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MCLELLAN: What do consumers want?

BY DREW MCLELLAN



That's the age-old question, isn't it?

I recently had the opportunity to preview some third-party research that will be publicly released in April. The results were fascinating. The study, which focused on Millennials and Baby Boomers, was designed to learn more about the subjects' ambitions, fears and concerns for 2012 and to understand their attitudes toward brands and what they wanted from them.

The study then stepped back to look at the social and cultural climate in which we'll need to do business over the next year or two.

When you think about everything we've experienced in the last decade or so - from the Y2K scare to 9/11, Iraq and then the recession - it's little wonder that a certain level of insecurity about the future has become a permanent part of our psyche as we step tentatively into 2012.

According to this study, done by OneSixtyFourth LLC, what consumers want most in 2012 is security and contentment.

Interestingly, here are the key needs, as stated by the respondents, that they expect brands to help them fulfill. If you can help make one or more of these needs a reality, you will earn their business and their loyalty.

Security: Food, shelter, keep my house, increase my savings, bolster my retirement plan, a corporate job, being part of a movement but not a sole anarchist.

Control: Frugality, effective money management, black-and-white answers that come from scientific pursuits, own business/entrepreneurship, self-reliance (especially younger Millennials).

Consistency: Stable employment, stay at college, complete college.

Proving self-worth: Value through charity work, striving to get promoted, finding a way to leave a legacy (Baby Boomers), constant resume buffering (especially Millennials), aggressive pursuit of success (older Millennial males in the U.S.).

Honoring my needs first: Protecting my health, making healthier relationship choices, spending more time with people who have my genuine interests at heart, valuing private information more (Millennials).

Respect for others (but only if they show respect for me first): Rejection of greed and self-serving society as demonstrated by governments and corporations, helping others through volunteer pursuits.

Progress: Pursuit of scientific invention and learning, further education, choice of foundations, supportive of organizations who take society forward in some way.

The study says, "Millennials and Baby Boomers tell us leadership brands that are sincere and transparent have the ability to encourage us to bring out the best of ourselves and progress society. In the absence of strong government leaders, people anticipate, and may even soon demand, brands step in and play the role of cultural reformers."

Here's my take on this. Our marketplace is asking us to be much more than a seller of stuff. They're expecting us to step up and inspire our internal team and our customers to work together to take charge of the problems facing our world. Think of it as corporate social responsibility - but on steroids. It's not enough to write a check anymore; we have to also be willing to give our ideas, our passion and our sweat equity.

Think about how this might change the way you communicate about your company and the work you do. Think about how you could build a community of raving fans who don't just talk

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about what you sell, but more important, talk about what you believe.

Interesting times ahead.

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