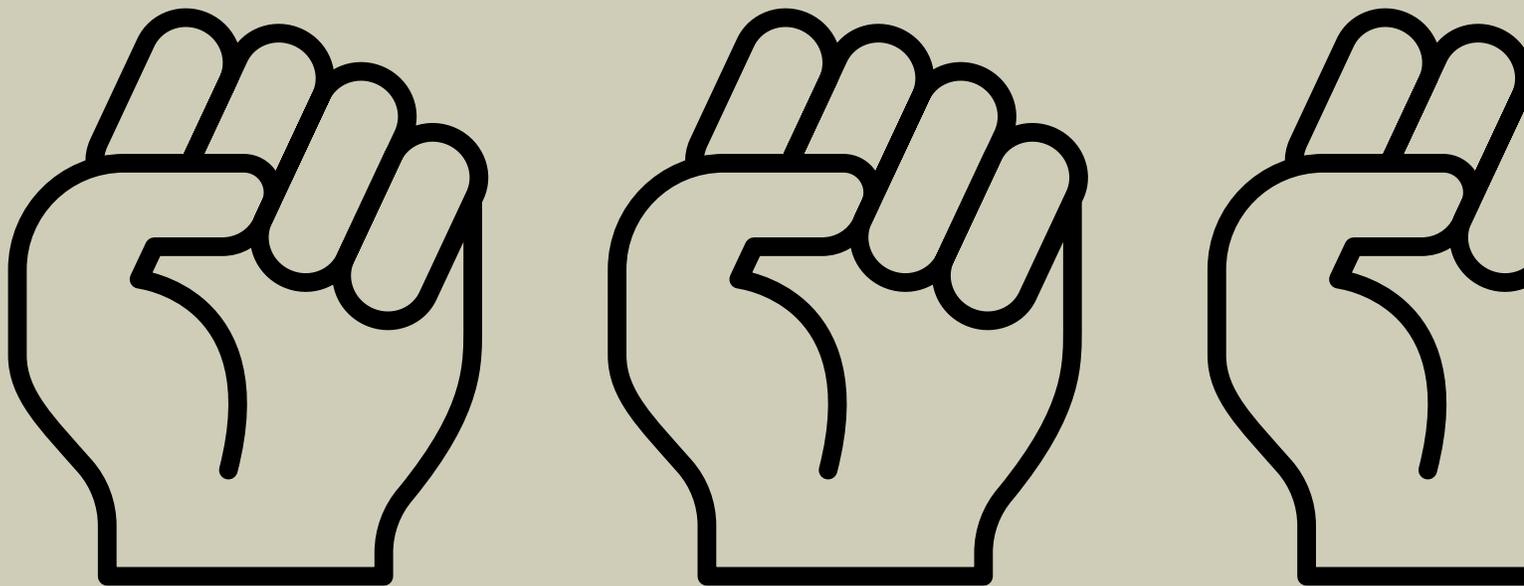




A Barkley POV

10/29/2020

An open brief for building an anti-racist brand.



A modern brand is an anti-racist brand.

This year has brought a dizzying amount of change to the status quo. But one aspect of American life that hasn't changed is the sinister prevalence of racism, a harsh reality that 2020 has made sure none of us turn a blind eye to. In response, people of all walks of life are demanding racial justice. Consumers are standing up to address it, to protest and vote for it with their dollars. They're demanding change from every direction, including the brands they purchase from and advocate for.

Barkley builds brands for these modern consumers demanding change today. Which brings us to a simple premise:

A modern brand is an anti-racist brand — an organization that identifies and dismantles racist systems, refuses racist behaviors and removes racist ideas.

Brands have always been both a mirror and leader of culture. Today is no different. And brands need to come off the sidelines.

Many brands have started. Following widely recognized initiatives like #BlackoutTuesday and #StopHateForProfit, many brands took the first step of publishing public letters regarding their stance and actions. Some of these brands have seen the backlash that comes in reaction to virtue signaling if that's all they did.

67%

67% of consumers say that how businesses react to and express themselves on anti-racist topics will permanently affect their decision to buy from them.

Morning Consult, CEO/Brand Intel, 6/10/20

2/3

2 in 3 of consumers say that it is now more important to them that companies they buy from have a diverse management team.

Morning Consult, CEO/Brand Intel, 6/10/20

67%

67% of Gen Z consumers will consider the extent that companies have delivered on commitments in response to BLM when deciding whether to buy from them in the future.

Morning Consult, Gen Z Poll, 6/22/20

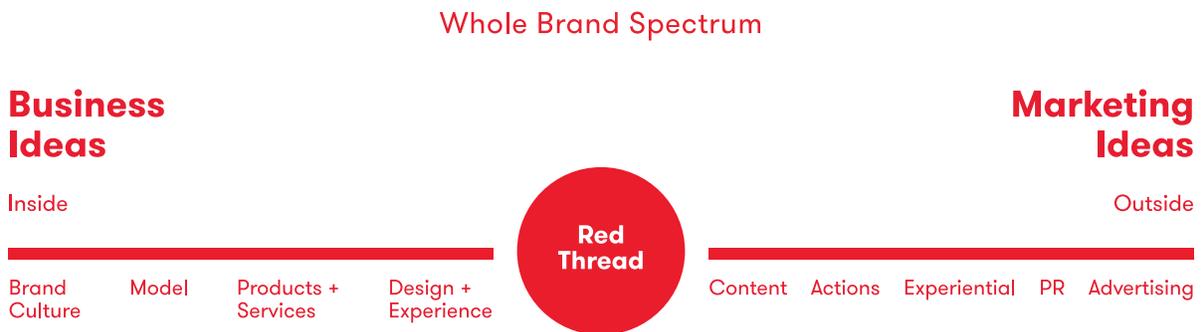
That said, diversity, equity and inclusion cannot be solved overnight: they are complicated, nuanced ideals that take deep investment from those at the top of organizations. In our work toward this with clients so far, we've learned a few things:

- 1** This can't be a PR or HR matter. This must be a prioritized, organizational commitment starting at the top with the CEO.
- 2** Every word counts. Future loyalty depends on how you respond in these moments.
- 3** Be ready to take action as a brand if you're ready to post support.
- 4** Begin in your communities. That's where change starts.
- 5** Creativity demands diversity. Better ideas come from diverse perspective.

This paper tackles what's next and where to put effort inside and outside your brand. In the following pages, we offer anti-racist starting points across the Whole Brand Spectrum. This document is a living, breathing framework intended to grow alongside our understanding of anti-racist brand behaviors. Barkley is on our own journey of acknowledgment and action.

Identify anti-racist starting points and actions.

Modern consumers will vote with their wallet and will check the receipts of today's brands. And simply put, they want to see anti-racist action. The Whole Brand Spectrum below is how modern brands grow. A whole brand must develop, launch and optimize every piece of their business, starting with a red thread, a singular, unifying idea, at the center. And inside each piece of the spectrum lives starting points to become an anti-racist brand. That is the framework for this paper.



Brand Culture / Model

As consumers demand diversity numbers to be publicized and efforts be shared, they are signaling that the work begins inside. 64% of Americans want to see organizations setting an example within their own walls (Source: WARC Guide to Brand Activism, 2020). We advocate employee-first, “inside-out” development and design across all facets of a brand — diversity, equity and inclusion included. This includes efforts around not just recruitment and retention, but also around culture: creating the ecosystem that not only accepts, but appreciates divergence and differences ... a truth that extends to the people inside of your brand, and the model you build with them in mind. Becoming an anti-racist brand means becoming an anti-racist business that operates and advocates accordingly.

Considerations

Brand Culture

- Have you implemented implicit bias training?
- How can your DEI efforts become an objective/responsibility of the entire organization, not just PR/HR?
- What are your workforce diversity targets? And what measures are you taking to reach them?
- Are your recruitment channels offering talent pipelines to a diverse range of candidates, and are your interviewing managers educated on diversity recruitment specifically?
- Do your employees have an outlet to share DEI feedback safely and anonymously? Do they receive transparent information regarding efforts, and are you holding ongoing conversations to share this?
- Is your leadership setting the tone for an inclusive culture where divergence and diversity are appreciated?

Model

- When identifying your bases for consumer research (ex: product testing, consumer journeys), are you prioritizing equal representation?
- Have you developed a DEI roadmap? If so, how is your organization being held accountable to it?
- Have you implemented a supplier diversity program? If so, does this reach marketing and advertising as well?
- What steps have you taken to ensure your customer analytics are unbiased?

Products + Services / Design + Experience

In a culture of consumption, aspiration drives purchase. But what stories have been painted as “aspirational?” While the conversation around diversity has been ongoing, subtle nuances in what we deem aspirational have painted a clear picture where, frankly, whiteness is coveted above Blackness. This isn’t just a case of putting a deeper skin-toned bandage on it. Ensuring equity in experience calls for deep examination of who you are designing for and appealing to with your goods and services.

Exclusion is inevitable. But the basis for that exclusion cannot be rooted in race. When considering who you are and are not for, how are you inviting Black people into your experience?

Just as not all products are created equal (ex: the merchandising and security around hair products suitable for Black women), the same can be said about spaces. People encounter brands inside branded environments: retail shops, restaurants, gyms, museums, salons ... spaces that, for some, offer leisure and commerce, while for others, represent settings of exclusion, inequitable treatment and racialized violence (ex: Black patrons being asked to show their receipts when leaving a retail space while White patrons are not; BIPOC being followed by security while browsing). Design means something different for everyone based on their race, their personal histories and their socio-cultural background. Recognizing who we design for, and how we serve them, is crucial in efforts to become an anti-racist brand.

Considerations

Products + Services

- Who is invited to participate in your brand? Who is allowed to own it, use it, enjoy it? Who is not, and what can you do to ensure race is not the basis for that exclusion?
- Have you undergone a product naming audit?
- Are you working with partners and vendors who also represent people of color?

Design + Experience

- Does your physical space lead to a sense of surveillance for customers?
- If you work with third-party retailers, what efforts have they taken to ensure they are not just a “White space”?
- Is it more challenging for a person of color to access the services or items they need?
- Are there barriers to entry where people of color have to justify their reason for being there?
- Are the gatekeepers to your brand (staff, salespeople, etc.) accountable for creating an anti-racist experience for each customer? Are they empowered to do so?
- Can you take the 15 Percent Pledge - allocating 15% of your shelf (or supplier) space to Black-owned business?

Content

Social media has long been an outlet for entertainment and inspiration, but it has grown (for better or for worse) into a source of education as well. Beyond just news dissemination, consumers look to social media to educate themselves on the brands they interact with. Brands become profiles with values, aesthetics, stances and personalities. Considering the context where branded content lives — next to political memes, news images and social movement commentary — leads us to naturally recognize that social media is not a neutral space.

Users have become increasingly critical of brands who have opted in or out of discourse. It's unsurprising that brands are held accountable for participation (or lack thereof) in movements — Black Lives Matter being the most recent. Toeing the line between participatory and exploitative, in the eyes of a user, is delicate, as it is with all branded content (advertising as a whole and public relations included — see the final section). Movements like #StopHateForProfit have brought a critical eye to the platforms we create content for and advertise on ... and the messages we send on them.

Considerations

Content

- Have you created and/or shared a resource guide to ensure the digital space your brand takes up is useful?
- If you have a substantial following, have you used that influence to amplify non-White voices, hosting BIPOC guests, takeovers, etc.?
- If you have published an outward statement regarding BLM or other anti-racist efforts, have you made good on those promises?
- Is all content you create representative of BIPOC in both authorship and talent?
- Are you utilizing platforms as a means to gather feedback from users?

Actions + Experiential

Consumer patience with brands has run low as purpose-washing has run its course. With unprecedented access to customer reviews, employee testimonials, brand histories and corporate information, consumers are highly aware of and educated about brand actions. Corporate responsibility has widened as consumers (and brands) recognize that every action an organization takes — supplier selection, retail partnerships, donations, employee benefits, even activations — is a statement about their brand. Every action is a statement for or against something. It's pertinent to ensure that today and tomorrow, every brand action is a statement against racism.

Considerations

Actions + Experiential

- Can your brand host or participate in an industry-wide anti-racist coalition?
- Where has your organization donated to in the past? Where can you donate to in the future to ensure your dollars work toward anti-racism?
- Are you partnering with credible, anti-racist organizations?
- Have you done the work to listen to BIPOC communities? If so, how will you continue to do so? If not, how will you learn about their experiences and/or get their input?
- Are the actions you're taking long-term? How can you ensure your commitments are ongoing?
- When selecting markets for activations and events, are the markets we're choosing reflective of diverse communities?

Public Relations + Advertising

The most visible messages a brand tells lie in its advertising. Advertising is a reflection of culture as much as it is an influencer of it, and as such, we must recognize our responsibility in historically unequal representations of BIPOC both in what we're producing and who it is that's producing it (82.6% of advertising employees are white, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Reliant on tropes and stereotypes, advertising as a whole has missed countless opportunities to shift perspectives in place of feeding them. In an anti-racist world, the messages we disseminate through PR and the stories we tell in ads amplify the voices of BIPOC and accurately represent their realities.

Advertising has painted a White world where people of color happen to exist. We look forward to instead portraying a world representative of the people who consume our messages: a world of people of color where some happen to be White. An anti-racist world where stereotypes are not reinforced and pigeon-holing minorities is not permissible. While the last stop on our brand spectrum, PR and advertising is not the least of the brand ideas, but one of the most crucial to impact the media-driven world we live in.

Considerations

Advertising + PR

- How are BIPOC represented in your advertising? Are they represented at all?
- Can we create anti-racist briefs by avoiding stereotyping, tropes, "cultural norms" that alienate BIPOC?
- Should your personas and target audience definitions be revisited to audit for BIPOC representation?
- Where and how is your message reaching BIPOC, if at all?
- Are we reflecting culture with our advertising, or are we shaping it?
- Are the vendors you work with to create your ADPR work inclusive of BIPOC partners?
- Is your work rooted in insights, not stereotypes? How can your creative brief become more inclusive?

We won't be perfect. But we won't sit still either.

We cannot write the playbook for what your brand can and should do. Each organization is processing and reacting to this landscape differently: some have been doing this work for years, others are ready now for the first time. Transparently, we lie somewhere in the middle of those two. So we'd like to share our work to date as proof of our point of view in action.

We recognize we have a long way to go. Working against years of systemic racism is not an overnight, one-month, or one-year effort. It is urgent, but it is also ongoing. Our promise to our internal and client partners is to be honest throughout this process, to share our missteps and our successes, and to do all we can in our power to create an anti-racist world.

Our work, at date of publication

What we've done so far:

- Published our diversity numbers and committed to more diversity at all levels, in line with 600&Rising's #CommitToChange initiative
- Published a Diversity Statement to connect our DEI&B work to our overall Agency Ambition, as well as uniting partners behind a focused mission
- Built out DEI&B (diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging) work groups who partner with the executive team and small groups of focus areas with over 100 partners actively participating
- Hired a DEI&B director with a background in diversity and inclusion to oversee all Barkley efforts
- Deployed a mandatory book club featuring anti-racist literature
- Continued our work with The BrandLab, an organization whose mission is to change the face and voice of the marketing industry
- Continued our work with organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters, Urban League, 826 National, and Teach for America to ensure the next generation is anti-racist
- Hosted a 4-part series in partnership with The BrandLab to expand our understanding of diversity and inclusion as an agency and as partners
- Added additional classes to our internal education program, Rocket Science, to include programming about anti-racist topics of discussion
- Expanded guidelines for how we can create work that speaks with authority on topics related to diversity and inclusion efforts to external audiences
- Founded an Employee Resource Group for our BIPOC employees that meets bi-weekly and conducts panel discussions
- Revised production bidding process to include BIPOC or minority-owned bid
- Recruitment team has been approved (and is on track to complete) AIRS, Certified Diversity and Inclusion Recruiter

What is in progress:

- Establishing Brand & Creative D&I Indexes to hold ourselves accountable to new standards and ways of working
- Revising our creative brief to include DEI&B considerations in all work
- Enrolling in 4As 2020 executive training program
- Developing interview guide and kicking off training to identify + prevent interview bias
- Resetting goals for diversity in research proposal and overall approach
- Participating in a 3rd-party Executive training program to elevate the senior team's knowledge, understanding and ability to be anti-racist leaders.
- Establishing a "culture contract" that supports the Diversity Statement and the culture needed to live by it every day.
- Incorporate DEI+B into the agency's formal employee review process with goals and job descriptions reflecting expectations tied to the Diversity Statement

We won't be perfect, but we won't sit still or be silent. That's what we promise to ourselves and our brands.



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About Barkley

Barkley is an independent, creative idea company committed to knowing the modern consumer better than anyone because that's the only way to build a whole brand. We do this through three idea centers: strategy, design and activation.

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