

3. Designing an Activist Brand



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With Your Host

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3. Designing an Activist Brand

You're ready to step up and design a bold brand. A brand that's in fact an activist brand. We'll let's chat about what that is and share some of the shifts you can make and questions you can ask to assess where you are today along this journey.

You're listening to *Watch Us Lead* where hard conversations become significant actions. I'm your host Kimberly Y. Bennett founder of K Bennett Law and Designing the New Legal. Together we'll create the brand shifts that lead to sustainable change. Now, let's dive into today's show.

Before we even get going in discussing what an activist brand is, first let me tell you what a brand is not. Or better yet let's broaden our view of what a brand is. Now as a trademark attorney, what I'm about to say might make you feel a bit like, "Wait, what, huh? This is not what I've been told about what a brand is." But bear with me and take in what I'm about to say as you expand how you view your brand and how you define what a brand is.

When we discuss brand, we always think about the logos, phrases, sounds, smells. All those elements associated with the brand. The Coca-Cola bottle shape, the swish for Nike, the Tiffany blue box. Those are all recognizable brands in many parts of the world. Yes, these are important pieces to the brand. Yes, these are elements that should be protected as well. But a brand is more than these trademarks.

While a brand includes the logos, phrases, sounds, and smells that we identify with it, it goes a step further and it's a complete package. A brand is also the essence, the emotions, the experiences associated with an individual, a product, a service, or an organization. Let me use an example to demonstrate what I mean.

Okay, close your eyes. Go with me for a second. Picture a red dart board like logo. What brand name comes to mind immediately? Without even seeing letters around it, do you think of Target? I know without even seeing the Target name anywhere. If I see that logo, I know there's a Target up ahead. I also know, and you may also know if you're like me, the likelihood

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of stepping into a Target and getting on the items you plan to buy is also unlikely. Why is that?

It's because the Target corporation has spent a ton of time doing research and committing the resources the understanding their customers. They understand what we want before we enter Target. They understand what's happening in our lives before we even enter Target. They understand why we come to Target. They understand what we're looking to buy when we come to Target. They also understand the other items we might buy based on the aisles that we're shopping in. All these elements. Target has a deep 360 understanding of the essence, experience, emotions their customers, us, associate with their brand.

All of these pieces are what a brand is about. As purpose driven leaders, we want to go beyond building a known brand and even a bold brand. We want to build brands that not only stand for a set of values, but are also leading advocates for the social, structural, and systemic changes we require. That's where an activist brand shifts from a traditional brand.

An activist brand aligns their values with their social impact. So the essence, experience, and emotions associated with their brand extends beyond the products and services they are selling to the issues and causes they are supporting. So while they might be selling products and services, they go beyond that and really show up for causes and issues. That seems seamless to their customers, to their community, to their industry, to the world.

To build an activist brand, we have to be intentional from the beginning. If you weren't intentional from the beginning, then it's about starting now at this very moment and asking yourself, "Where does my brand stand on the important issues of our society? How am I positioning my brand to do different, to be different, and to stand up for a set of values that indicates without question how my brand will show up in our community and in our society?"

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When we discuss activism, a lot of times we go straight to politics because that's what we have been engrained to do. But by doing this, we are missing the mark. We are missing the goal of activism, the social impact. Improving the greater good. Activism is about social change. It's about standing up and intervening. It's about using our position and power to bring awareness and resources to issues that go beyond our products and services and really impact society and that are focused on improving the greater good.

As purpose driven leaders, you know the status quo isn't working. In fact, you may have built your business or organization to disrupt the status quo. Because of this, you are unique positioned to design your brand to leverage its power and position to be a leader or change in our society. A brand that does better.

A brand that understands that silence and complacency is not an option. And a brand that's willing to make statements and do the work and use its resources to work towards creating the structural, systemic, and changes our society needs. And doing the work even if that should lead to some backlash from those who don't understand that the work you're doing isn't about a political statement. It's understanding that as a brand, you have a responsibility to both fuel and fund the change we want to see in this world. That's what designing an activist brand is all about.

So to be an activist brand, you must be aligned. You must be protected. Quite frankly, you must be unapologetic about your commitment to your values and the social change you are seeking. So let's talk about that first piece. Being aligned.

When your brand is aligned, you've intentionally designed for that alignment. It's intertwined in your business model, your team structure, your client and customer service experience, your industry throughout leadership. All the elements to successful and purposeful business design. It means that when people see your brand, when they buy from your brand, when they work with your brand, when they know you or representatives of

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your brand and your industry, they are clear about the social issues your brand stands for as well as the products and services that you sell. They know this without you even having to say a word.

Second, an activist brand must be protected. That means as a business you need to operate with a solid legal foundation. So of course, I'm a lawyer. Yes, we're going to have more detailed discussion about what it means to be protected and what it means to grow an IP portfolio and to think about your assets and documentation.

For today, I want to make sure as we're kicking off this conversation together, you understand just how important having a solid legal foundation is because you need the documentation in place. You need your finances in order. You need to risk manage. You need your assets protected. Because without that, your business will not exist. If your business doesn't exist, that means you're not doing that bold brave work we need your organization to do. Because we need businesses like yours, brands like yours to step up in ways they haven't before. So your brand must be protected so you can achieve that hundred-year plan.

Finally, your brand and your leaders need to be unapologetic about the causes you support. It's about living and breathing your commitment day in and day out. Not just to your team, your clients, and your industry but to everyone. It's standing up and speaking up for those causes even in the face of adversity. So there's no room for questioning your position or your motives. It's using the power of your platform for good, for social impact. This is what will separate you from those that just talk about it. It's confidently standing in your greater purpose with clarity of direction and commitment to the work.

We see examples of this in businesses now. Businesses that are not non-profit businesses. Businesses that are for profit. A few examples that come to mind for me in my legal industry, there's a company called Cleo. It's a for profit legal tech company that does take an activist stance on the issues they believe and the causes that are aligned with their company's values.

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The CEO speaks out. The team members speak out. You see it in the content they publish, the conferences that they produce. They are consistent and committed. We know as consumers of their products where they stand without question.

Then we have Ben and Jerry's, which is another great example of a for profit brand that aligns purpose and passion in how they've designed their business and their entity structure. On Ben and Jerry's website, you see a list of issues that they care about. They list a range of issues. Whether it's climate change to Black Lives Matter to LGBTQ issues, they are front and center about the causes and the issues that they believe in and that they support.

These are just examples of how activist brands show up. Definitely not the only ones, but examples. As you're on this journey towards designing an activist brand, I want to provide you an assessment to help you understand where you are today and identify opportunities for further work and improvement along your journey. This is an open-ended assessment. There's no right or wrong answer. Instead focus on discovery and honesty. Because when you know where you're starting, it's must easier to design where you want to go. So let's jump in.

First, what are the values that define your brand? Second, how does your brand values show up in the everyday lives of your customers or clients? Third, how are you committing to improving your customers or clients through your products? Fourth, how do you decide on brand partnerships as you look to grow and scale your business? Five, how do you live your values outside of just selling your products and services?

Six, where does your brand stand on the important issues and causes in our society? Seven, how are you positioning your brand to sustainability show up for these issues and causes? Eight, what systems or structures in our society perpetuate injustices to those you serve? Nine, how do your products or services perpetuate injustices to those you serve? So I'm going to take a moment and repeat that because that is specifically about how

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your products or services perpetuate injustice, right? So nine, again, how do your products or services perpetuate injustice to those you serve?

Now this question might feel a little uneasy, but this is a real question we need to ask ourselves and we need to understand how and what we do day in and day out could actually contribute negatively to those that we are serving. To our clients and customers. So it's really about understanding how you're showing up so that you can shift how you're showing up. Then finally number 10, how are you working towards dismantling those systems and structures as part of your overall business design?

Those are the 10 questions I want you to consider to help you identify where you are on building an activist brand. This is not a one and done journey. This is not a 10-question assessment that gives you exactly what to do. Instead, it's about discovery and honesty. It's going deeper. It's committing to doing this work and committing to doing it from a place of clarity so that you can move forward intentionally, and really go deeper and create the level of impact that we all know we need.

So once you've done this assessment then shoot us an email. Let us know what came up. What your thoughts are. We would love to get some feedback. In fact, if you have a question as you're going through this, let us know that question too because all of that is important as we're going on this journey. Remember we're in this together and that we know we need to create legacy level impact. So this is one of the elements of it. It's not the only one. It's a part of that journey. So stay committed. Do the work. Do the discovery, and then take imperfect action.

To celebrate the launch of the show, I'm giving away Audible gift cards to 10 lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review the show on Apple podcasts. It doesn't have to be a five-star review of course, although I sure hope you love the show. I want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome show that provides tons of value. Visit kbennettlaw.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how

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to enter. I'll be announcing winners on an upcoming episode. See you soon.

Thanks for listening to the show. I look forward to sharing more insights with you on upcoming episodes. Let's continue to take imperfect action. See you next week.