

Brand citizenship

Increasingly, consumers want brands to engage with them not only on a personal level but also in ways that can deliver a better world.

Anne Bahr Thompson of **Onesixtyfourth** outlines a five-step model in *Brand Citizenship*, to engage purposefully and cultivate customer loyalty

In a social world, building a brand and cultivating loyalty is all about managing engagement. In other words, fostering meaningful connections that pull people towards products and services by offering transactional value.

Over the past five years, Onesixtyfourth's CultureQ research on cultural shifts and the impact they have on our interdependence with brands consistently demonstrates that people develop more loyal relationships with the brands they interact with. In a world of virtual friendships, favourite brands represent more than products and services. They are badges that signify an ethos – one that mirrors our values or those we aspire to. And as consumer concern for equity, sustainability and national identity increases, more people want brands to link them to some kind of larger purpose designed to

simplify daily tasks, progress modern lives, connect us with communities that share our standards and ethics and better the world we live in.

Increasingly, marketers will need to shift their mindset to engage effectively with customers. For years, they have focused on engaging customers so they will support their brands – by recommending them to friends, 'liking' them online, and positively tweeting or posting about their experiences using them. But the tide is turning and customers themselves now want to be the advocates, looking for brands that represent the things that matter most to them. The time has come for brands to love people back.

Three years of research with nearly 4,000 customers has shown that consumers want brands to begin with a 'me first' orientation – meeting their personal needs by providing

quality products or services at good value – and then stretch across a continuum that culminates in a 'we' orientation, addressing issues that are important to the communities they belong to and society at large. People are calling for, yearning for, and paying for brands to actively engage with them across a me-to-we continuum of Brand Citizenship.

People imbue the brands that represent the products and services they buy with the characteristics of friends and family. As with real-life friendships, the acid test of satisfying engagement with a brand is rooted not in grand gestures, or even constant talking, but in thoughtful, empathetic



actions, and small, meaningful deeds that both improve and enrich daily life and help us to feel like we belong to a group of like-minded people. Across generations, people demand that brands simultaneously fulfil their individual needs and better society. They want brands to interact with them in ways that provide solutions to their personal 'me' problems, needs, and dreams, and their generalised 'we' worries about the economy, the problems in the world, the planet, etc.

THE ME-TO-WE CONTINUUM OF BRAND CITIZENSHIP

Brand Citizenship is a five-step model that reflects our flattening, democratising culture in which greater customer-brand collaboration delivers significant benefits to people, companies and society alike. It begins with trust and an understanding of how brands' customers live their lives – not just use their products and services – and recognises that brands have a variety of ways to elevate every interaction across the Me-to-We Continuum to a transactional opportunity to add value (Figure 1).

The five steps of Brand Citizenship logically flow from one another:

1 TRUST: DON'T LET ME DOWN
First and foremost, brands that deliver on their promises are trusted more. Morrisons' positioning, that it's a foodmaker and a shopkeeper, for example, places its employees front and centre in delivering the customer experience. When an employee recently allowed a young blind girl to play with the checkout, she brought that promise to life in a very meaningful way. She behaved like a shopkeeper focused on getting to know her individual customers. She saw the young girl as a real person, rather than a faceless customer who was slowing down her checkout line.

2 ENRICHMENT: ENHANCE DAILY LIFE
Brands that understand the things that are important to people individually engender greater loyalty by simplifying routines, making mundane tasks less dull, and enriching daily life. Consider sportswear brand Sweaty Betty. Appealing to customers'

interests and lifestyles, the brand offers free workout classes in its stores. In addition to traditional 'push' emails announcing sales and styles for the new season, the brand effectively 'pulls' in customers and engages them with emails featuring new workouts that loyalists can try out on their own.

3 RESPONSIBILITY: BEHAVE FAIRLY
Brands that exhibit human traits, behave sincerely, are honest about their shortcomings and strive to be better are identified as leaders and good corporate citizens. The John Lewis Partnership is one of the best examples of a brand that behaves fairly. From the way it treats its 'partners' and suppliers, to its Christmas ads, and its incubator JLAB, the brand embodies John Spedan Lewis's vision to establish a 'better form of business'.

4 COMMUNITY: CONNECT ME
Brands that rally communities, motivate behavioural changes and fix social problems – provided they are not overtly political – attract more loyalists. From its very start, before the war on fizzy drinks was in full force, Innocent set out to motivate behavioural change through a healthier drink and recognised the importance to its success of building community. The company began with a big sign asking people if they thought the founders should give up their jobs to make smoothies, placing a bin saying 'Yes' and a bin saying 'No' in front of their stall at a music festival. Today, it honours its heritage and offers customers the opportunity to meet like-minded people through 'Innocent Unplugged', a festival for grown-ups in a woodland clearing in Kent.

5 CONTRIBUTION: MAKE ME BIGGER THAN I AM
Brands that play an active role in creating a more positive and life-enhancing

future enrich loyalists' lives by improving life on the planet. The disrupter brand Warby Parker benefits its customers through fair pricing and makes a favourable impact through its one-for-one model. Designing glasses in-house and selling mostly online, Warby Parker offers high-quality glasses at a starting price of \$95. The company's commitment to helping the nearly one billion people across the globe who don't have access to glasses is as essential to its promise as is low pricing. Warby Parker partners with non-profits to ensure that for every pair of glasses sold, a pair is distributed to someone in need.

Importantly, a brand doesn't have to be a social enterprise like Warby Parker to contribute. Consider Kenco, a brand that makes a positive impact through innovative packaging to progress in the developing world. Through its Eco Refills, Kenco helps UK customers send fewer glass jars to local landfills, and through its Coffee vs. Gangs initiative, the brand is giving Hondurans a choice to do something more than join a gang or flee their home country. In 2015, Kenco trained twenty young Hondurans to be coffee farmers and is already under way with its 2016 class. Having completed their year-long course, the first students are now building businesses of their own, backed by funding from Kenco.

From brand purpose, to delivery of goods and services, to social media, sustaining the environment, and bettering the world, Brand Citizenship engenders pull and cultivates loyalty among customers. This is a natural outcome of the dynamic shift that social media has fostered and it is a principle that equips brands to more holistically influence and engage customers.

FIGURE 1: THE FIVE-STEP BRAND CITIZENSHIP MODEL

