



“Occupy” the Brand. To be relevant is to choose.

THIS PAST WEEKEND I wandered through an “Occupy Manchester” gathering; a local manifestation of the “Occupy Wall Street” phenomenon. Perhaps I should refer to it as a protest to add the requisite emotional distinction. But it certainly is not a movement, nor is it a relevant brand. Not yet anyway.

A movement has vision and direction. A relevant brand has purpose and tangible goals. Presently, “Occupy” is an aimless, yet significant, outpouring of citizen angst and anger. Angst at economic conditions and our country’s dearth of political will. Anger at our society’s growing income inequality and Wall Street’s role, and escape from responsibility, in the financial crisis.

There’s no doubt that there are significant problems with our present state of affairs. The average household wealth of the top 1 percent in the U.S. is more than \$10 million, while the average wealth for the bottom 80 percent is less than \$70,000. Three years after the financial meltdown the unemployment rate is still at a near record high of 9%, yet corporate profits are at an all-time high and continue to climb.

History shows that great movements and great brands are birthed by frustration and anger with the status quo. But it also teaches that they grow with a vision of the future, an inspiring plan of action, and the will for ongoing engagement and change. So far “Occupy” has the passion, and perhaps the will. What it needs, and soon, is a vision and a plan. What it needs is to become a relevant brand.

- A relevant brand stands for something tangible; a shared and motivating purpose. One its audience can wrap its heads—and hearts—around.
- A relevant brand has intentional focus and frames its communication—especially its distinctive value proposition—specifically to its audience.
- A relevant brand is a movement which co-creates value with its audience. It’s dynamic and flowing. It’s concerned more with learning, empowerment, and advancing well-being and less with static, discontinuous concepts like media impressions, positioning and persuasion.
- A relevant brand has a leader; someone who guides its evolving direction, makes the unpopular decisions when necessary, and inspires passionate participation.

“Occupy Wall Street” has certainly become a cultural phenomenon and, in time, it may shift the national dialogue. But editorializing has never changed anything. Change comes from focus and from hard work. Change comes from living with integrity, imagination and passion.

Please don’t misread this as a dispassionate diagnosis; I’m dismayed as well. But if “Occupy Wall Street” wants to have a significant and lasting impact on people’s lives, including mine and my children’s, it’s time for them to come together around one core idea. It’s time for them to set an agenda and get to work bringing that vision to life.

Like all relevant brands, it’s time for them to choose.