Don’t Just Disrupt How Consumers Think: Walk Your Talk

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> *“Greatness is for all of us” – Nike*

Back in 2012, the company Nike, an iconic world leader in athletic footwear and apparel, launched a campaign called “Find Your Greatness.” A powerful message meant to “inspire anyone who wants to achieve their own moment of greatness in sport.”

In a series of carefully crafted TV ads, you see footage of ordinary people and everyday athletes jogging, bicycling, skating with their peers, or running a marathon in a wheelchair.

“Greatness is not in one special place,” a narrator says, “and it is not in one special person.” The underlying idea is that we are all capable of the extraordinary; no one has to be part of the elite to push beyond their limits. “Greatness is wherever somebody is trying to find it,” the narrator concludes.

Suddenly, you’re not thinking about buying yet another pair of running shoes, you’re thinking that if you buy from Nike, you’ll become great, too.

Your entire model of thinking has been unknowingly disrupted.

That’s the power of innovative marketing.

What the most successful brands have in common

Nike has long been leading the way in creating meaningful stories to build a connection with their consumers.

And their bold marketing has paid off. According to *Forbes*, the activewear giant was given a brand valuation of $32.4 billion in 2019.

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The company’s huge success isn’t a surprise. Their campaigns evoke emotion, and more importantly, they strike a chord that changes how a person thinks about the retail experience.

That’s what the most successful brands have in common; they disrupt the status quo. As Mark Bonchek illustrates for *Harvard Business Review,* “Innovators change the lens through which we see the world.” He writes:

“Companies that successfully market and sell innovation are able to shift how people think not only about their product, but about themselves, the market, and the world.”

Challenging the way consumers think

> *“Disruption is all about risk-taking, trusting your intuition, and rejecting the way things are supposed to be. — Richard Branson, Virgin Group founder*

In a 1992 interview, Nike CEO Phil Knight spoke about what distinguishes them from their competitors “We’ve always believed that to succeed with the consumer, you have to wake him up. He’s not going to walk in and buy the same stuff he

always has or listen to the same thing he's always heard."

Indeed. A company that doesn't evolve will eventually kill its product. Why?

Because they've stopped nurturing a culture of innovation.

Since the early days of building my startup, I knew I wanted to do more than just sell easy-to-use online forms. I wanted to spread the spirit of creativity throughout my team, and create meaningful relationships with our customers.

Establishing an innovative company involves challenging old mental models, and giving consumers a new lens through which to view your business. Below are a few strategies I've implemented over the years to create this mind shift:

1. Drop the jargon and focus on your core message

Here's an incredibly common phenomena in the tech world you'll see: an eager entrepreneur trying to explain their product to a potential customer by using jargon-filled language. You'll then see the person scratch their head trying to figure out why they should care?

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As a self-proclaimed nerd, I get this tendency. I've been known to get overly excited about technological advances of a new feature. But I also make it a point to always remember my core message: *We make people's lives easier.*

We make *your life* easier.

Shifting someone's mindset about what you offer comes down to identifying what makes your product unique, and then asking yourself what *don't* people get about it? What problem are you

solving to *help them*? What gets someone excited about what you're doing? The answers are what you ultimately want to convey.

2. Don't just disrupt: walk your talk

A big part of what's made Nike the powerhouse they are today, is that they don't stop innovating. They don't come up with one singular campaign to connect with consumers. They constantly reinvent the wheel.

But they don't stop there.

Aside from using powerful stories to cultivate meaningful relationships, they also listen closely to ever-changing cultural and social contexts to have a greater understanding of their customers' needs and their role in effecting real change.

According to *Fast Company,* "During the 2016 Olympics, Nike put female athletes in the spotlight in its popular "Unlimited" ad campaign – and it promoted diversity in its own business."

The bottom line: they walk their talk. "In 2016, the majority of the company's employees were minorities, and women made up 48 percent of its global workforce."

Disrupting means very little if you aren't modeling the values you promote.

3. Breakthroughs involve relentless experimenting

Invention comes from looking to create more value. The better we get at explaining our *why* to customers, the more we push our company to do its best thinking – all of this comes from a

place of authentic interest.

“Shifts in thinking don’t happen overnight,” explains Bonchek, “any more than going to a weekend yoga workshop makes you flexible.” At Jotform, we constantly question our motivation and how we can better connect our technology to our customers. We never stop experimenting.

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In her revelatory book *Imagine It Forward*, author and former vice chair of General Electric, Beth Comstock writes the following “People who effect radical change have to exhibit an uncompromising faith in experimentation, a bias for novelty and action, and a sense that disruption is something you cause, not observe.”

How do we disrupt how consumers think?

By remembering these wise words by Comstock:

> *“Change is a messy, collaborative, inspiring, difficult, and ongoing process — like everything meaningful that leads to human progress.”*

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