



Brands  
in ***Motion***

The Bravery Mandate:

# Make it Real.

The complexities of our times are putting brands to the test. As people increasingly expect concrete solutions to complicated problems, they want brands to step up and **make it happen, make it matter and make it real.**

6th Edition



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# Introduction

Soaring costs, extreme weather, a fractured society. A new war, an ongoing pandemic, social upheaval. As the stressors of our volatile world pile up, people are turning more and more to their favorite brands for signs of hope.

This is our new constant, and internal and external stakeholders are demanding that companies join other trusted institutions in offering solutions to the urgent challenges affecting their daily lives. In fact, WE Communications has found that **“cost of living” is the No. 1 area where people want brands to accelerate their efforts.** At the same time, skepticism is growing about whether companies are

ultimately delivering on their long-term goals. Respondents to **WE Communications' 2022 Brands in Motion** say that **only about half of global companies that have made values-led commitments are delivering results.**

Companies know that purpose matters, and they want to make a difference. Now, they need new tools to show that their commitment is real and their actions will have true, lasting impact.

This will take a balancing act. Despite mounting pressures, companies must stay the course on their long-term plans to address larger societal issues, such as social injustice and climate change. People support such initiatives, and indeed they continue to see business as one of the most important institutions for driving positive change. But they will no longer take these commitments on faith. In 2022, they expect frequent updates, clear metrics and proof of real progress. Belief is tied to the transparency of the journey.

People don't expect perfection, but they do want progress. They don't need brands to solve every problem, but they do need them to own the ones they take on. They don't need brands to be superheroes, they just need them to be real.

The net result? Brand purpose is facing a pressure test. But this is good news for companies willing to meet this moment. WE's 2022 findings present a clarion call for companies to speak out and act now on their chosen causes while continuing to strengthen their legacies for the long haul. When it comes to breaking through on both a micro and macro level, the message is clear: **Make it happen, make it matter, make it real.**

Companies brave enough to take stakeholders on their entire purpose journey, sharing both progress *and* setbacks, will earn their respect and keep them on board—even when they don't achieve all they'd hoped. Those companies will gain market share and attract talent in the years ahead.

**People don't expect perfection, but they do want progress.**



The **WE Brands in Motion** report is a global study of how perceptions shift over time, conducted by WE Communications and YouGov.

Now in its sixth year, Brands in Motion has surveyed more than 100,000 consumers and business-decision makers.



# Key Findings



Respondents say only about **half of companies that have made purpose commitments are delivering** on those commitments.



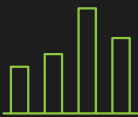
**Cost of living is the No. 1** area where brands must accelerate their efforts on behalf of both customers and employees.



In 2022, people prefer brands place **greater emphasis on practical values-led goals** over ambitious ones, with an ideal balance of 59% practical goals to 41% ambitious ones.



74% of people say **brands should be transparent when informing the public** about the actions they're taking in response to current and emerging issues in society. "Purpose patrons"—brands' most loyal supporters—believe this the most strongly.



Lack of data and data-driven goals is **the No. 1 reason people become skeptical** of brands achieving their values-led commitments.



In the face of economic constraints, the **top things people say brands must continue to invest** in are employee well-being, providing income and employment opportunities, and access to health care.



# Practicality Takes Precedence



The past few years have been filled with social upheaval and challenges to the world order. Amid so much tumult, it can be challenging for brands to determine where to focus. When (and how) does a company act, and when does it stay silent?

The good news: Brands don't have to speak out or act on every hot topic that hits the headlines—or even most of them. **In both WE's 2021 and 2022 Brands in Motion studies, about 70% of respondents said they prefer that companies focus their multiyear investments on a single cause, rather than support a different issue every year.** People most want companies to take ownership of the issues related to their organizations' core operations—that is, the places where they have direct influence and control—such as how they run their organizations, and how they're helping employees navigate challenging times.

For example, WE asked people where companies need to step up their efforts. Where do they need to work harder on behalf of employees and consumers? Not surprisingly, cost of living was at the top of the list for

both groups. People are feeling pain at the gas pump, the supermarket checkout line and everywhere else. And they expect brands to be conscious of external pressure points, if not able to help directly.

## The Pocketbook Pressure Point

Cost of living is the No. 1 area where brands should take more action—on behalf of both their employees and their customers.

### Where do brands need to show more responsibility on behalf of their employees?

1. Cost of living
2. Income opportunity/employment
3. Access to mental health resources

### Where do brands need to show more responsibility on behalf of their customers?

1. Cost of living
2. Access to healthcare
3. Access to mental health resources



## Help in Hard Times

During difficult economic times, people expect brands to look out for their employees and help people find a path to a better income.

### The top areas for brands to prioritize amid economic constraints\*:

Employee well-being

59%

Providing income and employment opportunities

57%

Access to health care services

47%

Climate change and sustainability

40%

Education opportunities

36%

\*Survey respondents were asked to choose up to five priorities.



Regarding employees, WE's findings reveal other quality-of life issues beyond financial compensation that need attention. **Companies also must support their people during these challenging times by investing in their emotional wellness.**

### **The three most important immediate actions:**

1. Ensure employee work-life balance by increasing paid time off, allowing flexible schedules.
2. Raise average employee compensation to meet or exceed the living wage.
3. Invest in health and well-being programs such as mental health, physical health and/or childcare support.

On the consumer side, rising costs are a major concern. When you're worried about paying the heating bill, it's hard to focus on issues that don't impact you in the here and now, such as a war in a distant country or an abstract report about CO2 emissions. **People still care about these issues and want brands to continue to work on them**, but they don't want brands passing the costs to them:

**68%** say brands should do the right thing, but not at the expense of product affordability, access and performance.

Only **46%** are prepared to pay a higher price for products and services so that brands can continue their purpose and ESG commitments.

**When you're worried about paying the heating bill, it's hard to focus on issues that don't impact you in the here and now.**

## Just Transition: A People-Centered Approach

At a time when tackling complex environmental and sustainability problems is crucial for all companies, it's easy for the message to get lost in a sea of numbers. Audiences reveal that they want brands to take people-centered approaches that make a real difference in the lives of their stakeholders—from employees and customers to the people in the communities where companies operate. That means ensuring that the move to a more sustainable economy is fair to everyone—that it is a “just transition.” People want companies to fortify their long-term promises with clear evidence that shows how they are helping people today. For example, by helping people cope with the demands of our fast-moving world by offering skills training for a changing economy and infrastructure solutions for a changing climate.

To learn more about just transition, read our recent research report, [“Making Net Zero Net Positive for Everyone.”](#)





## Case Study: virgin atlantic

Being a cabin crew member for an international airline has always been a stressful job, but in recent years that tension has been mounting as flight crews must deal with both the threat of disease and increasingly unruly passengers. Virgin Atlantic is working to ensure their employees' mental wellness by training more than 400 volunteer team members in a two-day mental-wellness first aid course.

The volunteers learn to spot early warning signs of mental distress and direct their co-workers to relevant support. The program was started by Virgin Atlantic Senior Manager Crew Experience Steve Sneddon, who was brave enough to be open about his own experience with panic attacks and anxiety. Now Sneddon and his team of volunteers are helping their colleagues keep their spirits lifted so their lives and careers can soar.

*Note: Case studies are based on outside reporting and were not part of the Brands in Motion survey.*

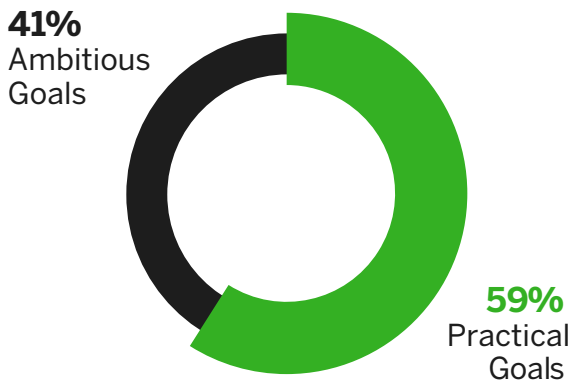


*Image Credit:  
Virgin Atlantic*

# Balancing **Big-Sky** and **Ground-Level** Goals



This focus on practicality is *not* a call for brands to abandon their ambitious plans—*nearly all* respondents say they want companies to have high-reaching goals. The distinction is that people say the effort devoted to these initiatives (think gender bias, climate change, etc.) should lean more heavily toward the practical 59%, versus the ambitious, 41%, respectively.



People still see companies as being extremely important actors on the world stage. **From 2019 to 2021, the number of people expecting brands to create stability in uncertain times rose 30%, and that number held steady in 2022.** The expectation for companies to speak and act on large-scale societal issues is here to stay. People see brands as one of the most important institutions for driving positive change, right after government and media.

But if people believe that only about half of companies are delivering on their purpose promises, how can brands convince them that they really are meeting those commitments?

**The expectation for companies to speak and act on large-scale issues is here to stay.**



The answer is loud and clear: Show your work and share the journey. Seventy-four percent of our consumer respondents tell us they want companies to be more publicly transparent about how they're responding to current and emerging issues in society. When asked why they are skeptical that brands will achieve their goals, the No. 1 answer was: "Lack of data."

**People want companies to take them along on their purpose journey, to show them what happens beyond the pledge, beyond the press release.** Yes, that 2030 executive-diversity or net-zero promise is important, but it's only the first step. Follow-through is essential. Stakeholders want to know what organizations are doing this year, this month, this week. Companies can demonstrate their veracity of initiatives by including stakeholders in the process, providing regular updates with hard data and quantifiable results—even when those results fall short of expectations.

Sharing both setbacks and success stories and revealing how they are course-correcting along the way will enable companies to build a partnership with stakeholders. People are rooting for brands to succeed, and they want an up-close view of the progress.

**“Lack of data” is the No. 1 factor that makes people skeptical that brands will achieve their goals.**





## Case Study:



Gotham Greens delivers on its sustainability promise on many fronts. The company's hydroponic urban rooftop gardens grow quality organic produce with less land, less water and less waste than traditional farms. By operating in high-density metropolitan areas, Gotham Greens significantly reduces the emissions that come from shipping produce from farms to cities. With such a strong environmental platform, why would the company package its produce in single-use plastic?

Gotham Greens CEO Viraj Puri told the Harvard Business Review that the team initially tried to use compostable fiber containers, but quickly wilting lettuce soon made clear that they needed to seek out alternatives. After testing out several other options, the team opted to package their produce in the type of plastic most universally accepted at recycling facilities. It wasn't a perfect solution, but Gotham Greens took a practical and transparent approach. A decade later, the company is still growing and making a positive impact.

*Note: Case studies are based on outside reporting and were not part of the Brands in Motion survey.*



# Brands' Most Ardent Supporters Say “Show Your Work”





People want brands to succeed. In fact, WE's research finds that brands' most ardent fans most want companies to show their work. **These purpose patrons strongly believe companies should speak and act on societal issues.** They want companies to take bold action to make the world a better place, and they are demanding concrete evidence of progress because they care so much.

## The Purpose Personas

### Purpose Patrons: 38%

Purpose has a high influence on purchase and advocacy.



### Matters to Me: 32%

Takes a passive view on purpose overall—except for issues with personal relevance.



### Purpose Cynics: 30%

Believe it is not the role of brands to comment or act on societal issues.



## Purpose Patrons Demand Transparency

“Brands should be transparent in communicating and informing the public on what they do in response to current and emerging issues in society.”

**Purpose Patrons: 88%**

**Matters to Me: 62%**

**Purpose Cynics: 68%**

Purpose patrons also favor practical goals more than other consumers do. This is not the contradiction it might seem. Purpose advocates have a very grounded and sophisticated view of how to address the world's problems. They understand that if every organization takes responsibility for its own actions—from reducing the emissions in its supply chain to relating to a diversity of stakeholders—we will go a long way toward solving the world's problems.

There is a lot of untapped potential in this group. **A company that spotlights its hard work and documents its progress, showing precisely what it is doing for a cause, will win over an influential audience.**

# Starting From the **Top**



Nearly every day, we hear another CEO declare another company's purpose commitment—a plan, for instance, to reduce the business's carbon footprint, support employee well-being, foster more diversity, equity and inclusion. But where does it go from there?

WE's findings show that CEOs and other C-suite executives have an opportunity to lead by example by keeping stakeholders in the loop. WE asked people to rank the actions CEOs should take to prove they will deliver on those purpose commitments. **By a significant margin, people called for transparency.**

## The Transparent CEO

**Which actions go furthest to convince you that a CEO will carry through with a values-led commitment?\***

Provide transparency on progress toward the commitment to employees and customers



Bring in external, objective experts to verify the achievement of this commitment



The CEO answering public questions about progress toward this commitment at regular intervals



Updating media about progress toward the commitment at regular intervals



Detail the personal actions the CEO is taking to achieve this commitment



\*Survey respondents were asked to rank up to three.



WE Communications' April 2022 whitepaper, "Making Net Zero Net Positive for Everyone." found a disconnect between the executive suite and the rest of the company's team members. **For instance, C-suite and executive teams are significantly more optimistic about net-zero plans, while senior and middle management want to know *how* their boss's visions will be operationalized.**

This transparency mandate presents an important opportunity for communicators. Externally, brands' most loyal customers have an appetite for more granular information about brands' purpose progress. Internally, there is a need for team members at different stratum of the company to communicate effectively about purpose initiatives—to hear one another's concerns and work together to execute the organization's vision.

**CEOs and other C-suite executives have an opportunity to lead by example by keeping stakeholders in the loop.**

# Leaning into the “S” in ESG



As companies work to create solutions and share progress, they must ensure not to leave anyone behind.

Environmental, social and governance initiatives, and ESG investing in particular, continue to make headlines, including recent backlash around whether companies and ESG funds are ultimately delivering on their promise. That said, the broader concept of ESG, that companies should take a holistic approach to understanding the impact they have on employees, customers and the communities where they operate, has never been more important.

This is an area where companies must find the right balance between showing their work and focusing on the human impact. For example, sharing hard data and making clear and accurate net-zero calculations is extremely important, but companies also must remember to not get lost behind the math. **They need to show how those numbers will help people—especially the world’s most vulnerable people. In other words,**

**they must lean into the “social” part—the “S” in ESG.**

For instance, WE Communication’s April 2022 research finds that when business leaders were asked to name the top three actions that brands should take to address climate change, **69% of survey respondents said brands should invest in projects that protect jobs and livelihoods of communities most impacted by climate change.**

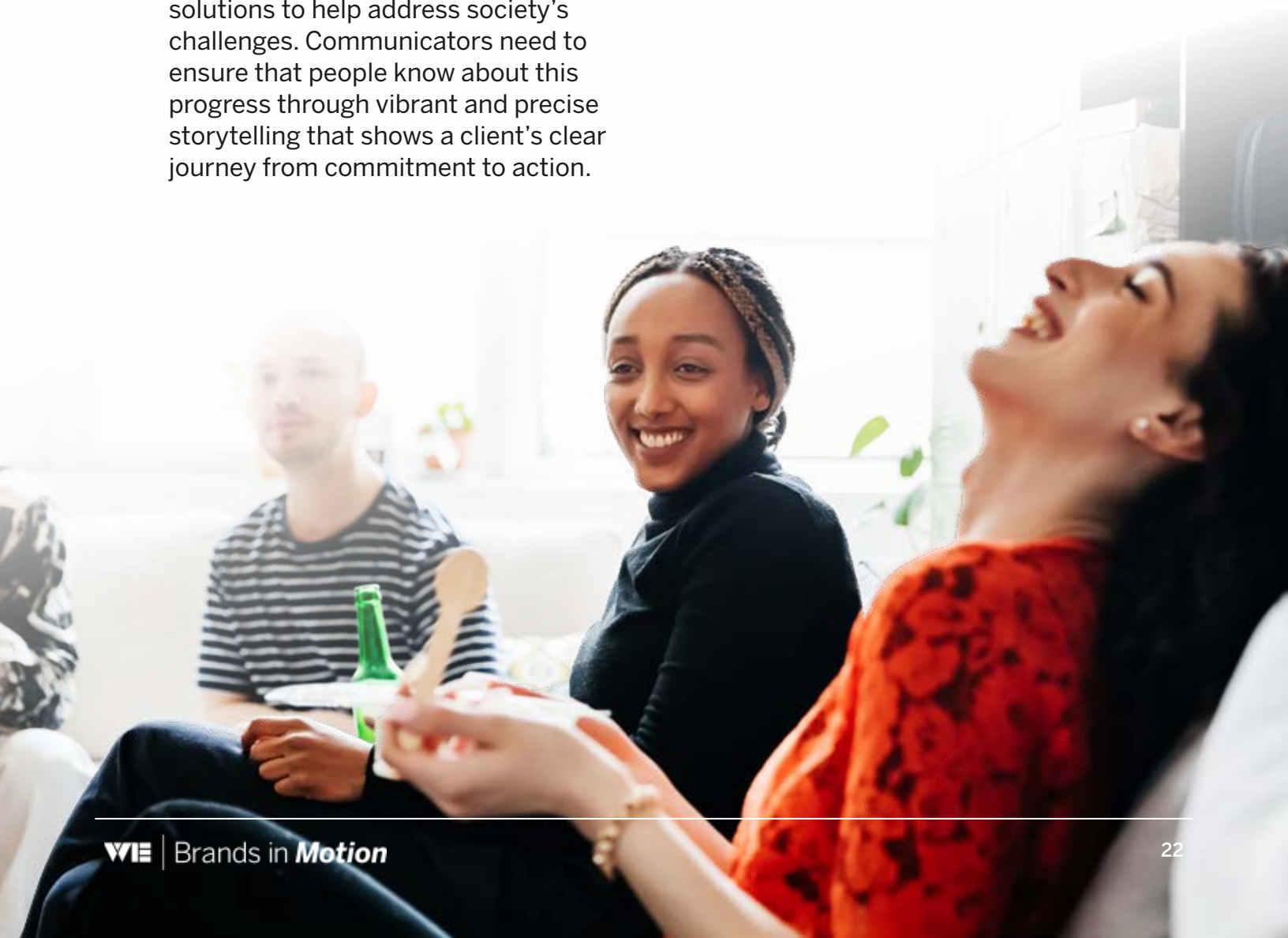
By telling the stories of how their work is helping—and providing the tangible, *human* impacts of their efforts—brands can show how effective their work is. For instance, a company that wants to show it’s not simply working to tackle climate change but also advocating for climate *justice* can provide strong proof of how exactly it is alleviating the impact of a heating planet on vulnerable populations *right now*. A CEO who declares a commitment to building a diverse team can follow up to show how that plan is taking shape—the mobility-impaired employee who can navigate the office



with ease, the trans team member who gets the health care they need, the senior manager who feels comfortable wearing a hairstyle or headscarf in keeping with her cultural or religious background.

Focusing on social license—cultural or company norms—presents a rich opportunity to create stories and content that shares the good news when people are very hungry for hope and optimism. Companies already are investing tremendous resources and developing innovative solutions to help address society's challenges. Communicators need to ensure that people know about this progress through vibrant and precise storytelling that shows a client's clear journey from commitment to action.

**By telling the stories of how their work is helping—and providing the tangible, human impacts of their efforts—brands can show how effective their work is.**



## Matching Ambition With Actions

**Do what you do best.** Focus on your sphere of influence—the places where you can deliver measurable and concrete results.

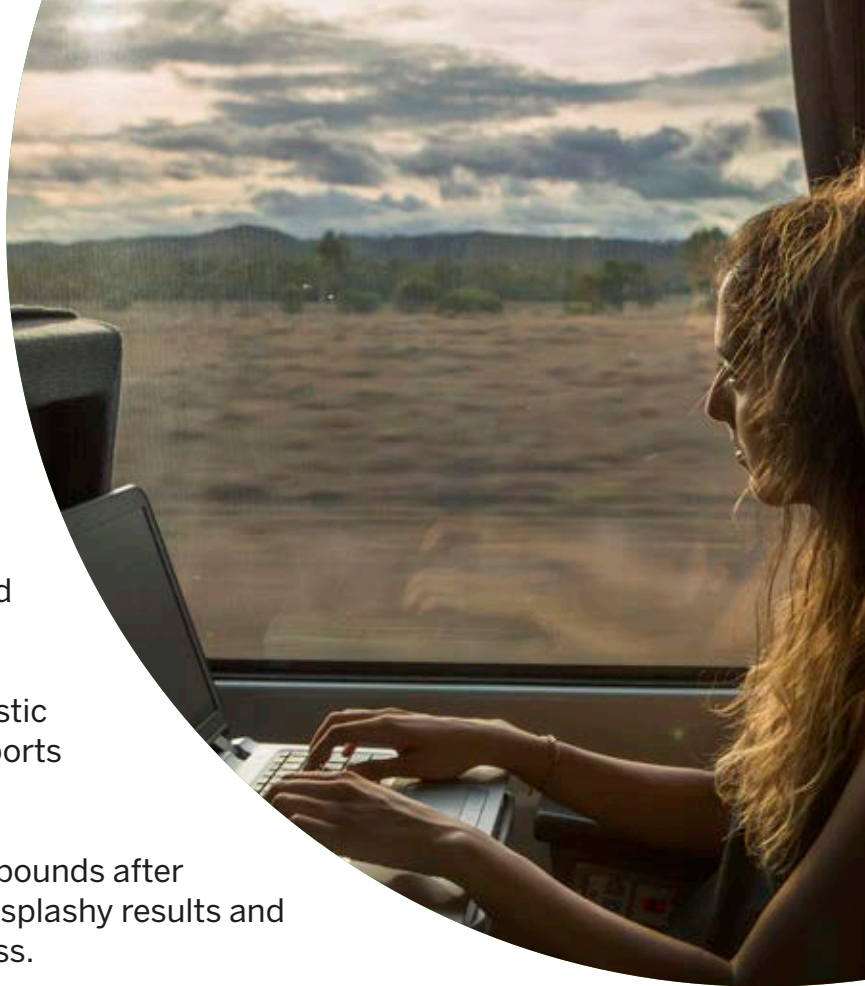
**Be brave—show your work.** Set realistic goals and issue frequent progress reports that take people on your journey.

**Get real.** You don't expect to lose 20 pounds after one day at the gym. Worry less about splashy results and more about building long-term success.

**You don't have to solve or speak out on every issue.** If brands spoke out on every flaming-hot topic that hit the newsfeed, their comms teams would be in crisis mode every day. You don't have to scramble to issue a statement each time a shocking news story drops. If the topic is not one your organization has influence over, or central to your brand's mission, it is OK to refrain from speaking or acting out.

**But you can speak out on issues you feel strongly about.** At times you may want to speak out on an issue, even if you don't have a purpose pillar around it. That's fine if you have another purpose promise you are dedicating time and resources to. A vote of support is still valuable.

**Stay consistent, and know the table stakes.** Don't dial back your DEI or ESG programs because they aren't central to your purpose pillar. These are now as essential as profit-and-loss statements.



# The Transforming Power of Pressure





In both 2021 and 2022, about **80% of Brands in Motion respondents agreed that during times of high social division, businesses and organizations have a moral obligation to help bridge differences.**

The public is pressuring brands to step up and take meaningful action because they believe companies are up to the task, and because they are under tremendous pressure themselves. They understand that addressing the big-picture issues is not only important in the abstract but also to their own lives. They see the impact that a distant war has on their gas bill, or how a virus on the other side of the world can radically change the way they live, play and work.

The demands of these times can often feel overwhelming, but pressure is what drives change. It makes us stronger, more resilient and more able to help create a better world.

People believe that brands are helping create that better world, but they need to see the proof. Now is the time for companies to make it happen, make it matter, make it real.

**People understand that addressing the big-picture issues is not only important in the abstract but also to their own lives.**

# Case Study: Hinge

After LGBTQ+ users told the dating app Hinge that it wasn't serving them effectively, the company conducted a study on themselves, asking their nonheterosexual users about their experience on the platform. Hinge found that 80% of nonhetero users didn't think the app was properly catering to their dating needs. They had difficulties filtering through profiles and accurately portraying themselves and their needs via the app's prompts and dating preferences.

Hinge heard these complaints and responded by publishing an LGBTQ+ dating guide that answers questions about sexuality, gender identity and the challenges of navigating dating in a more fluid world. Acknowledging their faults and empathetically taking this feedback into consideration, Hinge has now added a Not-So-Frequently Asked Questions (NFAQ) guide to the app, better equipping both hetero and nonhetero users to be more accurate in their dating search and better able to manage interactions online around sensitive topics.

*Note: Case studies are based on outside reporting and were not part of the Brands in Motion survey.*



# Appendix

## Brands in Motion Methodology

The WE Brands in Motion report is a worldwide study of how perceptions shift over time, conducted by WE and YouGov. Now in its sixth year, Brands in Motion has surveyed 100,000+ consumers and business decision-makers about their attitudes regarding:

- Expectations for brand actions and investments
- Forces affecting the market on a macro level
- Expectations for purpose initiatives

YouGov conducted the Brands in Motion online quantitative study, surveying 11,485 people in seven markets. In the master Brands in Motion study, participants were placed into one of three respondent types:

- General Consumers: 7,194
- Enterprise Tech BDM: 2,137
- Prescription Health: 2,154

This Brands in Motion white paper is an analysis of one segment of this group, the 7,194 General Consumers in these seven markets.

- Australia: 1,044
- Germany: 1,035
- India: 1,040
- Singapore: 1,040
- South Africa: 1,002
- United Kingdom: 1,027
- United States: 1,006

This whitepaper also contains data from WE's April 2022 report, ["Making Net Zero Net Positive for Everyone."](#)





## Your Brand in **Motion**

Our world is constantly changing. Brands in Motion provides the data-driven tools that enable brands to respond to disruptions and build an enduring legacy.

To learn more about Brands in Motion or find out about Brands in motion events in your area, contact WE:  
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