

Enough about the brand, let's talk about the brand
Mandy Wheeler, Punch It Up

Ok, here's a marketing idea that won't cost your brand a penny. Stop talking. Please. Just shut up. Because you're not really talking to me, are you? You're talking to yourself.

Stop sharing your commitments and your passions, stop parading your values and waving your ethos. Stop sloganising, stop storytelling. Please. I've had enough.

I'm sitting in a coffee shop. It's plastered with dinky little notices telling me the flapjacks contain locally sourced nuts, the bread uses artisanal yeast and the Baristas are specially trained. The coffee machine has heritage, the beans are ethically pure; the napkins are recycled. The Facebook address page is over the cash desk so I'll remember to like them, and the twitter account will make sure they can stay in touch.

Ok I get it. This is a good place. These are good, kind people. They care passionately about - well, everything. A shame then, that their coffee is ropey, their chairs excruciating and the staff so indifferent to the outside world that they can't even make eye contact during the ten minutes it takes to make - sorry create - a coffee. But they do care passionately about their milk. So that's ok then.

Only it's not ok.

Because it's not only happening in small coffee shops - this kind of self-regarding prattle is coming at us from all sides. It's coming from big brands whose attempts at chummy intimacy feel like the marketing equivalent of dad dancing. It's selfie talk gone mad, branding that's eaten itself, PR that's fallen headlong into narcissism.

And you know what? I don't care. I don't care about your hobbies or your passions or the exciting things your employees do at the weekend. I don't care how many Facebook followers you've got. I don't want to see your values, however nice the typeface they're written in. I don't care because you haven't given me any space to care. Because you've filled it all with you - a business pretending to be a person. And not even an attractive person - at best, someone with serious self-esteem issues, at worst, a narcissistic control freak.

Perhaps I might care about what you actually do, if only I could get to it behind all these adjectives, through all this hype. Perhaps some of the claims are even true, but, sorry, I don't believe a word of it. You can't be all things to all people, and in the rush to try the first casualty is authenticity. Surely we have reached the nadir when a company trumpets their values as 'Being Human' and 'Caring.' Really? You needed to tell me that? And you didn't think it would make me suspicious?

There's a saying in the self-development world: *'What other people think of you is none of your business.'* It's intended as a reality check for those crippled with self-doubt. It could serve as a reminder to brands that how they come across is in the eye of the beholder and there's only so much they can or should do to control it.

If only.

I'm walking out of the doctor's surgery after a bruising consultation. Before I get home a text arrives: *'How did we do? Would you recommend us?'* Later it's the bank manager, having finally sorted out a monumental screw up on my account. He doesn't pause for breath before asking: *'How would you rate my performance in dealing with this issue?'*

Really? You want to know? I'd rate it as just doing your job. You provided a banking service; you gave me medical care. That's what you're meant to do. I'm not going to throw you a treat because you did your job. I'm not going to thumbs up your Facebook page, or be in a selfie that you can show off next to your satisfaction figures as proof of your passionate commitment to providing customer solutions. And anyway, Mr Bank Manager, how about less with the image making and more on the stopping the screw up in the first place? As the saying goes: *'Quality is doing the right thing when nobody is looking.'*

Brands are commercial, it matters what customers think. So give us some space to think. Give us a bit more showing and a little less telling. Do the work, live your passions, love your job – just stop telling me about it. Please.

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