

Transparency made Meaningful

Connecting with consumers through relevant, purposeful, and actionable transparency

More than ever, consumers want transparency. They want to know where their food ingredients originated. Are they natural? And by the way, what does “natural” actually mean? They want to know about everything, from Energy Star ratings to the plastic used to make their children’s toys and the backgrounds of their elected officials. With the explosion of instant information, soon no brand, business, or politician will be exempt.

The drama around transparency can lead to heightened emotions. Must organizations provide access to absolutely every detail? How is that possible and what will it cost? By the same token, can people actually handle

all the information? Many consumers are already flat out overwhelmed, while others are clearly energized and want to learn more. Either way, this is an opportunity for companies to engage their customers in a deep and lasting way.

As informed consumers make clear that they intend to use their newfound power, organizations have an opportunity to take the lead. Here’s the key: in the age of instant information, why you decide to share information may draw as much scrutiny as what you choose to share. When transparency is made meaningful, consumers are invited into the sort of focused dialogue that deepens relationships in both directions.

TAKE ACTION – *designing for Life’s Changes*

1.

Pinpoint relevance

Listening to your customers will ensure that you know the right “what” and “why” to share with them.

2.

Promise what you can deliver

Design what transparency means for your business and deliver it to your consumer consistently.

3.

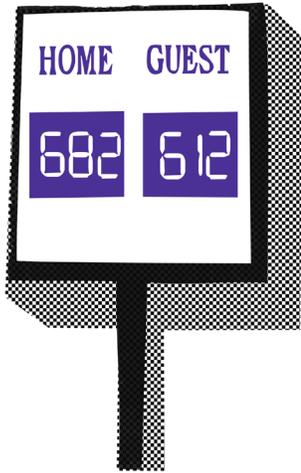
Engender action

Information can only do so much. Encourage your consumer to do something with it. How will you support consumers taking action?

4.

Start with small steps

Regardless of what you do, remember to do something. Even a little transparency can have a huge influence on the people you want to connect with.



Taking leadership makes it meaningful

Kevin became a baseball fan before stories about performance-enhancing drugs became daily fare. For him, the beauty of the game is its purity, but he now finds himself wondering, Did they cheat?

When asked what Major League Baseball (MLB) could do to repair the relationship, Kevin is quick to answer: “What I really want is for MLB leadership to come clean.”

The organization has shared a lot about the scandal, but it always seems to have been due to pressure from the press or politicians. The record books may never be fixed, but more transparent leadership on the part of MLB officials might go a long way toward turning the page on this chapter of MLB’s history.

How can you find out what your customers really want to know, so you can make smart decisions about providing this information?

Being honest makes it meaningful

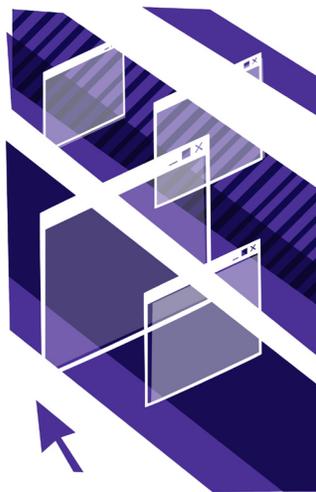
The community-curated website, Digg, is one of the most active sites for the Internet-savvy. “Diggers” submit links to the most interesting destinations on the Internet and other members can then vote them up or vote them down.

With growing frequency the community is turning against Digg because too many links on the front page can be traced back to marketers:

DirtyVicar: So this Digg article is just marketing? Man, I feel like a chump.
oxib: You new here or something? When did you ever think Digg wasn't about marketing? How do you think they pay the bills?
Chompy: Dude, “normal people” haven't gotten anything on the front page since 2006.

Members feel that Digg hasn't been transparent about something everyone already knows.

How do you decide what your business can realistically share?



Taking action makes it meaningful

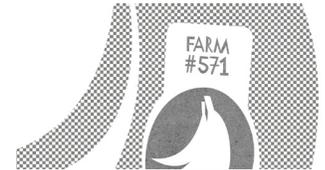
Patagonia is an industry leader in sustainable practices. But Rick Ridgeway, VP of environmental initiatives, knows the company can do better: “We take exception to the idea of sustainable business because we think that there is no such thing as a business without impacts.” This point of view has given rise to the core tenet of Patagonia’s organization, “lead an examined life.”

One expression of Patagonia’s “examined life” is Footprint Chronicles, an interactive website that tracks the manufacturing journey and environmental impact of specific Patagonia products. By educating their customers in a format that is candid and not self-congratulatory, Patagonia is betting on their willingness to make meaningful choices that support their environmental values.

How can you present your practices as aspirations that people can then act upon?

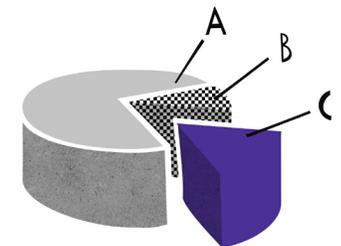
Showcasing the source

For many people, there isn't a more transparent and honest label than the one found on a Dole-certified organic banana. The two-inch sticker clearly declares the banana's organic status and lists its country of origin. The label even includes a farm ID number that allows consumers to pay a virtual visit to the farm that produced the banana.



Good information, not new information

When it comes to experiments in transparency, the hottest ticket right now is the Obama administration's Recovery.gov website. In its own words, this “is a website that lets you, the taxpayer, figure out where the money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is going.” Recovery.gov consolidates this information and presents it visually through maps, charts, and graphs.



Actionable, not just accessible

Singapore's Ministry of Manpower is charged with regulating the foreign workers on which the economy depends. To meet these challenges, the Ministry decided to create a customer-first quality of service that will transform the experience for foreigners who need to obtain a work pass. “Transparency is not a one-way process, where businesses lift a curtain to reveal information to customers,” says IDEO's John Rehm. “Transparency is about enabling customers to act on the information you are sharing with them.”

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

Be a pattern spotter: Now that you've been exposed to a few different examples, don't be surprised if you start seeing *Life's Changes* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it's the next new pattern.

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