

CAUSES

## Defining the right social impact platform for your brand

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The demand for brand purpose is only getting stronger. Gone are the days of "do no harm" this is a new age of "do good" that is here to stay.

Consumers, Generation Z in particular, are demanding brands add value beyond the products and services that they sell. They have strong expectations that the brands they support will take a stand on the important social issues of our time.

Show some teeth

According to our latest [Brands Taking Stands survey](#), 66 percent of young consumers say a brand's association with a social cause or platform positively impacts their overall impression of that brand, and 58 percent say this association is a positive driver of their likelihood to purchase.

Yet determining the right social impact platform for your brand is not always clear cut.

Sometimes the link is obvious: think Toms donating a pair of shoes for every pair purchased, or Patagonia and the apparel retailer's efforts to protect the environment.

For others, especially legacy brands who may not have been founded with a social cause baked into the model such as a Toms or Warby Parker, it is not quite as simple.

The first step must involve looking inward rather than outward.

Rather than choosing a cause that seems "hot," brands must decide on a cause that they are willing and able to live with internally.

Consumers want more than a feel-good ad. They want authentic impact.

Traditionally, authenticity has meant aligning the platform to your brand's services or products for example, a beauty brand can only have a voice in beauty-related issues. But the reality is no cause is off limits anymore.

For young consumers, "authenticity" simply means that the brand is implementing the cause from the inside out and committing to impact beyond just lip service.

With this in mind, it is important to understand that there is a spectrum when it comes to selecting your brand's social cause.

Consider using these three core categories when plotting your brand's direction:

#### Safe and Easy

On one end of the spectrum you have "Safe and Easy," the most direct line from the brand's product/service to the cause platform and thereby the most popular route to take.

What **Aerie** does for body positivity and **Lush** for animal welfare are two good examples.

At the same time, it is also the most crowded place for like-brands, making it harder to truly stand out.

It can also be perceived as more self-serving pure marketing rather than a principled stand.

That said, there is still room to find white space.

Brands such as shoe company **Allbirds** are finding success venturing beyond the obvious and doubling down on a commitment to sustainability. And there is definitely room for more brands to follow suit.

The trick is to ensure that your authenticity practicing what you preach from the inside out is firmly intact so as not to be perceived as disingenuous.

#### Bold and Bullish

On the other end of the spectrum is "Bold and Bullish," when brands support an issue with deep political divisions that can earn strong support from some and backlash from others.

This is where brands such as **Levi's** and Toms reside coming out in support of gun violence prevention laws, despite the fact that this issue is not one that is directly tied to the sales of jeans or shoes.

Nike is also an example of this when it decided to showcase its support of **Colin Kaepernick's racial justice movement** an incredibly divisive issue among Americans.

Brands such as these that are bold enough to jump into what might be considered a more treacherous space can reap significant benefits.

Bold and Bullish brands are much more likely to generate attention, especially on social media, and attract a fiercely loyal customer driven by a true marriage of shared values.

#### Fight for the user

But there is also a middle ground to the spectrum where brands can venture out from the Safe and Easy space but not go all in with the Bold and Bullish stance. We call this space "Fight for the User," and it is where brands put less emphasis on themselves and their products/services, and more on their consumer.

CoverGirl started to inch closer to this category with its support of the LGBTQ+ community and tapping its first **"Cover Boy."** The company certainly went out on more of a limb than the other cosmetic brands and received top-of-mind credit for it.

But brands can go even further and align with a cause platform that reflects genuine care about the consumers themselves.

Take mental health, for example, an issue that significantly impacts young people.

Although some would argue it is challenging to link mental health with a clothing or beauty brand, it nonetheless can connect with your brand's younger demographic.

Telling them "I care about you and am willing to use our brand's resources and voice to help you live your best life" speaks volumes and helps you stand out among the competition.

So how do you get started?

How do you pick a social impact platform that makes sense for your brand and its ethos?

One place to start is to dig into your organization's stated values: what are the things you are telling your employees that matter most to you as an organization? What are those commitments you are already making to your internal

brand ambassadors and how can that translate to your external consumers?

You could also ask your employees what matters most to them.

Levi's decision to take a stand on gun violence was, in large, part due to the concerns of its retail employees.

THERE ARE MANY ways that brands can extend their purpose beyond their four walls and align themselves with some of the biggest societal issues.

Determining where your brand sits on the spectrum will allow you to foster meaningful discussions about what path makes the most sense for your particular brand.

Just remember that wherever you decide to plant yourself on the spectrum, make sure you plant yourself somewhere. Not taking a stand is no longer an option.

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