

The logo features the text "IGNITE: GROWTH CONVERSATIONS" in white, bold, sans-serif font. The word "IGNITE:" is on the top line, "GROWTH" is on the second line, and "CONVERSATIONS" is on the third line. A small orange starburst icon is positioned to the left of the word "IGNITE:". The text is contained within a dark blue speech bubble shape with rounded corners and a small tail pointing towards the bottom left.

**IGNITE:
GROWTH
CONVERSATIONS**

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Marketing's time to shine

In a time of war, pandemic, economic crisis and climate change, marketing might be seen as a trivial pursuit. In fact, it's hard to think of a time when it's been more important.



We brought together smart people from very different industries to connect and reflect on what really matters right now; the need for marketers to come together, to share experiences and insights, and to accelerate marketing's assumption of the role of driving growth.

The most important conversation is the next one.

However, these conversations were only the start. We don't want to involve just 23 marketers. We don't even want to just involve the members of The Marketing Society. We want to involve every marketer. We want to engage with those who still think the sole purpose of business is to make more money. We want to inspire those who still feel the disdain of the 'serious' money-making parts of the business. And we want to empower those whose voices aren't being heard in the senior leadership's conversations about growth.

I hope you enjoy reading this report as much as I enjoyed the conversations that led to its creation. I hope you find it challenging, thought-provoking and inspiring. And if you do, I hope you'll get in touch: visit our website; come to our events; maybe even become a member of the Society. Most of all, I hope you'll join in the conversation. As Direct Line CMO Mark Evans says in this report, now is marketing's time to shine. We can shine so much more brightly together.

Sophie

“We brought together smart people from very different industries to connect and reflect on what really matters right now; the need for marketers to come together to accelerate growth”

As a society, we're increasingly recognising that business has broader responsibilities than just increasing shareholder value. It also has obligations to its employees, the communities in which it operates, and to the planet itself. And while for some, growth has become a dirty word, the truth is that businesses have to grow in order to survive and thrive. If they don't, they can't meet these obligations and be a force for good.

The engine of this growth is marketing.

Marketers, as former Group Brand & Reputation Director at Aviva Raj Kumar put it, are the ones connecting the outside of the business to the inside. They're the people translating customers' wants and needs into business opportunities, working with other departments to capitalise on those opportunities, and then presenting the resulting offerings back to the customers.

That's why we at The Marketing Society hosted ten conversations allowing 23 senior marketers to discuss how they're driving growth within their organisations; and within that how they balance long-term goals with short-term needs; the importance of creativity and innovation; and the role of purpose.

I feel really proud that we enabled these conversations.

A talking cure for growing pains

Growth, like space, the final frontier. And for many marketing and insight leaders, that's still the case. Not just because it's sometimes hard to convert the theory of mental availability and 60:40 into practice.



But because growth itself got harder.

Harder to identify 'brand' and activation in a world where new digital media compress their distance.

Harder to balance with the great challenge of our time, environmental sustainability.

Harder to find focus in a VUCA world of continuous disruption waves from digital to Covid.

And now, in 2022, harder to build and sustain due to the impact of inflation.

So we wanted to hear from those at the very frontline – those brand and insight leaders who have been there and done it, successfully – to help identify a real-world roadmap for how to tackle real-world brand challenges.

The outcomes from those discussions can be found in this 'Ignite: Growth Conversations' report. They outline a number of core themes, with five simple take-aways that every brand team can apply right now to go forward with confidence:

1. Get your brand's 'core' right: the fundamentals come first
2. Differentiate in everything you do: be meaningfully different rather than meaninglessly distinctive
3. Create strong pathways for connecting and deeply

“There’s never been a better time to focus on the fundamentals than during these extended times of turbulence. Getting these right provides your foundation for the future.”

empathising with your audience: don't underestimate the power of qualitative research

4. Build a culture of creativity: it's key to unlocking commercial impact
5. Embrace your wider leadership role as steward of the corporate imagination

These learnings aren't built from grand theory, but hard-won on the marketing frontline.

They're learnings that identify the core growth catalysts marketing leaders are adopting to build value and resilience into their brands.

Above all they highlight that there's never been a better time to focus on the fundamentals than during these extended times of turbulence.

Getting these right provides your foundation for the future.

That's an exciting prospect – and one Kantar will be championing with new industry-leading thought leadership with The Marketing Society in 2022 on the DNA of fast-growing 'Breakthrough' brands – and what brands need to do differently to compete.

Watch this space.

Even better, reach out and ask how we can partner with you to help unlock your brand's full growth value potential.

Dom Boyd, Managing Director, UK Insights, Kantar

KANTAR

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Ignite growth

Growth is a fundamental aim of all businesses. Like a shark that dies if it stops moving forward, a business can't sustain itself unless it's growing. At the top of every business, that means growth in revenue and profits. But that doesn't answer the key questions: how is the business achieving that growth and how is it measured? Is it sales, market share, customer base?

At Kantar – our partners in this project – they talk about growth in terms of meaningful brand difference, which their research shows correlates very closely with share price. The more differentiated a brand is in the market, the stronger return it delivers over the long-term. What's important about that is it confirms the people responsible for the brand – marketers – are the engine of growth. Other departments can (and should) influence growth, but marketing must lead it.

Raj Kumar, former Group Brand and Reputation Director of Aviva, put it well: “We speak to the most departments internally. We're the ones connecting the outside to the inside. So marketing is the best place right now to drive growth, both strategically and tactically. And if marketers are not at the top table, they should be shouting about why they should be, because I don't see how anybody is going to look at growth otherwise.”

Differentiation is particularly important in the attention economy in which we live, and even more so as we move into difficult economic times. It's what builds brand value, which in turn persuades customers to pay a premium. As Dom Boyd, Managing Director, UK Insights at Kantar, said,

“Marketing is the best place right now to drive growth, both strategically and tactically. And if marketers are not at the top table, they should be shouting about why they should be, because I don't see how anybody is going to look at growth otherwise.”

Raj Kumar

this premium is “the moat that protects a business by creating sustainable, highly-profitable cashflow even if demand slows.”

The Marketing Society Growth Conversations project brought together 23 senior marketers from a wide range of sectors to talk about what growth means in their businesses. They discussed how they're driving that growth while also recognising changing customer needs and responding to increasing demands for businesses to behave in a more responsible, sustainable way.

Brand versus performance

How can you maintain a long-term view in a short-term world?

The power of branding to deliver long-term growth is well-established, but it seems to have become under-valued in recent years. A WARC white paper published last year – Rethinking brand for the rise of digital commerce – argued that:

“As larger brands pursue digital commerce and attempt to emulate the high growth of successful early-stage companies, they are switching focus to a shorter-term, performance-based approach. The ease of access to short-term metrics like cost-per-acquisition is intoxicating when compared with the relative difficulty and expense of measuring the commercial return on investment in brand-building.”

Corinne Chant, Marketing Director for Grains at PepsiCo, acknowledged that one of the biggest challenges in driving growth is this short-term thinking.

“There’s often the temptation to throw up lots of stuff and see what sticks, because we’re always thinking year-on-year,” she said. “But while these smaller things give the illusion of short-term growth, they actually detract from the focus on the core. And deep structural growth comes from focusing on the core and ensuring it’s as good as it can be.”

Toby Horry, Group Brand and Content Director at TUI, also acknowledged the difficulty of balancing spend between brand and performance marketing. And he

pointed out that the problem of short-termism was exacerbated by the pandemic.

“COVID made everyone go super short-term,” he said. “Even though we had plans and strategies to make sure we were operating in best-practice ways, they got slightly sidelined. So in some ways for us it’s getting back on track, making sure we’re actually doing the fundamentals, trying to make the brand as strong as possible.”

A caveat to this emphasis on brand fundamentals came from Sabah Naqushbandi, Global Marketing Director at Mr Porter. She argued that, in an environment where disruption is the norm, brands risk becoming irrelevant if they don’t evolve.

“This is a really fine balance for marketers to drive growth,” she said. “You obviously need to be very clear on your fundamentals, and on what delivers the day-to-day value, but you have to also be very clear about what’s going to generate value in the future, and that could change.”

For Mr Porter, that has meant looking not just at new customer opportunities, but also at new categories and even new business models. The brand has started trying to attract younger, more fashion-conscious consumers, it has added new categories such as lifestyle grooming, fine watches and jewellery, and it has launched its own label.

“It’s these new ways of thinking which future-proof your business, but they’re built on understanding your core and what you have historically been your brand strengths,” Naqushbandi said.

One of the other effects of the pandemic was to increase

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“If you just follow what the consumer research and the UX testing tell you about how to create a good digital journey, you’ll create a really good, efficient one that is absolutely identical to your competitors’. But as the brand person in the room you should then go, okay, which bits are fine to be just like everyone else? And which bits have to be different?”

Sara Bennison

consumers’ expectations of a high-quality customer experience, simply because they were spending more time online and so had more online experiences to compare. This was highlighted by Ellie Norman, former Global Director of Marketing and Communications of Formula 1, who observed that a decade of change in people’s expectations of customer experience quality happened in the first two months of the pandemic. Coping with this, she said, means stepping outside the organisation to develop a deep understanding of how your customers are feeling.

“It’s everything from ongoing research, pulses, social sentiment but, for me, most recently it also meant going out and observing and speaking to fans in the fan zones to understand what their expectations were, what great looked like. And importantly, when things haven’t gone right, how do you recover from the broken promise with customers and look to drive incremental improvement and change?”

For Norman, being the voice of the customer is the marketers’ unique role within the organisation. “Then you need to collaborate and align sideways and

upwards inside your organisation, because achieving incredible customer value and experience typically touches upon every function inside the business.”

However Sara Bennison, Chief Product and Marketing officer at Nationwide Building Society, cautioned against slavishly following research when creating your customer journey.

“If you just follow what the consumer research and the UX testing tell you about how to create a good digital journey, you’ll create a really good, efficient one that is absolutely identical to your competitors’,” she said. “And that’s fine; 90% to 95% of it will be the same. But as the brand person in the room you should then go, okay, which bits are fine to be just like everyone else? And which bits have to be different, even if that doesn’t come out of the research. Where do you introduce more humanity where others would have more automation? Because these are signals that say, ‘this is why we’re different’, and they’re really important. So I do worry sometimes that, although it’s marvellous to put the customer at the heart of everything, it’s really dangerous from a differentiation point of view.”

Kantar’s Boyd pointed out another critical aspect of the brand versus performance debate.

“There’s been – rightly – a lot of discussion in recent years about the importance of balancing short-term performance with long-term fame,” he said. “But there’s been less about something that’s just as important; that fame on its own is fools’ gold. Difference is the engine of fast-growth brands.”

Creativity and experimentation

How can you harness innovation in service of your brand?

The brand differentiation that fuels growth is, in turn, driven by creativity and innovation. “We know that marketers significantly underestimate the commercial power of creativity,” explained Boyd. “In fact it’s the biggest competitive weapon at their disposal after brand size.”

But as he pointed out, innovation doesn’t exist in a vacuum.

“Innovation exists as part of a brand and as part of a brand experience, so the really big question is how your brand guides your innovation and your experience, because it’s very easy to get lost in the weeds.”

Jessica Myers, Director of Brands and Marketing at Metro Bank, put it even more succinctly: “Innovation on its own without a structure sitting around it is potentially just people creating cool stuff, with a bit of navel-gazing at the same time.”

In other words, innovation can only drive growth if it’s directed, and the ideas generated subjected to what Philip Mitchelson of McLaren Racing described as “ruthless prioritisation”.

In Myers’ view, the key things that organisations need to have in mind are who their target customers are and how to innovate to meet their needs.

“How do you ensure the innovation you’re creating is going to accelerate customer growth, but at the same

time be true to who your organisation is and the journey that you’re going on?” she asked.

For market-leading businesses, the answer to this question comes from making sure that everyone in the organisation understands the brand and feels responsible for it, as Sophie Wheeler, CMO at GiffGaff explained.

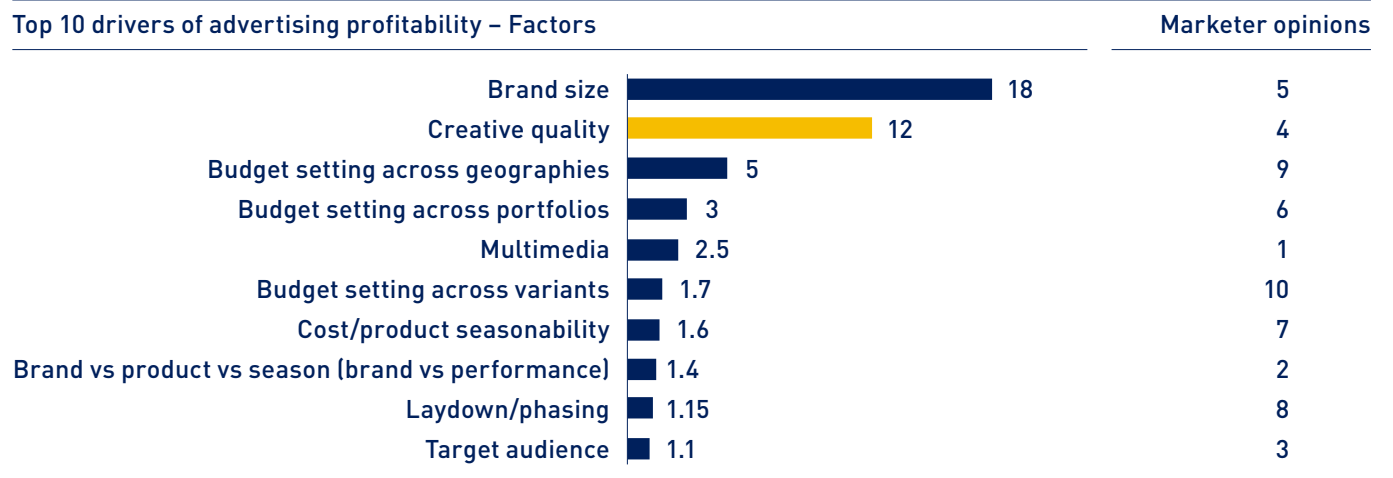
“There are people who’ve been in GiffGaff far longer than me and they’re probably more protective over it than

I am. And they’re in the tech teams. So if the brand purpose is not coming through in the work we’re doing, we will be called out on it, and it will be someone from tech or finance or business insight saying ‘That’s not very GiffGaff’.

As with many companies, when GiffGaff develops a new product, it starts with an insight. Its next step is less common.

“We don’t just share the insight within the marketing

Creativity is the most powerful commercial competitive weapon after brand size – but marketers significantly underestimate it.



Source: Kantar/Data2decisions; Global analysis

and proposition teams. We bring in the UX designers, the product managers, the techies, and as we tease apart the basics of what we might be building, they add value right from the very beginning. So creativity and innovation comes from across the whole business, if we're doing things right."

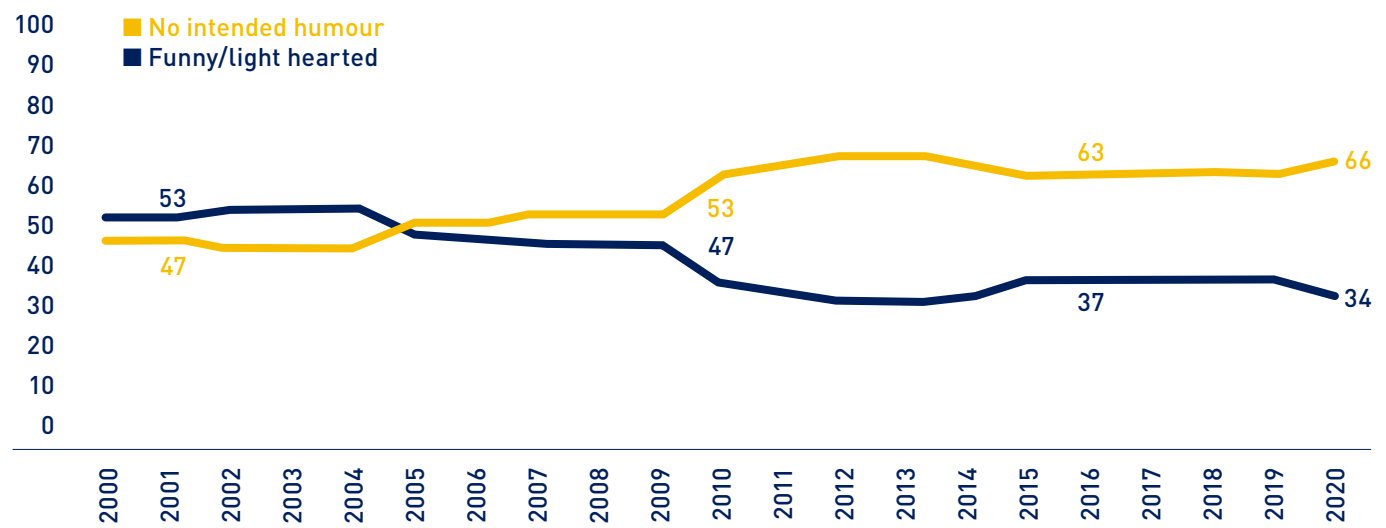
For everyone involved in these conversations, "doing things right" in terms of innovation and experimentation means recognising creativity is fragile, and that nurturing it is a key part of the leadership role.

"It's the marketing leader's job to try and bring that creativity," said Stephen Simpson, SVP of Global Marketing and Corporate Affairs at B2B travel and loyalty services business Collinson. "More importantly, it's our role to foster and encourage creativity, to find ways to empower people to be creative, to find enough time in the day to think outside the box. Not just in the marketing teams, but right across the board because good ideas can come from anywhere. Our job is to help the seeds spread and grow."

This, in turn, is inextricably linked to whether the culture of the business punishes and ridicules people for taking risks, or encourages and rewards them. Kantar's Boyd talked about the rise of what he called "wind-tunnel creativity", or creativity that has no edge.

"A lot of the fundamentals of what makes great creative, which is really about unlocking the power of emotion are being bled out, for whatever reason," he explained. "The amount of humour in advertising has almost halved over the last 15 years across our global database. And that's really worrying because, while humour isn't the only

The use of humour in advertising has seen a decline over time



Source: Kantar Link database

emotional tool in the box, it's a damn powerful one."

There are a number of factors at work here. Fear of a social media backlash was mentioned by John Bernard, Senior Marketing Director at healthcare company Dexcom, as a reason for some brands' caution. Meanwhile Jeremy Lindley, global design director at Diageo highlighted the growing focus on short-term metrics mentioned in the WARC report as another barrier

to experimentation and creativity.

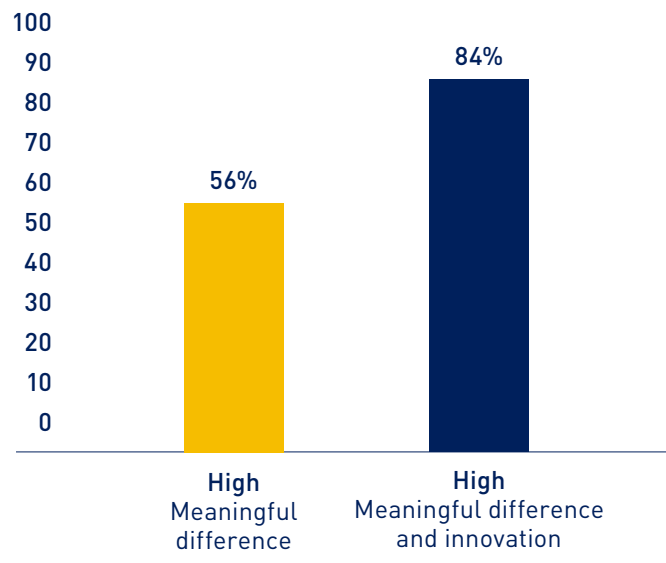
"For a lot of marketers in the early days of really being able to assess and get very precise, there's a risk of losing creativity and experimentation," he said. "That's something we're really conscious of, so we're saying; 'you can't hit exactly the same ROI on everything, but you need to push and try new things and experiment'. Then, having done that, you can get into what worked and what

didn't. What can we learn? What can we do more of?"

For McLaren Racing's Mitchelson, it comes down to courage.

"We know that an audacious car design – or an audacious marketing idea – can really change the game for us," he said. "So it's about building that courage in our

Brands that are innovative in a meaningfully different way are hugely more successful



Source: BrandZ 156 brands valued in 2019 and 2021

own convictions and being brave in our attitude to what we create."

Becky Brock, Commercial and Customer Director at Costa Coffee, is another who favours being bold.

"Creativity comes from a culture of fearlessness and curiosity," she said. "Within Costa we have a sense of optimism, boldness, and a willingness to take risks. If you're going to do it, go big. Don't just launch a loyalty scheme that's a bit better, go and launch the best. And then follow it up with wave after wave of improvements."

"Then curiosity; we have your standard commercial competitive set, but we also have what I call a creative competitive set, those who are doing it a bit better than we are. They don't need to be in our sector, but they're just creatively hitting the mark and you're thinking, that's good. How do we do that, how do we get better?"

Kantar's Boyd confirmed the need for courage around innovation.

"Innovation is a really powerful creative lever for building meaningful difference," he said. "But our BrandZ brand valuation work goes further, showing that what separates the leaders from laggards is their ability to be disruptive, creative and to lead from the front. And that requires bravery. One easy win is to do more agile creative idea testing very early in development – results show this almost doubles the chances of success."

At the extreme, fearless innovation can lead to brands embracing entirely new business models. The pandemic and the imminent loss of third-party cookies has led many brands that traditionally sold through retailers to look for

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ways to build personal relationships with their customers. One such is Mars, as Chris Rodi, European Portfolio Marketing Director at Mars Pet Nutrition explained.

"At Mars, we've built our model on fantastic physical availability and offline retail in combination with heavy advertising investment and driving reach. That model is still relevant today, but the fantastic opportunity is getting to know our consumers better through data-driven marketing. And the big pivot we're making is from a really generic advertising approach to following

individual consumers along their pet parent journey, trying to solve the pain points they might have, and trying to create really fantastic omnichannel experiences for those consumers. And ultimately that's going to enable us to move beyond just selling a product to servicing consumers with fantastic experiences."

According to Rodi, one of Mars' key moves is into DTC. "In Europe, we recently launched about five different DTC businesses, all offering a personalised nutrition or service experience. And the reason is that consumers expect it. And through doing that, we can understand

"Modern brands need to go beyond meeting customer needs, and do much more to differentiate to create an emotionally powerful 'whole brand' experience."

Dom Boyd

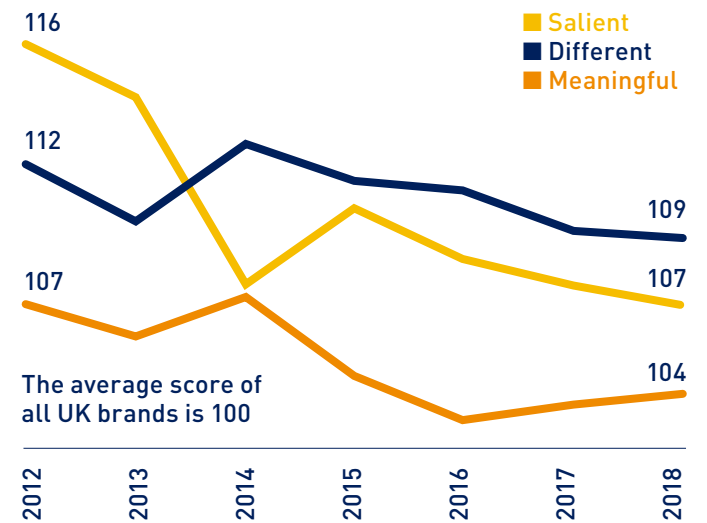
consumers better and retain them, helping us drive long-term value and repeat purchase."

However, this still leaves the issue of how a business can prioritise – and resource – the innovations which will matter in the future, but which customers don't want just yet. A good example of this is in the purpose space, as Catriona Woodward, Director of Global Technology at Pizza Hut, pointed out.

"At Pizza Hut, we've added some more sustainable options to our menu that appeal to flexitarians or vegans. We've also been leaning into brand purpose work through Equal Slice for Everyone community initiatives in several of our markets. While our research suggests that these aren't always decision-drivers for customers right now, they have high potential to be in the future. People want to know that the brands they're buying from are doing things to make the world better. While decisions still tend to be very product and value-led today, we know, that over time, other things will factor more prominently in consideration and we want to be building towards that eventual future." And also people want to know that the brands they're buying from are doing things in that space because that's what people care about at the minute. It's still very much product and value-led when you get down to the actual decision, but we know over time that's going to change and help us build the brand over the longer term."

According to Dom Boyd, Kantar's work with The Marketing Society last year revealed a ticking timebomb for many brands in the UK, where meaningful difference

Declining equity is driven by a loss of meaningful difference as well as salience globally



Source: Kantar BrandZ

scores for even the top 75 brands have been declining in contrast to global competitors who are gaining ground.

"This shows modern brands need to go beyond meeting customer needs, and do much more to differentiate to create an emotionally powerful 'whole brand' experience – through creative comms, innovation and CX."

The role of purpose

Does purpose make a difference?

Purpose has become one of the most controversial terms in marketing. One side of the argument regards it as at best an irrelevance, and at worst an active distraction from the business of returning value to shareholders. The other side sees it as a step towards a more responsible form of capitalism, a recognition that companies also have responsibilities to the communities they serve and the planet as a whole.

Jim Shearer, Marketing Director for Birds Eye UK and Ireland, falls very much into the latter camp. In fact, Birds Eye's purpose – to serve the world with better food – was one of the reasons he joined the company.

“Without sounding overly dramatic about it, the world needs brands and businesses with purposes like that more than ever. And yes, Birds Eye lives that every day.

“Purpose as a word has been very present within the marketing community for some time, and it can be misinterpreted as the pursuit of worthiness,” he continued. “As someone who manages brands, purpose is more about how easy it is for me to say yes or no to this idea, to this initiative, to this innovation. Ultimately, the litmus test is can I say yes really easily or, probably more importantly, is this something that just doesn't feel right and I have to say no to it.”

This idea of brand purpose as a 'North star' or a yardstick for making decisions is part of what annoys the traditionalist side of the argument, for whom the only

question should be 'will it make more money?' But it is playing an increasingly significant role in the decision-making of people in charge of brands.

According to Tamara Strauss, Global Customer Director at Premier Inn, the brand's purpose, which is to deliver a great night's sleep, informs every part of the operation.

“A great night's sleep has to be at the core of what we're doing and that brand purpose keeps us real. But it also becomes the positioning for all of our comms and the way that we do our development.”

Interestingly however, Premier Inn's positioning came from a business initiative.

“We spent the first lockdown working with a new agency to get ourselves ready for how we were going to come out of the starting blocks,” Strauss said. “So we were working on the brand purpose right the way through. And that's done us a huge favour, because it came out strongly from a trading point of view and made sure that we were defending our position as we came out of all the various lockdowns.”

This leads on to the distinction between brand purpose and corporate purpose made by Mark Evans, Managing Director, Marketing and Digital at Direct Line. For him, corporate purpose tends to be generic within categories – “being a force for good, helping people carry on with their lives” – whereas brand purpose is knowing what the brand does well, particularly in the context of a multi-brand portfolio, and applying that to being purposeful.

“For example, Direct Line is a 'fixer brand'. It fixes problems, and we're really good at that. So relating that

“Without sounding overly dramatic about it, the world needs brands and businesses with purpose more than ever. And yes, Birds Eye lives that every day.”

Jim Shearer

to climate change, a problem customers are facing is transitioning to electric vehicles. There's range uncertainty, price uncertainty, charging uncertainty, all sorts of things. And yes, we've launched a market-leading proposition, but also we see our role as very much helping people to fix that problem.”

However, it's equally possible to think about this the other way round; to start with a corporate purpose that then drives brand purpose, as Sara Bennison, Chief Product and Marketing Officer at Nationwide Building Society, pointed out.

“The opportunity for marketers is to be the stewards of the corporate imagination in leading it to sustainable growth.”

Dom Boyd

“The core purpose of the building society movement was to help people into a decent home of their own and help them build safe and secure lives,” she explained. “That becomes a really important overarching idea to communicate because, while day to day you’re trading in the way everyone else is on price and service and so on, ultimately people choose to come to us and stay with us and do more with us because they buy into mutuality and what that stands for.

“And it goes all the way through to the language you use every day. So paying as much attention to those details as you do to the big set-piece ‘here’s our brand strategy for the year’ is hugely important in credibility and the embedding of purpose day to day.”

Kantar evidence shows brand clarity is key to strong sales performance and that the fastest growing brands in BrandZ have 35% stronger clarity, Boyd explained.

“Getting your core foundational fundamentals right by aligning your organisation with your brand purpose is critical for growth success,” he said.

One aspect of purpose that has perhaps been overlooked in all the furor is that people increasingly want to work for organisations that are making a difference in the world, that are doing the right thing. As Rebecca Dibb-Simkin, CMO for Octopus Energy Group, explains, the company was set up; “to drive the global energy transition to renewables by whatever means necessary”.

“So wherever you sit in the business, it’s quite clear what your part is,” she said. “Do you work in the generation business, raising funds for investors to build solar farms and wind farms? That’s obviously completely essential to the global energy transition. Do you work in our operations team? Your job is to look after customers brilliantly, especially customers who are struggling in these times. Do you work in the electric vehicles team? Your job is to move as many people as possible to electric cars. The very clear mission from the top means everybody can see how their objectives ladder up, and they’re empowered to try and drive their small bit of it.”

In other words, purpose becomes a key tool to unite everyone behind the brand and to become the kind of brand ambassadors and custodians Sophie Wheeler has created at GiffGaff.

Certainly this is the goal of Charlotte Langley, VP of Brand and Communications at Bloom & Wild.

Langley explained that Bloom & Wild had just been through an exercise to refresh its vision and mission. In the process, it found that the number one thing its employees are worried about is sustainability.

“It’s super important that we’ve got them calling that out, and that we have an organisation in which they feel safe to say, well, hang on a minute, could we be doing this in a better way?”

“So because we were asked this question, we’ve just launched a range of what we’re calling TLC plants, which are the ones that would otherwise fail quality control. We’ve decided to sell them at a lower price, but with a care guide, which tells you what you need to do to bring this plant back to life. Because that’s perfect for a plant lover, and we’re avoiding waste.”

Kantar’s BrandZ work with Saïd Business School, University of Oxford shows ensuring brand strategy, experience and behaviours are purposeful and differentiating in creating a positive future for employees, suppliers, customers and the planet is not just ethically sound; it’s one of the top factors in driving abnormally high stock performance for brands after difference.

“It’s also becoming significantly more important as a factor underpinning perceptions of value, and it’s worth paying more for,” Boyd explained. “The opportunity for marketers is to be the stewards of the corporate imagination in leading it to sustainable growth.”

Conclusion

Marketing's role continues to expand, as does its status within the business. Companies are much less likely to see marketing as a cost or an investment, and much more as the engine of growth.

This is largely because disruption is now the norm. Every business is looking nervously over its shoulder for the start-up or scale-up that will destroy its business. The only way of protecting yourself is to have a deeper understanding of your customers and their needs than anyone else, and make sure that understanding permeates the entire business. Marketing's role is now 'to connect the inside of the business to the outside', and to do so by adding a layer of human understanding to the data flowing in to the organisation.

Lara Bealing, Marketing Director of Canada Life UK, illustrated this idea perfectly.

"Marketing's role is not just building relationships with customers, but also building internal relationships and rallying the organisation behind doing the right thing for our customers," she said. "Then our role helps us surface what those right things are, working with our customer services teams."

Nationwide's Sara Bennison gave another example of this more human approach. She regularly reminds herself that every number on the company balance sheet is a function of someone making a decision to do something with the company in a particular way.

"Then if we want to shift this number from X to Y, that means this many people need to do this thing. That helps

us reverse from balance sheet back to idea, and to gain the buy-in to do things we need to do. And all the time I'm also thinking, with all the insight that we've got, what are the social challenges that we're facing into? How does our purpose bridge some of those gaps?"

The crucial role of marketing is increasingly being recognised at the top of the organisation, with marketers more likely to be part of the leadership team, as Dexcom's John Bernard explained.

"Marketers are much more respected than we were perhaps 15 or 20 years ago. We know exactly where most of our marketing budget goes. We can see the impact and we can talk about lifetime value. And because we can show these metrics and show the business how important marketing is, we can then pitch for incremental budget, and show how that budget adds to the bottom line too. So now marketing is seen as part of the exec leadership team."

So marketing now has a higher profile than ever. But as the cost of living crisis bites and concern about climate change increases, it's also more challenging and more important too. As Direct Line's Mark Evans put it, these are volatile times, and volatility makes marketing more necessary than ever, because the necessity to understand what the customer really wants becomes even more pronounced.

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"The connectivity that a CMO provides from the outside world to the inside has to be heightened. It's time for marketing to shine and be that voice of the customer through into the organisation's growth agenda."

Mark Evans

Igniting growth: five take-aways



Get your brand's core right: the fundamentals come first

This is the rocket fuel that guides 'whole brand' differentiation through your comms, your innovation and your CX. Your fundamentals are your path to value creation.



Differentiate in everything you do: don't be meaninglessly distinctive

Don't fall into the fame trap: the highest-growth brands strongly over-index on being meaningfully different, the lowest-growth ones over-index on salience alone. Differentiated brands command stronger margin and value.



Create strong pathways for connecting and empathising with your audience: don't underestimate the power of qualitative research

The deeper you can truly 'feel' your audience's hopes, dreams, desires, needs, frustrations and moments of truth across their journey, the stronger your brand's ability to make a unique, value-adding impact. Identifying these emotional drivers is key in the inflationary economy where category norms are disrupted.



Creating a culture of creativity is key to unlocking commercial impact

Creativity is a brand's magic, and its ultimate competitive weapon, but it's often dismissed as risky. Applying agile low-cost early-stage insight testing can mitigate this risk, identifying the strongest seeds with potential for further investment.



Embrace your wider leadership role as steward of the corporate imagination

Brands that embrace responsibility in a valuable, clearly differentiated way grow faster and more profitably. Marketing leaders who can rally the whole organisation behind a strong vision will be the ultimate winners.

The logo features the text "IGNITE: GROWTH CONVERSATIONS" in white, bold, sans-serif font. The word "IGNITE:" is on the top line, "GROWTH" is on the second line, and "CONVERSATIONS" is on the third line. A small orange starburst icon is positioned to the left of the word "IGNITE:". The text is contained within a dark blue speech bubble shape with rounded corners and a small tail pointing towards the bottom left.

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