4 Post-Pandemic Trends Challengers Should Embrace

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Over the past year, we have seen brands put under the microscope like no other. It's changed the way consumers perceive brands, and the way brands should be perceiving consumers.

As lockdowns start easing across parts of the world and we acclimate to the new normal, there are several trends and shifts in mindset Challenger businesses should know.

1. Your brand's political position matters

Where before brands were focused on neutrality so as not to offend prospective customers, the market has shifted. Today, 50% of consumers in the US are more likely to boycott a brand over politics than a year ago. This startling statistic is largely driven by the presidential election and Covid-19 policies, but it is also a bellwether for the direction of consumer sentiment.

Those with power are obligated to leverage their privilege to speak out. Particularly in a time of rife misinformation and division, your brand's political position matters more than ever.

Approaching the trend like a Challenger

The cultural events of the past year have shown us that the activism and political standing of a brand matters. From the Black Lives Matters movement to Stop Asian Hate and the Capitol insurrection, the voice of a brand resonates and people are listening. By speaking out you are showing you are a brand with principles, offering customers and employees what they need to make informed decisions about where they place their money and energy.

Take Patagonia as an example. Besides sewing a discreet “Vote the assholes out” label in its garments as a direct message to politicians that deny the impact of climate change, it joined a coalition of Native American and grassroots groups in taking legal action against the Trump administration in 2017 for trying to reduce Bears Ears National Monument by 85% and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by 50%.

Take steps both internally and in your marketing messages to reflect your principles. Evaluate your supply chain to understand who makes your inputs and products, who owns those companies, who works there, and how those people are treated. Interrogate how you and those companies are dealing with waste and recycling, and apply that lens to your services, partners and advertisers.

2. Your brand should serve the community

In addition to highlighting where we can do better culturally, the pandemic put a harsh light on how we are building and fostering communities.

In some places that boiled down to child care and mental health support. In others, it meant providing access to the internet so students didn’t have to use local McDonald carparks to complete their work. In short, the gap between what should be considered a human right and a privilege has

widened.

It’s the responsibility of Challengers to close it.

Approaching the trend like a Challenger

A Challenger is defined not by its size, but rather by the way it does business. As a result, look where you can instigate change and foster community not just with consumers, but inside your organization.

This may be realized in the launch of safe spaces or initiatives to help disenfranchised communities, or by joining coalitions committed to improving the lives of others.

Throughout the pandemic, we’ve seen that come to the fore in all sectors. Whether it was digital freight network Convoy paying trucking costs for US businesses wanting to donate products to local food banks or Airbnb’s Open Homes and Frontline Stays initiative, which provided free stays for essential workers, consumers will expect these initiatives to stay.

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3. Your brand should prioritize organic growth

Advertising is changing. Andrew Chen, general partner at venture capital company Andreessen Horowitz, recently stated that startups are dying from an addiction to paid marketing.

He states, “Paid marketing is tricky to grow, at scale, as the primary channel. It’s highly dependent on both against external forces – competition and platform – as well as the leadership team’s psychology when things get unsustainable.”

For the rest of 2021, we’re going to see more brands learn this the hard way and embrace organic growth. They’ll take it

back to basics, to the traditional way we marketed, and discover they can foster even more engaged, loyal communities along the way.

Approaching the trend like a Challenger

As marketers, we're in a position of influence and have a responsibility to decide where that influence falls. Just recently we saw the state of Massachusetts sue Publicis Health for its work with Purdue Pharma, stating the company had propelled America's ongoing opioid epidemic.

As you shift your brand to more organic growth, ensure you're offering value and giving something to your customer in return for their details or time. Challengers are constantly asking how something can be better and act through their products or messaging. When you grow your brand, do it in a way that has a positive impact on someone else's life.

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4. Your employee's wellbeing and engagement is paramount

The pandemic shifted the way we work. For many, it was a welcome change. According to Pew Research, 54% of those whose job responsibilities can be done from home say they would want to continue working from home after the pandemic ends.

Yet, employees have also expressed that employers need to evaluate and improve their mental health offerings.

Approaching the trend like a Challenger

Your brand is nothing without its employees, and your approach to their wellbeing should reflect that. While introducing wellbeing programs and virtual initiatives that prioritize

physical and mental health are welcome and indeed encouraged, it should go deeper than that.

Think about the real problems your employees are facing, such as financial planning or stress management, and host workshops that educate and inspire. Foster an environment where asking for help is encouraged, and take actionable steps to fix problems when they happen.

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