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Three Valuable Insights from TED

SYSTEMS THINKING

BY SVEN WOLLNER   15 DEC 2014

Hoping to be inspired? Attend a TED or TEDx event. Here are three insights into how the achievements of some of the world's most remarkable people can help advertisers.

The common theme behind the stories of most TED speakers is their ability to turn information first into insights and then into transformative behaviors. Similarly, agencies and advertisers need to create and foster an active path from a consumer's interest in a brand through to purchase and advocacy. In order to do so, we need to cross the borders of traditional dialogue and communication, think around a few corners and build on creative thoughts.

Three recent TEDx events in Germany offer fascinating examples of how speakers in a

variety of fields have done just that (and if they can do it, why can't we?). Dutch product developer Bart Weetjens was fascinated by the continent of Africa. He also happened to have a seemingly unrelated passion for rodents. He found a way to marry the two by thinking about the thousands of people who still die every year from landmines in Mozambique… and wondering if he could train rats to sniff out these hidden bombs. A fascinating side benefit was that these practiced rats could also sniff out tuberculosis at an early stage in hospital patients, allowing them to get treatment before the disease advanced too far.

Observation #1: Don't stop looking for an answer. Think in broad "what ifs". An expected solution can sometimes turn a "good" into a "wow".

Laurence Kemball-Cook, an industrial design engineer, was determined to create an off-grid kinetic power source. Recognizing that millions of people around the world take billions of steps every day, he developed a paving tile made of recycled car tires that converts the kinetic energy of footsteps into electrical power. Such "footfall harvesting" can leverage 10,000 people in a football stadium to power a city of 20,000 inhabitants during a single soccer match. MediaCom's global client Shell partnered with Kemball-Cook to create the first-ever people-powered football pitch, opened in Rio de Janeiro just last month by international football legend Pelé. The "Pavegen" project has made power more accessible, and has the potential to make cities more sustainable.

Observation #2: Sometimes the solution lies directly at your feet and communities want to get involved in socially important initiatives. This is a great blueprint for thinking about social movements, which can also be directly translated to and used in brand communications.

Daniel Kraft is a trained physician-scientist, inventor, entrepreneur and innovator. He believes that combining technology and communication can foster a radical change in the way we deal with illnesses, preventive care and the call to action coming from our bodies when something is wrong. In his 2014 TED Talk, Daniel spoke of a future wave of products, including diagnostic apps and "wearables", that will empower us to act in real time when it

comes to our health. As a result, we won't need to rely solely on our doctors to live healthier lifestyles, and society can gain new insights into a wide range of medical issues. Personal responsibility will make way for a personal optimization process. Kraft believes that if humanity were to share its health data in a cloud, we would be one step closer to a healthier world.

Observation #3: Whether it's Uber instead of taxis, Airbnb in place of hotels or data transfers via wearables instead of doctor visits, being connected to our community in new and innovative ways is more relevant than ever.

Our task, then, is to pave the way from thought to positive action, while balancing the benefits of information sharing with the need to protect personal privacy. Brands and businesses that take on this delicate responsibility will create added value both for themselves and for consumers. Ultimately, the most respected and highly-regarded marketers help facilitate easy, rewarding and lasting relationships between their brands and consumers.

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