

Best Practice Guide

A Short Guide to Trust, Transparency and Brand Safety

This short report considers the factors which have been impacting trust and driving a need for further transparency around a brand's advertising.

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Introduction

In recent years, trust among the general population has taken a hit. The rise of fake news, along with high-profile data breaches and some inappropriately placed programmatic ads have eroded the trust that people and organisations have in the businesses they work with.

In 2017, marketing consultancy firm Edelman confirmed this sentiment, declaring in its annual Trust Barometer that trust was 'in crisis' on a global scale.¹ It observed an overall decline in trust among the public in the four key institutions – business, government, non-governmental organisations and media.

Edelman's latest figures suggest that the level of trust among consumers around the world is recovering. However, there remains an overall distrust in business among 10 markets studied by Edelman, including the UK. With increasing disruption and competition across all sectors, brands must work harder than ever to demonstrate their trustworthiness to customers. But how can this be achieved?

Transparency and brand safety are part and parcel of trust, so they are a good place to start. This short version of Econsultancy's [Trust, Transparency & Brand Safety Best Practice Guide](#) covers three of the main themes marketers should consider in order to build trust in their organisations, including tips on how to encourage transparency and ensure brand safety, namely:

- Communicating the brand's values
- Establishing a dialogue with customers
- Getting to grips with customer data

For a deeper dive into building trust in an organisation, including best practice guidelines from businesses including Virgin Atlantic, Formula 1 and Kantar, download Econsultancy's [Trust, Transparency & Brand Safety Best Practice Guide](#).

¹ <https://www.edelman.com/research/2017-edelman-trust-barometer>

About Econsultancy

Econsultancy's mission is to help our customers achieve excellence in digital business, marketing and ecommerce through research, training and events. Founded in 1999, Econsultancy is used by more than 600,000 professionals every month, and has offices in New York, London and Singapore.

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Communicating the brand's values



The first step a brand should take on its journey to building trust among its customers is establishing what it is, and what it cares about. It can be helpful to think of the brand as an individual, rather than just a company, that has morals and values that it chooses to live by. This gives a brand a personality – it's not a just a faceless entity – which gives potential customers a better sense of what it is.

Think about what your brand stands for

Brands need to set themselves apart with not just a unique offering and excellent customer service, but a focus on what their brand stands for. Customers feel better about working with a brand whose values they share, and this is particularly true among younger generations, who have demonstrated a preference for brands whose values align with theirs.

According to research by Enso,² brands that have a clear mission, including Spotify, Kickstarter and Chipotle, are far more popular with millennials, while boomers prefer established brands such as Procter and Gamble, Hewlett-Packard and Newman's Own.

To engage with these customers, brands must revisit their purpose and values, evaluate whether their behaviours truly reflect their values and assess how these manifest in how they deal with customers.

For further guidance on creating a customer-centric organisation, review [Econsultancy's Guide to Customer Experience Management](#).

Bake your brand's values into the culture

Company culture reflects and reinforces the overall brand and its values. To ensure that everyone in the business is working towards the same goal, it is crucial that company values are front of mind among the brand's people. This requires unfettered communication throughout the business.

Transparency starts at home. Communicate clearly from top down on objectives and goals for the business. Ensure employees understand where the company is going. Be open and honest when sharing information about any issues or challenges facing the company, as well as about its current performance.

Finally, just as inviting feedback from customers is good practice (which will be explored in a later section of this short report), it is important to understand how employees are feeling about the company. Have processes in place that incentivise the sharing of feedback, while ensuring that employees feel safe to do so, and use this to understand engagement levels in the business.



² https://www.enso.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/WorldValueIndex_2017-enso.pdf

Take an active approach to placing programmatic ads

It would be a shame to have established brand values, cultivated a culture of trust among colleagues and built goodwill amongst customers only to have that derailed by a single unfortunately placed programmatic ad.

In 2017, it emerged³ that on YouTube, some ads were being served against videos containing extremist content or hate speech, leading many high-profile brands to pull their advertising from the platform.

YouTube has since put measures

in place that reduce the likelihood of this happening (requiring that channels have 4,000 hours of annual viewing time and more than 1,000 subscribers before they can be monetised⁴), though the reality is no platform can ever be 100% brand safe. It is up to advertisers to adopt a proactive approach when it comes to programmatic.

Advertisers must look towards taking greater control over their programmatic activities and ad spend. According to a 2018 study by the WFA, 45% of marketers are looking to prioritise their internal programmatic capabilities, with nearly 28% looking to recruit programmatic specialists.⁵

Key takeaways

- Communicate what the company culture is and how employees should be demonstrating it. Company culture reflects and reinforces the overall brand and the values it stands for.
- Hire those who reinforce cultural values, embody the organisation's values and believe in the purpose of the company needs.
- Assess the quality of the environment and viewability of any content created and published by the business. Part of the brand safety agenda should be having verification of where your content is appearing and how it is being viewed.

³ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/taxpayers-fund-extremism-csdn0npsf>

⁴ <https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2018/01/additional-changes-to-youtube-partner.html>

⁵ <https://www.wfanet.org/news-centre/major-multinationals-hike-programmatic-budgets-while-seeking-greater-control/>

Establishing a dialogue with the customer



In order to foster trust, it is crucial to establish and maintain a two-way relationship with customers. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, though however the business decides to interact with customers, the relationship must feel natural and benefit them as much as it does the company.

Invite feedback from the customer

The simplest way to understand what the customer likes, values, and if there is anything they would like changed is to ask for feedback, and to do this at every step of the journey. Customer feedback helps the brand identify what aspects of the customer journey can be improved upon and can inform the development of products and services.

While receiving positive feedback and reviews will be a great ego boost for the company, negative feedback also offers an opportunity, as being seen to review and address the customers' pain points will make the brand appear more trustworthy.

Encourage customers to share reviews

As the online marketplace offers a seemingly infinite array of options, consumers continue to look to social proof and reviews when making a decision about a product or brand.

Nielsen's 2015 Trust in Advertising report found that consumer opinions are the third most trusted advertising format, behind recommendations from friends and family and branded websites.⁶ More than three-quarters (76%) of respondents said that they

view content posted by other consumers on social networks as more honest than advertising, and 56% of consumers are more likely to buy a product after seeing it featured on a relatable user-generated image.

With online reviews playing a key role in consumer decision making, companies should create and maintain a process that encourages their customers to leave reviews. Companies must monitor these reviews and work to improve any negative feedback they might receive.

Consider building an advisory board

As noted in the Econsultancy blog,⁷ customers are the greatest source of valuable feedback about a company's products and services. To get the frankest, most in-depth look at how users feel about the brand, while deepening relationships with some of the brand's best customers, consider building an advisory board.

For B2B companies, forging closer relationships with the brand's most loyal customers in this way not only helps build trust, but can also protect against any advances from competitors.

What does creating and maintaining a customer advisory board look like? Invite some of the company's best customers to meet a few times a year – this can be in person or online – to share their points of view. Be sure to probe any possible issues identified in feedback from the wider pool of customers and ask what new features might make their lives easier.

⁶ <https://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/nielsen-global/apac/docs/reports/2015/nielsen-global-trust-in-advertising-report-september-2015.pdf>

⁷ <https://econsultancy.com/five-tactics-b2b-companies-can-use-to-strengthen-key-customer-relationships/>

Key takeaways

- Identify ways to involve your customers in the development of your products and services. Bring customers into workshops or via communities to encourage collaboration where they can share their ideas and provide feedback.
- Create and maintain a process that encourages customers to leave reviews. Monitor the reviews they leave and act on any negative reviews.
- Create an advisory board or community. Ask your best customers a few times a year what might make their lives easier or if they have any bugbears.



Getting to grips with customer data



People are becoming increasingly aware of the price they are paying for their connected lifestyles. In a global study by Kantar TNS, 40% of respondents said they were concerned about the amount of personal data that companies have about them. Customers are also keener to understand how any data they share is being used.

Digital businesses need this data in order to compete, so it is imperative for brands to take a measured approach to managing the data they are collecting from their customers. Transparency on this front can also translate to greater trust among the customer base.

Use GDPR as a guide

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) governs the processing of personal data of EU citizens. It is primarily designed to give greater protection and rights to individuals while also reducing the risk of their personal information being exploited or misused by limiting the amount of data that may be collected by companies, the way it can be used and the amount of time that it can be stored.

Although some businesses have struggled to ensure compliance with the regulation, the organised and transparent approach to customer data that GDPR requires does have its own rewards. For example, it is easier to derive quality insights about your customers from clean, complete, and well organised data, which in turn makes it easier to provide better customer experiences.

Also, companies that demonstrate they are taking the regulation⁸ seriously will be seen to be more

trustworthy. A 2018 study by the DMA found that 62% of consumers had improved confidence about sharing data with companies after hearing the GDPR regulations, and that this was true of both those who were aware of the regulation and those who were previously unaware.⁹

Be clear about what data you are collecting

Advances in ad tech promise to deliver levels of personalisation and relevance never seen before. In reality, brands often fail to understand which moments matter to their target audience and end up following people with advertising, messaging, reminders and push notifications.

Sending customers marketing information they did not ask for and that is not relevant to them does not make for a good customer experience. It is important for businesses to be transparent about the data they are collecting at the point they are collecting it and what they are using it for.

Brands can use this as an opportunity to inform the customer so that they feel more empowered to make their own decisions about their data. For example, the business might hire an independent party to write a post about GDPR and what it means to the customer, or create a video to better illustrate what happens to data after it has been collected.

The approach and tone of the messaging will depend on the company, though any content should speak the same 'language' as the customer and avoid any ambiguous legalese.

⁸ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/risk/our-insights/tackling-gdpr-compliance-before-time-runs-out>

⁹ <https://dma.org.uk/uploads/ckeditor/GDPR-consumer-perspective-2018-V2.pdf>

Create a clear value exchange with the customer

Changes brought in by the GDPR have driven a focus on the value being delivered to the customer in exchange for their data, also leading brands to ask whether they really need all the data they are asking for. It is clear that a certain amount of data will be required by the business in order to deliver the level of service the customer expects. The key is making this exchange worth their while.

Research by the DMA found that consumers are not entirely

comfortable with the current exchange of personal data for free digital services, though also suggested that those who prefer personalised offers tend to be more comfortable about sharing their data with companies in exchange for marketing.¹⁰

Some companies are looking into what they can offer consumers in exchange for their data. Many businesses are in a unique position to offer something truly special to their customers, that they cannot find anywhere else, such as behind-the-scenes content, or invitations to exclusive events.

Key takeaways

- Follow the GDPR guidelines. This applies to any company that processes the personal data of EU citizens.
- Consider the value exchange that can be offered to consumers for their data. Identify opportunities for consumers that can be used in exchange for additional data.
- Identify ways to be transparent about what data you are collecting and how it will be used. For example, use a video or use clear copy at relevant points throughout the customer journey.

For a more comprehensive version of this report, featuring case studies and advice from experts from Jaguar Land Rover, Hong Kong Disneyland and the FA, download Econsultancy's [Trust, Transparency & Brand Safety Best Practice Guide](#).



¹⁰ <https://dma.org.uk/uploads/ckeditor/GDPR-consumer-perspective-2018-V2.pdf>



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