



Unilever's global campaign for Dove shows how excellent marketing makes a difference in the world by addressing important problems.

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Holding a mirror up to marketing

What would happen if marketers held a mirror up to the industry? The marketers for Dove did so in a highly lauded campaign. It revealed blemishes but it also tapped into marketing's strengths. Marketing at its best is democratic and can benefit individuals and societies around the world.

The selection of the 2007 Grand Prix advertising winner at Cannes honored a combination of creativity and social consciousness. In a gripping sequence of images, the low-budget Dove "Evolution" film charted the transformation of a typical young woman into a billboard model through the artifices of make up and Photoshopping. The concluding tag line was scarcely needed to convey the unmistakable message, "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted."

For Dove brand managers, parent company Unilever and advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather, the award capped a multi-year "Campaign for Real Beauty" that was launched to update Dove's meaning to consumers. It validated their decision to celebrate the individuality of ordinary women and girls: A billboard ad from the campaign unconventionally

depicted full-bodied women posing in underwear. A Super Bowl television commercial featured one young girl after another who felt unhappy with her looks, saying she wished she were thinner or blonde, or didn't have freckles. It also validated the decision to place the 112-second-long Evolution segment on the YouTube Web site, in the give-and-take environment of the Internet, rather than run a shorter spot in the controlled environment of television.

For marketers in general, the award occasioned a feel-good moment about the profession. "Evolution" resonated strongly with consumers and promoted a good cause—the Dove Self-Esteem fund, which provides workshops and literature to combat girls' insecurity about their looks and self-worth.

But all this understates how radical the "Real Beauty" campaign really was. The Dove marketers dared to hold a mirror up to marketing, revealing its blemishes and raising questions about the social repercussions of their work. Far from being a one-time nod to social consciousness, the "Evolution" spot was one of many pieces in an integrated strategy to change the way consumers view beauty and the beauty industry's promises.

EXECUTIVE briefing

The Dove campaign addressed a common concern that crossed cultural boundaries. Confronted by standard visual stereotypes of beauty in the global media, many young women develop self-image and self-esteem problems. The Dove Real Beauty campaign rejected these narrow stereotypes in favor of celebrating the diversity of beauty, supplementing functional benefit claims with an important emotional appeal that was inclusive rather than elitist. Inclusiveness is one of six key benefits that good marketing delivers to consumers, the others being information, choice, engagement, exchange and consumption. Here we show how political democracies aim to deliver these same six benefits to citizens. Marketing campaigns that focus on delivering all six “democratic” benefits, such as the Dove campaign, achieve a higher standard and more substantial, sustainable results.

How is it that the brand was able to seize upon consumers’ underlying discontent with the beauty industry and turn this to its own advantage? First, some background. Dove’s brand promise for over 50 years was a cleansing “beauty bar” alternative to soap that does not dry the skin. Advertising showed women with a fresh, clean, natural look. In contrast to the glamour appeals of much of the advertising in the beauty industry, the focus was more on functional as opposed to emotional benefits. The brand had a strong following and Unilever decided in the early 2000s to fashion it into an umbrella brand that could span multiple personal care product categories and functional benefits. That meant Dove marketers needed to de-emphasize the original functional benefit in favor of communicating a broader meaning.

Market research, which included consultation from psychologists, pointed to a growing disconnect between the way women perceived themselves and the way women were portrayed in advertising. The beauty industry had long relied on women’s desires for self-expression and self-improvement. But increasingly, rather than consider the ideals promulgated by beauty-industry advertising to be aspirational, women perceived them as unattainable. Moreover, the marketing messages were aimed at and being absorbed by, increasingly younger age groups.

In effect, Dove marketers sensed that, although the industry was nominally inclusive, a large segment of consumers felt excluded from a value-creating exchange. Rather than improving well-being, many women and girls were being made to feel worse about themselves. An opportunity existed to engage these consumers by taking their side—an approach that was credible given the brand’s heritage. Hence, the new mission statement: “Dove’s mission is to make more women feel beautiful every day by broadening the narrow definition of beauty and inspiring them to take great care of themselves.”

Tactically, brand managers relinquished close control over the brand image. The Evolution ad on YouTube inspired dozens of parodies and stimulated volumes of discussion on the Internet, as well as in commercial broadcast and print media, on the themes of self-esteem, beauty industry stereotypes, the

desirability or undesirability of picturing ordinary “unbeautiful” women in ads and, not least, the sincerity and motives of the marketers. In any case, sales of the brand reached \$2.5 billion by 2007, indicating that consumer trust exceeded misgivings and suggesting that the Real Beauty campaign both resonated with consumers and engaged them in choosing a new path to express their individuality.

What implications are there for other marketers and industries? Keys to the answer lie in a statement by vice president for brand development at Dove, Philippe Harousseau: “If you are not crystal clear what the brand’s mission is, you cannot control what happens when people amplify it. Everyone working on Dove knows these words by heart. . . . Our notion of beauty is not elitist. It is celebratory, inclusive and democratic.”¹⁷

The Democratization of Marketing

The marketers of Dove tapped into a growing democratization of marketing. By democratization we mean that consumers are playing a more powerful role in the marketplace. Furthermore, we also mean that the benefits consumers gain and expect from marketing are parallel to the benefits of democracy (See Exhibit 1). With democratization, there is an expectation that marketing benefits society. It is not enough to divert time and money into charitable activities or social-responsibility campaigns—it’s a matter of ensuring that all marketing is socially valuable, solves important problems and makes the world a better place.

It all starts with respect for customers. A.G. Lafley, chairman and chief executive of Procter & Gamble (P&G), says simply “the customer is boss.” Leonard Marsh, one of the three original founders of the Snapple Beverage Company, explained the brand’s success: “We never thought of ourselves as being any better than our customers.”

At a minimum, democratic marketing depends on mutually satisfying exchanges between consumers and marketers. The billions of daily marketplace transactions are based on mutual trust and the expectation that both parties will receive value. Brands like Dove promise consumers consistent quality and the delivery of functional and/or emotional benefits. You

know that if your customers aren't satisfied with the value they receive from your products or services, they will switch their business elsewhere as soon as they can. So you offer good quality at an equitable price and treat customers with respect.

More than that, consumers and business customers expect marketers to supply relevant information and to offer choices. They expect to be included in opportunities to purchase and consume goods and services that satisfy their needs and improve their quality of life. Increasingly, they want marketers to engage them and to earn their interest and loyalty. They also want to interact with marketers in co-creating brand meaning and to contribute user-generated content—they are the YouTube and American Idol generation.

In other words, political democracy and contemporary marketing at their best share six fundamental characteristics. As listed in the sidebar (see page 21), they seek to include as many people as possible; consumers and citizens actively engage in the process; information flows freely; decisions involve free choice; exchange is fair and equitable; a desired outcome is improved well-being for individuals and for society.

There is an inevitable tension—for both consumers and marketers—when what pleases consumers in the short run may not be good for them individually or for society as a whole in the long run. Myopic marketers concerned only with their firm's short-term interests shy away from such problems. More far-sighted marketers care about the kinds of consumption they promote. In response to increasing concerns about childhood obesity, for example, Kraft Foods, Inc., shifted advertising of sugar-laden Oreos and Kool-Aid away from children between the ages of six and eleven. Knowing there is no easy solution, marketers truly conscious of social value work to contribute to solving such dilemmas.

The Universality of Democratic Marketing

In Western industrialized countries, we now take for granted the seamless coordination of distribution and exchange mechanisms that deliver goods from producer to distributor to retailers' shelves to the consumer's home. Products are practically within an arm's reach of desire. Buy now, pay later is the norm.

Advertising and point-of-purchase marketing contain information that helps consumers make decisions. Most marketers respect and respond to consumer differences, offering a variety of choices. Whenever it is profitable to do so, they design tailored marketing solutions to satisfy different market segments. Marketers introduce new products and product improvements based on insights into how to add value for consumers. Top brands attain their position by earning consumers' trust. Consumers vote in the market everyday and will not repurchase if the experience is unsatisfactory, or the value received in the exchange does not live up to the price paid.

The net result is democratization of consumption; more goods are accessible to more people. Wal-Mart is often dis-

paraged, but its aim is to "lower the cost of living for everyone everywhere." Procter & Gamble says, "We will provide branded products and services of superior quality and value that improve the lives of the world's consumers."

Of course, marketers are far from serving everyone everywhere. Poor consumers in developing countries have limited access to goods and services and may have little, if any choice, over the purchases they make. Typically they do not have marketplace clout. But global marketing is expanding and as it does, marketers should seek to follow the democratic principle "one person, one vote" and treat all individuals as potential customers.

It helps that consumer aspirations are much the same worldwide. Adoption cycles of many items track per capita income growth from country to country very clearly. With economic development, people want a cell phone at \$1,500 per capita annual income, a TV at \$2,500, a car at \$5,000. Levitt correctly observed in 1983 that "Almost everyone everywhere wants all the things they have heard about, seen, or experienced via the new technologies."² Free-trade agreements and global mass production of standard products at ever lower prices are further expanding global consumption, even of technically sophisticated electronic goods, such as personal computers.

While such manufacturing and supply factors are helping to make PCs more affordable to more people, a democratic marketing vision is also having a catalytic effect. The democratization of PCs has been galvanized by Nicholas Negroponte and his One Laptop Per Child organization, which set a \$100 per PC target to bring education through technology to hundreds of millions of children close to the bottom of the pyramid. He opened the eyes of the for-profit manufacturers to the new bottom-of-the-pyramid market opportunity. They would have arrived there eventually but not as fast as if he, or one of their own, had not been inspired by the democratic principles of inclusion and socially beneficial consumption.

Other global marketers are aggregating niche segments that would be unprofitable to serve at the individual country level and addressing them with a worldwide marketing program. Witness the effort to mass produce a standard \$20 mobile phone by first consolidating orders from mobile operators around the world.

There is a notion that this type of democratization in global marketing is nothing but Americanization and cultural imperialism. This is far from having to be the case. In most product categories in most countries of the world, there are powerful local brands reflecting local tastes and cultural differences coexisting alongside global brands. Further, there is increasing evidence of successful global companies—Samsung of Korea, Lenovo of China, Infosys of India—growing beyond their original bases in emerging economies.

Consumers in developing countries do respond to marketing messages that export Western values and Western

lifestyles. Many want to participate in the global consumer culture. But, they also take matters into their own hands by putting a local stamp on attributes and the meanings of consumer goods. In India, for example, consumers rejected McDonald's original meat-based menus; they embraced fusion products such as MTV India, which blended Indian lyrics with Western beats and visuals.

Global marketers acting democratically learn about and respond to local cultures. Historically, Procter & Gamble excelled at serving the world's more affluent consumers. Consistent with the inclusion principle, it is now trying to figure out how to serve low-income consumers around the world. Many low-cost products that fit the needs of low-income consumers are under development. An early example was Pur, a water-purification device. P&G sends its marketers through "cultural immersion" in emerging markets—they have to live with consumers for a few days—and emphasizes product innovations and promotional practices that demonstrate cultural empathy³.

Retailing and distribution still remain largely local activities—although there are significant opportunities for global marketers to contribute to improved systems of exchange. In many instances, global marketers are partnering with local suppliers or distributors, local governments, or non-governmental organizations to build infrastructure. Ericsson, for example, is setting up local franchises to own and operate telecommunications centers serving poor communities. ABB and the World Wildlife Fund are collaborating on a pilot project to bring commercially viable delivery of electricity to rural Tanzanian villages.

Marketing in some respects has been more democratic than the political system. Among its strengths, practitioners seek to understand and engage consumers. They increase opportunities for exchange. They respect differences among individuals and seek to inform and serve—profitably of course—a variety of customer segments, each with different needs. In the long run, we believe, marketers and marketing that follow democratic principles are likely to be accepted as legitimate and beneficial across countries with varying social, economic, political and religious systems.

How Does Your Marketing Shape Up?

Every once in a while, it's healthy to hold a mirror up to your marketing mix. How well does it encompass the six democratic principles (see *The Six Democratic Principles* on page 21)? As with Dove, are there opportunities to create more value for consumers and society? For example, are your marketing communications providing information that makes customers aware of the choices that suit their needs—and incidentally, stimulating consumption and accelerating new-product adoption as a result? Are you making good use of consumer information to deliver better products and services and are you scrupulous in guarding the security of sensitive personal information?

Pricing is a key determinant of exchange value. Are products and services priced at levels that provide value to target consumers as well as profit to you? Efficient distribution and logistics systems enable exchange. Are you exploring new go-to-market distribution options and providing customers with more convenient ways to obtain products and services?

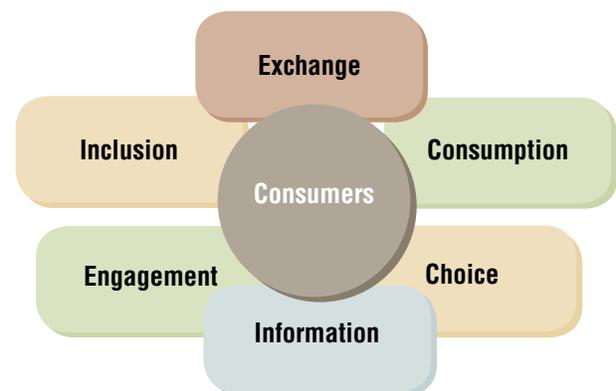
Is your marketing engaging customers? The creativity in marketing communications, in good product design and enjoyable retail experiences all bring fun to people's lives. The best marketers have always entered into a dialog with consumers, but increasingly that dialog takes place in real time, thanks to electronic communications. Consumers lend their creativity to marketers by creating ads, participating in market research, suggesting product improvements and joining in viral marketing campaigns.

Could you develop creative solutions to serve domestic or global markets that are currently underserved and thereby add more people to your customer mix? British-based supermarket chain Tesco, for example, is entering low-income urban markets in the western United States with a small "Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market" format that allows consumers in these areas to buy previously hard-to-find fresh fruits and vegetables at low prices. Industry experts believe Tesco has a good chance of taking on Wal-Mart and other rivals by changing the way people shop.

"Bringing good quality to the masses" has motivated many successful marketers, from Henry Ford in the 1900s to Howard Schultz of Starbucks in the 1990s. Only a few privately-held luxury brands reject the mass market and don't require an expanded base of customers. Are you neglecting a broader audience of potential customers?

Are you examining the societal context surrounding consumption of your products and services? For example, in the 1990s, sales of bottled water soared, related to health consciousness; lately, a backlash from environmental groups opposed to the production of millions of plastic water bottles,

■ **Exhibit 1**
Marketing's six benefits



as well as from critics of water privatization, has slowed the growth in consumption.

The Company We Keep

Imagine for a moment how difficult it would be to do business in an environment where customers mistrusted marketers in general, or marketers in your industry. What if customers hesitated to enter into long-term relationships or contracts, or were inclined to retaliate when they felt ripped off? What if brand names no longer signified assurance and trust? In a lawyers' paradise, details of transactions would have to be spelled out and tighter regulation could ensue. The U.S. home-mortgage industry is perilously close to this situation and the brokerage industry isn't far behind.

Marketing goes wrong when consumers do not receive value in marketing exchanges. Consumption of goods and services should improve the quality of life, not undermine it. A positive aspect of the burgeoning mortgage industry was inclusiveness; it made home ownership possible for households previously shut out of the market. Tragically, marketers in the industry did not provide completely truthful and adequate information nor did they ensure that the choices they presented ultimately served buyers' best interests.

Beyond examining how well your marketing activities deliver the six "democratic" consumer benefits, it's good practice to monitor how well your industry is delivering them, because you are known by the company you keep. In particular, it's important to watch out for early warning signals that industry practices are eroding the trust and respect that hold market-places together. For example, the credit-card industry is relying heavily for its profitability on charges and fees that punish consumers for not obeying often opaque rules. If there are warning signs, the best course of action is to adopt a leadership position in order to set the bar higher for expected good practice or to steer the industry toward self-regulation that will underpin its long-term reputation with customers.

Boost Marketing's Public Image

In addition to pointing to opportunities to serve customers more effectively, the framework of the six democratic marketing benefits may also help marketers articulate the benefits of marketing to the general public. Marketers have compelling reasons to do so. A few years ago, Yankelovich reported plummeting public opinion of marketing and advertising in the United States. More than six out of ten consumers questioned the practices and motives of marketers and advertisers; equal numbers felt that marketers and advertisers do not treat consumers with respect. There is no reason to believe opinions are any more favorable now.

Marketers have under-marketed marketing. In large part, that is because many are unable to formulate for themselves, let alone for the general public, the benefits that society gains from good marketing. It is difficult to market a product if you cannot

The Six Democratic Principles

Following these six democratic principles—on the part of both consumers and marketers—will lead to better marketing.

Exchange. The act of exchange between a buyer and a seller can create value for each and also add value to society. Exchanges are fair, equitable and socially responsible.

Consumption. Marketing offers consumers the opportunity to consume innovative products and services that improve the quality of life. It does not promote consumption of products that harm consumers.

Choice. Choice strikes a balance between diversity and confusion. There are meaningful differences among choices and benefits, real and perceived, that stem from the provision of different choices.

Information. Marketers inform consumers with minimal intrusion. They make information interesting and relevant. They scrupulously protect the information they collect about consumers.

Participation. Marketers empower customers; engage them in the design and production of goods and services; they solicit, listen to and act on the information customers give them.

Inclusion. Marketers reach out to all consumers; they respect diverse values and cultures.

define its distinctive benefits and brand promise. If marketers can demonstrate marketing's social benefits, they will also be able to market it more persuasively. If they like what they see when they look at marketing in the mirror, they can present a confident face to their customers and to the general public. ■

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Endnotes

¹ John Deighton (2008) "Dove: Evolution of a Brand," Case No. 9-508-047, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA, p. 5.

² Theodore Levitt (1983) "The Globalization of Markets," *Harvard Business Review*, May-June, pp. 92-102.

³ Gary Silverman (2006) "How can I help you?," *Financial Times*, 4/5 February, pp. 16-21.

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