

From where I sit

Redefining good marketing, by Vicky Knowlden



Sadly, we're all too familiar with spammy, gimmicky, poorly timed, greenwashing, pushy marketing campaigns that lead to overconsumption. This may be what first springs to mind when you think of marketing. But tolerance for this kind of activity is wearing thin, and it really doesn't have to be that way.

Marketing done well is informative, creative, inclusive and engaging. It's both functional and strategic. It helps people find services and products that align with their values. It tells stories but it doesn't gloss over things. It creates interest by stripping brands back to their core and showing the truth. Its goal is authenticity rather than persuasion. This is the marketing I'm proud to be a part of.

Whatever your opinion of marketing, consider its power. It's the reason we eat bacon and eggs for breakfast, wear certain styles of clothes and take coffee breaks – it shifts behaviour. If marketing can shape our everyday life in this way, imagine what it could do as a force for good? Fundamentally, its purpose is to encourage us to take action – to be part of something bigger than ourselves. I believe the future of marketing is to drive change for better.

Heading up the marketing and communications of a purpose-driven organisation like ADP means living and breathing its vision and values, being a guardian of the brand. But what is a brand? In its most simple definition a brand is a promise, a promise to keep the values we hold important.

ADP's mission is to redefine good architecture by measuring success in terms of sustainability, belonging and engagement. It's this mission which will lead us to achieve our ultimate purpose – to create more joy in our world. This drive to have a positive impact on people, communities and the environment carries through the entire business, including our marketing.

Sustainability – reducing our impact and promoting sustainable choices
We've started with minor changes to reduce our impact. We cut down on printed collateral and created reduced-ink document templates. For the printing we need, we use a climate-positive printing company, which is also a B Corp – a company that has been certified for demonstrating high social and environmental performance.

We've considered the impact of our events, and last year asked for charity donations at one of our exhibition stands instead of giving away branded collateral. We're now looking into other ways we can reduce our carbon footprint – including the digital carbon footprint of our website. The environmental impact of a web page can easily be measured through free sites such as <https://digitalbeacon.co/>.

Being transparent in how we communicate the sustainable elements of our buildings and business is key. The Green Claims Code is a positive step in providing regulation that cracks down on greenwashing in every industry. We're conscious that we shouldn't over-emphasise what we're doing – we still have a way to go. And it's okay to be human. If we miss a target or objective, we'll explain why and move on. This helps build trust.

We don't want to be so afraid of greenwashing that we say nothing – communicating helps bring people along with us. External accreditations can also help here. We started the process to become a B Corp in 2021 as a way of benchmarking ourselves, ensuring we remain accountable and can evidence our positive action.

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Belonging – improving accessibility and inclusivity

Part of my role is to take technical and complex information and make it easy to understand for everyone. The architecture world has a lot of jargon. I write web copy for people, not for algorithms – I would rather our content connects on a human level than worry about how Google wants to rank it. Often people believe having a human voice is only important for consumer brands, but it is equally relevant in B2B: both involve people interacting with people.

One area we're still learning about is inclusivity and accessibility across all of our communications – printed and digital. There is lots to consider here, from the use of inclusive language and close-captions through to alt text, and selecting colours and font sizes. We want to get it right, and it's something we're working on this year. The goal here is to ensure that content is designed for everyone and that all people are treated with respect, dignity and impartiality.

Internal communications are an underrated aspect of a marketing strategy, but are integral to helping employees understand why the business exists and where they fit. Employees are a key stakeholder, if not the key stakeholder, and culture is everything – especially in an employee-owned organisation like ADP. Our culture is intrinsically linked to our brand. We empower employees to tell their stories, which are often more compelling than brand stories.

Engagement – creating informative, authentic, and joyful content

We craft and share purpose-led content as part of our programme of insights and research initiatives. We're not disruptive: we go to where our target audiences already are, to their publications and events. Our aim is to bring joy to every touchpoint and to communicate what we stand for to attract like-minded people and build trust.

Client events are a good example of this. For instance our annual Art Challenge provide our employees with an opportunity to showcase their talents at an art exhibition and to raise money for charity, as well as being a business development event.

I'm interested in how we can use social media to engage with communities. Can we support others using our own reach? While there is undoubtedly a toxic side to social media, it can be a great tool for connecting people, and promoting charities and awareness campaigns. And as an employee-owned business, it's another way to give our employees a voice, and share their thoughts and ideas. Our recruitment video posted on social media was created from outtakes of professional films and videos taken by employees on their phones. We felt this offered a more authentic insight into life at ADP than a polished, scripted video.

In summary, the definition of good marketing I try to apply to my everyday role at ADP is one that *builds trust, creates connections, and spreads joy* to our external audiences and employees. If all marketing took a similar approach – driving purpose-driven brands – I believe we may just be able to change the world for the better.

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