

Telling the real, good story

 By Melissa Baird

18 Jan 2016

Five years ago, the *Harvard Business Review* announced "The Age of Transparency", swiftly followed by *Time* magazine reporting on "the rise of the citizen consumer, and the beginnings of a responsibility revolution." Today, we are seeing the lies that have been told by the world's best known and respected politicians and brands falling at the feet of people with shattering result; the aftermath of which we still do not know entirely.

Short-term gains and obfuscation

The way we all communicate has shifted so radically that traditional advertising is no longer a proxy for trust and there are many people who can see through the glitter of promises not founded in truth. The flawless ad campaigns of brands that have been caught out in bare-faced lies and behind-the-scenes lobbying against climate change action act as stark sign posts of the terrifying irony of PR gone wrong.



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The stories we are told by politicians are based on short-term gains and obfuscation. The stories of mass consumer goods still champion how buying more will make you more of a person and those of the fast food industry tell no nutritional truth and use cause-marketing to 'green wash' their social image.

The truth will out. The new age of transparency assures this.

On a global scale, I meet social and environmental change agents representing NGOs, the private and public sector and brands and companies adapting to the new environment and still delivering profitability and product innovation without further impacting on the communities and environment on which they depend. Many are enabling regeneration of communities and resources once destroyed.

Stories untold

But their stories are untold in the broader context and this is the saddest tale of all. The opportunity for communicating in ways that enliven, motivate, and show and tell how the world is being re-written in order to activate a contextual mass awakening to the realities of the world we live in is now and looking for a much broader audience.

Even though behind-the-scenes, conscious business practise is gaining traction, policies are being re-written and new legislation being drafted, little is actually being openly said in the media or in major campaign work about why these changes are occurring and how individually and collectively we can contribute.

Trends come and go but there are no planets for sale and we are in the midst of a massive, multi-faceted resource crisis that is affecting all of us on some levels, with the most impact being felt by the most marginalised.

Moving towards a resilient and regenerative future has to consider environmental, social and economic factors and includes telling a true story as a fundamental activator.

Call to action

This is a call to action for communicators to do their best at bringing to life the positive work being done by so many brands, small businesses and the many individuals who work in social contexts educating, supporting and nurturing new talent and ways of working and being. These are the guides who, as they face the impacts and outcomes of environmental and economic chaos, can give us the inspiration and will to adapt to an uncertain future.

Research conducted by the UCT Graduate School of Business asking investment houses about their approach to "sustainable investments" (as if this is still an option to ignore) noted that the biggest challenge facing a growing economy and the people who invest the money "is a lack of interest or scepticism about the products available and that somehow our economic drivers are separate to environmental issues".

But as Gaylord Nelson (politician, environmentalist and founder of Earth Day) said in the early '70s, "The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the other way around."

New nature of communication

All business can take part in the new show and create the context as to why they do what they do and thereby create a new way of understanding our connections and impacts better. How and why a product came to life and why and how to dispose of it correctly is just the beginning.

Communication of this nature is new. In the past, the role of marketers and advertising professionals has been to "sell or else" and create demand for products, goods and services for every person, regardless of where it came from and who was affected by its creation.

Never before has the role of a communication agency been called in to question to ensure that the stories they tell on behalf of their clients are real and within the context about how and why the world is changing and with it the business and social landscape.

May 2016 bring those real, good stories to life.

ABOUT MELISSA BAIRD

Melissa Baird is a multi-faceted communications strategist, workshop facilitator, public speaker and talented wordsmith whose career has spanned traditional advertising, interactive television, digital marketing and book and magazine publishing. Currently Baird is an independent sustainability communications strategist, writer and editor after a five-year tenure heading up strategy at Ogilvy**earth**.

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