

MARKETING

## 3 steps brands can take to boost bottom line by creating behavior change

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As the United States, Europe and other parts of the world reopen after months of shelter-in-place, we are seeing just how difficult it is to convince consumers to change long-established behaviors or adapt to new ones, such as wearing masks or keeping physical distance.

Yet change is the only way we will reach the "new normal." And no one is in a better position to help make this happen than marketers and brands.

Brands have natural incentives to get people to buy their products and reward them for picking up a new behaviors. They have decades of experience in convincing consumers to do just that, so they know how to influence behavior. They bring extensive resources, capabilities and the creative heft to think about solutions.

Just look at Durex, a condom brand, that helped reduce HIV infections worldwide by creating behavior change through marketing and public-private partnerships.

Among other initiatives, Durex ran edgy, head-turning ads that normalized condoms, often with humor, and helped drive positive discussions about sex and protections.

The beer brand, Carling Black Label, combated domestic violence in South Africa through its #NoExcuse campaign against gender based violence and fighting against toxic masculinity.

Toothpaste brands have tackled school absenteeism and oral hygiene. And these are just a few examples.

Through my own work helping millions of people worldwide embrace the hand washing habit while working at Unilever including spearheading the United Nations-recognized Global Handwashing Day and through research for my new book, *Brands on a Mission*, I have identified the three key steps brands can take to change behaviors as deeply entrenched as domestic violence and oral hygiene habits, all the while driving demand for their products and boosting bottom line.

Create awareness using through "disruption-solution"

In this step, brands create awareness of a behavior issue related to its products by demonstrating why certain behaviors or habits are harmful or need changing.

Videos, music, ads and instructional demonstrations are just a few of the tools they can use.

Japan's recent **black light experiment** showing how quickly germs and viruses such as the coronavirus can spread at a restaurant in the absence of handwashing and social distancing is an example. The solution? Behavior change often involving the use of the brand and its products whether handwashing with soap, or brushing teeth day and night.

Help consumers feel gratified through "trigger-reward"

There is nothing like the feeling of a clean mouth after brushing your teeth. Or the self-confidence boost that comes from knowing that your clean mouth radiates a positive image of you as somebody who takes care of yourself and is a good potential partner or spouse.

Consistent messaging that emphasizes these rewards triggers an association between them, and the brand whose products pave the way to this rewarding scenario.

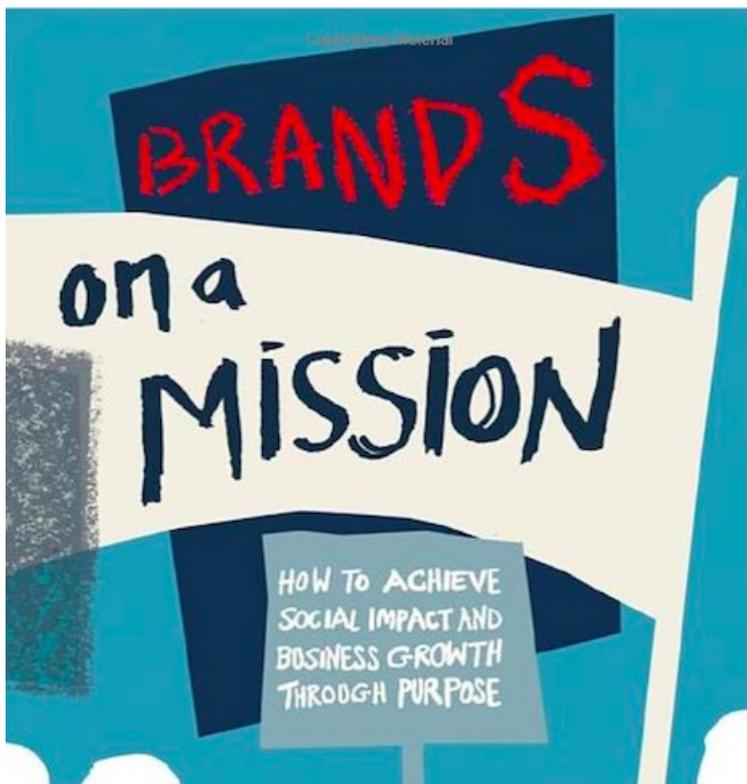
Shift social standards through "norm-reinforce"

Norms serve as our guide when we decide what behavior to engage in.

When we change behaviors, they validate our choices by offering proof that the new behavior is acceptable and desirable.

With their powerful messaging and the trust that consumers have placed in them, brands can reshape norms and cast a positive light on target behaviors such as brushing teeth, wearing condoms or wearing face masks.

The key to creating strong social norms is to make sure the expected behavior is clear and observable, and that there are no excuses to avoid performing it.



*"Brands on a Mission: How to Achieve Social Impact and Business Growth through Purpose," by Myriam Sidibe (May 2020, Routledge, hardcover 226pp)*

CREATING POSITIVE behavior change is a win-win scenario and helps break down much needed stereotypes.

On the consumer side, health and safety will improve. As for the brands, helping forge behavior change will create greater demand for their products.

In promoting overall condom usage, Durex's message went beyond a specific brand. Durex recognized that any increase in condom acceptability would include an increase in its own sales even if competitors benefited, too.

Being a champion for positive behavior change is good for a brand's reputation, which will ultimately have a

positive impact on a brand's bottom line.

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