

SPECIAL SECTION

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enter  
the  
**CATALYST**

Discover the bold moves that can energize  
a brand's purpose and accelerate results

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THINKSTOCK

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# COMPANIES EVERYWHERE ARE DISCOVERING THE POWER OF HAVING A PURPOSE. AT THE 2014 ANA MASTERS OF MARKETING ANNUAL CONFERENCE THIS PAST FALL, THE SPEECHES OF MAJOR BRAND CMOS POPPED WITH THIS EVER-POTENT IDEA.

Mark Addicks, senior vice president and chief marketing officer at General Mills, explained how his company's purpose urges teams to "think big [about] where the brand can grow." According to Anne M. Finucane, global chief strategy and marketing officer at Bank of America, her organization's purpose serves "as the filter through which every decision is made." And former Procter & Gamble Global Marketing Officer Jim Stengel marveled at how an "ambitious purpose" can drive real change. Each seemed to agree an idea bigger than profit has the power to clarify direction, unite action, and build a business centered on customers.

Make no mistake, a purpose doesn't detract from profit — it drives it. The 2014 Lippincott Brand Study, an analysis of more than 480 brands, found that those with strong purpose outperform those that lack one by 8 percent annually in shareholder value creation. However, only companies that deliver on their purposes actually achieved such results, and this requires sincere commitment and a ton of hard work. Leaders must change the way they make decisions and empower their teams to innovate. Everyone must come together with a shared vision so the

very core of the company's culture can evolve to champion the bigger mission.

## DEFINING A PURPOSE

What's your brand's purpose? If the answer comes immediately, you may already know about the tremendous value it creates. If you're still scratching your head, don't worry, you're not alone. Many companies — especially big, complex ones — struggle to find a rallying cry beyond near-term sales and category leadership. Asserting what your brand stands for, and becoming esteemed for it, is a journey that takes time to complete. (Unwanted brand perceptions can stick with a company for as long as a decade.) But you can take the first step by changing the conversation to what the brand contributes to the world and how that makes your customers' lives better.

Then comes the hard part. How do you get millions of customers and thousands of employees to notice, believe, and get charged up about your brand's purpose? How do you captivate an audience distracted by posts and pop-ups, texts and tweets, banners and blogs? How do you convince socially minded, media-savvy Millennials

that your brand means what it says? How do you turn skeptics into evangelists?

Enter the catalyst. Catalysts are bold moves that energize your brand's purpose. They show what your company is about. Catalysts grab people's attention. They're buzzworthy and tweetable, and they accelerate the flywheel of change, beginning the virtuous cycle of belief that leads to action, which in turn inspires greater belief.

Catalysts can take many forms — from the brief spark that injects a bolt of electricity into an organization to the more per-

manent change that fuels ongoing action over a long period of time. Great catalysts refocus a company. They strip away distractions and home in on what matters most; they show

leadership and vision; and, if implemented properly, the reverberations of a catalyst will be felt far outside of the company. Catalysts can shake up an industry and put the competition on notice.

As examples, look to the chief executive officer of T-Mobile, John Legere, who catalyzed the company when he defied convention and eliminated mobile phone contracts. He stood up to the telecom goliaths, declaring his brand the

## CATALYST

*noun* \ 'ka-tə-ləst \

**A person or event that quickly causes change or action.**

“Un-Carrier,” and, best of all, he did it in a neon pink T-shirt and blue jeans. Howard Shultz, chief executive officer of Starbucks, closed thousands of stores for an afternoon to retrain baristas in “the art of brewing the perfect cup of coffee.” Elon Musk, head of Tesla, gleefully relinquished patents to, well, whomever wanted them. “The world would all benefit from a common, rapidly evolving technology platform,” he announced at the time.

These bold moves were indeed catalytic. Sure, they involved a bit of showmanship, but the best catalysts entertain as much as they energize. Sometimes arched eyebrows and dropped jaws are signs of positive customer perceptions taking shape and employee attitudes changing.

Today’s leaders who create catalysts to spark change aren’t conjuring some form of modern magic. A tour through the last century reveals how symbolic action has reshaped even the most rigid organizations and changed the most intransigent minds.

An Indian lawyer voluntarily committing to a life of poverty changed the course of a nation. A politician ordering the demolition of a wall dividing Berlin precipitated the decline of social oppression for millions. A secretary refusing to vacate her bus seat hastened a future of greater racial equality. And, not long ago, a pope washed a Muslim woman’s feet on Holy Thursday, chose a modest residence over the Papal palace, and eschewed the customary limousine for his own 1984 Renault. These bold actions became larger than life because of their deeply symbolic power.

Admittedly, it’s a stretch to compare our daily jobs as marketers to the iconic work of Gandhi and Pope Francis, but if we’re serious about brand purpose, we can learn from these lessons. If we create meaningful symbols — big enough so there’s no turning back — we too can inspire belief and accelerate action.

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT CATALYST?

A catalyst isn’t a clever stunt or a crafty ploy — it’s a commitment. It’s a declaration of your company’s place in the world. An effective catalyst embodies these five qualities:

### 1. It reflects your brand purpose.

A catalyst must embody your brand’s beliefs, goals, vision, and values. It is genuine, principled, straightforward, and

sincere. A catalyst is only as powerful as it is authentic.

**2. It shatters expectations.** A catalyst is creative and surprising. The “Closed” sign posted on the doors of more than 7,000 Starbucks stores, so baristas could take the time to hone the craft of brewing espresso, was a tweetable moment. People noticed because it broke the rules. Coffee shops are supposed to stay open for the afternoon rush. Telecom execs are



FROM TOP: Companies with a brand purpose must embody their core principles, as Starbucks did when it temporarily closed its restaurants to retrain its most important asset — its baristas; John Legere’s unconventional fashion reflects T-Mobile’s position as the “un-carrier.”

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AND YOUR TEAM:

- ▶ How can we symbolize our brand purpose in such a clear and committed way that it will break through?
- ▶ What's the strongest and most irrefutable demonstration we can make to show we're serious about our brand purpose?
- ▶ If we were to do one thing that would get the attention and capture the hearts of our employees, what would it be? What do they think we don't understand, and what could we do to show them we get it?
- ▶ If we stopped doing one thing that is getting in the way of living our brand purpose, what would that be?
- ▶ Where can we give up control and let our customers decide?
- ▶ What individual moments will create energy in our team, thus spurring dozens of follow-on moments?

supposed to wear suits, not pink T-shirts. Think about what assumptions may inadvertently define your brand. Then, see if brand purpose inspires you to write your own rules.

**3. It shows you're serious.** A catalyst is proof of a brand's commitment. Southwest Airlines didn't spend millions of dollars painting hearts on its planes only to downplay its reputation as the compassionate airline. Use catalysts to mark a point of no return.

**4. It says you get it.** A catalyst strikes an emotional chord, it shows empathy and an understanding of the surrounding world. Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign addressed an important issue with candor and vulnerability. Use catalysts to connect with customers and employees in new ways, and to show you're in tune with what matters to them.

**5. It takes courage.** A catalyst is for the brave. That's because it requires putting a stake in the ground — and then tying a giant flag to that stake for the entire world to see. Bold moves may

cause discomfort, but that only means they're working.

## FINDING YOUR CATALYST

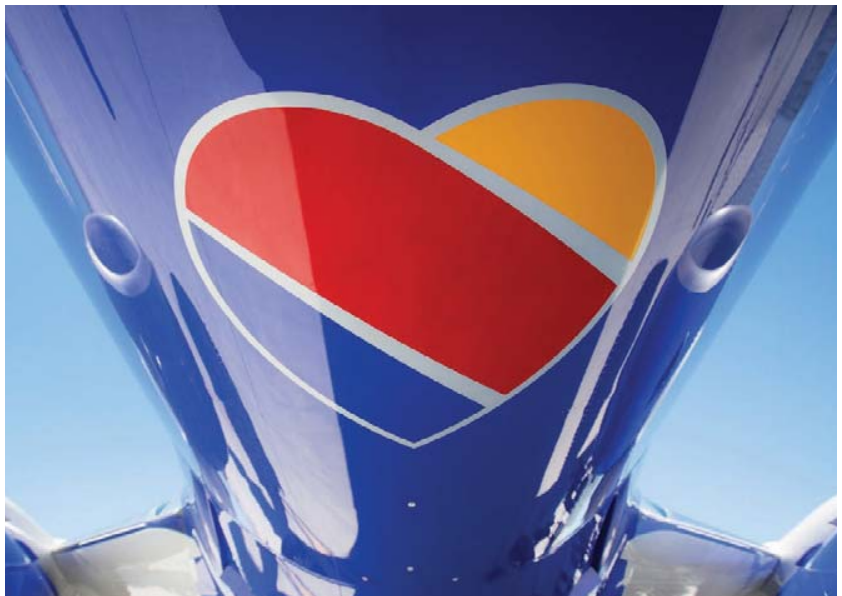
Catalysts come in countless shapes and sizes. There's no formula. So when searching for a great catalyst, start by probing your company's intent, asking, "How would our brand like the world to be?" Go big when thinking about what you believe and how you want to answer that question. Then, get specific.

How can your brand show genuine commitment, in a tangible way that breaks through and creates an emotional connection? What could you do to magnify its purpose? You'll need deep insight about the symbols that will be truly meaningful to customers and employees.

Inspiration lives everywhere, even in some rather unexpected places. Here are some places to look:

### Look at your brand's expression.

Words, images, and symbols still move mountains. Unforgettable, anthemic ads like Apple's "1984" and Chrysler's "Imported from Detroit" heralded assertive proclamations you'd be foolish to make if



Southwest's heart is a reminder of the company's commitment to customers and employees.

you weren't serious. These brazen ads were catalytic because they invoked the cultural zeitgeist with a provocative point of view.

Done right, a bold new identity is also a measure of commitment and courage. Walmart successfully delivered on its brand purpose by investing in a fully immersive transformation in 2008 — the logo, identity, store design, signage, and advertising all aligned around one, powerful idea: Save money, live better.

Southwest's recent makeover further proves the catalytic power of design. The airline believes "without heart, it's just a machine," and so its bold new identity celebrates the heart-as-hero. From the belly of the planes to the threshold of the cabin door to the boarding pass you hold in your hand, the company's emblematic heart promises every passenger that they'll be cared for and it reminds employees to bring their renowned warmth and kindness to the job.

Design-inspired catalysts shouldn't be thought of as "brand recovery." Southwest and Starbucks were already beloved brands before their visual refreshes. The best brands constantly inject new and often surprising meaning into their expression. Catalysts born from your brand's expression can vividly amplify purpose and proactively maintain vitality. They become a permanent part of the experience and a constant reminder of what your brand stands for.

### **Look at your brand's experience.**

If actions speak louder than words, your brand experience broadcasts volumes about what matters to you. Walmart knew this when it doubled down on its purpose with a remarkable offer — the \$4 prescription. Virgin Atlantic surrounded customers with its radical experience rethink, by restyling its website and in-flight video to reflect its charmingly irreverent attitude. Bank of America discovered a new way to deliver value through an innovative partnership with Kahn Academy, bringing

## **“CONDENSE SOME DAILY EXPERIENCE INTO A GLOWING SYMBOL, AND AN AUDIENCE IS ELECTRIFIED.”**

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

surprisingly simple financial education to the world, for free. Faced with mounting regulatory pressure and heightened public concern, McDonald's championed an emerging social issue and led the fast food industry with increased transparency into nutrition and ingredients.

We don't always need to develop catalysts from scratch. As marketers, we can shine a light on something we're already doing that embodies our brand's purpose. CVS Caremark knew it couldn't credibly build a brand around health and sell cigarettes, so it walked away from a long-standing moneymaker. This was a bold move, made catalytic by the fearless marketing that promoted the change. An important, new strategic decision may actually be a catalyst in disguise. Look for innovative ways to celebrate meaningful changes to your brand experience.

**Look inside.** An untapped catalyst may already reside within your company's four walls. After all, it takes highly engaged, committed people to deliver on a purpose.

Unilever catalyzed employees by uniting behind a big, public pledge to halve the company's environmental impact while doubling sales. United Technologies widely promotes its massive investment in providing access to higher education for every one of its employees.

These are audacious commitments, but even something small can carry real symbolic weight. The Daimler Group touts the importance of work-life balance by automatically deleting emails sent to employees on vacation. Yahoo! Chief Executive Officer Marissa Mayer gave every employee a smartphone to

signal renewed commitment to leadership in mobile.

The most powerful catalysts have an effect inside and outside the building. They unite the team around the purpose and display that unity to the world with a single, unambiguous gesture.

### **MARKETING MUST LEAD**

Inspiring a company to define its purpose and deliver on it requires that the entire leadership team work as one.

Granted, many symbolic actions are appropriately viewed as the province of business leadership, the CEO, or HR, but marketing is uniquely positioned to lead the charge. By trade, marketers are skilled at the art of winning hearts and minds, forging emotional connections, building buzz around something new, and motivating action. When it comes to deep insight, creative energy, and wow factor, marketers carry the day. Great catalysts require the full force and imagination of a committed marketing team.

True brand leadership involves committing to a bigger purpose, one that amplifies the value it brings to your customers and employees. And that's hard work, especially in a world where every move is scrutinized. But catalysts get you going. They don't have to be monumental changes; authentic, surprising, and meaningful acts that tell your story can propel you forward. ■

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