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B2B Marketing

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Putting the why first: How brand purpose impacts business



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Comment

Finding the ‘why’: Voice, values and vision



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No matter how sophisticated we get, the fundamentals of marketing stay the same. Get the message right. Deliver it to the right people, at the right time.

Understanding what your audience think, how they buy, what they believe and what they value allows you to make a credible case that your brand either shares their values or can contribute to the things they care about in a meaningful and personal way.

That meaning comes from being able to articulate a clear brand purpose, to land your ‘why’. But when it comes to landing their why, B2B often encounters a mental block.

This is an issue. Anyone who’s been involved in a big-ticket new business sale will know not to underestimate the power of emotion or ‘gut’ in purchase decisions. Decisions are made by human beings whose experience in the consumer world, with brands like Apple, Uber and Amazon, has raised the bar for what they expect from the B2B brands they interact with.

So explaining what you do doesn’t cut it any more. To resonate, people need to know *who* you are and *why* you do it.

If that sounds like marketing fluff, think about this:

We’ve all heard of Tesla. Customers buy Tesla’s products because the firm’s stated purpose, “to accelerate the world’s transition to sustainable energy”, is relevant to their lives.

And people who work for Tesla are driven by the same purpose. “Putting in long hours for a corporation is hard,” says controversial Tesla founder Elon Musk. “Putting in long hours for a cause is easy.”

That’s why the first thing we do before we guide clients through the ‘how’ of events, digital marketing and content, is to help them define their ‘why’, their values and their voice.

This is vital, not only does it significantly increase their chances of finding and resonating with customers whose values align, but it’s the rule of thumb that every decision and strategy can be measured against.

‘Why’ is the lighthouse that ensures everything and everyone in your business is pulling in the same direction.

Introduction

Every company knows what they're doing and how they do it. But do they really understand why they're doing it?

What makes your employees care about their jobs? What turns your customers into brand ambassadors? What keeps a company turning a profit in a constantly evolving world? The answer is purpose.

Most companies understand what their customers want. But in today's competitive landscape, focusing solely on the products they buy or the profit they generate isn't going to cut it. Marketers have to connect with what drives their staff and customers – the emotion behind the action.

To do it, they must to go deep inside the organisation and connect its beating heart to that of its customers and staff.



Section 1

The what, the how the why

1.1 Getting to the heart of the business

To find the heart of the business you must uncover its three important truths, the what, how and why.

- **What:** The output of a company – its products or services or offerings – is what it does.
- **How:** You must then understand how the company produces and delivers those things – i.e. what makes them different and special.
- **Why:** The 'why' is the emotional drive or purpose behind the 'what' and 'how'. It encapsulates why employees are committed to their job and why customers don't just buy your products but love your brand.

For many decades companies focused on what they produced and how they did it, but successful modern marketers are now all about the why. Within this report we'll take you through why this fundamental landscape shift is occurring, how to get onboard, and the benefits of doing so.

1.2 What *is* brand purpose?

Churchill gave people purpose in their darkest hour. "We shall never surrender," was his rallying cry to the public. Its powerful rhetoric brought the country together, unified by a common goal. Let's face it, he wouldn't have had the same reaction if he'd merely said: "Let's fight the Nazis".

But a brand's purpose is not just about tapping into the power of words, it's about the way marketing – through words and actions – affects our emotional state.

A great brand purpose will create intrigue, enthusiasm, trust and a sense of connection. It will play to the emotional drivers that lead to a purchase, which can really give marketers the edge.

"It's about the way marketing – through words and actions – affects our emotional state."

Simon says

The 'what', 'how' and 'why' of a business make up what leadership expert and author Simon Sinek coined as 'The golden circle'. He used this term to explain how to create a strong value proposition in his TED Talk, which with more than 38 million viewers is one of the most popular of all time.

1.3 The benefits of building your brand purpose

Traditional marketing methods seek to manipulate purchase decisions by tweaking a product's price, promotion or claims about its worth. But these methods have limited reward. Offering promotions or dropping the price will eventually erode profit margin and these transactional efforts usually equate to one-off purchases.

Marketers who focus on the brand purpose are those who inspire, rather than manipulate. They make customers so engaged with their business that they become uninterested in their rivals. And, having bought into the collective ethos rather than the singular product, they are more prepared to pay a premium.



Customers that are NOT connected to your purpose

- Purchase from you because they need to.
- Are easily seduced by cheaper or more engaging competitors.
- Are less likely to buy your other products and services.
- Don't advocate for your brand.

Customers that ARE connected to your purpose

- Purchase from you because they need AND want to.
- Are loyal to your brand and are repeat customers.
- Trust you and will buy your other products and services.
- Act as advocates of your company.

Section 2

The heart of the matter

2.1 It's not just what you offer, it's who you are

We all want to spend our time with good people, and it's no different when scaled to a company level. A company's purpose shouldn't just be about profit. It's about people, community and wellbeing.

It wasn't always like this. For many decades the primary (and often the only) driving force between a business and its customers was profit. This heady and blatant desire for ROI reached its zenith in the 80s, before succumbing to the call for greater good. Today, people want meaning. They want brands that connect with them on a personal level, and companies that contribute more to the world than just pure business.

Those that are driven only by profit – and not by purpose, passion and vision – are not only becoming antiquated but are at a higher risk of corporate wrongdoing. A clear 'why' offers a rule of thumb, reminding a business to align its actions and decisions with its ultimate purpose. This can allow a company to identify potential mistakes before they become catastrophes.



The true cost of profit over purpose

Volkswagen's decision to falsify the emissions on its diesel engines meant 11 million cars were released onto the market having intentionally evaded regulatory standards and violating the Clean Air Act. Three days after the fraud was announced in September 2015, the company's share price had fallen by a third. It's thought the decision will cost Volkswagen at least €16.2 billion to rectify, not to mention the huge loss of revenue.

All this was the result of profit over purpose. Had those responsible been better attuned to Volkswagen's commitment to brand equity, consumer trust and corporate social responsibility, all this would have been avoided.

CSR sense check

People will draw a link between brand marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) whether that link exists or not. Ethical efforts can build trust, morale and recognition for your brand, both internally and externally. But unless these efforts are aligned to your stated purpose, there's a risk that you'll lack authenticity.

- Start by auditing the emotions your company currently evokes in regard to its effects on society.
- Assess your current efforts in CSR – from diversity in the workplace, to charity support or how much environmental waste your business produces.
- Look at the touchpoints where your company interacts with the outside world, from customers to the supply chain – how do you affect this community and what makes you proud to shout about?



Section 3

Purpose in practice

The 'Why' behind Electrium and Castrol

We spoke with two B2B brands that have stood the test of time – electrical manufacturer, Siemens Electrium, and international lubricant manufacturer, Castrol – about how to gain and maintain success through purpose.

3.1 What's your motivation?

"I'm not sure Steve Jobs had any idea of the brand he was building when he set out. But he may well have had an idea of what he wanted to give to his customers and how the product was going to be experienced," says Mike Cash, channel and group marketing manager at Electrium. "He set out to create that experience and the ROI began its journey much further down the line than the first product."

Mike argues that without a strong sense of the company's initial motivation for its existence, and a focus on what the customer will experience, brands will struggle to find the 'why'.

Electrium's sense of purpose helps to maintain the ethics and value of the businesses, and without these "the brands would have failed and faded away," Mike says. The brands sitting beneath Siemens Electrium – Wylex and Crabtree – must also embody the company's purpose: to deliver quality, safety and excellent engineering.

For Mike, it's all about connecting with the customer. "A brand is a non-entity until a customer has an experience with a product or service. You don't gain a reputation by just promoting the brand," Mike explains.

Approaching a strong brand from this angle – the inside-out, purpose-first way – is a great way to attract and keep customers. "You have to know exactly what your proposition and objectives are, and then you have to brand it in a way that gives the right message," he adds. Having this strong proposition is essential at the outset. And for a business like Electrium, that means continuing the way the founders intended the company to be led through its purpose, and consistently maintaining its success.

Electrium at-a-glance

One of the UK's largest electrical manufacturers, Siemens Electrium has several subsidiary brands including Crabtree and Wylex - both created in the early 1900s to take advantage of the rise in the availability of electricity.

Wylex

The What: Wylex makes protective devices for installations in homes, offices and commercial premises.
The Why: To protect the structure of installations and their users from the dangers that can arise from faulty electrical equipment.

Crabtree

The What: Creates wiring accessories such as electrical socket outlets that allow the safe use of electricity for everyone.
The Why: To protect its customers, ensuring everyday living is safe.

3.2 How are you feeling?

"Brands are inherently emotive. You have to lead with an insight that triggers a shift in emotion, making them more likely to notice and consider your product," says Zoe Chapman, global offer development manager at Castrol.

"The question is, 'how does it make you feel?' You can't build a successful brand without considering how customers feel when they interact with it."

For Castrol, Zoe says this purpose is all about making life run better with great products. The phrase used internally is 'We keep the world moving', whether that's your business, car, truck, or even the QEII. Castrol keeps shipping lanes open and companies productive, propelling them to create profit.

She describes Castrol's main product – its lubricant – as "a pack of amazing, cutting-edge chemistry", and the brand and its purpose do the rest. "It's being able to package the benefits and sell it in an engaging way that makes people think and do something differently.

"Otherwise," she says, "our products could be perceived as just a commodity, just a functional fluid that goes into an engine."

Castrol at-a-glance

The What: Castrol is a global manufacturer of industrial and automotive lubricants, sold in over 150 countries.
The Why: Internally, Castrol's purpose to lubricate the wheel of global commerce translates to the mission statement: 'We keep the world moving'.

3.3 Consistent excellence in a changing world

Wylex, one of the subsidiaries of Siemens Electrium, has been a market leader for generations. Mike puts this down to the trust built over years of consistent delivery of quality, safety and excellent engineering, which are all core to the company's purpose. "Products have a finite life," says Mike. "Their function gets usurped by another development." Brand purpose, however, has more staying power.

Crabtree, another of the Siemens Electrium brands, was formed in 1919 with the motto, "that which is built soundly endures well". At the time the phrase was meant to engender high standards within the workforce. Almost 100 years later, it's the brand that has endured.

Thinking of a brand as more than simply a suite of products can go a long way to keeping it healthy. These legacies mean as much to Electrium's customers as they do to its employees, who have a strong sense of duty to maintain a steady, infallible reputation. "Someone created these brands for us and we're the custodians of it," says Mike. "It's our duty to keep them going."

3.4 The lighthouse statement

Brand purpose can act like a lighthouse; constant, immovable and there to direct the business through its changing environment.

Castrol's mission, 'We keep the world moving', is its lighthouse statement. How they fulfil this purpose can be flexible, provided the business keeps the lighthouse in sight. "We're always moving forward," says Zoe. "It's good for building advocacy and credibility and provides assurance that you're dealing with a trustworthy brand."

It also means Castrol has a constant purpose to steer by. This makes the business flexible in ways a product-focused brand is not.

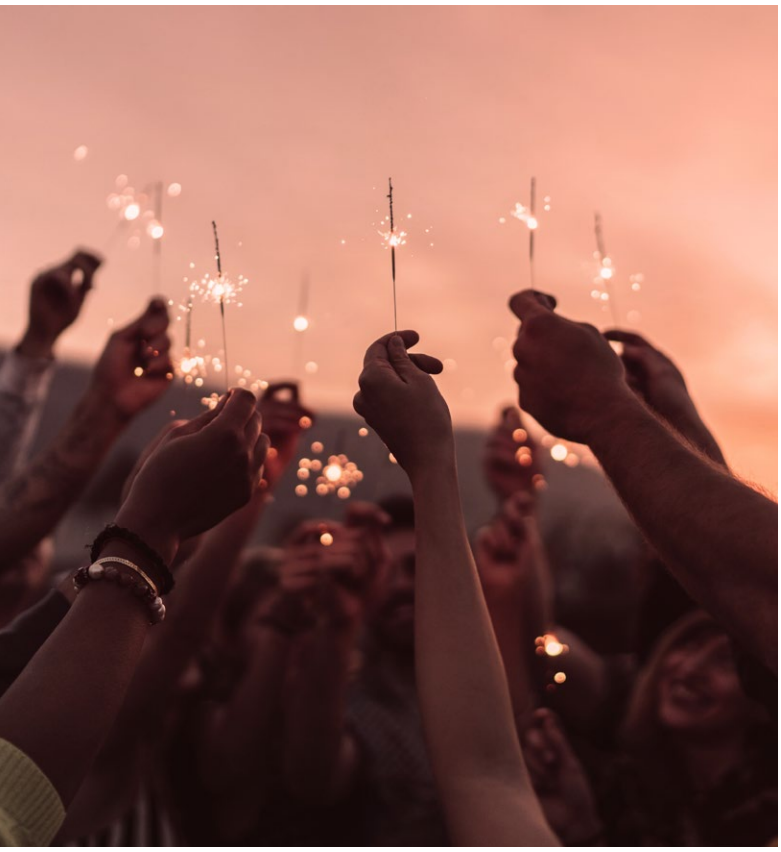
As the world changes and business priorities shift, Castrol will benefit from the brand's umbrella of credibility so long as it supports the lighthouse statement. So long as it helps keep the world moving.

Section 4

Building an army of advocates

A clear purpose gives customers and employees something to fall in love with, not only becoming more loyal themselves but shouting about your business to the wider world.

This starts at home, and for staff it's about seeing the importance of their role within the context of the company – they want to feel in it together, all focused on achieving something amazing. That collective goal is the company purpose and celebrating it creates a powerful energy that can fuel greater innovation and creativity.



4.1 Electrium on engagement

Mike describes Electrium's employees as "custodians" of a brand that's been growing for more than a century. Yet he admits: "Asking them to stay on point, stick with the principles, and sell our products at a premium price can be difficult."

Driving home the message to employees, regularly and consistently, should be part of every company's strategy. "We publish our strategy and objectives and report in our monthly briefs the progress being made against them, so the business understands our method of delivery and strategy," he explains.

Everyone from the shop floor to the MD gets to see the same information, which drives advocacy and helps to push the brand's message throughout every area of the company.

4.2 Commitment at Castrol

Zoe at Castrol says wearing a company's logo on your clothes is a symbol of this commitment. "People are quite happy to wear a Castrol shirt to the office or walk around with our brand on their clothing in their own time," she says. "They're happy to be ambassadors.

"You can't have a strong brand unless you have pure advocates," she adds. "They're not born overnight but over time, through recognition and empowerment – and in realising that the brand means something to them, their behaviour changes as a result."

Once you've achieved this commitment from your employees, once they're walking, talking adverts for your brand, invest in it, use them to cascade positive messages about the brand internally and externally.

Castrol uses different internal tools to instil a sense of united pride in its company purpose, such as competitions to win Castrol-powered experiences, or to become a vlogger and document how Castrol's products are used in Formula 1, for example.

How to get your guys on board

- Help make staff feel part of the fabric of the business by celebrating your company's collective goal, your purpose.
- Celebrate and publicly reward actions and behaviours that support your brand's purpose to ensure people have tangible examples of what it looks like in practice.
- Reinforce your purpose both through internal engagement drives and as part of your brand ethos.
- Create advocates by demonstrating your company's impact in engaging ways, such as competitions and awards.



Section 5

Next steps

How to define your own brand purpose

Here are some simple next steps on how you can identify or strengthen your company's sense of purpose:

1. Uncover the origin

Every business has an origin story. If the company founder is still involved, speak to them. What's their story? Why did they start the business? What early challenges did they overcome to forge the business values and the DNA of its brand identity? Their passion should be the brand's passion. If the founder isn't around, learn about the founding of the company though press interviews, company reports or through wider conversations across the business.

2. Connect with the stakeholders

Senior leadership
What is it the senior team want to achieve, what do they feel passionately about and how is the company a bi-product of that? This process can be uncomfortable. It can highlight glaring contradictions, but don't be fobbed off.

The 'shop floor'
Ask staff why they work there. Are they happy? How much pride do they have in the organisation and what it does? How much do they understand about the organisation's purpose?

The customer
Customers should be able to articulate what it feels like to deal with the organisation at all points of the buying cycle. Ask what they think about the business, its people, reputation and what it stands for.

3. Evaluate the current messaging and adapt

Assess the collective feedback of your stakeholders but don't take what they say at face value. People, both customers and employees, are intensely sensitive to any conflict between words and actions. So probe behaviours, not regurgitated mission statements!

The easiest way to do this is to ask hypothetical questions. If X happened, how would we behave? Pose it to employees, business leaders, and customers.

Establish that what you say matches what you do, that your brand purpose permeates your business, and your customers feel the benefit.

About

B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as *B2B Marketing* magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats.

Its key products are:

- Online community
- Magazine
- Awards
- Research and reports
- Training
- Events
- Membership.

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Bray Leino

Bray Leino is one of the world's top ranked B2B marcomms agencies.

From our offices in the UK, Asia and the US, we help businesses identify and articulate their brand purpose, then engage customers and employees with world-leading creative and strategic campaigns.

To find out how the insights in this document can be applied to your business, please contact our B2B Director Adam Holder.

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