

Get purpose obsessed, your customers are

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Isobar Good consider why now is as good a time as any to prioritise purpose in marketing.

If businesses aren't already thinking about purpose, social impact, or why they exist beyond making a profit - they should be now. Social impact was already a hot topic and crises like climate change, Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter (BLM) have put a magnifying glass on what brands stand for. This magnification is burning through businesses that have brushed purpose to the side to focus on other transformations, rather than fusing it to the core of everything they do.

Giving purpose a seat in the C-suite

How businesses and brands talk about purpose, social impact, sustainability and CSR is the first signal of where they are in their purpose journey. C-suites who don't understand these terms, have leaders dedicated to this space, or a strong integrated strategy to bring it to life will undoubtedly suffer. Customers expect brands to drive change, with nearly 75% believing CEO's should lead change against world issues rather than governments - increasing 9% since 2019 ([Edelman, January 2020](#)). Brands face the challenge of executing effective actions and considered customer touchpoints to support their grand visions. They often get caught up in ticking 'sustainability' or 'diversity' boxes and end up creating one-off initiatives that have no real alignment to their business model or meaning to their customers.

Fusing purpose, social impact and sustainability

Purpose provides business and brands with a reason for their existence. Social impact is having a significant positive impact on the community, environment, and the world. Sustainability (a principle within social impact) is being able to maintain and grow natural resources to preserve ecological balance. In the business world, we're seeing a much-needed fusion of purpose, social impact and sustainability to drive positive growth. A business should exist to have a positive impact, therefore social impact and sustainability strategies should be integrated within a company's core purpose and brought to life through tangible initiatives.

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) could be considered an outdated term for many businesses. Traditionally CSR consists of charitable activities like

volunteering or donations that only sit within one part of the business, such as HR, rather than across teams to achieve a higher purpose. It doesn't take ownership of the problem space, or create innovative partnerships between corporates, start up's, NFP's and governments. Employees spending one day per year picking up rubbish or volunteering at a soup kitchen will not help a brand grow revenue or have impact at scale.

Purpose drives business growth

Brands with purpose at their core grow twice as fast as others. They have a brand valuation increase of 175% over the past decade compared to a significantly slower 70% growth rate for brands with a lower sense of purpose, according to [Kantar's Purpose 2020 report](#). Sonos, the wireless home audio company, has a sophisticated approach to purpose and impact. They drive sustainability practices in their product design, facilities and supply chain and report transparently on their progress. They provide children in need opportunities to think creatively through high-quality music education run by their '[Sonos Soundwaves](#)' programme. These initiatives relate to their business - their products, their supply chain, their ethos of 'reinventing home audio for today and tomorrow', and the company has seen year on year revenue growth of 25%.

Purpose enables agility

Without a solid purpose and impact strategy, it's hard for brands to react in a timely, appropriate and meaningful way to world events. Within 24 hours of the BLM protests in the US, Nike had launched their 'For once, don't do it' campaign (below) which demonstrates the strength of their purpose led brand.

They know their customers, they know themselves, and they know how to make a stand. Most businesses are still figuring out what to do about the health and economic crisis of Covid-19 and sadly brushed BLM into the too hard basket. Brands are fighting to survive, and fighting for sales. Ironically, their sales are driven by their purpose obsessed customers. Customers are prioritising purpose more than ever before, with ethical drivers being three times more important to their trust than brand competence ([Edelman, January 2020](#)).

Purpose builds consumer trust

Customers have been prioritising purpose led brands for years. In 2018, 88% of customers would buy a product from a purpose led company and 66% would switch from a product they typically buy to a new product from a purpose led company ([Cone/Porter Novelli, 2018](#)). Dove has transformed from a soap brand in the 1990's to an entity that is changing the way the world sees women, and how

women see themselves. Kickstarted by the ‘[Campaign for Real Beauty](#)’ in 2004 that challenged the status quo of body image by celebrating women, of all shapes, ages and backgrounds without makeup. They shifted the conversation to be about inner beauty and diversity, rather than their products. This higher purpose alongside product innovation and geographic expansion has propelled their business from \$200 million to \$4 billion in the past 30 years.

Accelerating business impact

With 75% of customers agreeing that how companies act during the coronavirus pandemic will affect their perceptions of the brand into the future, it’s time for businesses to buckle down on their purpose and social impact to survive and thrive ([Porter Novelli, April 2020](#)). The first step is being realistic with where they’re at in their journey. Next it’s about how to accelerate their strategy with simple, clear actions that are customer facing. The strategy needs to relate to their core business, be flexible enough to experiment with customers, and measurable. Brands need to be wary of bandwagoning against social causes, and adapt and change to the world’s climate. Most of all, purpose needs leadership and focus, and together we will be well on our way to making the world a better place for now and for future generations to come.

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