

street scope

A new level of customer intimacy




'Insights Online'

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Dear reader

The great thing about the GFC (Global Financial Crisis) is now we have a real and common reason to be anxious.

We have for the first time in two decades, a unifying threat.

A clear and present danger giving all levels of government, our businesses, our communities and most of all – us, a shared adversary and therefore, a much needed, common purpose.

While for marketers such a landscape might not appear easy, it has never been clearer, nor have the opportunities been better defined.

In this week's IO, we want to share some 'Positive Anxieties'. These are perspectives generated from our most recent field work in an environment with a new and defining point of reference.

Insight of the week

The day the individual died, and the birth of collective self interest

According to social researcher, Hugh McKay, for much of the nineties and into the 'noughties', our increasing prosperity was matched equally by a rising sense of dread/threat/apprehension...

Hugh described an underlying uneasiness coupled with a general sense that the **world's gone mad** and that **individuals are powerless** in the face of international political and economic forces, rising crime rates at home and inevitably – the unruliness of the rising generation and degenerating communities.

Our individual prosperity was at once the 'blame' for community breakdown and at risk from forces beyond our individual control.

So we took refuge in our prejudices, we dealt with our fears and insecurities by turning inwards further. We became more self centred, more self absorbed, less compassionate and more concerned with the need to tend our 'own' patch.

What's remarkable here is the 'prosperity' paradox. As we became more prosperous, we became less unified, more individual, isolated, indulgent and anxious than we had ever been.

Until two events changed the way we see ourselves, our communities and our nation.

The first in October 2008 was the GFC and the collapse of wealth starting at the very top. The rolling effect continues and is now reached the grass roots. For all but the bottom-end and first home buyers, we're feeling the pain; we've lost money and with it a grasp of the future. We're feeling powerless and we're looking to government for a collective solution to our collective problem.

Then when February 7th, 2009 became the worst day in Victoria's history, it also became a defining moment in time, not just for the devastation and enormous loss of life, but also for a moment when every Australian ceased to be an individual.

Could the overwhelming reaction of the nation to the bushfires and the bushfire relief effort have tapped a reservoir of need created by two decades of disconnection, individualism and anxiety?

We believe it did, because at the heart of the reaction was self identification with an overwhelming sense that these people could be me, are like me, were likely known to me, and like me need to have their lives restored to their former positions.

What drove the overwhelming physical response was a crisis greeted almost with 'relief'. This was a chance to do something about something. This was a unifying crisis; with a clearly defined cause matched with equally clear solutions demanding collective rather than individual actions.

For the first time in two decades we had a common (at home) problem which in one stroke, had shifted the emotional focus from my problem, to theirs, to ours....*if it wasn't so serious, it would feel good.*

The GFC era will be marked by new collective anxieties generating new collective energies.

If the bushfires released the lid from what was seen as a rising social discontentment with going it alone, then the self absorption and negative anxiety of our prosperous years, is rapidly being replaced by a new, positive and unifying anxiety – welcome to the GFC.

But to see this simply as a case of 'looking after each other' or interpret the new need for pulling together as a nationwide epiphany is to miss the fact that this attitudinal shift remains a need based reaction driven by self interest.

"The magnitude of it all (the bushfires and the financial crisis) really makes you frightened...and for the good of everyone, you just get emotional and really do anything you can to help them and protect what we all (I) have" - Respondent

This is a realisation of an immediate threat that is...'*bigger than the individual*' but still about the individual.

"I still want it all for myself; it's just that now I can't do it on my own" - Respondent

Positive anxieties are the leverage points for maximising the GFC:

Because...In good times or bad we are all wrought with anxieties:

- If individually generated they are often negatively introspective and destructive
- If bigger than the nation they become goals to overcome together
- If they can be shared nationally, they can become the focus of a movement

Government and business can leverage 'Positive anxieties' by:

- Leading a movement...identifying a goal with the sum of the parts
- Mobilising an existing support base...customers, citizens, staff, rate payers...
- Leading group responses – by not rewarding loyalty, but making loyalty a group defence in hard times
- Rationalising both consumption- and labour in the common good

'Generous brands like true friends are there when needed'

In an anxious business trust-starved world, "generous brands," will be winners. E.G. Woolworths gave a day's profit to the Bushfire Appeal. And the underlying metric they will use to measure results will be sales because ultimately: *"Market share is trust materialized."*

If you were Qantas...

Time to invoke the full spirit of the 'Australian home' – by repaying every Australian who has ever flown Qantas to keep Australia moving,

- mobilise your vast past customer base, introduce a national group advantage
- then extend every frequent flyer status level by one year without further qualification
- make flying Qantas and its past positioning a rallying point for the Australian recovery

If you were a financial services company...

Treat your customers well, and keep in constant contact...

- be a leader, talk to your customers daily, tell them all the good moves you're making
- be a leader, move fast to give them your take on negative media commentary
- make service your biggest marketing investment (not deals)
- understand your existing influence is more important than new influences
- make public the intensity of your private customer conversation and leadership

If you were reviewing a sponsorship..

Shift your reason for association from profile to support for talented Australians in difficult times

- Not schmoozing with the big sports, supporting an industry and the people who rely on them for escape.
- Not high brow arts, support for struggling musicians, actors, artists...

If you were a retailer...

- 'Telling and selling' is defunct. Bring a relationship to everything you do and say"
- Don't just run sale promotions and inappropriate existing feel good '...jingles
- Stop promoting to them and start talking to your customers and share news with them
- Make friendships the lifeblood of their lives, yours too
- Make home, community and DIY the focus of security, entertainment and lower risk
- If they have '**Apocalypse Soon anxiety**' anchor your conversation in long term value rather than short term risk.
- If they have '**Bargain Anxiety**' help them understand where the bottom might be and the risks and rewards of waiting. .

The message to business is simply this...

Become a part of a bigger movement, play the anxieties that promote positive actions...not negative

Change your language, and make group opportunities the de-facto for individual benefit

Make service and customer involvement your biggest investment

Quote of the week

"...and there are lessons to be learnt"

- Ralph Norris CBA after repealing a charge to bushfire victims for missed mortgage payments

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