

LAST BRAND STANDING

Why having a good solid
“social game” is key to
surviving in business

BRAND®
ESSENTIALS



Having a solid social game is becoming a determining factor for anyone earning the title of sole survivor

We all have rituals. One of my favorites is to watch the mega-hit 'Survivor' with my 18-year-old daughter Shannon, who over time has become a true aficionado of the game. The contest pits people from all walks of life, dropped on to a remote island in Fiji for 40 days and pitted against one another – may the best person win. As the show has evolved over the years, so have the strategies to compete using brains, brain, mental chicanery and full-on deception.

In recent years it has become clear that most of the eventual winners had a very important ingredient to their success: "Their Social Game." Here, the social game boils down to the emotional bonds one creates with their peers (who ultimately vote for you to be the winner) - Are you conscientious? Do you do what you say? Can you be trusted to do you do the right thing when no one is watching? Do you compete in a way that earns respect? While the casts and circumstances change every season, having a solid social game is becoming a determining factor for anyone earning the title of sole survivor.

Interestingly, in the world of branding, where consumer loyalties can be fragmented across myriad brands it can be equally challenging to forge deeper social relationships. Not surprisingly many brands are turning their efforts to upping their social games, to survive the competition over the long haul.

But what does the social game look like in the world of business, and how can a brand be socially engaged with their target audiences in an authentic way, while at the same time performing the basics of business blocking and tackling?

One recent example is Gillette's recent ad campaign that leverages the #MeToo movement in a very memorable and emotional campaign, which evolved its decades-old mantra "the best a man can be", by encouraging men to better model their behavior to respect all members of society. The campaign was meant to get attention and provoke a response and it certainly succeeded. As is the case today, the public was polarized in that some people loved how it called out the role of men in society, while other saw it as preaching to men unnecessarily. Whatever side one took, the campaign certainly cemented a deeper social relationship with women, who interestingly, are the chief buyers of razors in most US household – a smart "social game" connected to solid a business driver.



At the same time, some have observed that Gillette's new social game was a direct response to arch rival Unilever's acquisition of Dollar Shave Club (DSC), a decidedly all-male brand that has been a huge growth engine in Unilever's quest to forge a its own unique social game with younger, male shavers. Positioned as a membership club, for just a few dollars a month, DCS's social game reaches deep into the "man cave" to tap into primal male grooming habits that reside at the intersection of branding and bravado.

Regardless of which shaving camp one falls into it is clear that 'brand survival' today may require developing social game strategies that are authentic, smart for the business and never, ever erode the brand's treasured equity that it has built up over time.



Given this, establishing of an effective social game should be driven by 10 key considerations that could ultimately assure what is the last brand standing:

1. Do Your Homework:

Research can identify the core issues a brand's audiences care most about – get to know these well and importantly, the reasons behind them. There is always a “story behind the story”.

2. Focus On What Matters:

When aligning your brand with any social issues, focus on those things that are not only true, but true and important. Your target audience can always tell you an array of things they think are true about your brand, but it's only the ones that true and important that will penetrate in the marketplace and become enduring.

3. Audiences Are Dynamic:

Audiences age and their allegiances to social issues change over time.

4. Have a Standard:

Your Brand's Social Game must be:

- Clear - people get it right away
- Credible – it sounds authentic coming from that brand
- Compelling – it's make me proud to associate with hat brand

5. Avoid Fads:

Make sure the basis for a brands social game is that it is not a trend or a fad, but rather has very enduring properties.

6. For every Action there is a Reaction:

You brand competitors are smart and you have to imagine engaged in a very similar strategy, so always try to predict what the competitive response will to your Social Game in advance, if possible.

7. Brand Inward:

Stand for things that matter to your employees (you're the ultimate brand ambassadors) too - if they are not on board why should anyone else be?

8. Have a Plan B:

Social issues, or personalities associated with them (e.g. spokespeople) can turn “unfavorable” or be met with resistance and sometimes asymmetric opposition.

9. Go Deep:

If you stand for everything, then you stand for nothing. Be choosy about the social issues that you anchor your brand to so that it is authentic and quickly understood.

10. What's the end game:

Ask yourself what level of investment, resources and duration you are willing or expect to be tethered to your social game – what is its shelf life? When should it be retired?



AUTHOR

DAVID KEEFE | PRINCIPAL

EXPERIENCE:

A branding veteran, and classically trained at Unilever, David has worked in brand consulting for over two decades across multiple sectors including packaged goods, telecom, pharma, healthcare, financial services and non-profit. During David's tenure, he has led global strategy and design teams at Siegel+Gale, Landor and Conran Design Group, and is known for his thought leadership and ability to deliver results to clients.

KEY CLIENTS:

Alcon, AstraZeneca, CBS, Citi, Comcast, Coca-Cola, Deutsche Bank, KCI, Novartis, Merck, Pfizer, Roche, Sanofi, Teva, TD Ameritrade, Unilever, Verizon, Walgreens, Zoetis

EDUCATION:

BA, DUKE UNIVERSITY
MBA UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
KENAN-FLAGLER BUSINESS SCHOOL

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BRAND®
E S S E N T I A L S

david@brandessentials.com
(203) 227-3000