

## CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS *3 trends show a significant shift*

It would be an understatement to say the past two years have been challenging. With the world – and consumer behaviour – changing so rapidly, how do we predict what individuals are thinking or doing, let alone corporates?

Fortunately, there are people out there whose job it is to predict the future. No, I'm not referring to celebrity astrologers, or crystal-ball-wielding fortune tellers, but credible and intelligent organisations known as trendwatchers and futurists.

Read on to discover how the pandemic has impacted consumer attitudes, beliefs and consequently buying behaviour. Most importantly, how companies and brands will respond in order to resonate with customers' values, meet their needs and remain relevant. When a company fails to respond to changing attitudes and customer needs, diminishing returns and even bankruptcy awaits. Just think Kodak, Blockbuster and Toys R Us.

If you want your corporate partnerships strategy to yield results, and keep current partners happy, you must meet their needs. Understanding their world is the first and most important step.

### WHAT'S A TREND?

When I refer to trends, I don't mean that new hairdo or a topic that's trending on Twitter. In the business context, a trend is a pattern of gradual but significant shifts in attitude and behaviour change. In times like these – a global pandemic – change can be less 'gradual' and more rapid. Trend predictions can be fairly reliable if they're based on multiple research studies from numerous credible sources.

In order to bring you this article, I've scanned the globe and Australia for major consumer trends and selected those that are consistent and credible – from firms including Dentsu, Mintel, Accenture, Globescan, KPMG, McCrindle, Microsoft, PWC and Dynata. I've also included statistics from our very own *Conscious Consumer Report 2021*.

Here are the 'Big Three' consumer trends..

### TREND 1: THE CRUSADING CONSUMER

While trends 2 and 3 will impact the way in which you partner with corporates, this significant trend will drive corporates to your doorstep. The Conscious Consumer movement has been growing for some years, and COVID-19 has accelerated it. We've seen the once conscious consumer morph into the crusading consumer, using their voice, skill and wallet as instruments for change. Around the world, consumers are demanding a systemic reset, believing that the old model of corporates operating purely for profit is dead. In Australia, the *2021 Conscious Consumer Report* found that two in three consumers believe this to be true. They want companies and brands to not only address their impact on society and the environment but be active agents of change.

Companies not only have the resources to address society's problems, but they have the mass market reach to amplify issues to effect behaviour change. In Australia, over half of consumers believe corporates have the greatest potential to solve societal problems and three quarters believe corporates should partner with charities to solve social problems in the coming year.

This is supported by numerous global research studies and trend reports. According to Dentsu's *Brave New Normal: Creative Trends 2021*, one in five brands say they have re-evaluated their purpose this year. The *Mintel Global Consumer Trends Report 2021* reveals that COVID-19 has revitalised the concept of community, with consumers craving human connection more than ever. In the USA, 46% of consumers feel giving back and helping others is one of the top 5 values they live by. Consumers using their purchasing power for good is a global phenomenon. In the UK, 20% of consumers say they shop with a retailer that supports a cause they



believe in and 47% of Brazilian consumers agree they're prepared to boycott companies who behave unethically. In Australia, the *Conscious Consumer Report* found that over half of consumers say they will switch to brands supporting a charity in the coming year.

The Globescan study, *Business & Society, Social Trends & Corporate Leadership 2020*, shows that climate change is considered the third most serious global problem behind COVID-19 and the spread of human disease. This is also reflected in Australia, with our report revealing climate change as the most motivating cause for consumers to switch brands. Globescan reveals that the expectation on companies has shifted towards transparency, treating staff well, and minimising environmental damage, over providing products and making a profit.

Another global study by Accenture shows that more than half of Gen Y and Gen Z say they've shifted a portion of their spending away from a company that's disappointed them around a social issue.

### Why this matters to the sector

The most exciting thing about this trend is it validates that the conscious consumer movement is now mainstream globally. Switching brands to support a cause is at the highest level in the 25 years we've been tracking the movement, and it's not just the activist Gen Z and Gen Y,

it's across all generations. The Baby Boomers and even the older Builders are flexing their muscles at the (online) checkout, signing petitions and making their voice heard.

This positions the nonprofit sector as not just the 'caring sector' that supports vulnerable people, but a powerful partner to help companies meet consumer demand. As the country emerges from lockdown, companies will use everything at their disposal to rebuild their businesses and win back customers that have gone elsewhere during COVID-19.

#### How it will affect corporate partnerships

This represents a significant opportunity for nonprofits (especially the causes that motivate consumers to switch brands). Nonprofits can demonstrate to corporates that a partnership has the potential to win customers, motivate staff and enhance reputation. And now you have the statistics to prove it. A partnership with a cause will become a necessity not a luxury. Get ready for an unprecedented partnering frenzy!

#### TREND 2: THE GREAT RESIGNATION

The pandemic has afforded people an opportunity to think deeply about the role of work in their lives. Global research from Microsoft predicts that more than 40% of the global workforce – from frontline workers to senior executives, will quit their job. The mass exodus has company leaders bracing for a seismic shift in the workforce and it's likely to hit Australia in early 2022.

The pandemic has rewritten the psychological contract between employer and employee, shifting the balance of power. Suddenly a good salary, a nice office and other materialistic benefits are not as attractive as before. Employees want flexibility – to work when and where they want – and for their work to be enriching and meaningful.

#### Why this matters to the sector

Firstly, expect a boom in the social enterprise space and corporate executives looking for work or seeking board positions within the nonprofit sector. This will bring fresh new thinking and innovation to the sector, which can only be a good thing. But it also means you'll need to increase your training budget, and be open to new ideas, if you intend to bring these new recruits into your organisation.

#### How it will affect corporate partnerships

You'll need to re-focus existing and new partnerships on company and brand synergy, not relationships. Nonprofits are brilliant at building relationships – indeed it's a default position based on years of cultivating donors and major givers. However, if you want to secure corporate partnerships and sponsorships,

funded by the marketing and CSR purse, your focus will need to be on synergy – alignment with brand personality, values, purpose and geography. Of the four corporate purses (marketing, CSR, human resources and philanthropic), marketing and CSR rely heavily on synergy as opposed to relationships.

If you have existing relationships, expand those touchpoints. As Lynda Inglis, Corporate Partnerships Lead at the Royal Flying Doctor Service, says, "When managing my corporate partnerships, I've made a real point of connecting with multiple employees within the company, rather than a single relationship manager. By cultivating these unilateral relationships, they become champions for the cause and are invested in our success. Too often, when a primary person leaves, a once-strong relationship can become vulnerable. Given this trend, it will continue to be a vital component of our corporate partner management strategy."

A word of warning: companies may look to embed more staff volunteering opportunities as a strategy to encourage retention, motivation, loyalty and pride. Unless your organisation is in desperate need of volunteers for a specific event, it may be worth offering this time-intensive benefit exclusively to those

companies that are providing funding – so cash paying partners and sponsors. Provide it to those that are financially supporting you, not just using you to boost morale. Also, expand your offering to include skill-based, virtual opportunities.

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#### TREND 3: THE HERO IS ME

In a world of 'new normal', the face of the standard hero (or heroine) is evolving. There's been a shift in who we look up to and admire. They are people like you – humble people doing their job to keep the country on its feet. From frontline workers like doctors and nurses, ambulance drivers, grocery checkout staff, our invaluable posties as well as volunteers, nonprofits and social enterprises. I've always considered the people who work in nonprofits to be heroes, it's what attracted me to the sector, but it's taken a global health crisis for everyone else to see it. Out go the glossy retouched celebs, Insta-perfection influencers and the predominate pantone colour (white). In are normal people from diverse backgrounds working for the greater good.

Diversity is a driving force here, with companies needing to go beyond just ticking the diversity workforce quota box. Despite recent lockdowns, according to the Centre for Strategic & International Studies, the number of public protests advocating for the rights of vulnerable and marginalised people has increased by 11.5% each year this past decade. This came to a head in 2020 with the Black Lives Matter and Transgender rights movements.

### Why this matters to the sector

This is your time to be recognised for the work you do – the quiet achievers and the big brands alike. Whilst there's no doubt you are indeed heroes, the opportunity here is for you to hand the cape to others. Leverage your hero status and allow those that work with you – donors, funders, volunteers and of course corporates – to join you on the hero's journey. Become familiar with this journey and storytelling – the time-honoured technique which has become the single most potent practice for cutting through the digital media noise.

After an all-time low in 2018, trust in big business has bounced back. Despite the comeback, it still remains one of the least trusted industries. The Globescan study reveals that only 28% of consumers believe national companies operate in the best interest of society, and only 12% believe global companies do.

Embracing the hero archetype, through partnering with a cause, is an effective way for companies to show their human face. Of course, this must be authentic, showing demonstrated actions and outcomes, so do the necessary due diligence and homework to avoid woke washing, cause

washing, green washing, purpose washing, the list goes on. Consumers will call it out, doing damage to both partners' brands. In Brazil, McDonald's separated their Golden Arches to promote social distancing which was met with backlash as it was about branding, not how they were protecting staff and customers. A supersized mistake.

### How it will affect corporate partnerships

Companies and brands will be embedding diversity in various ways, to appeal to a broader audience by representing multiculturalism in their offerings and communications. Crayola, who inspire creativity in children in the form of wax crayons, has introduced a 'colours of the world' range that has 24 specially formulated colours representing different skin tones.

Financial firm Citi have launched a new initiative called 'True Name' where customers can request their chosen name on their credit card and bank accounts. For transgender and non-binary people, this is a first.

For nonprofits that represent everyday people and diverse cultures, this represents a big opportunity to reinforce

a company's diversity platform through a cause partner. It also means that when approaching companies, it's imperative to reflect diversity in your own teams and the visuals used in presentations.

"I recently pitched to a company and used storytelling tools and techniques. It resonated immediately, engaging and inspiring the decision makers – they signed up instantly," says Janet Grima, CEO, Bully Zero.

When the world is changing so fast, it's almost impossible to predict what the future will hold. Armed with these trends, you will be well-equipped knowing what corporates will be thinking and doing to adapt their products and services to meet consumer needs. If you want your corporate partnerships strategy to produce results, you need to be prepared to adjust to the brave new world and meet their needs. Get ready for the incredible opportunity this presents. **F&P**

*Georgia McIntosh is Co-Founder and Chief Communicator at BePartnerReady.com®, an online training and implementation program that upskills changemakers to win corporate partnerships.*