

Social Investments and Consumer Ideologies

Our world is in deeply rooted turmoil, and it's no surprise that consumers are searching for leadership within the businesses that they trust most. Giving your brand a social purpose/investment may feel like the best and most appropriate move for your business, but missteps happen and can result in severe consequences. Here's why – lack of authenticity.

Your business should serve the customers that support you and ultimately make meaningful contributions. As I said in a previous blog, no matter what culture you are trying to cultivate within your business, leading by example and being grateful are visible and active proponents to success. However, customers can and will express a disconnect if you, as a business leader or owner, develop a social purpose strategy that feels unauthentic and unclear on how your brand is making a meaningful contribution. Or simply put, everything about what you stand for should shine through your brand, your messaging, your products, and your services.

Today, I will provide a few tips to consider cultivating a business's authentic social investments and being a light in a world that sometimes feels exceptionally dark right now. As business owners and humans, we have a duty to act in the best interest of our society and for all of humanity. This doesn't mean that we need to tip the world on its axis, but one small ripple in the ocean can cause a significant wave towards a better future.

Get Clear!

Before making or promoting a social investment as a business owner – get clear with yourself. Look inward to understand your personal values and where they intersect with your brand and business. Look at your 'why' and 'why now' to confirm its authenticity. Take the time to organize your thoughts and beliefs.

This inner work is endless. You may realize you have more work to do than you thought. You may need to unlearn, unwind, and deprogram beliefs and systems that are deeply rooted, and this takes time. Do the work to become more educated and informed by reading books, researching events, or listening to interviews/speeches from historians. Access your mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being so they're in alignment with your integrity, values, and truth as well as your business's social investment.

Next, you need to be clear and intentional in who you serve and how. Being too broad may feel overwhelming for your execution. By focusing on your intentions and looking at the specifics – you will have a clear road map of your direction. For example, let's say an existing business has a social purpose to serve the environment and lessen water usage. They successfully serve that intention through selling hydroponic systems in communities located in hot, dry terrains in South America.

When you feel organized and comfortable standing in your values and ready to give your brand a social purpose – find a community to talk with and work through your plan to make and/or promote a social investment before you put yourself out there. Bring in experts with diverse views who have the courage and permission to challenge you in a supportive way.

Come Together

Bring your team together as a collective whole – including vendors you engage, personal/professional coaches and agencies you rely on – to be sure your entire wheel is working to support and reflect the social investment and what it stands for. Together, answer questions such as –

Are people that are looking to work with you – see and feel your values?

How are your values integrated into the business's ideologies?

Does your team have these same values?

What shifts do you need to make in your culture?

How do you adjust your messaging?

Your business may have established social responsibility programs underway, some of which could become relevant aspects of your brand's value proposition. If that is the case, now may be an excellent time to communicate with your team, how that program or incentive could align better with the business's current ideologies. Maybe it's adjusting the goals or outreach of the program. Perhaps your team examines the mission statement and purpose and find ways to dive deeper into the benefits and focus. As a team, being diligent about the business's higher mission means you take great responsibility in your social due diligence.

However, if you are starting a new social responsibility program or outreach, a good fit may not be enough. Consider how social purpose can create value by strengthening (or creating) your business's attributes that feel genuinely relevant to consumer choice in your industry, niche, and community. If you want to focus on giving back to environmentalist programs, how will your business align with that cause? What are you collectively and consciously doing that your customers will see as leadership towards the cause? Sure, you may encourage your employees to recycle, but is it enough? Perhaps your company wants to help with racial injustice – beautiful! Now, how are you going to do that? Your words may inspire, but your actions will be the lasting change your company will work towards making. Authentic action translates into priority.

By coming together, in whatever stage of the building process you are in, your team can contribute to how the change will come. Your leadership can create a legacy that inspires consumers and employees to want to do more, learn more, and become a part of much bigger movements than the single self. This means you will work out of love, care, and utmost authenticity to take deliberate action.

Final Thoughts

More than ever, our world holds everyone accountable for their roles in helping the greater good, which should excite business owners to work with purpose and intention. Be inspired to reflect and build a business that is driven to provide creative solutions to world issues that are much more substantial than ourselves. When you are motivated to work authentically, follow your truth, and take the initiative to be a change agent – your passion for serving others will shine. Together, you and your business's supporters can make a difference and meaningfully contribute to humanity! And as always, stay connected and reach out.

-Erica



A passionate organizer of people and initiatives, Erica Smigielski brings over twenty years of experience in project leadership to financial software and SaaS companies who want to launch their next big idea. She leads large-scale, complex projects like product launches and company mergers and acquisitions as well as focused efforts to bring structure and process to fast-track businesses. Erica holds certifications as a Stanford Advanced Project Manager as well as a Certified Group Facilitator, making her a master orchestrator of strategic planning, as well as a skillful communicator who can expertly navigate complex group dynamics.