

## THE MARKETING OF MEANING (1)



CxO Redactie

Dit is een eerste uittreksel uit het boek 'The marketing of meaning' van Erik Saelens.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The accumulation of know-how, learning, experience and insight dovetailed last year in a single question: How will branding in general – and brand marketing in particular – evolve in the coming years in order to retain (or regain) meaningfulness? It's a question that keeps many people awake at night. 'The marketing of meaning' provides some recipes to bring meaning into your brand.

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## MEANING MAKES SENSE

*Trusted brands are now being eyed with suspicion, doubt and hesitation. They have long been welcome in consumers' minds, which made them too comfortable. They have started taking their place in the human decision making brain for granted. In his book, Erik Saelens (Brandhome) discusses the quest for brands to become meaningful to society and their consumers.*



seek out brands instead of the other way around. Brands and companies have become target audiences themselves – and they are ours. Brands can now say and promise all they want, but we don't have to buy them just like that anymore. And we don't. Not just because the internet influences our decision making and buying behavior. But also because we have entered a different state of mind. We have literally changed our minds about what brands and companies should add to our lives. People are waking up from a consumercoma.

## MEANING WHAT EXACTLY?

According to data in "The Power Of Customer Context," a report by Forrester Research, some 62% of American adults are consciously and actively avoiding any kind of advertising. They are done with advertising. And now that they can do something about it, they are doing something about it. How surprising is that, the huge success of Netflix: watching TV-series without commercials, unspoiled by any form of advertising whatsoever. What a treat after all these years of endless commercial breaks!

Straight out of their consumercoma, millions of people have already become a marketer's worst nightmare. They have become practically unreachable and even if something does manage to slip through their defenses, they show themselves to

gain. Brands and companies alike communicated consumers to numbness: "Why this brand? No particular reason; we just buy it all the time."

**CONSUMERCOMA**

Enter the internet and its myriad social media channels. Now we can turn to anyone with an opinion about anything anywhere we want and as easy as we like. There is nothing standing between us and the truth behind brands and companies anymore. As consumers we are freer than ever before in the history of consumerism. Today it is we who

There was hardly any way to avoid the stampede of messages, relentlessly broadcast by any brand with a budget to burn and a market to

be nonbelievers. The marketing and advertising industry have pushed too many people too far in their effort to sell them more. Their reward is that they sell less.

Their traditional marketing weapons have become blunted. This new internet and social-media-empowered crowd will not be won over by advertising anymore. The only way you might begin to win them back is by inventing a whole new way of approaching them. Which means: like individual human beings instead of a comatose population of consumers. Which means above all that brands will have to invest in their customers and potential customers – not so much in terms of spending money on them, but in terms of spending time with them. To find out what they really find important in their lives.

## THE MEANING OF LIFE

What has happened is that the easy availability of information has made people more aware of their existence as human beings on this planet today. Today's life seems to be filled with nothing but bad, ugly, lifethreatening, upsetting, shocking things happening all over the place. That is the biggest difference of all compared to times past. The world has always been an eventful place. Bad things have always been happening on a daily basis everywhere. The difference today is: most of it we didn't find out about.

Today, every second of every day something upsetting gets through on our smartphone as breaking news, trending topic or viral video. As a result, people are seeing the world as it is and why it develops the way it does – and more and more people don't like what they see.

## MAKING SENSE AGAIN

We have begun to wonder about what we have been doing to our planet and why we have been leading our lives the way we have, senselessly and egotistically stuffing ourselves with too much of everything. Since the Club of Rome published its ominous report "Limits to Growth" in 1972, we have done too much too little too late to limit our growth. We looked away and went about our consumerist business as if there were no tomorrow. Let's face it: since around that time, the world has been a marketing and advertising paradise. People were eager to buy and the industry was eager to provide.

Actually, a lot of people were already aware that this behavior didn't really make a lot of sense. Buying for the sake of buying felt great and people had the money to do all that. If not, there was always some bank willing to provide a loan. It was fun while it lasted, but now we have had one economic crisis too many, the money has run out, the world's oil and gas supplies are running out, and indeed the planet itself is running out.

There is a growing sense of doubt about human behavior in general and consumer behavior in particular. Left and right there is a movement towards wanting to become more responsible consumers. Consumers we will always be, but the general feeling is that it would be nice if we started to become choosier about the things we buy, the things we use and the things we do during our lifetime on earth.

From practically out of nowhere, people are taking an interest in issues that used to have no place in day-to-day conversations: sustainability, green energy, authenti-



"Traditional marketing is dead. Because its audience died as well. Instead, a new generation of critical consumers is born."

city, earthy, homemade, natural, true, honest, responsible, sharing, environment, community, mindfulness and, increasingly, that one word that captures it all: meaning.

People are starting to become big fans of meaning. Meaning touches a deeper emotion that has been left to sleep for the last couple of decades. Now, it seems, it is time to get smart and choose wisely and responsibly. In as much as you shouldn't just buy whatever stuff is offered, but only stuff that doesn't damage this planet of ours. Products that are being produced by responsible companies and actually do more for people's lives than supplying instant gratification. Brands, products and services should make sense again. Let's put an end to the senseless shopping; let's start looking at anything that has a purpose that goes beyond "just buying for the hell of it." Because that can never have been the meaning of life.

And as consumers around the world shift their state of mind towards more meaningful consumer behavior, there is only one thing tomorrow's marketing people can do: reset and start over.