

The Anatomy of Rebuilding & Recovery

A CEO LOUNGE INITIATIVE

Marketing on a Mission

In conversation with



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Marketing on a Mission



Cause marketing is increasing its footprint, thanks to a growing socio-environmental conscious consumer segment. It is being viewed through a prism where an organisation's social and economic pursuits are simultaneously achievable. This new view has exponentially enhanced the idea of embracing the fifth 'P' – 'purpose' of marketing, imbining it into the organisational DNA. While it has thrown open doors that capitalise and quantify the emotional impact, the question of the underlying story truly bringing out transformation and a meaningful change is a constantly lingering one. CEO Lounge invites some of the country's top marketing leaders to share their views on how marketing power can be used for the greater social good.

Words by **Divya Sista**

From behavioural nudges to a spike in positive impact on the workforce, the direction of moral fortitude in the journey of building sustainable business systems is a welcome one. With rich yields of both social and financial dividends, it has shown that marketing that creates a social impact — popularly known as cause marketing — has been both effective and exciting. Pioneered in the 1980s, this ranges

from powerful social media messages of making a difference to local communities, supporting causes at checkout counters, corporate businesses adopting villages, to pledging a give back to the underprivileged each time a purchase is made. This success of the partnership between a purchase and purpose, tying a cause to the company, has moved from what was once advertising for the non-profit to customer loyalty and even brand identity.

A PUSH THROUGH PURPOSE OR A PURPOSEFUL PUSH?

Marketing teams are always hustling and pushing to find what clicks — social impact marketing or cause marketing is that connection point between consumers, employees and letting the world know what a brand stands for.

“The idea of marketing as a tool to create social impact is an unusual subject yet a fertile area for deliberation. We know that marketing always works in finding the right intersections. In the Venn diagram of marketing spend vs returns where everyone is selling products and services with an expectation of return, there are spends on social impact initiatives that don’t necessarily deliver a tangible value of return immediately. These could be in the realms of sustainable living to education, skill development or just an extension of corporate social responsibility through altruistic activities. But we need to look at how corporate businesses are using this in their brand messaging,” explains Vidhu Sagar, Managing Director, MediaDonuts.

The concept of “doing well by doing good” puts the trio at a happy, sweet spot — the corporation builds its reputation as a socio-environmentally responsible entity, the consumer feels good about being associated with the right brand, and there is a positive impact for the cause

involved in the whole endeavour. Is there a ‘why factor’ beyond this feel-good factor?

Says Aradhana Lal, Vice President - Brand, Communications & Sustainability Initiatives, Lemon Tree Hotels, “We can respond to this question of ‘why’ from the lens of three types of companies. First, companies where it is a core business principle, a way of life that is embedded in the organisation’s business model. Second, companies whose main business is purely commercial, but they believe that a part of their communication and connection can be built around key social issues. Third, a commercial organisation, where the founder or principal investor believes in a cause. The first and third are very effective because the cause reflects in every action of the company. When an organisation makes issues like diversity, inclusion, environmental impact or sustainability a part of its culture, and does not leave it just to one initiative... then brand loyalty and consumer connect are the indirect outcomes the organisation witnesses. Even in the second type, to some extent, when used strategically the messaging can hit the spot.”

The need for social messaging and indulging in causes of an organisation can range from philosophical beliefs to retribution, a marketing strategy backed by behavioural science to championing a cause.



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Kavitha Rao

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SUSTAINABILITY OF A SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

While marketing a social cause gives a peek into good deeds the corporate entity has taken charge of, the challenges are too many and too big at the same time — identifying the social issue that needs to be addressed, how much funds they have at their beckoning, and how to maximise impact. Though we have come a long way from the ‘good to do’ avatar of social cause championing to a ‘must do’ form, maintaining momentum, striking authenticity and keeping it sustainable are still key. Identifying an organisation-relevant cause that can resonate with the target audience, while helping the company grow is ideal, making it an extension of the brand.

“GenZ and millennials today are highly conscious and aware about how important socio-environmental aspects are in business. In the early 90s, India was not prepared to face nuanced issues like human rights, emissions and so on. Post-liberalisation, we have evolved to value environmental concerns, worker conditions, safety norms, as they do in forward economies. Today, we can create a social and environmental impact through business that in turn creates an ecosystem. The ESG — environmental, social and governance — certification, for instance,

attracts preferred investments. Carbon credit green buildings may get you brownie points with building permissions and subsidies. When business is conducted in harmony, taking everyone around you forward, good things happen for everyone. The way forward is to be aware of the ESG impact and create businesses that not only generate profit but also make a difference. Every new business should have a story. Communication is just a part of this story,” says Manish Mandhana, CEO, Mandhana Retail Ventures.

The incentive to associate with a social cause is well established. Consumers are receptive across demographics and geographies, and many consumers even turn brand advocates.

“Different businesses have different motivations. Some brands and businesses are mercenary in their approach, while some appeal to a niche. Choosing the cause wisely is important because consumer segment appeals may even contradict each other, making the whole idea of purpose-driven marketing a risky proposition,” remarks Sagar.

The potent combination of a value-driven brand with a relevant cause is heady and promises efficient social results, whilst serving as an effective brand campaign. Brands and corporate

organisations have resources, and credible power that can influence the world that entails beyond a PR exercise. An established brand can take a social cause that aligns with its core value, and give it a platform or amplify a cause that it believes in. But to do so, it would need two values beyond what it already has — consistency and authenticity.

“Another dimension of this value-driven cause marketing is the simple fact that it is a part of your DNA,” says Kavitha Rao, Country Commercial Manager, IKEA India.

“When everyone in the organisation’s ecosystem — suppliers, vendors, employees, management and customers — understand that money flowing through is for a good cause, things fall in place wonderfully. The employees expend their discretionary energy to make a meaningful impact. More consumers want to associate with your brand; they have a sense of engagement with the good. It is also true that the larger you get as an organisation, the larger your give back to the society become and you have to contribute beyond business and profitability,” Rao adds.

ON A MISSION — TO DRIVE A MESSAGE

Brands are using social messaging as a vehicle to guide their marketing efforts. From creating awareness, contributing funds to identified issues or economic development, the umbrella of socio-environmentally conscious ventures is large. The message marketing of these endeavours sends across is simple — it makes the consumer responsible for every little social victory achieved, giving them an idea that they have made a difference.

“The inherent nature of human beings is such that once they reach a level of success, they start questioning their success, and with it comes the desire to contribute to the greater good. Be it charity, or leveraging technology to solve issues, or empowering the underprivileged — when you are enabling knowledge and capability, it makes things easier for consumers to establish connections. People are looking for stories that they can use to make easier, better decisions. Good deeds and good actions make a difference to reflected glory. That’s the balance we all need to



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necessarily gravitate towards,” explains Hari Thalapalli, CEO, CallHealth.

Brand expression is no longer limited to traditional mediums. The internet and social media have merged and emerged as powerful mediums to create meaningful campaigns and dialogue. From personalised stories to AI (artificial intelligence)-based auto suggestions, the role of new media in meaningful social campaigning is positive, interactive and responsive.

“Social impact from the organisational level trickles down and is linked to individual drive and behaviour. All of us agree special causes need a more powerful messaging marketing since there is no quid pro quo. But the larger question is, how can we make social cause-marketing more impactful and sustained? There are smaller companies that are doing great work but lack visibility. Perhaps social media steps in here,” says Sagar.

It is easy to confuse marketing related to philanthropy or corporate social responsibility, as seen in projects funded by trusts and foundations, with social cause-related marketing. The idea behind social cause-related marketing is to connect the initiative to the brand and give all stakeholders a reason to remember the organisation. There are

brands whose whole foundation lies on the tenets of being environmentally conscious, eco-friendly or socially supportive. Lines of clothing that employ eco-friendly sourcing and healthy working conditions, cruelty-free cosmetics, or organic food products, are easily relatable examples.

“In the end, marketing is but an articulation of a promise and a delivery of that promise. We could say that it is the ability to create impact or the ability to create awareness. The ability to create awareness is disproportionately larger than the ability to create impact. But we must remember, that impact is a great point of reference,” says Thalapalli.

MEASURING VALUE ADDITION

The idea of socio-economic development and environmental conservation is a relative and subjective field.

“Everyone cares and is interested in something good. Purpose-led is a big umbrella. We could measure the success of these initiatives in something quantifiable, like, what percentage of sales of your products are contributing to sustainable homes? Over time, there are ways and means where metrics will automatically evolve and improve,” informs Rao.

As countries squabble on emission

rights and socio-economic issues that change with minute differences in geography and culture, it is difficult for corporations large and small, to employ a metric that can measure the success or failure of a cause marketing exercise. Perhaps classical marketing strategies and frameworks may lend a hand, or collaborative efforts may help organisations get down to brass tacks.

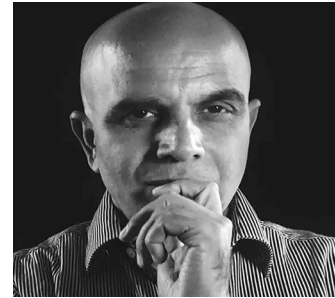
"In classical marketing, we have a product or a service that we want to create awareness for, amongst our target audience. This could be through a launch, special offers, advertising or a PR exercise. 'Cause marketing' has revolutionised this idea. This is not because the 'impact initiative' is why your product or service sells, *but it is the USP* (of your brand) that helps consumers make a choice. Like all strategies, there is no one-size-fits-all. For certain sectors or for smaller organisations, classical marketing tools may not create the desired impact. Social media marketing works well in these cases. Sometimes, well executed ideas and on-ground activation — in line with the brand's purpose — is good marketing in itself. The bottom line is, an organisation

must find the strategy that knocks the ball out of the park," remarks Lal.

These are disruptive times, and with social media democratising the entire landscape, organisations must choose wisely. While it may seem like an effort to square a circle, the benefits cause marketing offers are truly worth the effort.

"In a quest to return to sincerity in design and rediscovery of purity, brands are forced to adopt a model that is less bloated and more conscious of everything they do. There is a need to build a brand for long-term success. Constant improvisation and sticking to the first principles of humanity are the only guiding lights we need," expounds Mandhana.

Cause marketing works well for everyone, an intentional strategy that harnesses the power of purpose. When all stakeholders who create value — society, employees, investors and consumers — are involved, it becomes a superimposition of the acts of charity and philanthropy onto business goals. Brands have the power to challenge stereotypes, establish conditions required for change and create a positive impact. Together, we actually can!



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TAKEAWAYS

- Cause marketing is witnessing an uptick as people are increasingly making conscious decisions with socio-environmental factors in view.**
- Identifying and aligning the brand with a cause is a win-win proposition — for the society, consumers and the organisation.**
- Cause marketing appeals to every stakeholder's basic instincts — to be good and do good — and if positioned right, it can be a loud resounding success.**
- The mantra to choose the right social cause-marketing strategy is — authentic + defined — be authentic in your messaging, and make concrete, quantifiable promises that will yield results.**



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