



a playground project post

The new golden of brands.

A new golden age of brands? Really?

The argument is pretty straightforward.

1. New media has caused diffused messaging and transparency.
2. Diffused messaging and transparency have made behavior and experiences more important than messaging.
3. The emphasis on behavior and experience has forced authenticity.
4. Authenticity drives brand consistency.
5. Consistency makes tribalism possible.
6. Tribalism leads to evangelism and fanaticism.

It was not like this in “the good old days” of branding, when the Oscar Meyer Weiner mobile and bologna jingle spread across the land. It was all so much easier back then. Really, it was easier if you had the budget and even a halfway decent product, but it all lacked depth and meaning.

Alas, the easy to control, brand in charge storytelling weapons that the masters of Madison Avenue once wielded are dull and worn out. Replaced by social media, AI, chat bots, big data, and media dispersed across a myriad of platforms.

The traditional brand stewards are no longer in control of how people perceive brands and form their opinions about them. Alright then, what is driving brand affinity these days? Not marketing budgets and advertising agencies and not celebrity spokespeople and mascots. This is not about the same “the consumer is now in control” crud that has been talked to death. It is about the fact that brands can’t fake it anymore. People are paying more attention to how companies behave. Your brand will be defined by what you do, how you act and react, not by what you say. You have probably heard all this before and what is important is not the brief history lesson, but where it has led.

It is harder to build a great brand today, but the payoff is bigger.

That is why this is “the new the golden age of brands.”

Behavior led brand connections are deeper and more meaningful. Data shows that people have more faith in brands when it comes to positive social change than they do in governments and religion. Look at Nike and the World Cup inspired equal pay for women TV spot <https://youtu.be/dPzh0gg-SJc>. It is far less controversial than their Colin Kaepernick work, but it is a social statement nonetheless and a case of putting your money behind your beliefs. This is not a case against traditional advertising, we still love well crafted, beautifully produced advertising like the Nike spot, but Nike is a case where it goes beyond the advertising. They

have pulled shoes from distribution based solely social politics — it is that reinforcing behavior that creates magic.

You may agree or disagree with the politics of it, but it demonstrates the point that brands are leaning in on these issues like never before and benefiting from it. It is tribalism in a way that goes well beyond the Coke versus Pepsi or Miller Lite versus Bud Light wars. These brand connections are geo-social-political.

You can pick your cause and belief and find a brand associated with it. Animal Rights? Right-Wing? Left-Wing? Equal Pay for Women? Anti-Abortion? Take your pick and you will find brand that represents your tribe. The affinity that behavior, or cause-based branding creates leads to something beyond loyalty. When how a company goes about business is driven by its beliefs and values evangelism reaches its pinnacle.

Chipotle is a perfect example. They took a stand against GMO foods and touted their supply chain and chose to not offer Pork for a time because they could not find a supplier that met their needs. Then their food made people sick, really sick. In 1993 an E. coli outbreak almost ended Jack-In-The-Box, but when the same thing happened to Chipotle their loyal customers stuck with them. It was all based on experiences, food sourcing decisions and guest experiences, not advertising.

Chick-fil-A is another example with its commitment to not being open on Sunday's for religious reasons. The food is good, yes, but not that good!

This type of thinking has gone all the way to toy manufacturers. Mattel revitalized the Barbie brand by introducing a more inclusive line: curvier, different ethnicities, taller, shorter, etc.

There is even a HULU documentary about the development of the dolls. It is a move that may have saved the whole Barbie franchise.

Kirk Souder, co-founder of [ENSO](#) refers to it as creating scalable Impact versus sales. We could go on and on with examples of what he is talking about (Subaru, Tom's, Beyond Meat...), but you get the point.

So yes, it can be a complicated thing to build a great brand today, but if you are consistent in your beliefs and values the pay-offs are greater than ever before. That is why having a real, fully-aligned brand identity and strategy is a must.

In our post "[the playground project](#)" we have begun to layout a new approach to building behavior-led brand eco-systems that rely heavily on this orientation toward deeper values.

If you would like to find out more, you can visit [XLR8GRP.com](#).