

The New Golden Rule Of Branding: Embracing Equality And Inclusivity In The 21st Century

Today, the world is smaller than ever before. Nearly everyone has some [access to a mobile phone](#), and more than half of the world now has [access to the Internet](#). This increased connectivity has massive implications for the business world, bringing together new products, new companies and new markets like never before. In this changed world, business leaders also need to build durable, modern brands that will connect with these new markets and align with their values—particularly the values of equality, diversity and inclusion.

As two top brandings experts who built the company, [Main & Rose](#), into a leading personal and corporate branding strategy firm that works in diverse markets across the globe including the Middle East with a team in Dubai, Managing Partners Beth Doane and Kelly Gibbons have seen firsthand the importance of mastering the new rules of branding for a global modern audience. As Beth Doane said in a recent interview, “Throughout my career, I’ve learned a central truth about branding for the modern era that all leaders in the c-suite should know:

The golden rule of branding today is you have to be inclusive. Gender equality, diversity and inclusion are not only morally important, they are also absolutely imperative to your brand if you want to succeed.

Doane and Gibbons elaborated on why this matters.

Reason one: Modern customers prize these values

Regardless of what industry or market you’re in, any business leader who wants their company to be able to compete and thrive in the modern era needs to embrace equality and inclusion. 21st-century clients and customers overwhelmingly consider these to be non-negotiables—particularly, but not exclusively, [millennials](#), who grew up with a greater appreciation for diversity and tolerance. As Kelly Gibbons says, “In the past, companies could ignore these values, but in our era of heightened social awareness—and with social media to accelerate our awareness—brands will fail unless they project an authentic commitment to equality.”

Reason two: Inclusive brands will help your company tap into new markets

Companies that embrace these values as part of their identity and ethos—think, [Lush](#), [Nike](#), and [CoverGirl](#)—can count on a strong, sustainable base of support from markets that are ignored by too many too often. Women, people of color and religious minorities can be expected to show brand loyalty to companies that value and respect their contributions. “Many American companies (and even many multinationals) have eschewed certain

regions, including the Middle East because they haven't understood how to market to them. Projecting an openness and willingness to embrace diverse customers and markets is key to breaking into the MENA market," explains Doane.

Reason three: Inclusive brands financially outperform their less diverse counterparts

"The strongest external brands are reinforced by a strong internal brand; simply, you cannot (and should not!) promote a brand that embraces equality and inclusion without building a team that reflects those values," notes Doane.

This is not merely an issue of due diligence: studies show that [companies who embrace diversity perform better](#). Rigorous meta-studies suggest that companies with more ethnic, racial and gender diversity in management produce [greater financial returns](#) as well as [higher return on equity and higher net income growth](#).

Reason four: Inclusivity and diversity lead to better, faster and more innovative thinking

Inclusive teams are also typically able to [make accurate decisions faster](#), and implement them quicker, than less inclusive teams. Why is this? Studies show that increased diversity on a team tends to lead to [more accurate and fact-based thinking](#), by forcing team members to become more aware of their own biases that could blind them to key information. At the same time, diverse and inclusive teams bring in more diverse perspectives while discouraging complacency, which fosters the innovative thinking that can lead to new and better products.

Reason five: Ignoring inclusion and diversity can be a company's downfall

At the same time, companies that ignore these values will be rejected as tone-deaf and will fall out of favor. This is true even for older and well-established brands: [Pepsi's Kendall Jenner ad](#), [H&M's "monkey hoodie" scandal](#), and [Nivea's "white is pure" scandals](#) each dragged their companies into notoriety and prompted a massive backlash. While companies apologize for these gaffes, it's clear that they are still recovering from the fury they unleashed.

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