



Marketing Messages

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Survey shows that you need a social strategy for your brand

Have you noticed a subtle trend lately? Companies are donating profits to good causes. Charities are hooking up with brands. Brands are launching their own causes. Environmental issues are becoming mainstream. It would appear that corporate consciousness is growing. Often it's altruistic and sometimes it's about brand building, but undeniably it's because business has realized that consumers are demanding it.

Having a social strategy may well be the latest buzz, but brands where a social strategy has been at the core of their brand promise since inception, long ago realized the power it can yield. For those genuinely social conscious brands, it was more about sharing customer values than becoming a successful brand. But when it's honest and those shared values make an emotional connection with customers, good brands become great brands. They own a distinctive position in the marketplace and often keep their customers for life.

Let's look at some research on just how powerful this need for a social strategy has become. I recently undertook a study with **Pollara**, a Canadian national public opinion and market research firm. In a poll of 1,206 people across Canada we asked:

- How important is it to deal with companies that care about the community they conduct business in?
- How important is it to deal with businesses that make the world a better place through their actions?
- Does an ad. which demonstrates social responsibility resonate with you?

Survey result highlights:

On the importance of dealing with companies that care about the community they conduct business in:

87% of women and 78% of men said this was important to them. These are strong numbers. They get even higher, up to 90% for women aged 35-54 years. These numbers are a real heads up if you sell to women. Although the movement seems strongest in the Atlantic Provinces, 80% of British Columbians said it was important to them.

On the importance of dealing with a business that makes the world a better place through their actions:

Again women are consistently higher than men. 84% of women and 76% of men agreed. Curiously 80% in Greater Toronto said it was important to them, while 66% in Greater Vancouver said it was. Intuitively we think of the west coast as the heartland for this stuff. It's where the co-op style business model used by successful companies such as MEC and Vancity has been enormously successful. Perhaps it's fall-out from corporate greed in a head office town. Or maybe we on the coast just take it for granted by now. Regardless, the numbers are still strong here and you should take note. And if you're expanding back east, say you heard it here first.

On whether an ad that demonstrates social responsibility resonates with them:

The female skew remained consistent here. Baby boomer women in particular, those 35-54 years old, care a lot about this. There also appeared to be an education effect. The more highly educated, the more the respondent was apt to care. Upper and middle-income earners cared the most, while those with low income or those with very high incomes cared much less.

What does it all mean? It means having a social strategy is important. And if your business targets customers where the sensitivity to the issue is elevated, it is even more important. Just look to the success of locally founded Mountain Equipment Coop. Their core values state: "We conduct ourselves ethically and with integrity. We show respect for others in our words and actions. We act in the spirit of community and co-operation. We respect and protect our natural environment. We strive for personal growth and continual learning." "These aren't just words", notes Peter ter Weeme, Manager of Communications and Marketing at MEC, "It's what we actually deliver". And they just happen to have sold \$225 million in products for wilderness recreation pursuits this year doing it. Ter Weeme, soon to be launching his own company, Juxion Strategy, recognizes the social strategy trend. Juxion Strategy will help businesses with their commitments to sustainability and social marketing.

Consumers are increasingly looking for sources of meaning and trust. They're looking deeper, and they're turning to brands that support their values and connect with them on an emotional level.

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