

Brand Admiration and the Value of Respect: How to Build a Revered Brand

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A few years ago, my wife bought her first pair of TOMS shoes. At the time, it wasn't a purchase driven by philanthropic admiration of the company's famous "one-for-one" **social** mission. <http://www.toms.com/beyond-one-for-one> Instead, this initial purchase was influenced by comfort, style, and the opportunity to experience a new **brand**.

Today, my wife remains a happy TOMS customer (the half-dozen pairs of TOMS shoes in her closet serve as proof). But her relationship with the **brand** has changed.

Yes, her purchasing decisions still involve style and comfort. But her ardent support of the TOMS brand has much more to do with its karmic promise. Very simply, she feels inspired by and connected to the company's mission and vision—both of which make her more loyal and more likely to advocate on the **brand's** behalf.

The Business Benefits of Building a Respected Brand

There's one word that perfectly sums up my wife's relationship with TOMS: respect.

And, according to marketing researchers C. Whan Park, Deborah J. MacInnis, and Andreas B.

Eisingerich, this one word (or feeling) can have enormous psychological influence over my wife's purchasing decisions. In their forthcoming book, [*Brand Admiration: Building a Business People Love*](#), the authors argue that strong brand reverence has a direct impact on the following:

- **Credibility and influence:** When people respect your brand, they're more likely to follow your lead and embrace your ideas. Apple (which was recently ranked the world's most respected company [by the Wall Street Journal](#)) is a hallmark example: When the company releases new products or [voices its opinion](#), people listen.
- **Forgiveness for mistakes:** Every company screws up, but revered brands overcome those mishaps much faster. Just ask Disney, which has faced [plenty of controversy](#) but remains one of the world's most respected and admired brands. Less-revered brands aren't given as much leeway.

- **Access to better partnerships and talent:** When your brand is respected, other companies and top talent go out of their way to associate with you. Naturally, your brand can then be more selective, which only bolsters your brand's respect in the market: Salesforce, Google, and IBM are excellent examples.

Ultimately, all of those things can have a very tangible impact on a company's bottom line.

Let's look at TOMS. In just over a decade, the brand has provided more than 60 million pairs of shoes <http://www.toms.com/blakes-bio> to children around the world, yet it is still generating [nearly \\$400 million in revenue](#). Those numbers might pale in comparison with those of giants like Nike and Adidas, but they're incredible figures for a smaller boutique **brand**. And it's hard to argue that the respect for the brand hasn't played a role in that growth.

For a broader perspective on the correlation between **brand** respect and bottom-line strength, let's compare the [Wall Street Journal's ranking](#) of the world's most respected companies against [Fortune's ranking](#) of the world's most profitable companies. Apple tops both lists, and Berkshire Hathaway, Johnson and Johnson, and Wells Fargo also rank in the top 10 of both.

Three Ways to Cultivate Deeper Feelings of Brand Respect

If such a wide spectrum of **brands** can achieve high levels of brand respect, there's no reason your brand can't do the same.

That said, respect—and, more broadly, [brand admiration](#)—isn't something that can be "hacked." It's not a tactical campaign, nor is it a short-term initiative. Rather, brands like TOMS, Berkshire Hathaway, Apple, and others have earned respect through purposeful efforts that are designed to...

1. **Convey empathy:** Becoming a genuinely empathetic organization starts with talking to the people you hope to influence, so that you can understand where you can have the biggest impact on their lives. What do your customers, employees, and partners struggle with the most? What are they most afraid of? How can you help them?
2. **Clearly communicate the brand's mission, vision, and values:** Most brands invest the bulk of their time and resources into communicating the value of their product. Respected brands invest a disproportionately large amount of resources into telling their story through their mission, vision, and values. So, what do you stand for? What attributes set your brand apart from its competitors? What's your vision for the future?
3. **Enrich people's lives:** The most revered brands in the world are the ones that enrich people's lives in both intangible and tangible ways. TOMS enriches its customers lives through feelings of social good and a higher purpose. IBM enriches its employees' lives by giving them the freedom and resources to tackle incredibly complex technical problems. How does your brand enrich the lives of its stakeholders?

All of this reminds me of a great Warren Buffet line: "Either hold a rock concert or a ballet. But don't hold a rock concert and advertise it as a ballet." Put another way: The most efficient path to cultivating brand respect is to say what you do and do what you say.

When people know exactly who you are and what you stand for, it makes it easier for them to feel connected to, inspired by, and validated through your brand. At scale, those feelings of enrichment are the entry point to cultivating much deeper feelings of mutual respect and, ultimately, **brand** admiration.

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