

BUILDING BRANDS ENGAGING PEOPLE

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT FOR BUSINESS AND BRANDS

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The
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First 5000* asked us:

Why is optimism important in building brands?

* Articles were written for First 5000, Australia's mid-sized business network www.first5000.com.au

Part 1: Optimism Drives Long-term Value



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With communities, the environment and the economy all negatively impacted by recent events, the outlook to the start of 2020 in Australia has not been the positive start to the decade we'd all hoped.

In this climate, it's only natural for businesses to seek ways to "batten down the hatches" and minimise the impact on their bottom line - both of which further impede positive sentiment and positive, forward-moving action.

Unfortunately the "softer" people-focussed areas - marketing, human resources, community engagement and environmental action - that are more difficult to attribute direct impact on revenue and easier to attribute costs are often the first to be eyed for reduction.

However building long-term value for business and brands requires creating long-term value for customers, employees and all stakeholders, not just shareholders. People, planet and profit go hand-in-hand.

This means business and brands need to invest in the future as much as they can afford whilst looking for quick wins that don't negatively impact long-term brand value.

We need an optimistic outlook to develop future-focussed strategies: for brand positioning and brand planning, in establishing the vision, purpose, brand belief and objectives; in translating values to behaviours and culture "values in action"; for longer-term brand-building communications that position the brand aspirationally and inspirationally in people's hearts, minds and lives; and innovation for new products and services within the brand, new brands and new business models.

We need positivity to persist in improving the customer experience, employee experience, community relationships and environmental impact, fixing pain points and pursuing surprise and delight at the moments that matter most.

We need the confidence to move away from short-term sales activities that diminish brand trust - such as ads following people around the internet - and avoid altogether implementing short-term activities that are detrimental to the brand - such as price discounting.

Part 2: Optimism Attracts



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In building brands that attract, retain and engage customers, employees and stakeholders to drive business results and raise brand value, we seek to achieve “a great place/product to buy”, “a great place to work” and “a great reputation”.

Great brands are inherently optimistic. They look to the future, aim to solve people’s problems and make people’s lives better. In challenging times, great brands have the power to drive optimism amongst their audiences - customers, employees and stakeholders. People first, not last.

Brands that are positioned in the future have to be optimistic in imagining a better world and encouraging their customers, employees and stakeholders to imagine and buy into it: large engineering and built environment brands such as ARUP and WSP, technology brands like Samsung and industrial brands like GE. But optimism is not just for these brands.

Historically during challenging times, optimism has been driven by smaller priced items such as the rise of lipstick sales for ladies to cheer themselves up, referred to as “the lipstick effect”.

With the shift from material items, particularly amongst the younger generations, we’ve seen experiences grow as a source of optimism.

For example, where purchasing a house may seem less feasible, enjoying smashed avo brunch is a positive experience with friends. Many beverage (alcoholic and non) and QSR (quick service restaurants) brands do this well.

Over the last couple of years, we’ve seen an increase in large corporate brands that provide optimism by supporting you in life and business during good times and bad - such as AMEX, Westpac, NRMA, ANZ, AAMI.

The recent fires across Australia have taken the support platform to a new level, we see optimism being driven by altruism in community support and now regeneration - brands that are giving individuals the platform to not only feel good, but do good and invoke optimism, themselves.

This goes beyond charity brands seeking community donations to customer and business brands contributing portions of their sales to affected areas, tourism and place brands encouraging people to holiday in affected areas, and employer brands motivating employees with additional annual leave and volunteer days to holiday in and help affected areas.

Brands are doing amazing things to drive optimism and set themselves up for the future.

Part 3: Through the Lens of Optimism



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Working with Mid-sized Businesses and the larger end of Small Businesses, I understand that the key challenges are lower profit margins, cash flow and access to capital. As such, a challenging macro environment compounds these challenges.

Park your problems for a day and think about how you can use your brand to drive optimism, both now and in the future, for your employees and customers, suppliers and partners, the communities in which you work and the environment.

Get out your Edward De Bono Yellow and Green Thinking Hats and run a workshop to look at your strategies and plans through the lens of optimism.

Use these blogs (parts 1, 2 and 3) as stimulus, generate ideas and prioritise for positive, future-facing, forward-moving action. Here are some questions you can consider=>

Ask your participants to bring their own examples of business and brands driving optimism. Simply encouraging people in your organisation to think of examples of optimism helps them be more hopeful and confident about the future, and as such, drive more optimistic strategies and activities.

Optimism is contagious so a team fuelled by optimism will enthusiastically pay it forward to all stakeholders, building positive relationships and compelling them to buy, work with and invest in your brand.

1. How is your vision and purpose optimistic about the future? What are you doing to work towards it?
2. Have your values been translated to behaviours and cultural attributes that drive action towards the vision and purpose? How can you drive optimism today?
3. Have you established optimistic objectives and what would you need to achieve them?
4. How is your brand positioned for the future? How is this relevant to today?
5. Do you have a positioning territory with an existing brand or innovation that will bring optimism to your audiences today - such as products or experiences that make people feel good, services that provide support, platforms that encourage altruism and regeneration?
6. Are you balancing short-term sales activations with longer-term brand-building communications that position your brand inspirationally and aspirationally in people's hearts, minds and lives?
7. How are you taking away the pain and surprising and delighting your audience along the customer experience, the employee experience, community engagement, environmental impact?
8. Have you been planning any activities that may be detrimental to the brand in the future, that send a signal to all stakeholders that something is wrong or that denigrate competitor? What could you do that lays the ground for an optimistic future instead?

Part 4: Optimism Makes Life Better



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When times are tough, businesses and brands can drive optimism by: helping people feel better about themselves and their lives; and helping people feel better about the world in which we live.

Helping people feel better about themselves and their lives

In the shorter-term, businesses can look at ways at helping people feel better about themselves and their lives. I recently ran an online “pulse” survey to ask some everyday 35-54yo Australians which brands help them feel optimistic, when times are tough.

Many of the brands mentioned are fulfilling people’s implicit goals of security and enjoyment, which is what we’d expect to see in response to difficult times, “wrap me up” and “pick me up”. It’s not future focussed, it really is meeting an immediate need to feel better. Kleenex is associated with comfort and Newcastle Brown Ale with nostalgia. Cadbury and Coca Cola are associated with togetherness and happiness. Virgin and Kmart with fun. Chloe perfume with fresh and playful.

Some of the brands are more aspirational and future-facing, yet their promise feels authentic and achievable for everyone.

Nike and Lorna Jane are motivating people to “dream” and “believe” and both are associated with mental and physical wellbeing; Apple inspires creativity; and Qantas is representing the Australian spirit – of which we have a newfound appreciation – around the world.

There is an overwhelming simplicity to, familiarity with, inclusivity about and trust in these brands. They are not your brave tech brands pushing the boundaries such as Amazon, Google and Samsung. They are not your big service brands, banks and insurance companies. And they’re not your charity brands, each working hard to achieve their specific social purpose.

Whilst the brands mentioned are consumer brands, there are at least six key themes any business and brand could consider for refining or revitalising their positioning, experiences and communications to drive optimism in a challenging market and make people feel better:

- Enjoyment / Happiness / Fun / Playfulness
- Safety / Security / Comfort / Nostalgia
- Belonging / Togetherness / Connection / Inclusivity
- Australian Spirit / Community / Support / Resilience
- Authenticity / True to self / Real / Whole self
- Aspirational & Achievable – Creativity, Wellbeing, Professional & Life goals

These could work for employees, customers and stakeholders – equally applicable to your employer brand, employee experience and culture as to your customer brand, customer experiences and communications – so long as they make sense for your brand and business to be playing in these areas.

Part 4: Optimism Makes Life Better

Helping people feel better about the world in which we live

Looking further into the future whilst activating plans now, businesses can find ways to help people feel better about the world in which we live.

In their Trust Barometer series, Edelman identified that "Australians feel a lack of confidence in the system. They feel that as it's currently constructed, it is broken. The Australian dream is fragile, the general population are in a place of pessimism that is accompanied by a call for change." (<https://www.campaignasia.com/article/australia-has-largest-trust-inequality-in-the-world/458344>, Edelman Trust Barometer 2020)

Edelman also identified that people's most trusted relationship with an institution is their employer; and they expect their employer, with the CEO prominent, to take the lead on change rather than waiting for government to impose it - addressing issues such as equal pay, prejudice and discrimination, technology, innovation and training for the jobs of tomorrow, the environment and climate change, personal data privacy and protection, mental health, sexual harassment and fake news (Edelman Trust Barometer 2019)

This is a great opportunity for businesses to drive optimism by turning the situation around and driving change in the macro and micro business environment, addressing the needs and concerns of all stakeholders - employees, customers and the community as a whole, partners, suppliers and shareholders.

Through the strategic thrusts of vision, purpose and aligned customer, employer and corporate brands, the future can be imagined and the role of your business and brand/s defined in creating it.

Activated by values translated to behaviours and culture "values in action" and clearly communicated business and brand strategies and plans, businesses drive optimism by creating long-term value for all stakeholders to achieve the triple bottom line - people, planet and profit.

About Rachel & The Healthy Brand Company

I am a strategic marketer, brand strategist and researcher with over 25 years' experience engaging people to transform organisations to be brand-driven, customer-centric, employee-empowered and results-focused.

My roles span local, regional and global; marketing in Unilever, News Limited, Glenfiddich and Westpac; and consulting in brand, design and innovation, advertising and research agencies, before founding The Healthy Brand Company in 2012.

At The Healthy Brand Company, we believe that people and brands are an organisation's most valuable assets, yet value is not realised due to lack of alignment: between the company's and people's purpose and values; between business, brand and employer brand strategies; between operational silos; and between the promise the company is making to its employees, customers and stakeholders through its communications and their actual experiences.

We unlock value by engaging, aligning and activating people around a distinctive, meaningful purpose, values and idea, building aligned business, brand and employer brand strategies, and integrating all communications and experiences. Ensuring your brand connects with and consistently delivers against its promise to your customers, employees and stakeholders.

We align objectives, strategies and activities, informed, inspired and imagined by primary and secondary, quantitative and qualitative research and workshops. Linking brand to business strategy and the bottom line to raise brand value and drive business results.



B.Bus Major in Marketing
FAMI CPM
Cert Employer Brand Leadership
Member AMSRS
Cert Digital Marketing
Cert Behavioural Economics
Design Thinking

First 5000 articles

Optimism (this series)

1. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/the-future-is-bright-for-business-and-brands-optimism-drives-long-term-value/>
2. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/the-future-is-bright-for-business-and-brands-optimism-attracts/>
3. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/the-future-is-bright-for-business-and-brands-through-the-lens-of-optimism/>
4. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/the-future-is-bright-for-business-and-brands-optimism-makes-life-better/>

Reset: Top 10 Themes Driving Business & Brands into the Next Decade

1. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset-ten-themes-driving-brands-into-the-next-decade/>
2. https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset2_purpose-delivering-promises-and-trust/
3. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset-theme-3-employer-brand-and-employee-experience/>
4. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset-theme-4-brand-alignment-culture-and-ecosystems/>
5. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset-theme-5-return-to-investment-in-long-term-brand-building/>
6. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset-theme-6-balancing-tech-and-human-experiences/>
7. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset-theme-7-data-security-privacy-and-control/>
8. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset-theme-8-ethics-in-marketing/>
9. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/reset-theme-9-seeking-competitive-advantage-through-data-and-innovation/>
10. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/rest-theme-10-wellbeing/>

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The Data Ecosystem

1. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/redefining-the-data-ecosystem-for-the-data-economy/>
2. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/one-brand-one-culture-needs-one-data-ecosystem-technology-platform/>
3. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/the-agile-evolving-organisation-needs-a-living-evolving-data-ecosystem/>

Brand & Employer Brand

1. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/in-it-for-the-long-term-business-brand-and-marketing-strategy/>
2. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/be-more-human-the-human-centric-organisation-and-experiences/>
3. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/the-value-of-values/>
4. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/do-your-employees-trust-you/>
5. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/aligning-people-brand-when-everything-is-changing/>
6. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/how-the-brand-aligns-customer-and-employee-experience/>
7. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/attract-best-talent-building-culture-brand/>
8. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/put-employee-well-heart-brand-healthier-results/>
9. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/time-talk-rather-relying-data/>
10. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/think-current-customers-attracting-new-ones/>
11. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/priorities-practical-recommendations-mid-market/>
12. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/grow-need-people-attract-people-need-employer-brand/>
13. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/brand-ready-enable-business-growth-2017/>
14. <https://www.first5000.com.au/blog/to-grow-your-business-in-2017-build-your-brand-before-communicating/>

Thank you!

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