

Market Leader

NEW THINKING, DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

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Winning goals

Using the UN Global Goals as insights for positive action

The newly agreed UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development provide something surprisingly useful for brands – a universal and practical set of insights from which to decide how to take positive action in the world. Not just ‘sustainability’, this is ‘positive societal impact’ in all its forms.

Liz Tinlin outlines why the goals could provide brand opportunities – and what to do about them

INSIGHT. It’s something our marketing lives depend on. Good marketers root their brand in consumer insight, solving a problem or creating an opportunity to surpass expectations. Brilliant marketers link that with insight into the product or service experience, and into cultural trends to ensure that the strategy has a deeper relevance, so it won’t be yesterday’s news before the ink has dried. But still fewer of us have got our heads round the bigger picture – insight into society and our changing world.

It might seem too big a task, or one that people labelled ‘corporate affairs’ or ‘corporate strategy’ worry about. But if you want your brand to be a force for good in the world, if you want to create a deeper engagement with consumers by tapping into their values, then you need address this bigger picture. And finally, we have an easy tool to get started – thanks to, of all surprising sources, the United Nations.

In this article I lay out why the UN’s new Global Goals are a gift for marketers, how they work, and what to do with them. With the double whammy of an increasingly aware and concerned consumer base, and increasing competitiveness in all consumer markets, it could actually be the win-win-win strategy that brands need to support meaningful differentiation: wins for not just consumer and brand, but consumer and brand and society.

A GAME OF TWO HALVES

From 2000 to 2015, the UN was working to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which put focus of nations and NGOs on to issues such as poverty, education, and health. By 2015 we were halfway there on many targets. Now, the UN has agreed a post-2015 plan to finish

the job. It’s called the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, and all 193 nations signed up to it in September 2015, with an ambition to achieve it by 2030.

THREE BIG AMBITIONS

So what’s it all about? Simple. End poverty. Halt climate change. Fight injustice and inequality. Big, audacious goals, but we can all picture something within each that we would like to see sorted.

Personally, I would like to see women all over the world treated as equal citizens, with voting rights, property rights, and the right to not be abused and beaten. I would like to see less waste of our precious resources, and protection for wildlife and biodiversity. I would like all children to grow up without malnourishment, with a working toilet and fresh water to drink. The list goes on. If you stop to think about it, there’s a lot of things we each care about. We all want the world to be a better place. And we’re all consumers.

The UN has narrowed it down to 17 goals – 17 actions that need to be taken towards these three big ambitions (Figure 1). They identify the common issues all nations and all people can and should care about, and which every person and organisation can play a part in addressing.

PUSHED TO THE CONSUMER

Unlike the MDGs, this isn’t a behind-the-scenes effort. This time, it’s about people power and peer pressure. In this new digitally enabled, socially connected world, there are significant forces at work to take the message straight to the people – to enable everyone to feel like citizens of the world, to be aware, to take part. It’s not a massive leap to say it’s going to filter into the consumer consciousness, everywhere. Not just by accident, but by design.

Project Everyone, established by the

FIGURE 1: The Global Goals for Sustainable Development



UK's creative treasure Richard Curtis, aims to "Tell everyone about the goals. We all need to know what our rights are in order to claim them".

Amanda Mackenzie, Aviva CMO and executive adviser to Project Everyone, says: "It is our belief that growing the awareness of the goals and creating a greater focus on their progress will in turn increase the likelihood of the goals themselves being achieved".

Project Everyone has secured massive support from celebrities and businesses, and has reached its first objective of getting the message to three billion people. It will keep going for the next two years to ensure that not only does it eventually reach everyone, but that awareness is followed by understanding, and then by demand for action.

And Project Everyone is not the only 'push party' in town. Virgin Unite has teamed up with Global Citizen's people power network to create the Global Goals Alliance – bringing the message of the goals to the public, and particularly youth, through the theme of 'everyday superheroes'. Unilever has dedicated a section of its Sustainable Living website to reports and video clips that bring the Global Goals to life. And many organisations and networks will be pushing the message to their own members, employees and citizens.

FERTILE GROUND

But will all this push to the public have an effect? Research consistently shows that even before the Global Goals, consumer awareness of issues, and desire to have them addressed, was very high – and highest in the developing nations.

The BBMG/Globescan/SustainAbility study of consumer attitudes back in 2012 already identified that more than 85% of people felt strongly about safe drinking water, healthcare, jobs and wage fairness, waste reduction, education, ingredient transparency and renewable energy. And more importantly, people believe it's the job of businesses, not just governments, to sort this out.

Cone Communications' Global CSR Study 2015 reported that 91% of people expect businesses to do more than just make profit, and 90% want to see more responsible products and services on offer. Eighty-eight per cent said they are more loyal to companies that support social and environmental issues.

So in terms of attitudes, the Global Goals message is going to fall on fertile ground. At the least it provides language and a sense of expectation. We know there's a gap between attitudes and purchase behaviour, and it's easy to say: "Ah yes, but that's not to do with my brand, my category, my consumers. It didn't show up in our segmentation study as a purchase

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PHOTO: YUAN TAO AND YAN LU



Above: giant pandas Qicao and Qixi inspect a flag representing Goal 7, Affordable and clean energy, raised at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in China to support the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development

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driver.” But building brands is about more than purchase drivers. It’s about connecting with the needs and values of your target audience.

BRANDS ALREADY TAKING POSITIVE ACTION

So who is already addressing the Global Goals? We have done a cursory audit, using about 90 case studies of brands doing ‘for good’ activities in markets round the world, particularly the US and Europe. The three big headlines are these:

- **Every Global Goal has potential.** There’s at least one brand example against every single one of the Global Goals.
- **The most popular Global Goal is ‘Responsible consumption and production’.** That’s not surprising, given for most companies ‘doing more with less’ saves resources and therefore cost, so it’s been the early win for many brands.
- **Less well-trodden paths are worth taking.** Some of the most outstanding examples (in terms of results and sometimes awards) are those brands that have picked a different Goal, one with less noise from other brands, so they could really own it.

We can classify these case studies into three types of brand activity – projects, production and persuasion. Doing all three seems to be the best way to build authenticity and be credible in this space, and to have the best impact on the brand. It’s easiest and most effective for brands that have defined a clear purpose, or higher order benefit, to unite all their marketing activities, so that this is a synergistic part of the whole – unlike standalone ‘cause-related marketing’.

PROJECTS AS POSITIVE ACTION

This allows the consumer to contribute through the brand to a specific project, actively or passively. At the passive end,

Whiskas ‘Protect a Tiger’ (addressing GG15, Life on land), or Volvic’s ‘Drink 1 give 10’ water wells programme (GG6, Clean water and sanitation), both require no effort beyond purchase. Part of your money is going to projects to improve the world on your behalf. Active projects give consumers the chance to get directly involved: In the US, SABM’s Leinenkugel’s beer brand runs ‘Canoes for Cause’, combining mass-participation river clean-ups with canoeing events, in keeping with the brand’s outdoors-based positioning, encapsulated in ‘Join Us Out Here’. Corona’s ‘Save the Beaches’ had a similar clean up theme in Europe (GG14, Life below water).

PRODUCTION AS POSITIVE ACTION

This is about changing the way the brand does business, its supply chain, its products and processes. Often this is the best way to build consumer credibility – change yourself first. SABM’s Eagle beer in Uganda is an affordable beer made from ingredients locally sourced from 20,000 smallholder farmers, supporting women’s employment, and ploughing money back into local education and environmental initiatives (GG8, Decent work and economic growth, and GG5, Gender equality).

Another example is Lyf shoes in the US – an amazing convergence of 3D printing technology, closed loop recycling and pioneering customer service. It 3D-prints shoes to fit the individual customer’s feet, put together in several easy pieces and made with recycled and recyclable materials. A sensor in the sole means that next time customers buy a pair, Lyf can make them a shoe that better suits how they walk (GG12, Responsible consumption and production).

PERSUASION AS POSITIVE ACTION

This is all about using the power of the brand to influence attitudes and behaviours. Collectively, brands influence a huge amount of our culture and can build trends, set expectations, introduce issues and reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Through everything a brand does or says, it can be holding us back, or helping to address Global Goals. For example, Kenco’s ‘Coffee vs Gangs’ campaign is by nature a small scale initiative, with participants in the dozens, not millions (GG16, Peace and justice). But investing in communications highlighting the issue of gang violence, raising questions about youth and their futures, has impact beyond just the project.

B&Q’s decision to delist patio heaters represented a very public statement about energy wastage, supporting its ‘One Planet Home’ strategy. (GG12, Responsible

consumption and production). And who can deny that Sport England's award-winning 'This Girl Can' campaign makes a significant contribution to gender equality by tackling women's attitudes to themselves and their own capabilities (GG5 gender equality)?

Patagonia is a brand that not only champions a point of view, but tries to shape behaviour. With its 'Worn Wear' programme, it encourages the consumer to 'Repair, Reuse, Recycle' their clothes – with purchase a last option (GG12, Responsible consumption and production). To the consumer, this shows that Patagonia values the resource issue more than it values the next purchase.

Taking this kind of stand is a win for brands – it creates a deeper engagement and stronger loyalty among consumers. Adam Morgan's great work on challenger brands highlighted that success comes from taking thought leadership, and becoming part of the conversation. Global Goals provide a menu of possible 'thought leadership' opportunities.

A PRACTICAL TOOL

So how can brands get started? With any insight source, you interrogate the insight, connect it to your brand, and create ideas. It's the same here. The globalgoals.org website has done most of the groundwork – under each goal is a detailed set of 'targets' that list all the key areas to address. It's a great start point – ready-made workshop stimulus for a first investigation.

The other two parts of the story are your brand's values and purpose, and your consumers' values. Success is connecting those two with the issue to create the brand's own 'positive action' solution (Figure 2).

For the brand values connection, it's all about having a clear purpose, which defines the role the brand should play in the world, and the beliefs behind that.

Sometimes the big step you want to take doesn't have a clear link, you have to make one – make it make sense to the consumer. For example, Stella Artois' 'Buy a lady a drink' campaign saw it teaming up with water.org to raise awareness of the global water crisis (GG6, Clean water and sanitation) and provide donations to clean water schemes – so far it has raised \$1.2m. But it had no history, no brand credibility, in that space – so it used the category-relevant 'buy a lady a drink' line, to highlight the plight of women having to walk miles every day to collect water.

For the consumer values connection, it's about understanding what your consumers hope for and worry about. Do they care about employment prospects, sanitation,

pollution, wildlife protection, child mortality? In their local area, or elsewhere in the world? Using existing research or trends, or tailor-making your own research study, can answer those questions. But we have often found that just the marketing, insight and corporate affairs teams sitting together and hypothesising can get to 80% of the answer.

MAKING IT REAL

Once you have got ideas that unite consumer, brand and society, it's the same as any other marketing challenge – turn it into impactful, compelling brand initiatives. The only addition is that you want to measure your societal impact, not just brand impact, to be sure you are really making a difference.

One of the most consistent and impactful campaigns has been P&G brand Pampers' 10 year support of the Unicef campaign to eradicate newborn tetanus via its 'One pack sold equals one vaccine bought' initiative.

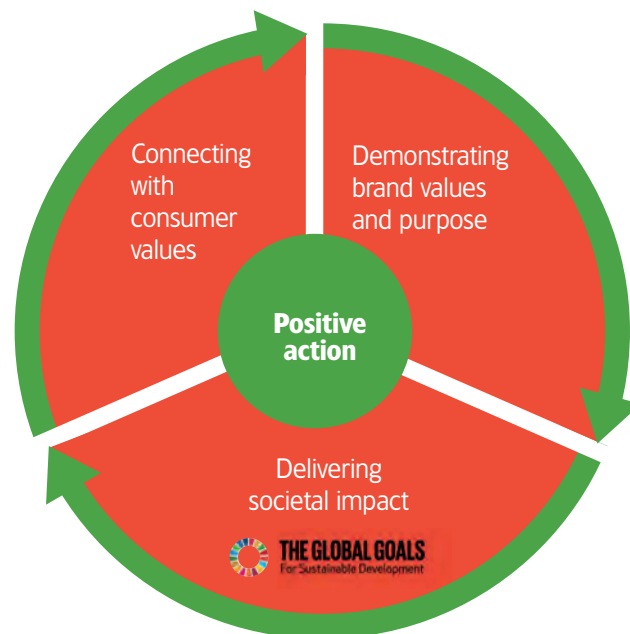
Goal, addressing it in whatever way suits their brand. And in future, we could even see non-competitive brands collaborating around a goal to collectively create more impact than one could do alone.

Robbie Millar, SABMiller's group director for innovation and brand propositions, is one marketer endeavouring to help his organisation's brands build positive action programmes, with the support of bluebabel.

"We believe our brands can and should create societal value," he says. "To get started with a brand, we create a sustainability theme that connects perfectly with the brand purpose. We ensure we choose a credible issue for the brand to tackle and that it really connects with consumers. The full programme is then developed from there. Across the world, we now have over 30 brands with sustainability programmes."

And that was before the Global Goals. So now, with the easy framework ready to

FIGURE 2: Creating brand-positive action initiatives



As of 2015 it has succeeded in 16 countries, saving thousands of lives (GG3, Good health and wellbeing).

This 'positive action' is something all marketers can do. It uses all our existing skills and provides a fresh opportunity for differentiation and deeper consumer engagement. The wealth of examples currently in place are the tip of the iceberg of what consumer brands could achieve if they each applied themselves to a Global

use, there is no excuse. Make your brand part of the solution, not part of the problem. Take positive action and be a force for good. What better legacy could you leave on your brand and with your consumers?

Liz Tinlin is a strategic marketing consultant and founder and managing director of bluebabel
liztinlin@bluebabel.co.uk
www.bluebabel.co.uk