



MORE THAN  
A BRAND  
POSITIONING

# Meaningful communication to nurture **HOPE** for the next normal



# How to stay relevant and unique for your customers in the new decade

Even before the international outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, strong indicators surfaced all over the world suggesting a change in people's value systems towards a fairer societal dispensation based on sustainable values, fairness and equality. Covid-19 emphasized the strength of this drive and focussed the spotlight on corporate responsibilities in this respect. It brought the reputation of the organisation and its brands into the equation.

The extent to which the pandemic has pushed this agenda is clearly illustrated by a much stronger social voice calling for freedom, fairness, equity and a sustainable planet. The internationally growing Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is just another example of this new focus. This evolution needs to be accepted and embraced by companies and their brands if they want to stay relevant. It requires a redefinition of the brand purpose that shall be genuine, societally driven and unique. As a key part of your company's mission statement, its purpose needs to answer the critical question what the world would lose if your brand should disappear. This critical question today is no longer limited to get the job done for your customers but to get it done in a socially acceptable and sustainable way. To stay credible and not risk severe reputation damage, this cannot just be done superficially to avoid 'purpose washing'. In this paper we will elaborate on the path towards the upgrade of your mission statement and purpose and how to embed it in your brand communication strategy to stay or become a relevant and respected brand for your customers.



# Covid-19: A Situational Analysis

Comprehensive surveys conducted by Ipsos in January 2020, i.e., just as the first news of coronavirus broke, found that 61% of respondents believed that their respective countries were on the wrong track in addressing what they perceived as the key problems their countries were facing. More than 30% of the respondents identified these challenges as:

- ✧ **Poverty and social inequality**
- ✧ **Unemployment**
- ✧ **Crime and violence, and**
- ✧ **Political and financial corruption.**

**In Belgium 70% of respondents believed that the government was on the wrong track in these respects.**

The Kearney Earth Day Consumer Sentiments Survey conducted in April 2020, connected these trends with the coronavirus pandemic. It found that:

**48% of consumers are now more concerned about the environment**  
**55% are now more likely to purchase environment-friendly products.**

It also found that the percentage of consumers that occasionally consider the environmental impact before making purchasing decisions had increased from 71% in 2019 to 83% in late April 2020. 78% also felt that their brands could do more to assist the consumer to make better informed decisions that would improve environment-friendly outcomes.



Towards the end of March 2020 more than 88% of consumers across all age groups said that their shopping behaviour had been influenced by the coronavirus outbreak.



The Ipsos survey found that 40% of people believed that the effects of the coronavirus were likely to continue for at least another year or two. Covid-19 has clearly strengthened people's appreciation of sustainability.



75% of consumers want companies to ensure that changes they had made as a result of COVID-19 must have a positive environmental impact. While 77% of consumers now, more than ever before, hold businesses accountable.

**To the consumer trust, reputation and conversation have become almost as important as price and convenience.**

We have reached the tipping point. The post-Covid-19 truth is that sustainability as a social norm has reached the 25% of the population benchmark to become the next normal. According to research conducted by Wim Vermeulen and prof. Gino Verleye, 55,2% of consumers indicate that they prefer brands that are driven by socially responsible goals. Even more: they want to noticeably see the brands practice what they preach. According to the Kearney survey, 57% of consumers indicate that they are willing to change their purchasing behavior in favor of more socially responsible brands. The societal conscience has indeed shifted, making room for new social norms and values. These now have trust at its core, and it expects its brands to help solve problems for all, protect all, care for all, collaborate with all and innovate in the public interest.

## Implications and Challenges

Ipsos' What Worries the World survey found that Belgium, at no 6, has firmly embedded itself amongst the top 10 EU countries where the population is concerned about climate change. This confirms the expectation of consumers to find a commitment to sustainability inherent in the products and services they purchase. Many major businesses internationally have already embraced the principles of the new social order and have rewritten their mission statements, marketing strategies, corporate social investment policies and development goals to reflect this.

The most profound finding flowing from qualitative analysis by UPR Agency of the mission statements of 100 Belgian companies was that:

**One out of every three Belgian companies does not have a future-proof mission that delivers on, or contributes to, the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[1]**

These companies do not include one or more SDGs in their mission statements.

**One out of every four companies surveyed does not address societal challenges as part of their mission statements.**

**Half of the companies have mission statements that do not address disruption at all.**

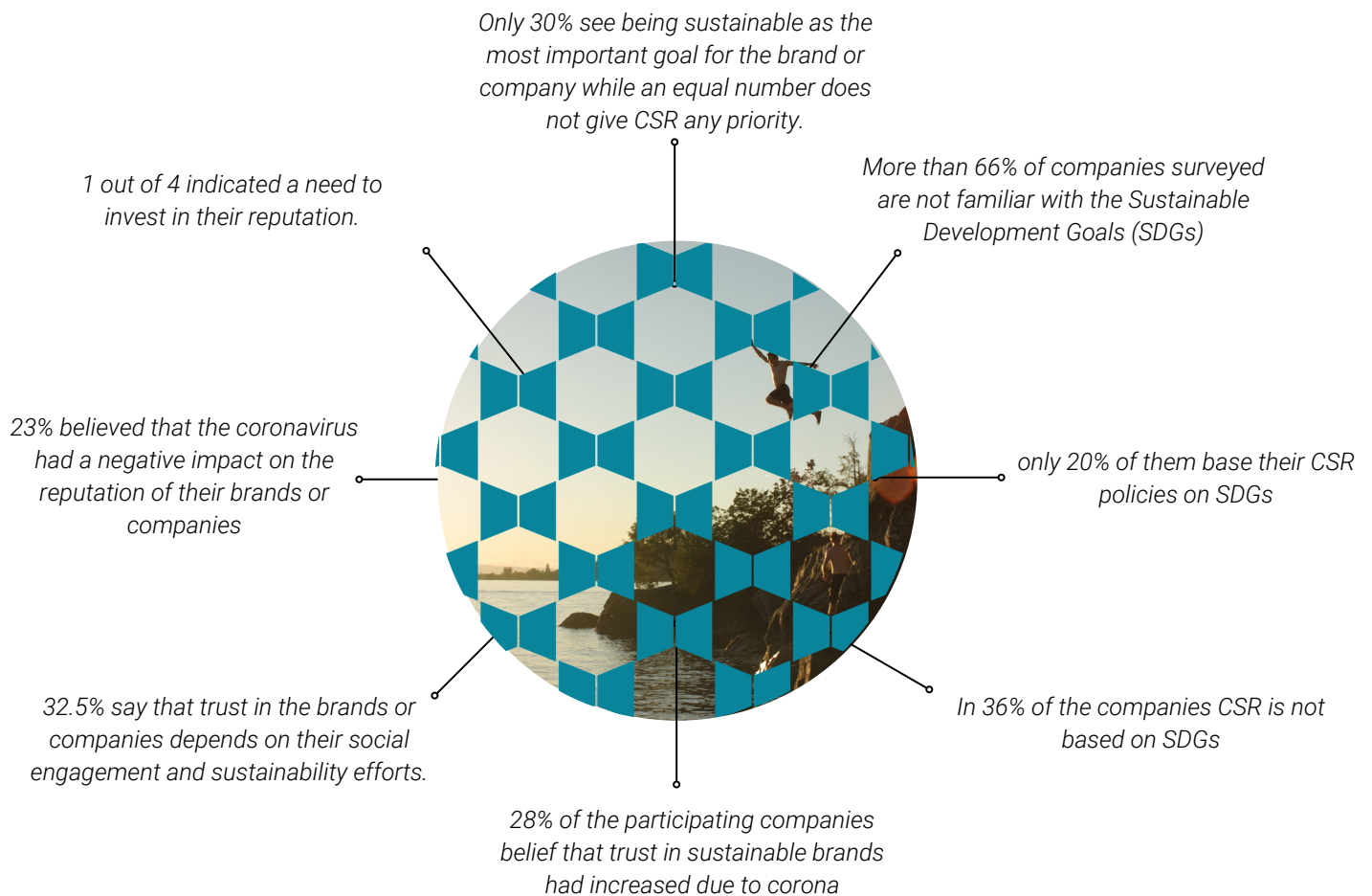
A quantitative survey on behalf of UPR Agency, covering 250 Belgian companies, examined their perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on their mission statements, reputation, trust and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy. This survey also produced some revealing results.

**Almost half of the responding companies (45%) believe that nothing will be the same as before the pandemic again.**

**Many (44%) believe that their mission statements should be reviewed.**

[1] The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. Civil society more and more expects just that from its suppliers and brands.

## Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) does not appear high on the agenda of many organisations.



Herein lies the challenge: if we accept (a) the universal move towards a more sustainable and environmentally conscious world where fairness, humaneness and equity are key elements, and (b) our companies' and brands' reputations have clearly already been harmed by the ongoing pandemic that may still be with us for several months or years, something has to change for brands and businesses to survive and prosper.

## The Solution: authentic purpose-driven brand communication, not 'purpose washing'

People say they trust companies that contribute to a better world, but they need to be convinced by the companies that claim to do so. "Walk and speak the talk" is the message. This requires a renewed look at the fulfilment of brand purpose and its communication. Companies and brands that align their mission, vision, values, purpose and communication strategy with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will have a much better chance to be successful and to address the challenges of the future.

Why choose the SDGs as anchor? The SDGs have been universally adopted and accepted as goals to lead to a new and better world order, based on the very values society is increasingly striving to achieve.

- **They offer a road map for brands to engage with their stakeholders as civil society more and more expects just that from suppliers and brands.**
- **By linking their purpose to SDGs, the brands can better create shared value for all stakeholders and unite them around a common meaningful purpose. They are inspiring and distinctive and offer a strong leverage for growth.**
- **The SDGs will future-proof brands against risk and open up challenges towards innovation, employer branding, new markets and opportunities, and help to define an aspirational purpose that is relevant, meaningful and inspiring to stakeholders.**

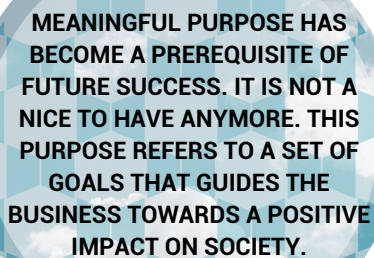


The SDGs allow purpose to become the basis on which a strategy to ignite long-lasting positive change to increase long-term shareholder value can be developed. Purpose should therefore not only address functional and systemic needs, but also emotional and social demands. By aligning these, a much more comprehensive need is fulfilled: by simultaneously addressing customer needs that cannot be solved by the product or service itself, one may often satisfy a more social need by the customers' engagement with the brand. This approach has the added advantage that you develop a meaningful purpose that is close to what the customer really finds important (customer intimacy) to achieve its return on investment (ROI).


# How does the Brand get there?

To stay relevant for their stakeholders, brands and organisations will gain maximum traction by adopting our comprehensive HOPE model. Our model will assist you to develop a communication strategy that is based on a Covid19-proof mission/vision, reputation, trust and branding. We called it HOPE as we believe it to be at the core of what companies and their customers need the most today: a new project, a new vision, a fresh breath of air. Our HOPE model is based on a 6P-approach that aligns the 5 SDG clusters (peace, prosperity, people, partnerships and planet), with the 6th P for meaningful purpose. Reputation and trust in an organization and its brand(s) become key drivers in the perceptions of its publics and the choices they make. The objective is to empower companies and brands with communication assets that will combine storytelling and story-doing, to help them face the future.

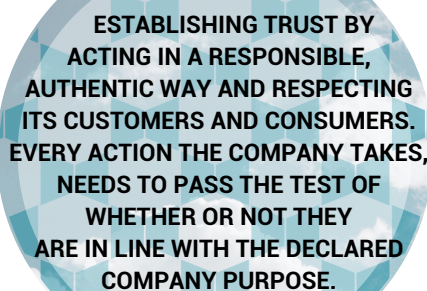
Business leaders need to consider how and to what extent their companies and brands make the world a better place. Four critical factors require special attention:



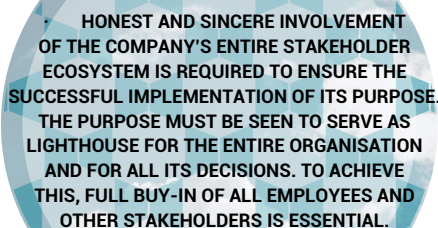
**MEANINGFUL PURPOSE HAS BECOME A PREREQUISITE OF FUTURE SUCCESS. IT IS NOT A NICE TO HAVE ANYMORE. THIS PURPOSE REFERS TO A SET OF GOALS THAT GUIDES THE BUSINESS TOWARDS A POSITIVE IMPACT ON SOCIETY.**



**COMMITMENT TO HONESTLY, SINCERELY AND OPENLY SHARE THE COMPANY'S PURPOSE WITH ITS EMPLOYEES AND EMPOWERING THEM TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**



**ESTABLISHING TRUST BY ACTING IN A RESPONSIBLE, AUTHENTIC WAY AND RESPECTING ITS CUSTOMERS AND CONSUMERS. EVERY ACTION THE COMPANY TAKES, NEEDS TO PASS THE TEST OF WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE IN LINE WITH THE DECLARED COMPANY PURPOSE.**



**HONEST AND SINCERE INVOLVEMENT OF THE COMPANY'S ENTIRE STAKEHOLDER ECOSYSTEM IS REQUIRED TO ENSURE THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS PURPOSE. THE PURPOSE MUST BE SEEN TO SERVE AS LIGHTHOUSE FOR THE ENTIRE ORGANISATION AND FOR ALL ITS DECISIONS. TO ACHIEVE THIS, FULL BUY-IN OF ALL EMPLOYEES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS IS ESSENTIAL.**

The time to start is now as the evolution to a new business ethos is also growing in the Belgian business and amongst its SMEs.

# HOPE model for 360° Covid-19-proof brand purpose and communication

People today expect all stakeholders to do good for people and the planet. As their trust in government policies to achieve that is very low, they particularly count on companies to deliver in that respect. The HOPE model will enable you to leverage the societal relevance of your brand to address new challenges and stay future-proof through:

- ✧ **strategic and pragmatic, result- and action oriented 360° method**
- ✧ **feasible process and outcomes that meet your budget requirements**
- ✧ **an effective results-driven communication plan**
- ✧ **turnkey operational plans that are ready to be rolled out.**

**The HOPE model provides a step-by-step process, accessible and workable for small and medium-sized Belgian enterprises.**

Our model entails four distinct steps that will be conducted under the guidance of our reputation management specialists.



## Setting the playing field

In the first phase we will assist you to answer one strategic key question: Which issues matter to your stakeholders? This will require an intensive analysis of your unique micro and macro business environments and will deliver outputs such as the demographic, economic, social, technological, environmental, political and regulatory issues that have the most profound impact on your business. This first step of the model will provide you with a comprehensive snapshot of your unique stakeholders' perception issues. This knowledge will enable us to move into the second phase.



## Mission Audit

In the second phase we assist you to critically analyse your current mission to answer the following strategic key question: How is your company currently contributing to make the world a better place? The model will test which SDGs fit best and most credibly with your mission and brand purpose.



## Future proof mission and values

The third phase requires you to align your mission and purpose with one or more SDGs. In doing so we will deliver a future proof mission and purpose for your organisation as final output.



## Result driven communication strategy

In the fourth and final phase of our HOPE model, we need to answer two strategic key questions:

- How will your company communicate in a responsible authentic way?
- How will your company implement its purpose with its whole stakeholder ecosystem?

This is a critical phase in which we assist you to develop and define the following key outcomes for your business and all its stakeholders:

- Key target groups and the key messages that have to be delivered to each group
- A touch points strategy
- Internal and external communication campaigns
- A reputation and trust strategy
- Stakeholder relations policies and approaches



# A new era of HOPE

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world, and its effects are due to last well into the future. We believe that the growing new world order will lead to a better society in many ways. The new normal society is more than ever driven by the need to do better for both people and the planet. In these volatile times, people need guidance, support and care and will turn to companies, organizations and brands that deliver on these. To achieve this, companies and brands need to address these needs with a sustainable vision, mission, meaningful purpose and values that nurture hope. These commitments must, in turn, be demonstrated noticeably in their processes and communication strategy. Through the HOPE model, Belgian SMEs are given the strategy and tools to act, inspire and kindle a new sense of hope.

This paper is the result of co-creation between brand experts, Olivier Bialek and Alain Frisson of Second Floor and reputation and stakeholder management expert, Erik Struys, partner at UPR Agency. UPR Agency commissioned the field research and survey on the mission statement of 100 Belgian companies and the impact of corona on brand purpose and communication executed in the second half of 2020.

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**More information:**

Liesbet Debucquoy

[liesbet@upragency.com](mailto:liesbet@upragency.com)

0485 76 70 86

[hope.prezly.com](http://hope.prezly.com)

A photograph of a person jumping over a rock by a lake at sunset. The person is in mid-air, with arms outstretched. The background shows a calm lake, trees, and a sunset sky. The text 'WELCOME TO THE ERA OF HOPE.' is overlaid in large, bold, blue letters.

**WELCOME  
TO THE ERA  
OF HOPE.**

**WE HELP YOUR COMPANY NURTURE HOPE THROUGH PURPOSE.**

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