



# 2021 Global Marketing Trends

Find your focus

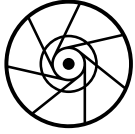
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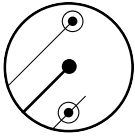
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# Introduction

## 2021 Global Marketing Trends: Find your focus

**T**HROUGHOUT HISTORY, MOMENTS of crisis and uncertainty have galvanized new innovations and shifted views on what matters most to people. The 1918 pandemic popularized the use of the telephone so much that the people-powered switch operators couldn't keep up.<sup>1</sup> In the Cold War era, the rise of televisions in households directly influenced how people perceived conflict at a time when the Vietnam War became the world's "First Televised War."<sup>2</sup> And, more recently, as issues of climate change and gender equality took centerstage, people began to demand more from businesses.<sup>3</sup>

Now, we are confronted with an amalgamation of uncertainty—and the world is collectively looking for answers. With an omnipresent pandemic, we had to find new ways to socialize in a world where social distancing quickly became the norm; work had to be redesigned so people could do their jobs

safely and productively; grocery shopping, dining out, education, and medical treatment fundamentally changed. And, almost in parallel, as a reckoning of systemic racism came to a head, we were forced to reassess and reflect on our values and what it means to be human.

From people and businesses to governments, everyone needed to find new ways to navigate this new world—and this trends report was no different. How do you uncover and discuss the implications of global marketing trends at a time when the world has seemingly turned on its axis and still continues to change in unpredictable ways?

To seek an answer to this question, we set out on an all-encompassing journey to better understand how people and brands responded to the pandemic—and, most importantly, why some brands were able to flourish even during these

### THE 2021 GLOBAL MARKETING TRENDS STUDY

As our world went through rapid changes, we recognized a need to dig deeper into the evolving milieu to better understand how consumers and executives are responding to their new environments. With this in mind, we conducted two surveys to inform each of the 2021 Global Marketing Trends chapters.

**The Global Marketing Trends Consumer Pulse Survey** polled 2,447 global consumers, ages 18 and above, in April 2020. This survey was launched in the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, China, South Africa, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

**The Global Marketing Trends C-suite Survey** polled 405 US C-suite executives from global companies in May 2020. This survey asked CMOs, CFOs, COOs, and CHROs their thoughts on a variety of topics related to their response to COVID-19.

turbulent times. In our second annual report, we combine subject matter expertise, voices from the field, and two overarching surveys—one consumer-based and the other targeted toward executives—to separate the signals from the noise of change (see the sidebar, “The 2021 Global Marketing Trends study” to learn more).

Even among executives, our research found they’re feeling the pressure of an uncertain future. For instance, 18 months ago, we polled executives on their ability to influence their peers and make a strategic impact.<sup>4</sup> When we asked 405 executives the same questions in May of 2020, we saw C-suite confidence has plummeted across the board (figure 1).

As often is the case when we are unsure of how to respond, our most basic instincts kick in and we prioritize survival over *human connection* and *growth*. When we asked these executives what outcomes they hoped to achieve in responding to

the pandemic, the majority prioritized improving efficiency and productivity over more human-centric initiatives such as strengthening customer engagement, retaining talent, and increasing the company’s impact on society. And in these moments of high stress and low certainty, almost no one was thinking about growing revenues or disrupting their industry.

## Answering the call for help

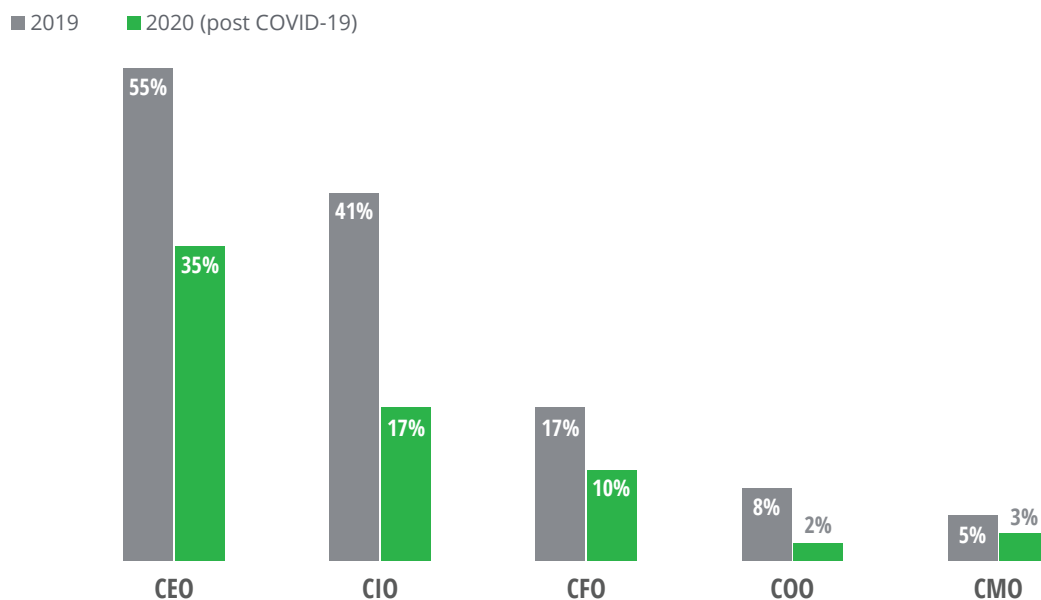
Of course, this isn’t unprecedented or unexpected behavior, but when we polled consumers, they showed us that as times get tougher, they expect more from the brands they frequent. Consider the following findings from our consumer survey:

- Almost four in five people could cite a time a brand responded positively to the pandemic and one in five strongly agreed it led to increased brand loyalty on their part.

FIGURE 1

### C-suite executives have all seen a significant drop in confidence

Percentage of confident executives



Source: Deloitte Global Marketing Trends C-suite Survey.

- Conversely, more than 25% of those who noticed brands acting in their own self-interest walked away from those brands.
- More than 70% agreed they valued digital solutions that deepened their connection with other people, and 63% believe they will rely on digital technologies more than they did prior to the pandemic even well after it subsides.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents could recall at least one brand that quickly pivoted to better respond to their needs, and 82% said this led to them doing more business with the brand.

When we analyze these findings in tandem, we see a very clear message: In these wild times of uncertainty, people are looking to brands for *help*—and rewarding those that can meet their most pressing needs in the moment.

In this spirit, we developed seven trends to help executives break through this wall of uncertainty and take action. These trends can enable leaders to *respond* to customer needs as they unfold, *pivot* business models to better align to evolving needs, and *foster* the human connection we all crave.

## Breaking through with seven trends

Each of our 2021 global marketing trends shares the common theme of breaking out of our often-defensive mindsets to more holistically—and authentically—meet human needs.

In our opening trend chapter on **Purpose**, we establish the foundation required to flourish in even the most turbulent of times. To do this,

organizations should be deeply attuned to why they exist and who they are built to serve.

Our second chapter, **Agility**, explores how organizations can best structure themselves to not only live out this purpose, but also to do so as stakeholder needs unfold.

The **Human Experience** chapter explores how organizations can break out of their efficiency-first mindsets to elevate the experiences of their customers, workforces, and business partners. In our fourth chapter, **Trust**, we provide a means to holding brands accountable and ensuring that the messages they convey are congruent with the experiences they deliver.

Our fifth trend chapter, **Participation**, makes use of an in-depth consumer study to highlight how some of the leading companies in the world are harnessing customer passion to bolster their engagement strategies through customer-led innovation and advocacy.

Our **Fusion** trend sheds light on how some of the most creative companies in the world were able to overcome their defensive mindsets to create entirely new solutions through the fusing of new partnerships, customer ideas, and digital ecosystems.

The final chapter, **Talent**, provides a line of sight into how marketing can elevate its talent model into a competitive differentiator—even in the toughest of times.

These trends do not purport to predict what the future holds, but they may offer something more pressing: a path forward to help your customers, workforces, and society when, collectively, we need it the most.

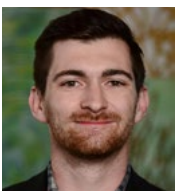
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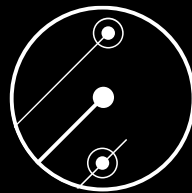
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## Purpose

Organizations that know *why* they exist and *who* they're built to serve are uniquely positioned to navigate unprecedented change.



# Built to flourish

Navigating an ever-changing world through the purpose-driven enterprise

THE WORLD HAS been through one of the worst crises of this century—the coronavirus pandemic—and is just beginning to pick up the pieces and rebuild itself socially and economically. As COVID-19 took its economic and emotional toll on the world, businesses were—and still are—faced with myriad uncertainties. How do organizations navigate a reality where their products and services may no longer have the same standing as they did prior to the outbreak? For some, it may be a question of how to connect with their communities when storefronts are shuttered, or, in terms of talent, how to support workforces on the frontlines as well as those confined to their homes.

**Purpose-driven companies inherently understand *why* they exist and *who* they are best built to serve regardless of what they sell today.**

While most brands are mulling over how to reposition themselves and best serve their

stakeholders, some are positioned to remain steadfast in one key dimension—their **purpose**. These companies inherently understand *why* they exist and *who* they are best built to serve—from their customers and workforces to the community—regardless of what they sell today.

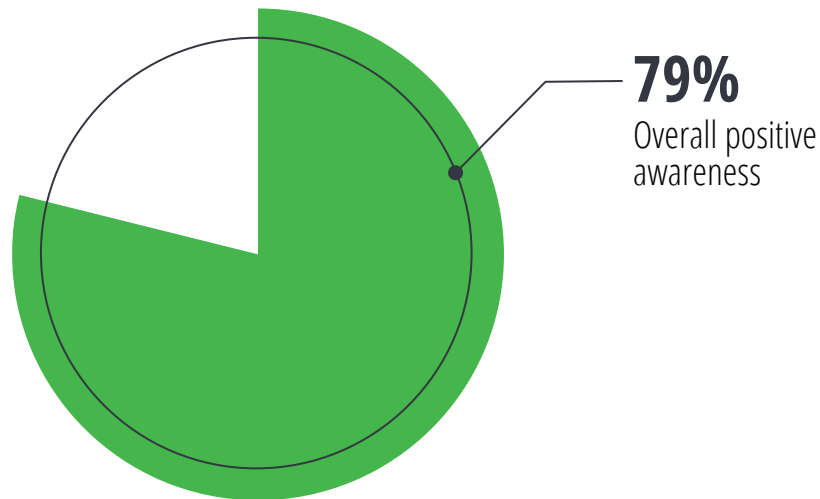
Promisingly, people are taking note of these brands. In Deloitte’s survey of 2,447 global consumers, 79% of respondents recalled instances of brands positively responding to COVID-19 to help their customers, workforces, and communities (figure 1). We saw this manifest in countless ways: financial institutions pausing overdraft fees and deferring loan payments; shoe companies donating

thousands of pairs of shoes to nurses healing their communities; and many companies shifting their long-standing corporate policies to better support the workforces that drive their business.

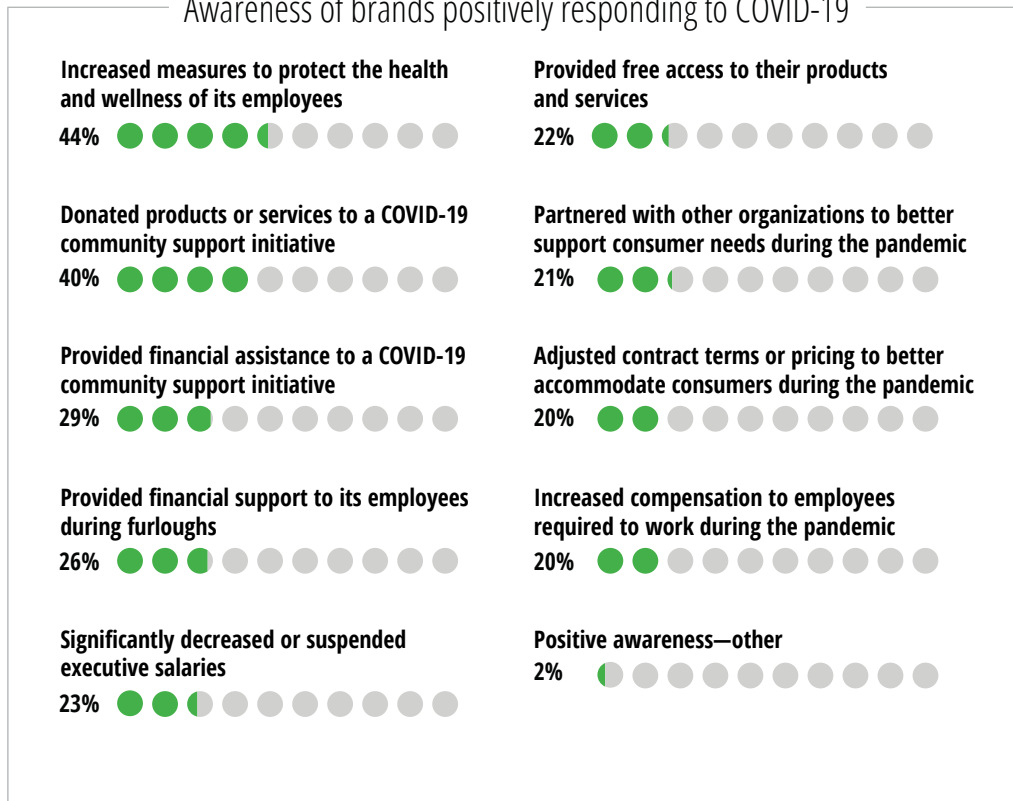
When an organization’s crisis responses are driven by a holistic purpose—connecting a business’s role in society to its long-term value—there is a clear alignment between its brand identity and a sustained commitment to all stakeholders—including customers, employees, suppliers, and communities, in addition to shareholders.

FIGURE 1

**Since the COVID-19 pandemic, are you aware of any brands that redirected profits in any of the following ways?**



Awareness of brands positively responding to COVID-19



Source: Deloitte Global Marketing Trends Consumer Pulse Survey.

We call these *purpose-driven enterprises*. Guided by an authentic, enterprisewide purpose, these organizations turn tough decisions into simple choices—following the path that best embodies their purpose. Purpose-driven enterprises are not only garnering more attention but also spurring consumer action. Nearly one out of four respondents strongly agreed that these actions positively shifted brand perceptions and one in five strongly agreed that it shifted their buying preferences in favor of the brand (figure 2). Conversely, we saw that *sustained commitment* matters as consumers were also well aware of negative brand actions (66%) that led to one in four consumers walking away from the brand. The takeaway: Organizations can't pick and choose when they lean on their purpose. Rather, it's a long-term commitment that guides how an organization exists. In the absence of this commitment, public trust can quickly erode (see our trend on [Trust](#) to learn more).

What does it take for an organization to operate as a purpose-driven enterprise? It typically requires a deep understanding of *why* the organization exists, widening the aperture on *who* it is built to serve, and ensuring it follows through on its promises with purpose-driven KPIs. In this article, we look to demystify what being a purpose-driven enterprise *really* means and how marketers can elevate their purpose to encompass all their stakeholders—in good times and bad.

## Demystifying purpose

The ever-evolving dialogue around *purpose* has led to multiple interpretations of the term, coalescing the definition of purpose into a moving target. Purpose can represent the underlying motive behind why a brand sells its products and services, or it can be the platform that articulates why the organization exists in the world. In an effort to

FIGURE 2

### The customer funnel from awareness to purchase behavior



Source: Deloitte Global Marketing Trends Consumer Pulse Survey.

demystify purpose, we refer to the former as *brand purpose*, as it is anchored in the consumer; while the latter refers to a *purpose-driven enterprise*, intended to address the needs of all its stakeholders. Regardless of the endeavor, most purpose-led brands and organizations require clarity in motive and a means of holding themselves accountable to the promises they make.

#### HOW A BIGGER “WHY” EXTENDS THE REACH OF THE ENTERPRISE

Brand purpose and the purpose-driven enterprise don’t have to be mutually exclusive endeavors. In fact, a purpose-driven enterprise aligns its brand purpose to a bigger *enterprisewide purpose*. However, in many cases, the “why” behind an organization’s products and services is siloed from other important facets, such as talent and business partnership strategy.

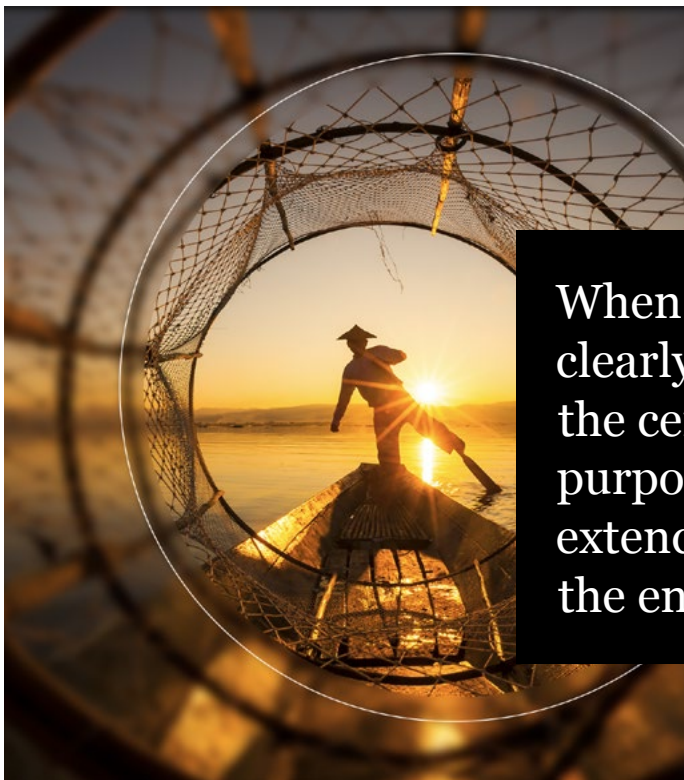
When purpose is managed in siloes, its meaning can be confused or, at worst, it can appear disingenuous. But when an enterprise clearly puts

its “why” at the center of its operations, purpose can be amplified and extended both within and outside the enterprise.

Consider one such purpose-driven enterprise—Ella’s Kitchen. The maker of organic baby and toddler food wants to “create healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.”<sup>1</sup> Ella’s Kitchen’s intent is to live out this purpose by going beyond simply selling food. In line with this, it applies its “good to each other” standards and works with myriad stakeholders to ensure an ethically sourced supply chain. Besides using healthy ingredients in its products, it also provides parents and caregivers resources to help them develop healthy eating habits in their children.<sup>2</sup>

Ella’s Kitchen also galvanizes its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives by donating more than 300,000 food pouches to underserved children across the world.<sup>3</sup> For clarity, CSR initiatives are not synonymous with a purpose-driven enterprise.

Rather, organizations with an enterprisewide purpose work to ensure that their CSR activities reinforce their purpose and their ability to positively impact the world (see sidebar, “Elevating the social enterprise”).



**When an enterprise clearly puts its “why” at the center of its operations, purpose is amplified and extended within and outside the enterprise.**

## ELEVATING THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Countless brands have existed for decades—and financially flourished as well—even without a purpose that ties directly to societal good. However, two global trends suggest organizations can do better than “well” by ensuring their enterprise purpose and ensuing CSR initiatives are focused on making the world a better place. These trends are:

- **The world is shifting to the social enterprise:** The social enterprise’s mission combines profit with societal impact. We see businesses trending in this direction as CEOs most often cite “impact on society, including income inequality, diversity, and the environment” as their most important success measure.<sup>4</sup> It’s not just CEOs either—millennials and Generation Z are most likely to support companies that share their values and walk away from those that don’t hold themselves accountable to these values.<sup>5</sup>
- **The world is looking to businesses for solutions:** According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, which surveyed 34,000 individuals in 28 global markets, people see businesses as the most competent group to solve global issues, even more so than nonprofits and governments.<sup>6</sup> Notably, respondents suggested that stakeholders including communities, consumers, and talent are most important to an organization’s long-term success (only 13% noted shareholders as the most important stakeholder).

Increasingly, “brand” represents how people perceive the organization, and consumers are gravitating toward enterprises that support socially important endeavors. Keeping this in mind, organizations should infuse a societal dimension to purpose throughout the enterprise to effectively answer the call of stakeholders.

## Measurement: Staying true to promises made

Our news feeds are peppered with examples of businesses falling short of their grandiose promises. It’s easy to put something on paper but takes considerably more effort to authentically live out those words. Whether it’s a brand upholding its promises to its customers or an enterprise demonstrating its purpose across the value chain, organizations can benefit from promoting KPIs that ensure they are living out their purpose across three key dimensions:

### Ingraining measurement in policies:

Organizations can establish measurable policies across the enterprise that bolster their purpose through key practices. Take United States–based investment management company BlackRock, for instance. BlackRock CEO Larry Fink once notably said that purpose and profits are closely linked and, as such, require policies that align fundamental

business decisions with purpose.<sup>7</sup> In line with this, BlackRock requests “robust” disclosures from companies regarding how they are adhering to the industry-specific guidelines provided by the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB).<sup>8</sup> For those who fall short in these disclosures, BlackRock will “increasingly conclude that companies are not adequately managing risk.”<sup>9</sup> Following these standards, BlackRock “voted against or withheld votes from 4,800 directors at 2,700 different companies” where there was a lack of sustainability disclosures.<sup>10</sup>

**KPIs for teams:** To truly live out a purpose, the workforce needs to live and breathe its values and mission. For instance, Alaska Airlines employs annual engagement surveys to better understand how its employees perceive the company and engage in living out its purpose.<sup>11</sup> In 2020, its goal is to ensure engagement scores are 80% or higher across company divisions. Organizations can build on this method by reporting to boards how these

engagement scores are trending over time while simultaneously ensuring that purpose-related conversations are a foundational part of performance reviews.

**Linking profit to purpose:** If profit and purpose are linked, organizations should measure purpose-driven outputs to demonstrate the value of adhering to a purpose. Further, success helps secure buy-in and provides a line of sight into what's working for the organization. For example, Unilever's enterprise purpose is "to make sustainable living commonplace."<sup>12</sup> Living this purpose, Unilever measures the performance of its sustainable living products versus the rest of its product portfolio. The results: "Sustainable Living Brands are growing 69% faster than the rest of the business and delivering 75% of the company's growth."<sup>13</sup>

## How marketers can bring purpose to the forefront of the enterprise—for the long run

A purpose-driven enterprise can require multiple facets of the organization to work in concert. However, we recognize that not all businesses start from the same place as far as purpose is concerned. Start-ups can integrate purpose into their operations from the ground up, whereas large, legacy companies have a steeper hill to climb as they pivot to more purpose-driven endeavors. *How* marketers can weave purpose throughout the enterprise varies depending on the organization's maturity and industry.

Regardless of organizational maturity and the industry, CMOs and their marketing organizations can take three steps to bring purpose to life for

their consumers and, in time, all enterprise stakeholders. They are:

- 1. Own brand purpose:** As marketers are traditionally regarded as customer experts,<sup>14</sup> they are uniquely positioned to understand and articulate the higher order "why" behind the brand's products and services. Bringing the "why" to brand purpose can unlock creativity, inspire employees, and create differentiation by building an emotional connection with consumers. Marvin, a window and door company, shows how marketers can turn their products into a higher-level purpose. Their purpose: "To imagine and create better ways of living."<sup>15</sup> Through its brand purpose, Marvin articulates how it can take a seemingly straightforward product, like a window or door, and help people see this purchase as a way to live a happier and healthier life in their homes. This can be through innovative technology, such as hidden lock sensors and smart skylights, or the ability to fine tune every design detail to help customers build spaces that best reflect their individual personalities, wants, and needs.

*How marketers can weave purpose throughout the enterprise varies depending on the organization's maturity and industry.*

- 2. Catalyze the enterprise purpose:** If the organization is not currently thinking about enterprise purpose, marketers can catalyze the

conversation by bringing an “outside-in” perspective to C-suite conversations. This may mean speaking to corporate reputation or bringing data to the table that sheds light on current perceptions of the company relative to the competition.

As noted in our consumer pulsing research (figure 1), consumers are most aware of brands that responded to COVID-19 by protecting employees (44%) and donating products to support a COVID-19 community support initiative (40%). Ethias, a large insurer in Belgium, did exactly this when the pandemic first hit. Wilfried Neven, the chief digital transformation officer of Ethias, said they quickly developed three phases of response: “First, protect the employees; second protect the clients; and third, overall, protect the company.”<sup>16</sup> Beyond moving employees to remote work, Ethias stood up digital messaging campaigns to check in on employee well-being. And to assist the community, Ethias employees combined their digital expertise with their insurance ecosystem to develop a COVID-19 volunteer network through their App4You platform. This platform matched volunteers with community needs—while providing free insurance to the volunteers providing service. In doing so, Ethias was able to expand its core mission and purpose across the enterprise—and beyond the traditional customer base.

### 3. Fuse brand and enterprise purpose

**where appropriate:** Are an organization’s CSR initiatives a major reason its consumers are loyal to its brand? If yes, marketers can work directly with public relations to help ensure that the messaging for the brand and enterprise purposes is congruent. If not, marketers can work with the CSR team to strengthen the enterprise’s voice in the marketplace.

Consider Expensify, a corporate credit card and expense reporting company. Expensify started with the strong brand purpose of giving busy professionals some time back by making expense reporting fast and easy.<sup>17</sup> As the company grew in popularity, it was able to build a larger enterprisewide purpose. Expensify now donates 10% of its card revenue to societal initiatives addressing homelessness, child hunger, and climate change. When someone books a hotel on its platform, Expensify donates to causes addressing homelessness, and when someone buys a plane ticket, it helps plant trees to reduce carbon emissions. Expensify has a strong brand purpose that directs its CSR initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that companies which know “why” they serve their stakeholders are uniquely positioned to navigate unprecedented change. When purpose is embedded across the entire enterprise, organizations can live it out across the value chain to fulfill the hopes of their stakeholders, and possibly, change the world.

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# Recognition and appreciation

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