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**The new principles
of brand leadership:**
The 2016 Impact Project
Executive summary

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In today's open, social and increasingly values-driven marketplace, disruption has shifted from technological to social to personal. People of every social strata and in almost every nation are gaining in the power that comes with knowledge.

This is also true for brands. A brand respected in Europe will likely grow market share in Africa, while a misstep in North America could instantly diminish credibility in Asia. People now view brands and companies as if they were human, and, like any twenty-first century relationship, loyalties are shifted with the click of a mouse or the tap of an app.

Thus, we embarked on a global investigation of how great brands are built today, offering a window into the new requirements for leading the marketplace. We examined over 150 brands in

28 countries and interviewed rising stars across various disciplines. Although all the brands studied exhibited a common desire to create both social and economic impact, four distinct segments emerged based on leadership, structure, core values and culture:

- 1. Y-Prophets** are relentlessly committed to their 'meaningful why,' a higher order purpose
- 2. Free Radicals** challenge conventions and rethink everything from employment practices to company culture to competition
- 3. Tiny Titans** build success by staying intimate and small despite exorbitant growth
- 4. Re-Starts** are renovating their brands for the twenty-first century, despite their tenure as large, established Fortune 500 companies



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Together, these brands offer a panorama of workable, inspiring concepts that show how to thrive in an age of ever-rising expectations and constant disruption:



1. The inside is the outside: Transparency as a cultural imperative

Traditionally, brand leadership fixated on a company's external reputation, trying to spin an image that was often inconsistent with their inner (company) reality. Impact brands start with their culture and build outward, resulting in better products, services and a more authentic reputation.



2. Think value & values: Each brand is an agent of social change

Impact brands follow the belief that what they do is more important than what they say—profits follow principles. To build meaning and loyalty, they hardwire social change into their business models.



3. AI meets EQ: Humanizing the digital revolution

Impact brands embrace technology, but what makes them different is their focus on the human connection. Technology enables them to operate at the intersection of real emotional needs and seamless transactions, creating a brand experience that is simultaneously human, intimate, and useful.



4. Be the best at getting better: Keep the ethos of a student

Impact brands embrace agility and humility because it allows them to continuously improve, while abstaining from the need for surface level perfectionism. These brands push their own boundaries, challenge their own status quo, and adapt to the emerging needs of consumers and employees.

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5. The inversion of credibility: Brand credibility gets personal

Previously, being the biggest corporation was an automatic seal of trust; today, this is not necessarily the case. Impact brands encourage their leaders, employees and stakeholders to build their own personal brands of authority, recognizing it's a sum of their people's personal credibility that builds their own.



6. Flexible mentality: Tactics are strategies

Impact brands find new advantages in the market by defying convention, re-writing the rules, and going beta. Their agility comes through a culture that rewards experimentation and thinking outside the box—often through strategic small bets to find new sources of growth.

To be a brand leader, you must learn how to think like one. To create meaning in today's marketplace requires leadership, innovation and solving social problems. It demands resiliency and trust. Marketing is no longer just selling; it's about making connections and solving problems that improve people's lives. The brands that will win tomorrow will build themselves into future-ready objects of desire—in their products, services, people, and soul.

Are you ready to make an impact?



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