

Global brand leadership begins at home

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Even when companies are considering expanding globally, brand leadership begins at home - with carefully researched and executed brand localisation - according to Anne Bahr Thompson, founder of brand and communications strategy firm Onesixtyfourth.

In 2013, expect to see more leadership brands addressing local issues that are pertinent to their consumers' lives before they campaign on behalf of global challenges. Why? Simply put, technological advancement - often reflected by the idea of a 'new and improved' offering - has become a hygiene factor for brands, regardless of the category.

In fact, if you aren't perceived by consumers to be continuously evolving, you will probably be left behind the competition fairly quickly. While innovation is expected from brand leaders, consumers who participated in Onesixtyfourth's recent *CultureQ* research said they believe brands should "positively use their prominence and influence first to enhance the lives of individual users and then benefit communities and society at large". Overall, participants expect leadership brands to evolve our lifestyles, set new standards, and even progress society itself.

After years of seeking inspiration and aspiration from leading brands, people are clearly focused on the basics. In the *CultureQ* study, 663 respondents from the US (aged 16 to 65) first and foremost characterized brand leadership as "product and service excellence offered at a fair price for the quality". Respondents, regardless of their generation, ranked attributes such as "produces durable/reliable products or services" (48%), "excellent customer service" (42%), and "value for quality" (41%) as the most important in fostering leadership, out of a set of 23 potential brand leadership characteristics. Clearly, a good product is the basis of a strong brand.

But respondents also said that to become a favourite brand and to cultivate loyalty, "a brand leader must also help me in my everyday life" (62%), as well as "help me accomplish my goals" (30%), and "mirror my personal values" (48%).

So, what are the personal values and concerns our respondents are looking for brands to reflect? Many can be found in their definition of good citizenship, which emphasizes the importance of delivering goodwill locally before investing in larger global initiatives. Characteristics such as "employs people from the communities in which it operates" (29%), "donates money to the communities it operates in" (26%), and "uses local suppliers" (24%) outrank factors such as "implements changes in its operations that are in the best interest of society" (23%), "treats suppliers ethically" (20%), "uses only ethical suppliers" (19%), "engineers solutions that help address societal challenges" (16%), "donates to or supports social programmes in developing nations" (12%), and "takes a stand on social or political issues" (9%). A local outlook is clearly more important to most consumers than benefits to wider society.

Interestingly, one they have chosen their favourite brands, respondents were found to be highly loyal to them, with 68% reporting that they use their most favourite brand exclusively and "would never cheat on it". Qualitatively, participants reported that favourite brands provide "intuitive solutions that effortlessly integrate into my routine" and that "my favourite brand knows me, but not in an invasive way".

Importantly, people - and especially Millennials - are driven to positively reinvent the future and make it more life enhancing for themselves as well as the communities they belong to. Because they expect their favourite brands to do the same, the opportunities for brands to innovate and stretch will grow over the coming months and years.

Obviously, marketing strategists do need to think globally in terms of developing products and

expanding market share. But they first need to understand the connection between creating brand leadership and building up their brands in each local market. Simply put, successful brands demonstrate their life-enhancing qualities in their consumers' everyday lives as well as their communities.

More Info: <http://www.onesixtyfourth.com>

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