

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

3 lessons brands can learn from Greta Thunberg

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Greta Thunberg addressing the U.N. Climate Action Summit 2019 on Sept. 23 in New York. Image credit: ABC News

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While the world watched a tough, passionate 16-year-old from Sweden take on the very real and pressing issue of climate change, I kept thinking about the impact to brands.

After all, an estimated 7.5 million people across the world participated in the climate strike, and many others supported virtually. The end result is that whether brands like it or not, eco-consciousness is now firmly on consumers' minds and their awareness is sure to increase as the effects of climate change continue to be felt.

This presents both a challenge and an opportunity to brands that wish to address their customers' increasing eco-mindedness, but have yet to do so or do not know where to begin.

The good news is that there is much to be gained by embracing this growing environmental awareness with brands positioning themselves as purpose-driven.

There are three important lessons that brands can learn from Greta Thunberg:

Eco-awareness is rapidly increasing

I was in awe watching the global climate strike unfold on Twitter.

I know that environmental consciousness is on the rise, but I was surprised by the millions of people who hit the streets, and the sheer number of countries participating an estimated 180 countries took part.

I could not help but view the crowds from a branding lens.

Clearly, environmental awareness is on the fast track, and it is not just millennials or Generation Z that prioritize the environment within their shopping habits: two-thirds express a preference for brands that stand for something.

Older generations are also being influenced and brands had better take note.

If your brand is not environmentally sustainable or eco-conscious to some degree, you had better get to work.

After all, if you think environmental activism will not impact your brand in the very near future, think again.

According to a 2018 Accenture study, 62 percent of global consumers want companies to take a stand on issues about which they are passionate. Translation: This movement is going to drive a giant wave of consumer behavior change.

Fast fashion's days are numbered

Brands such as Zara, you have been warned.

The days of fast fashion will quickly evaporate as more environmental awareness grows and the environmental impact of cheap fashion garments or throwaway clothes becomes more known.

While consumers love stylish clothes at a low price, the growing concerns around climate change will move consumer-buying trends away from fast fashion. That means brands that appear to disregard the environment will go by the wayside.

H&M already has a leg-up with its Conscious collection as well as its efforts to provide sourcing information of its merchandise to offer transparency while encouraging customers to recycle their clothes. The brand has a long way to go, but it is a start and no doubt it is happy it started when it did.

It is not just plastic straws

Plastic is top of mind for today's consumers, and they do not just care about the plastic straws at restaurants, albeit that gets all the attention.

Brands such as Adidas are well aware of the growing concern of plastics in the ocean, and the potential negative impact to a brand that sells sneakers.

Adidas was ahead of this trend when it launched its Parsley collection of performance apparel, which is made from up-cycled plastic ocean trash. This speaks to its astute understanding of its customers' interests.

Even better, Adidas used a customer-centric approach to drive product innovation within its business. It knows its customers' interests, attitudes, motivations and aspirations.

Let us not forget that Adidas is a favorite among millennials for a reason. They love that Adidas represents their eco-consciousness as well as their style.

The truth is that doing good for the environment is also good for business.

Brands that plant their flag in the eco-friendly landscape give themselves a critical differentiator at a time when seemingly similar products crowd store shelves both online and in-person.

It provides a connection with consumers by saying "we're all in this together" and brands that support social causes stand out from the hordes of competitors. It is also great for delivering a strong return on investment.

BRANDS SUCH as Patagonia can attest that being stewards of the environment is sound business.

Patagonia CEO Rose Marcario stated in a 2018 recent article that "doing good work for the planet creates new markets and makes us more money."

A 2017 Unilever study agrees, stating that an estimated \$1.2 trillion opportunity exists for brands that make their sustainability credentials clear. That is great news for brands and for the environment.



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