



Fighting Friction: Building successful brands in the age of disruption

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SARAH DILLON - DIGITAL ACCOUNT DIRECTOR 06 DEC 2017

Recently I was fortunate enough to attend the UK instalment of ad:tech as part of their international series of digital advertising and technology conferences for marketing professionals from brands and agencies alike.

Keynote speakers covered a wide range of topics relating to data and technology however there were two themes that were most frequently discussed throughout the conference – the impact of GDPR and the concept that we are now in a post-digital era; ‘offline and online’ no longer exist for a consumer and the focus for brands should be on connecting with their audience across the customer journey.

Perhaps the most obvious, but often very easily forgotten subject matter was that agencies and brands exist to serve people & solve their problems; it is considered essential to

sustainability that brands adopt a consumer centric approach and respond to how the consumer is interacting with the brand. How often do brands stop to consider what value they are adding to the consumer with a digital marketing campaign that hinges on disruption and causing friction whilst the user is trying to consume content?

Jeff Rosenblum, Co-President of Questus, finished the first day of the conference with an incredibly inspiring and thought provoking presentation addressing this very problem. Rosenblum believes that brands should move away from disruption and into the emotional to succeed in creating brand loyalty and evoke passion amongst their customers. The key is to create an army of evangelists and these evangelists carry these messages forward better than any other mechanism a brand has access to.

'Fighting friction' was defined as creating content and experiences that people go out of their way to participate in and share with their friends whilst also providing value for the consumer so brands are improving people's lives. He illustrated his point with an example from outdoor clothing brand, Patagonia. During Black Friday in 2011, Patagonia executed a unique marketing strategy as part of their *Common Threads* initiative, instructing consumers not to purchase their wares. Their approach was based on the notion for the company to address the issue of consumerism head on.



'The most challenging, and important, element of the [Common Threads Initiative](#) is this: to lighten our environmental footprint, everyone must consume less. Businesses must make fewer things but of higher quality. Customers should think twice before they buy.'

The brand acknowledges that each piece of Patagonia clothing, whether it's organic or uses recycled materials, emits several times its weight in greenhouse gases, generates at least another half garment's worth of scrap, and draws down copious amounts of

freshwater now growing scarce everywhere on the planet.

Since 2011, Patagonia have launched 'Worn Wear' which is a set of tools to help their customers collaborate with Patagonia to take mutual responsibility to extend the life of the products Patagonia makes and customers purchase. "The program provides significant resources for responsible care, repair, reuse and resale, and recycling at the end of a garment's life." according to an official statement on their site.

To date, this strategy is proving to be massively successful at both evoking passion and advocacy but perhaps most importantly, building the brand.

So what does this mean for the advertising industry, should we all pack up and go home? Rosenblum maintains that there is a significant role for advertising but brands must look inward first to understand what value they are adding to people's lives before setting about disrupting them at every turn.

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