

# Social Change: The New Frontier

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CMOs face an impossible challenge: how to distinguish one brand from the next in a market where price, quality and convenience are at parity. The answer is passion. That's the "x factor" that every company wants. It's what [Apple](#) has and it's also what [TOMS Shoes](#) has. Apple created brand passion around technology; TOMS created brand passion around changing the world.

World-changing technology may not be within every company's reach, but world-changing impact is. To win, companies need to find new ways to harness the power of social change to build their brands, turn customers into brand "passionates" and deepen their "social value proposition." It's no longer just about social responsibility; it's about social innovation — using the engine of the business to solve social problems.

Social innovation goes beyond simply associating with a charitable cause. Every company has a strategy to do good. Today, people are more powerful as customers than citizens. When it comes to substantiating the effectiveness of social innovation strategies, companies should move beyond the low bar of reputational benefit and focus on brand loyalty and emotional bonds. Customer-oriented market insights will enable CMOs to discover what behavioral drivers deliver business impact through social change.

Billions are spent on corporate philanthropy. Imagine applying these resources to a social strategy that is intentionally designed to drive results. This approach was embraced by a [Fortune](#) 100 global retailer client of ours that sought to strengthen loyalty, improve its brand trust and engage employees. By leveraging data-driven research that identified what issues prompted actionable customer engagement, we provided the client with new market insights. This kind of measurable research is antithetical to traditional check and logo philanthropy.

Helping them craft a social value proposition of developing hunger-free zones in the areas it operated in expedited its entry into large urban markets based on its offerings to this pressing social cause. By understanding that hunger was the social issue their key customer segment found most compelling, they were able to increase their economic behavior. The client scored higher on key reputation measures, and the strategy yielded higher-value business outcomes: new market entry strategies and increased share of customers' wallets.

The desire to mitigate risk is understandable. For CMOs, the real risk is staying the outdated corporate social responsibility course. The opportunity lies in turning customers into brand passionates and developing a social value proposition to drive business impact through social change.