Make empathy the heart and soul of your brand strategy

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The turbulence of recent events has accelerated many trends that were already under way – flexible working for one – but perhaps none more so than the unstoppable rise of empathy.

Yes, the growing prominence of this ability to feel and understand things from another's perspective is one of the defining features of our times. And it's not just people, buffeted by a seemingly endless series of crises, who are becoming more empathetic, brands are too.

Your customers are becoming increasingly aware of how the brands they use impact their lives. What's more, they want those brands to have a positive effect on their lives and on society in general. Empathy isn't just a desirable quality for a brand, it's fast becoming a necessity.

It's a development that is perhaps most prominently seen among Generation Z and Millennials, who see a world that has more than enough to deal with, from the fight against climate change to the struggle to create a more equal society. They expect your brand to play its part. They are increasingly seeking out brands that 'get them', that understand and share their values, that 'know where they're coming from'. Likewise, if brands fail to empathize, then they won't think twice about boycotting their goods or services.

Empathy, then, is the glue that exists between a brand and its loyal customers.

The more empathy your brand has, the stronger the bond. Brands that recognize the importance of putting empathy at the heart of their branding and marketing strategies can form much deeper connections with their customers. And deeper connections drive higher customer loyalty, advocacy and, ultimately, higher sales and profits.

It all sounds simple to achieve, but all too often we see brands failing the empathy test.

Most commonly it's because brands just don't understand just who their customer is, beyond the snapshot of customer profiling that is. They haven't got underneath their skin, they don't know what drives their customers or what they believe in. And that's usually because they haven't taken the time to listen to their customers.

Expectations are only getting higher when it comes to brand empathy, but how can you be sure that your brand empathizes with your customers. Firstly, people expect brands to be honest in their communication, which is the foundation of empathy. Gone are the days when customers would turn a blind eye to overpromising or greenwashing for example. Secondly, you need to truly understand your customer, which isn't as hard as it sounds. Take the time to listen to them and you'll find out what they need, what they value the most and you'll 'get them'.

And finally, by acting on what you have learned you will align your brand with your customers' needs, whether that's by changing your positioning, adapting your product or standing up for something you believe in.

Consumers want brands that inspire people to better themselves and the world they live in.

We can help you do just that.