

# P&G, Walmart, Unilever, General Mills Are Major Marketers on a Mission

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From 'We Save You Money' to 'We Nourish Lives,' Giants Make Some Big Statements

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BATAVIA, Ohio (AdAge.com) -- If you haven't touched and improved more lives more completely lately, you probably wouldn't last long as a Procter & Gamble Co. marketer.

The touching-and-improving mantra flows off lips at P&G these days with the eerie ease that "consumer is boss" did nearly a decade ago. The catchphrase rotation has been the most obvious manifestation of the transition to CEO Bob McDonald. He and Global Brand-Building Officer Marc Pritchard frequently answer questions about everything from growth strategy to the role of a brand manager by citing that touching/improving theme.

But P&G is far from the only practitioner of mission-statement marketing. The recent Association of National Advertisers meeting in Phoenix was a veritable parade of companies crediting a renewed focus on corporate or brand missions with turnaround or continuing success.

At the same time, P&G alum and Unilever CEO Paul Polman noted on a conference call this month that his company, too, has been touching and improving a lot of lives lately -- 2 billion in all -- albeit in the more specific way of helping consumers look good, feel good and get more out of life.

As Unilever looks to step out more from behind its brands, expect to hear more of that message, including through its e-mail and web relationship program Making Life Better.

### **Keeping culture**

It's not just behemoths managing the culture to massage the marketing message -- and vice versa -- these days. To help preserve its culture as it grows, comparatively tiny Method has each prospective employee do a homework assignment during the interview process that includes answering: "How will you keep Method weird?" The company rejected all three finalists in the first round of a CEO search last year when none could answer that question satisfactorily, co-founder and Chief Brand Architect Eric Ryan said.

Walmart is perhaps the most direct example of a mission-statement message. The company credits much of its brand turnaround to distilling a mission statement first uttered by legendary founder Sam Walton into its ad-selling line from the Martin Agency, Richmond, Va.: "Save money. Live better."

In another sign that the same things that used to motivate employees can work with consumers, Walmart CMO Stephen Quinn noted in an ANA presentation that a video created for employees on the "Save Money. Live Better" theme had scored well in consumer copy testing with ARS, too.

Mission-statement marketing goes hand in hand with cause marketing, with such brands as Macy's, Dove and Pampers making it a centerpiece of their marketing efforts. Cone Inc. last year found 79% of consumers said they'd switch to a brand associated with a good cause, up from 66% in 1993, and 38% said they'd bought a product associated with a cause, compared with 20% in 1993.

Still, the jury's out on how much mission marketing is rekindling growth. The parent company reported its second consecutive quarter of top-line numbers below analyst projections on Nov. 12, with same-store sales at the U.S. flagship down 0.5% despite a 1.5% increase in customer traffic.

Walmart executives blame accelerating grocery price deflation, though top-line performance at Costco and Target actually has improved lately.

### **Employee help**

Regardless of the numbers, getting employees to embrace the mission has taken on added importance in the age of social media, when they make up much of the content.

A big part of the scale advantage a company such as General Mills can have is the word-of-mouth from its employees, said CMO Mark Addicks. But that power has to be cultivated. General Mills' "We Nourish Lives" motto has helped, he said, and so has testing products and ads with employees, either by generating buzz or preventing mistakes -- such as when African-American employees torpedoed an ad as "white people for black people advertising."

Companies are probably talking about their missions more because times are tough, so "it's important for employees to believe they're doing something bigger than what their quarterly results would suggest," said Sanford C. Bernstein consumer products analyst Ali Dibadj.

But not everyone is sold on mission-statement marketing. One analyst noted a former senior P&G executive told him: "They should stop improving lives and start improving market share."

Mission statements can provoke eye rolls nearly strong enough to cause head trauma among journalists, not to mention the more cynical or maverick elements within corporations. So will getting everyone on the same page end up driving out mavericks and nonconformists and, by extension, creativity?

"If you're force fed it too aggressively," Mr. Dibadj said, "it certainly has the possibility of stifling creativity."