



## Science of a movement

Every marketer dreams of catching lightning in a bottle. It's that moment when a brand—the product and the values it represents—catches fire and becomes more than just something to buy. It spurs a movement, centers a community, and becomes part of people's lives.

But true brand-fueled movements are both as rare as unicorns and hard to deconstruct, given the swirl of excitement and intensity of emotion that typically surround them. Deloitte wondered if there was a way to analyze movements and whether companies, entrepreneurs, and creative teams could create the conditions that would give rise to them.

To explore the science of brand-fueled movements, Deloitte performed a wide-ranging review of published materials and

then conducted one-on-one interviews with top marketing minds from around the world, many of whom have witnessed brand-fueled movements first-hand. A select panel of those experts gathered together with Deloitte thought leaders for a Marketing Incubator, an extensive brainstorming session, to explore brand-fueled movements in depth and consider what makes them tick.

### What is a brand-fueled movement?

The first task was defining terms. Deloitte's research revealed that a brand itself cannot be a movement on its own, but it can help spawn a movement. That usually happens at the point of intersection between a brand identity and a social trend, unmet need, or untapped passion. TOMS shoes introduced a brand concept near to founder Blake Mycoskie's

heart—buy a pair of shoes to fund a second pair for a person in need—but the fans who were touched by the cause and got caught up in the idea created the movement.

Similarly, Starbucks crafted a brand that wasn't just selling coffee but offering customers a third space to hang out, away from home and work. Starbucks' customers, eager for connections in an increasingly mobile and transient world, showed up in droves to help create a modern coffee shop that's now deeply woven into the social fabric. ➤

**Deloitte research uncovered that five characteristics are essential for strong brands in general, and only strong brands are likely to spur movements.**

**Today's successful brands:**

- 1 Inspire and evoke emotion.** Participants of Deloitte's Marketing Incubator concluded that brands should "nail a passion point" for users. One senior marketing interviewee put it this way: "A movement occurs when a company or brand makes a grand statement and asks its customers to join it," touching a consumer emotionally and triggering a response.
- 2 Encourage involvement.** Great brands establish opportunities for customers and employees to become involved and empowered. Whether it's buying TOMS shoes, joining American Express to #ShopSmall on Small Business Saturday, or deciding to #OptOutside with REI, customers can actively participate in living out the visions of the brands they support.
- 3 Create and build community.** Brands can do that via social media or build real communities—like SoulCycle or Airbnb, whose executives say, "We're really about home." The former CMO of upscale fitness company SoulCycle, Spencer Rice, said, "We think of ourselves as an experience company, not a fitness company"—a place where customer birthdays are celebrated, participants find each other through the brand's Facebook group, and leadership tries to cultivate brand evangelists who will expand the community.

- 4 Provide a way for people to visually display their commitment.** A Starbucks cup, a yellow Livestrong bracelet, or a Harley-Davidson jacket have been brand badges for proud, passionate customers.
- 5 Are authentic—and transparent.** When REI invited consumers to #OptOutside rather than shop on Black Friday, the chain put its money where its mouth was and gave its employees a paid day off work. As Marketing Incubator participant and former Procter & Gamble CMO, Jim Stengel, has written, companies that outperform the competition have "ideals that power their growth and provide incubation from temporary setbacks in their brand equity."

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**Spencer Rice, former CMO, SoulCycle**

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**Jim Stengel, former CMO, Procter & Gamble**

According to Deloitte's research, an additional five elements distinguish a brand-fueled movement beyond these basic brand characteristics.

- 1 There is purpose beyond the brand and the transaction.** Movements are generally tied into a social cause or a community's belief that they are contributing to a greater good or purpose within broader society. In the words of one senior VP of marketing, *"There needs to be a deep emotional attachment to a central truth about the product or service, such that a customer willingly engages in the relevant connected community,"* thereby catalyzing action beyond the brand itself. One brand mentioned often is Unilever's Dove, whose "Real Beauty" campaign—now called the "Movement for Self-Esteem"—has encouraged women to be comfortable in their own skin and to push back against a single arbitrary standard for female beauty.
- 2 It captures something anthropologic.** The experts point to both the presidential campaigns of 2016 as movements that tapped into deep cultural and political attitudes, and grew communities ultimately bigger than their candidates and platforms. In fact, everyone agrees that political candidates and issues offer strong potential for movements.
- 3 There is a strong call to action and a clear role for customers.** In some cases, like Small Business Saturday, founded by American Express, the brand serves as the enabler of the movement, providing opportunities for people to interact and develop relationships and community.

- 4 The movement drives cultural or behavioral change or is aligned with a fundamental shift in social values.** Brands at the center of movements, like Starbucks during its high-growth period, become part of the social fabric, changing mind-sets and how people consume products and services.

- 5 The movement has enduring impact.** One research interviewee, a senior global brand development manager for a consumer goods company, cited Ben & Jerry's and Nike in this context. She put it this way: *"To know if it is a brand-fueled movement, ask yourself: Could you make a documentary about this brand?"*

**Deloitte's research also found brands and brand stories that, while successful, don't rise to the level of brand-fueled movements. A true movement is not simply:**

**A great marketing or advertising campaign.** GE's ad campaign focused around innovation, *"Ecomagination,"* for instance, but it's not a movement. As one Marketing Incubator participant says, when a movement happens, *"It's not a brand campaign that caught fire, but an authentic mission that caught fire."*

**An innovative business model.** Dollar Shave Club provides consumers with a completely different way to purchase necessary products and has dedicated customers, but it does not contain the deeper meaning of a true movement.

**A passion brand without social cause.** Gilt built a strong following with loyal customers, but its fans were primarily connected through the merchandise versus a social cause.

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Joshua Sizemore, CEO, Unify Water

**A fad.** Pokémon Go swept the world last summer; millions downloaded the app and were captivated by the idea of catching and collecting Pokémon in the wild. But once the initial excitement wore off, so did use of the app. Says one senior manager of global brand marketing: *“Brand-fueled movements differ from mere fads in that they are not based on one-time, short-term events, but occur when the brand becomes part of someone’s daily life in a sustained manner.”* Agrees former Shinola VP of Retail/Marketing and Founder /CEO of Unify Water Joshua Sizemore, *“Movements have a stickiness to them compared to trends or fads.”*

In short, a brand-fueled movement is an enduring phenomenon that organically transcends the brand, involving and connecting customers with each other, the brand, and the bigger movement itself. In a cluttered, fragmented marketplace, movements can build communities and mobilize people. As Lauder Professor at The Wharton School of Business Jerry Wind and Wharton Future of Advertising Program Executive Director Catharine Hays pointed out, *“all movements, regardless of their genesis, address an unmet need, galvanize people, and truly let the people take it over.”*

Given these parameters, Deloitte’s research found that there are probably fewer true brand-fueled movements than the industry counts on the surface. And there are definitely disagreements. What one person identifies as a movement might be dismissed by others as merely a new business model or an example of great advertising.

### Measuring success with brand-fueled movements

What metrics can help define and measure a brand-fueled movement, aside from longevity? First, look to the core financial metrics that define success: revenue, profit margin, and market share. Moving the needle on corporate performance is one undeniable, and enviable, outcome of successful brand-fueled movements.

One of the most successful efforts broadly considered a movement is Small Business Saturday, founded by American Express. Coming into its eighth year, Small Business Saturday has been recognized by the US Senate, city proclamations, and public service announcements over the past several years. Encouraging people to Shop Small at their local brick-and-mortar stores during the busiest holiday shopping weekend, the Saturday after Thanksgiving, the campaign has provided an umbrella for many independent brands and retailers.

Small Business Saturday meets all of the criteria for a movement. It has a purpose and a strong emotional component. *“It ties to core human values,”* says one global marketing VP of a consumer products company. With a call to action built on personal connections, family rituals, and community support, Small Business Saturday captures an anthropologic desire to support Main Street. Its clear call to action—shop local, on the Saturday after Thanksgiving—has driven sustained increases in both the number of people shopping at small businesses and the sales at independent retailers and restaurants over the past seven holiday seasons.

Second, consider marketing metrics. Deloitte proposes that a brand’s ability to captivate customers, beyond sparking awareness and even transactions—and measured, for example, by social media engagement—is “imperative” to fueling a movement today. TOMS encourages its customers to post photos on social media; its Facebook page has more than 43,000 photos posted by others. *“In addition to co-creation opportunities, [social media] supports a brand’s effort to stay authentic and transparent, which is critical in any brand-fueled movement,”* says Brigid Stevens, former Director of Global Brand & Americas Marketing for TOMS.

Based on its study, Deloitte also recommends tracking internal metrics, including employee retention rates and employee satisfaction ratings, to check that the team shares the brand mission and purpose. Brand purpose matters, especially

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**Catharine Hays & Jerry Wind, Wharton Future of Advertising Program**

to millennials. According to Deloitte LLP research, two out of three millennials say their organization's purpose is a reason they choose to work there; in organizational cultures without perceived purpose, only one out of five is satisfied at work.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, to measure the long-term quality of a movement, consider and track loyalty and brand rapport. It is also critical to understand how a movement impacts the lifetime value of the brand's customer; there are a host of ways to measure lifetime value using some tailored combination of data, including the average spend per transaction, the number of purchases per year, marketing costs, retention rates, customer life span, and profit margins.

### Creating conditions for brand-fueled movements

With a definition of a movement in place, the next questions are: Can a company create a brand-fueled movement? Is there a formula or blueprint for developing a movement?

Although marketing experts emphatically assert there is no guarantee to creating a movement (just as there is no guarantee that a piece of content will go viral), veteran marketers agree there are things that can both help and hurt the potential for a movement to arise.

First, some industries and categories tend naturally to engender the types of communities and user commitment that lead to movements. And others, maybe not so much.

Consider the fitness category. Because of the lifestyle choices reflected in fitness and outdoor activities, brands like Nike and REI often are mentioned in brand-fueled movement discussions. Location-based workout brands like SoulCycle, the chain of high-end indoor cycling studios, aspire to create a third place akin to that offered by Starbucks to its customers.

On the flip side, some brands, frankly, may not even be interested in or appropriate candidates for the social change elements and deeper meanings connected with

movements. And certain categories and businesses may have qualities that don't lend themselves to movements.

For instance, some experts believe car brands don't offer the same movement opportunities because cars are such a relatively infrequent purchase for most consumers—although Subaru, the Toyota Prius, and Mini Cooper, whose loyal buyers proudly boast of their quirky and socially conscious transportation choices, might disagree.

Similarly, some think it's more difficult to build a movement around small-ticket items or everyday necessities, although Dove's "Movement for Self-Esteem" campaign may indicate that creating movement in such a category is possible.

Research indicates that there could soon be an uptick in movements in business-to-business categories, especially among technology brands. Evernote CMO Andrew Malcolm pointed out that bottom-up, grassroots pressure in many companies, combined with the BYOApp practice—where employees sidestep corporately sanctioned software and use their own apps—has led to a switch to Apple<sup>1</sup> products from other management-preferred computer brands. That movement has also supported the rise of Evernote and other technologies such as Dropbox and Slack, which are all popular with users.

Second, organizations may not be able to create a movement, but they can create the right internal atmosphere for one to develop and grow. In order for employees and customers to embrace the passion of a movement, company leaders need to be fully invested in the brand and the mission. There must be passion from the top.

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<sup>1</sup>Science of a Movement is an independent publication and has not been authorized, sponsored, or otherwise approved by Apple Inc. or any other companies mentioned.

<sup>2</sup>Starbucks Makes Global Commitment to Hire 10,000 Refugees by 2022, <https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/community/refugee-hiring>.

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**Brigid Stevens, former  
Director of Global Brand  
& Americas Marketing, TOMS**

Third, the brand needs to remain true to itself. One global brand marketing director points out that Starbucks' public positions through the years—from its holiday cup designs to its issue advocacy—have generated controversy. But controversy has not swayed Starbucks from sticking to its point of view, nor deterred it from taking a stand at the next opportunity (most recently, a commitment to hire refugees).<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, key barriers to a movement mentality include:

- A single-minded focus on ROI.
- Organizational silos that prevent employees from working together and sharing the passion.
- Behaviors typical of larger, bureaucratic companies, often characterized as slow-moving and inflexible, too ready to adopt prescribed outcomes and slaves to the annual plan.
- Confusion about the company's identity—a hodgepodge of mission statements, proclaiming too many values that dilute a core mission and don't ring true with customers.

Fourth, movements cannot be reverse engineered. In other words, it's unlikely a company can recreate a brand in hopes of inspiring a movement. One expert says a

brand-fueled movement *"must be rooted in a mission, with purpose first. A successful brand-fueled movement will not arise from retrofitting a mission into the brand DNA. It has to work the other way around . . . a mission with a company, not a company with a mission."*

### **Brand-fueled movements: Magical but conceivable**

Following this preliminary investigation into the science of brand-fueled movements, it's clear that brands can't simply follow a playbook to create the passionate customer communities that fuel and energize long-term brand-fueled movements. And some brands may not be interested. But, unlikely as they may be, these movements are not accidents.

All companies can work to build the kind of brand rapport with customers—the warm, authentic, long-lasting emotional connections—that forms the foundation of any strong brand—and underpins all brand-fueled movements. There remain untapped opportunities for brands to capitalize on social trends and catalyze action beyond themselves. And if they play their cards right, they could find themselves at the center of a movement.

## **Authors**

**Diana O'Brien**, chief marketing officer, Deloitte LLP

Learn more about Diana O'Brien here: [cmo.deloitte.com/xc/dobrien](http://cmo.deloitte.com/xc/dobrien). Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

**Jennifer Veenstra**, director of CMO Client Experience program, Deloitte Services LP

Learn more about Jennifer Veenstra here: [cmo.deloitte.com/xc/jveenstra](http://cmo.deloitte.com/xc/jveenstra). Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

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