

10 Smart Ways To Approach Political And Social Commentary

Political and social issues can be polarizing, which makes it difficult for companies to participate in these conversations. However, many consumers are more willing to give their loyalty to businesses that openly explore important issues and support causes in ways that are authentic to their brand. The key is to balance advocacy concerning political and social matters with sensitivity.

By utilizing a few smart techniques, your business can provide commentary on hot-button issues appropriately and authentically. These include:

Be Consistent With Your Support

Once you wade into the water here, you have to be consistent. You will have to balance out all of the needs and concerns of your various constituents across customer, partner and employee ecosystems. This means mapping out not only your collective values as a brand but also how you are going to continually demonstrate your advocacy over time, not just in the moment.

Be Honest, Cynical And Human

Be honest; say what you really think, not what you think people want to hear. Be cynical; look at your statement from every angle. Could someone read it in a way that would suggest your words don't match your company's actions? Finally, be human. This is not the place for corporate speak or euphemisms. Speak in clear terms. Tell them what's really in your head—and in your heart.

Be Sensitive To All Parties

We advise against taking a political stance unless it's necessary. When taking a political or social stance, it's important to be sensitive to all parties by making sure that what you're commenting on is fact-based and that you are supportive of beliefs outside of your own. Raise informative awareness without coming across as being biased or uninformed.

Make sure your comment fits the brand message and values.

Base Your Approach On Your Company Culture

A company's approach to social and political commentary must be based on its own culture. Company culture is based on the shared values of its people. Those values should be evident in the behaviors and attitudes of everyone in the company. They should be recognizable in all internal and external communications.

When you speak from those values, it will be authentic and appropriate for your brand.

Follow The 'Less Is More' Concept

The past year taught marketers to ask themselves a very important question before posting on social media: "Do people actually want to hear from us right now?" Less was more at that time, and the same is true now. Be thoughtful of what you say online, and embrace a less frequent posting schedule that prioritizes authentic communication over best practices prompted by an algorithm.

Align Commentary With Company Values

Companies need to take a hard look at their values and ensure that the stances they take externally align with their internal mission and culture. Consumers are smart enough to spot a disconnect and can “feel” when a brand is simply being opportunistic.

Consider Your Company’s History With The Topic

Context is important. Suppose you have a history or a strained relationship with the topic for any reason or even the perception of one. In that case, it’s often safer to simply avoid the conversation when you can. Authenticity comes from acting authentically: If you’re actively invested in a cause, and your history and current stance support that, people are more likely to view your approach as authentic and appropriate.

Make Change Instead Of Talking About It

Corporations seem to be jumping into making social and political commentary, often oblivious to their own internal challenges. Authenticity comes with action, not words. Be the company that is making change instead of one of those that is just talking about it. If you don’t, your reputation will be put at risk.

Consider Customer Reactions

Before providing social commentary, give serious thought as to whether your position reflects your brand and aligns with your current practices, not just your ideals. If not, then your approach will not be authentic. Be prepared for repercussions. You might find that it makes some customers even more loyal, while it makes others feel alienated. Fully understand who your customers are and how they may react before posting.

Do Not Comment On Every Topic

Resist the urge to comment on every hot-button topic that comes along. Every aspect of your communication must be aligned with your brand values, vision, and mission. If your comment seems inauthentic, at best, you will seem desperate or insincere; at worst, you will prompt a backlash that escalates. You must be prepared to back up any comment with action, as your audience will expect follow-through.