outlook is positive, which [Google Trends 2020](#) data also highlights. Last year we looked for a better future more than we wished to return to the past. “How to change the world” was searched twice as much as “how to go back to normal.” Meanwhile, we looked for ways to show we cared. “Compassion” was searched more in 2020 than any other time in history. While the world is changing, people are too, looking for the positives and focusing on the rebuild.

Brands that mirror this same optimism and positivity to rebuild better than before will be rewarded.

H&M One Second Suit

As the pandemic started to lift and millions were left struggling to find employment, H&M released a campaign to help people put their best foot forward for upcoming job interviews. The One Second Suit campaign allowed men to book suits, have them delivered and returned within 24 hours with no cost attached. This global campaign helped build people's confidence during a tough time for everyone globally and had the added bonus of demonstrating the H&M brand's continued commitment to sustainability.



Source: H&M, film directed by Mark Romanek

Consuming with feeling: From experience to the economy of things

Pragmatic, analytical, connected, global, social and visual: a lot can be said about younger generations. While COVID-19 inspired them to look at their careers differently, what they wanted from life was already shifting prior to the pandemic.

Across generations, the “experience economy” is declining, with the focus moving to tangible, aspirational products—even if conventional. The [2020 Junkee Media Youth Research](#) found that two in three 16-35 year-old Australians still measure owning a home as a success, a change from previous generations’ desire for ‘experiences’ such as travel. Rather than the hedonistic consumerism of the past though, today’s tangible products and aspirations are about feelings of “control, safety, empowerment and self-care”, and the research found younger audiences are focused on creating a sanctuary at home.

The consumer crystal ball: Predicting the future

Staying abreast of rapid changes in consumer behaviour while servicing your existing customers is critical. Brands must prepare today for the values-driven consumer of tomorrow, optimising systems, products, offerings, services, communications and infrastructure. As Charlene Li from research firm Altimeter recently told a October 2020 [WARC digital event](#), “If you try to build for the customer today, once you’ve finished building, they [will] have moved on...But if you aim for where they are going to, and get there just as they get there, you will be ahead of your competition.”

What this means for communications

- A brand’s stance on social issues prompts the same purchase intent as promotion of product features when done authentically and consistently.
- Be mindful of Gen Z’s context when connecting, especially the mental health pandemic they are experiencing.
- Instead of returning to old ways, be optimistic and future-focused, mirroring positive consumer sentiment.
- Understand that the economy of things is still about consumers buying into the emotion that a tangible product provides.
- The deeper into the consumer crystal ball brands can look, intimately knowing their customer of today and predicting tomorrow’s, the more successful they can be.



04. THE POWER OF PURPOSE: UNLOCKING AN ASSET

People are now paying more attention to those brands demonstrating purposeful action and those that are not and are simply pretending. Genuinely purposeful brands have a true and consistent “why” at the core of every interaction and operation, while the pretenders are often just really good at promoting reactionary isolated initiatives when it suits them.

In the past, companies have been able to put on a good show when it comes to socially conscious behaviours. But now those efforts are under the microscope. Consumers are demanding new levels of authenticity—empty acts or co-opted causes only lead to anger and, in some cases, brand “cancellation”.



Demystifying purpose: The ‘why’ made simple

Let’s make it clear.

pur·pose / ‘pərpəs /

Noun: The reason why something exists. For brands, it’s the basis of every moment, interaction and decision. It’s not about products, but about what you do as a company that makes you essential and relevant.

Purpose paves the way to growth. [Jim Stengel & Co](#) found purpose-oriented companies have higher productivity and growth rates, along with a more satisfied workforce that stays longer. Understanding your brand’s unique purpose allows you to live up to consumer expectations, contribute to society and connect the ‘why’ with the ‘way’ of profit. Today’s brands don’t exist to make a profit, they make a profit in order to exist, stay relevant and fulfill their true purpose.

If it does not fit through your purpose filter, then it does not fit with your brand. Full stop. When it comes to purpose that is authentic and consistent, there's no room for qualifiers or asterisks.

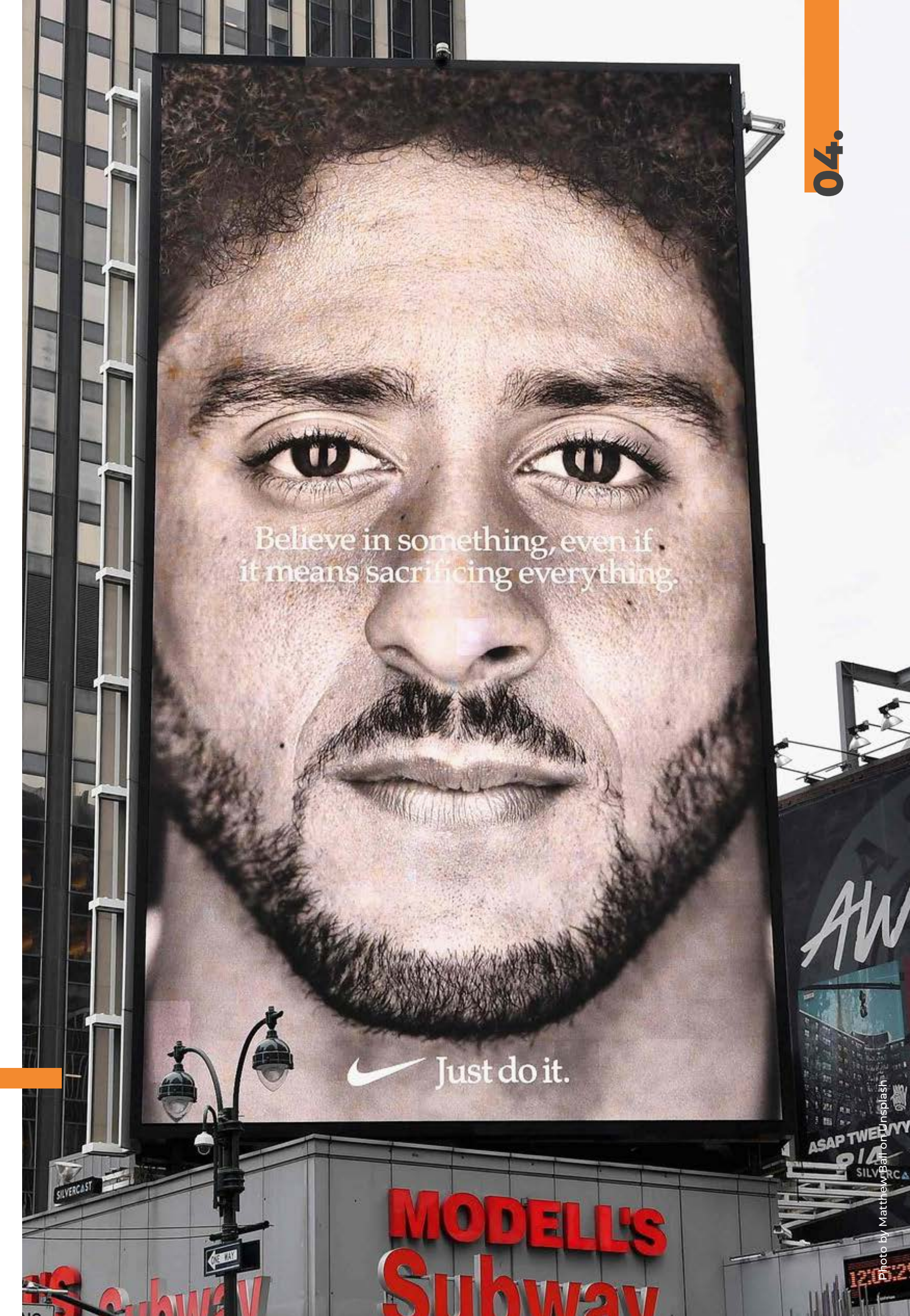
Building brand equity through purposeful action

No longer can brands rely on the weight of their heritage, low price point, or perceived quality of their goods for brand equity. Consumers are calling for not just purpose, but purposeful action across sustainability, justice and social impact. Les Binet and [Peter Field](#) find there are the two undulating lines of growth representing short-term, performance marketing and longer-term, incremental brand building. Purpose falls into the long-term, building reputation. Connecting with your purpose is more than small acts or promises. The goal should be being part of

transformational long-term change. Audiences are hungry for information that explains precisely what a brand's values and initiatives are, so they are better educated to make choices to purchase and support brands creating real impact.

Corporate activism, where a company takes a public stance to positively impact social change or legislation, is increasingly rewarded with product or service purchase intent, and investor support. Brands that take a stand to help drive change to solve the most urgent problems facing society based on their beliefs, purpose and values gain loyal communities and advocates. Consistency also separates the genuine from the tokenistic with purpose needing a year-round approach, embedded into the fabric of how consumers and employees are treated. Activate only around key dates like Mardi Gras and International Women's Day, without truly diverse policies and culture, and your brand risks being criticised for "rainbow-washing".

Transparency as a currency is critical.



Source: Widen + Kennedy

Anti-Black Friday campaigns

This year has seen some fashion and retail brands boycott overconsumption and the notoriously frenzied Black Friday sales, known to encourage mania and impulse buying. With hyper-consumerism one of the biggest threats to the planet, high-profile brands such as IKEA, Cards Against Humanity and Deciem have led calls for change in the way people consume goods.

Black Fridye by Citizen Wolf

Australian fashion label Citizen Wolf piggybacked on the back of the Black Friday sales hype to create a movement that called on consumers to redye their garments black to give them a second life and “save the planet”, while highlighting the fashion industry’s impact on the environment.



Source: Citizen Wolf & For Good Design Lab

What this means for communications

- When it comes to purpose that is authentic, consistent and paves the way to growth, there is no room for qualifiers or asterisks.
- Brands must take a real, always-on stand for the consumers and causes they care about.



05. MAKE YOUR GREEN SEEN: COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY

No longer a nice-to-have, sustainability is now top of boardroom agendas across the world. With the increase in regulation, shareholder activism, employee expectation and consumer demand, companies considering jumping on the sustainability bandwagon now have the right incentives in place.

The question most commonly asked is: How can anyone stand out when every company is announcing their roadmap to achieving net-zero emissions and working hard to create a better world?

Companies need to do more than just comply; they need to lead. They need to consider their unique role in supporting transformational change, that can be found at the convergence of [social and environmental needs, and what the company does best.](#)



Being a corporate leader in sustainability requires bravery; to move before all the data is available, invest money in the short-term knowing it is a long-term game, take bets on emerging technologies and change the way the company operates.

Increasingly, the community is looking to big business, rather than government, to move Australia towards the net zero target we want to reach.

To be seen and trusted as a sustainable business, taking positive steps to reduce impact on the environment is also contingent on how well you communicate the actions you are taking, and why.

There are several factors that will contribute to how well a company communicates, from the narrative that shapes the company's actions and the earning of a social licence to operate, to putting substance behind the promises the company makes. Companies need to be seen as both inspiring and authentic; taking a shortcut is a sure-fire path to being called out for greenwashing.

The power of a clear narrative

A clear communications narrative is one of the most important tools a brand has to embed sustainability into its very fabric. This narrative can become the "north star" as a company works towards ambitious targets. Serious organisational change can only be achieved if everyone is actively playing their role across the company. For employees, it provides clarity, enables aligned decision making and inspires action while bringing external stakeholders on the journey.

An unwritten agreement: Social licence to operate

The premise of the social licence to operate requires companies to consider, respect and abide by community concerns, not simply market dynamics and shareholder interests, to retain credibility, relevance and, effectively, the unwritten right to continue operations. This concept is now inserted in everything from CEO keynotes to sustainability reports to investors. Its appeal is both in that it can never be self-granted, nor directly controlled by brands, though transparency and accountability do influence it.

Internal and external stakeholders are looking for deeper disclosure and transparency to establish ongoing trust in companies and brands. They expect companies to share their learnings and demonstrate evolving commitments to earn trust and build social capital.

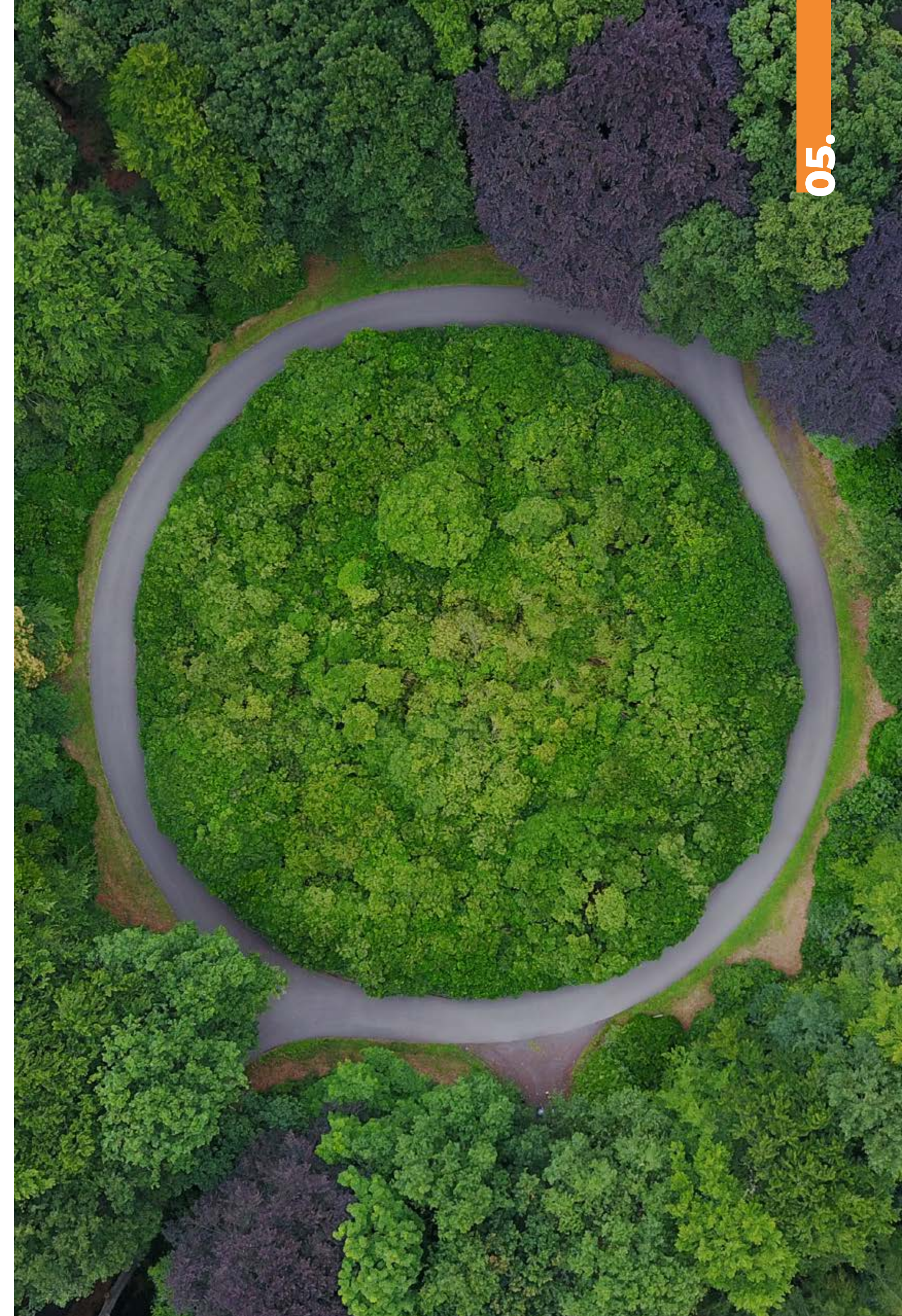
Promises and pretences: Act with meaning and intent

The conundrum is that while ethical companies are incentivised to act for good, less ethical companies are incentivised to engage in greenwashing.

Today, there are still companies talking about ethical production while using child labour in their supply chain, or touting decarbonisation targets on Earth Day with no tangible metrics, actions or transparent reporting in place.

‘Hello I’m a Paper Bottle’ is a case in point. Cosmetics brand Innisfree reduced the plastic in its bottles by 51.8% which is commendable, but instead of explaining this factually, proclaimed on its bottles: ‘Hello, I’m a Paper Bottle’. With early prototypes of paper bottles being tested and piloted by [Omo](#) and [Coke](#), the paper bottle is now something consumers are starting to think about, and Innisfree tried to ride that wave. Consumers called the company to account and Innisfree apologised “for failing to deliver information in a precise way.”

Cutting corners never pays. Examples like this only fuel consumer frustration and make them less likely to engage in conversations with brands that are genuinely making progress towards tangible targets. It has never been more important for brands to take consumers on the sustainability journey. With the inevitable trade-offs between performance, look and sustainability that will continue to be made in the coming years as innovation progresses, brands need to let consumers in on the reasons behind their decision-making. Only then will consumers see the real progress made and how brands are contributing to a better planet. The more greenwashing that takes place, the harder it will be for brands to collectively drive meaningful change.





Playing the long game

Sustainability is not a short-term strategy. It might be a point of differentiation today, but in five years' time, it will only be a point of difference for those that are left behind.

Companies need to take a serious long-term approach to communicating sustainability efforts to build social capital, reputation, and stakeholder value. This will help attract top talent and create a platform to demonstrate aligned values with key audiences.

Case study

Lush

Known for its ethical and sustainable approach to cosmetics, is looking ahead to regenerative methods that help conserve and rehabilitate the planet. Their projects with regenerative agriculture specialists, [reNature](#), seek to demonstrate regenerative methods make business sense while benefiting people, communities and the environment. To raise awareness of their mission Lush has introduced products like the [Cork Pot](#) which contributes to regenerating forests where it is harvested; while enabling Lush to spark conversations about the importance of regenerative farming.



Photo by Olena Sergienko on Unsplash

WHAT IS WORKING?

Staying a step ahead

Lush is looking beyond present-day ESG expectations and in doing so, showing leadership within the cosmetics industry.

Bravery

Lush is setting out to prove that regenerative farming makes business sense which means investing before all the data is available.

Making it tangible

By creating a product that links to the brand's work in regenerative farming, it can talk to consumers about the bigger actions it is taking in line with its purpose and values.

Case study

New Zealand Tourism

The travel industry has been in crisis since the start of COVID, but with the absence of travel, a spotlight has been put on the negative impacts the industry has been having across the world. Travel contributes to carbon emissions and environmental damage. It results in an extraordinary amount of waste and can make popular areas unliveable for local populations. [New Zealand Tourism](#) is rethinking travel and finding ways for tourism to give back more than it takes by embracing and enabling regeneration.



WHAT IS WORKING?



Turning a crisis into an opportunity

that will safeguard the industry in the long-term and differentiate New Zealand from other tourist destinations.



Authenticity

Regenerative tourism goes back to the country's roots and embraces the ethos of "guardianship over the country" (tiaki) from Māori culture.



Empowerment

At a time when awareness of the impact of travel on our environment has never been higher, New Zealand Tourism is giving people a meaningful role to be part of the change.

What this means for communications



Sustainability has gone from 'nice to have' to necessity—a core part of the company's purpose, not an add-on.



Companies need to take a long-term approach to communicating sustainability efforts to build social capital, reputation, and stakeholder value.



There is a significant business opportunity for companies that do more than tick boxes and define a meaningful role in supporting the sustainable development agenda.



06. THE WAY FORWARD

As we live through a time of global upheaval, it is fair to say we have experienced a collective awakening. Consumer behaviours have changed drastically, as people seek and demand information and connection whenever and wherever the mood strikes them—often while doing something else and on multiple devices. We have seen the birth of a new, more humane and intuitive decision maker. Alongside this, as conventional media channels fragment and new technologies emerge, consumer expectations of those in power to do better have surged.

Transparency, culture and reputation have become valuable currency in today's rapid change world.

As the power of consumers grows, brands must lean into this unprecedented opportunity, taking a stand and putting people where they belong—at the centre of every thought and action. Earning the right to the consumer relationship relies on connecting on authentically shared values.

Just as brands must intimately know their consumers and what matters most to them, they must also know intimately—and consistently act on—their purpose to build and protect reputation. Unlocking the powerful asset of purpose will help drive deeper connections with consumers and business customers, and improve competitiveness. Key to this is having a clearly communicated role in building a sustainable, circular economy for future generations.

The opportunity for companies and brands is the promise of authentic actions and communication that builds trust and reputation, and deeply connects brands with their value-aligned, purpose-led communities. This is the communication that matters.

Contact us to discuss
what these trends
mean for your brand
reputation and how
Sefiani can help

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