



Brand Citizenship Comes Together When Purpose Meets Profit

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In today's transparent world of social media, many consumers - especially millennials and Gen Zers - expect their brands to live their values. That can be challenging, but for brands who have really taken their values to heart, it's an opportunity.

"The way we look at brand citizenship is that it's an opportunity to be both purpose- and profit-driven," said Linda Ong, chief culture officer at Civic, during a panel on brand citizenship at the 2018 PromaxBDA Conference in New York on Wednesday. "You really have to think about your brand being in a public-private partnership with your audience."

According to Scot Safon, chief marketing officer at UpTV, more than 80 percent of millennials said they expect their favorite companies to make public declarations of their brand citizenship, according to a Nielsen survey.

"They really want to hear the words, they want to hear you say it," he said.

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One example of brands living their values is NBC's and Walgreens' partnership

with Comic Relief SA on Red Nose Day, which raises awareness about childhood poverty. Walgreens provides people the opportunity to buy red noses, celebrities appear in spots wearing the noses, and NBC airs a primetime special featuring those celebrities.

"That has a halo effect on all of their brands," said Ong.

Another example is a public service announcement that Netflix recently ran ahead of season two of its series *13 Reasons Why*, which tackles such subjects as suicide and substance abuse.

"In recent days and weeks, this message has become more profound," said Ong. "While this could have been entirely self-serving, now it has entered part of a larger conversation."

Another example is the following advertisement that AirBNB aired during the 2017 Super Bowl while the U.S. was going through an immigration crisis caused by President Trump's travel ban on people traveling from seven countries considered by the U.S. government to be dangerous.

"They scrambled fast and did an astonishing act of citizen activism," said Ong. "This 30-second Super Bowl spot shouted very loudly."

Another example comes from Freeform, which aired the video at the top of this story in advance of International Women's Day on March 8.

"I wanted to include this because they took on their own content by doing this," said Safon.

Besides running the spot, Freeform also bleeped out every instance of a woman saying "I'm sorry," that aired on the network that day.

"You don't have to be partisan to take a stand," said Ong. "You just need to pick an issue that you feel strongly about and be an activist about it."

Of course, this doesn't always go well. Pepsi's ad starring Kendall Jenner posing as a protester in the middle of the #BlackLivesMatter movement was swiftly hit with a huge backlash on social media that forced the brand to pull the spot. And Nike, which has long had a strong brand voice, recently had to backtrack on its bold spots about equality when it was revealed that several of its executives had to resign due to allegations of sexual harassment.

"That's what happens when you are not walking the walk internally," said Safon.

As brands develop a strategy around brand citizenship, they need to ask themselves: "what problem can you be solving? What are you most concerned about? What could you do that nobody else could or would do? What actions

can you take? How can you get your leadership involved?"

In closing, here's one more example of a brand backing up what it believes in when it counts the most: