



PRESS RELEASE

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Clear statement: how brands turn their attitude into their trademark

Anyone who works in marketing or communications or is concerned with corporate strategy is sure to have passed the topic of “purpose” in the past five years. Entire books, conferences, and agency business models have been dedicated to this buzzword. They describe a corporate purpose, for example, as a “success concept of the future” or as a way of “combining the common good and profitability”. For companies in the organic food and natural cosmetics industry, however, this is no longer a real differentiator – at least not among themselves. To stand out from the crowd of market competitors, you need more – and that is: attitude. At least, that's what Hamburg-based PR and marketing expert Björn Köcher believes.

To save you from a fallacy, which one could quickly draw based on the introduction of this article and my professional background: the following lines show the value of purpose and attitude from a marketing and PR perspective and should not be taken as a plea for purpose and attitude for marketing and PR objectives. On the contrary, lack of authenticity and copycats will damage your brand faster than you can count to three. In one of his essays Karl-Heinz Büschemann, the chief reporter at the Süddeutsche Zeitung, also suspects that this scenario is not entirely unlikely:

"Have they (the managers, author's note) understood that they have overdone it in their pursuit of profits and multi-million salaries? There is something to be said for that. Yet, there is little to suggest that the practice in the executive suites will change any time soon. The suspicion remains that consultants and PR professionals are once again reaching into their bag of tricks and that this new thoughtfulness is probably more tactical in nature."

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To discuss this topic objectively, we should define the term purpose. When I talk about purpose, I mean the idea of a "higher" purpose of a company that goes beyond pure profit orientation. Nothing new, you might think. Stakeholder Value, Corporate Citizenship, or Corporate Social Responsibility – many concepts of the past decades aimed at linking the raison d'être of a company not only to the creation of jobs and the maximization of profits. So what is different now?

The general conditions make the difference, not the core of the idea. More and more people recognize the elemental nature of climate and environmental protection, which is not just about a little less snow in winter, but about social stability, peace, and food security. More and more people understand the projections regarding the finite nature of our natural resources, which we are bringing ever closer through our hunger for cheap energy or growing consumption. And for more and more (young) people – and thus potential customers and employees – the quest for meaning is playing an increasingly important role in their purchasing decisions and in the choice of a job.

Therefore, it is not surprising that new studies are regularly published, the results of which underline the value of purpose, among other things, as a strong differentiator for companies and brands.¹ But what can industries like organic food or natural cosmetics do, whose players per se carry a purpose that is almost the same at its core? To answer this question, it is worth looking at a very similar industry: the outdoor clothing industry.

A worthwhile look at Ventura, California - and Tettngang on Lake Constance

Suppose you buy a rain jacket, a pair of mountain bike pants, or a pair of hiking socks today. In that case, you won't be offered anything by the brand manufacturers that doesn't have at least one badge with references to sustainable and fair production hanging on it. Many young brands have even launched with an exclusively sustainable product strategy. The purpose of making outdoor experiences more environmentally friendly is almost

¹Example: OWM-Study

<https://www.wuv.de/Archiv/Purpose-lohnt-sich-für-Unternehmen-auch-wirtschaftlich>



standard in the outdoor industry today. The difference is caused by a publicity-effective and, at the same time, credible attitude.

The prime example of this has its headquarters in Ventura, California, and goes by the name of **Patagonia**. Founded by climber Yvon Chouinard in 1973, the company has repeatedly drawn attention to itself with campaigns that convey a clear stance - even at the risk of losing certain consumer groups. You may be familiar with the spectacular (for its time) 2011 full-page ad in the New York Times featuring a picture of a new Patagonia down jacket and the advertising slogan "Don't buy this jacket". But did you know that Patagonia started hosting the "Tools for Grassroots Activists" conference back in 1994, which continues to network and "educate" NGOs and environmental initiatives and activists today?² In 2017, Patagonia took on Donald Trump directly, suing the Trump administration over plans to downsize two national parks - the slogan at the time, "The president stole your country."³ In 2020, the company launched a campaign against politicians who denied the climate crisis. Among other things, labels with the inscription "vote the assholes out" were sewn into shorts.⁴

Another very striking example was founded just one year after Patagonia in Tettngang, Baden-Württemberg, by Albrecht von Dewitz: **Vaude**. At the latest with the transfer of the management to his daughter Antje von Dewitz in 2009, the almost uncompromising strategic orientation towards sustainable and social criteria took place, which led to numerous awards for the company as well as the company director. However, this was not enough for Antje von Dewitz: At the beginning of 2018, she founded the initiative "Right to stay for refugees" (later "Right to stay through work") together with other entrepreneurs from Baden-Württemberg to ensure that asylum seekers from the European refugee crisis from 2015, in particular those who had already been integrated, were able to stay in Germany.⁵ At the end of 2020, the company announced the founding of the Vaude Academy for Sustainable

²Source:

<https://www.outsideonline.com/culture/books-media/tools-grassroots-activism-patagonias-guide-saving-world/>

³Source: <https://utopia.de/patagonia-verklagt-trump-72573/>

⁴Source:

https://www.alpin.de/home/news/41032/artikel_patagonia_startet_anti-trump-kampagne.html

⁵Source: <https://www.vaude.com/en-INT/blog/detail/sCategory/2281/blogArticle/712>



Business. Interested companies, organizations, schools, and universities can benefit from the outdoor brand's broad wealth of experience here. In 2021, Vaude publicly condemned the military coup in Myanmar, where the company has had various products manufactured since 2003.⁶

The head of Vaude marketing, Manfred Meindl, who has just been named Marketing Head 2022, explained Vaude's political involvement in the industry magazine [One-to-One](#) like this *"We live in a consumer society. In particular, the younger target group views the selection of brands almost as a political process. When they buy a brand, they buy it because of the brand's values. So why shouldn't a company participate in the social dialog like other stakeholders and adopt a certain stance? Consumer decisions are therefore almost political decisions. That's why every company should also communicate a clear stance."*

And what is the organic food and natural cosmetics industry up to?

Even more than the outdoor clothing industry, the organic food and natural cosmetics industry is immanent with a purpose that aims at suitability for grandchildren, social justice, and environmental compatibility – differentiation is no longer so easy. One solution could be to show a transparent edge and a publicly visible stance – provided you have the courage to make a splash. There are already a few examples:

- **Alnatura** started supporting the Fridays for Future movement and climate protection demonstrations with "Free Fruit for Future" in 2019.
- In 2020, the Hamburg-based company **Hydrophil** even went one step further: founder Christoph Laudon gave climate change deniers the middle finger on large-scale posters. The reactions turned out very differently, as he explained in an interview with the *Hamburger Morgenpost*: *"We received many e-mails in which people expressed their lack of understanding. At some point, even the advertising council contacted us because a person had filed a complaint. At the same time, however, we also received an incredible amount of encouragement from individuals and corporate partners. Many people simply thought it was really good that we took a stand."*

⁶Source: <https://nachhaltigkeitsbericht.vaude.com/gri/news/Myanmar.php>



- Food-Start-up **the nu company** took a similar tack, denouncing the policy of the then Federal Minister for Food and Agriculture, Julia Klöckner, in an [open letter](#) in the magazine Der Spiegel and the Lebensmittelzeitung as well as in a large poster campaign. Addressed to her personally and to the large food corporations, the posters and letters read: *“You pump our food full of unnecessary sugar, pollute our oceans, and use ingredients for which the rainforest has to burn. We are heading at full speed towards an ecological catastrophe, and you continue to step on the gas pedal.”* The letter signed by the three founders continued: *“All this is no coincidence, but the result of lobbying and greed for profit. Because the true costs of your actions must be paid not only by your children and ours but by all of us together – not only in the future but now. Do you still believe that you are part of the solution? We don't, and we're no longer waiting for you.”*
- Hydrophil and the nu company may have copied this from **fritz-kola**. In summer 2017, the company positioned itself with a poster campaign against the controversial G20 summit in Hamburg. The large-scale motifs featured drawn portraits of Erdoğan, Putin, and Trump - three of the summit's most controversial participants - asleep in front of a conference microphone. The [Campaign-Website](#) read: *“What seriously can we expect when the discussions are led by politicians who already sweep such important issues as freedom of expression (e.g., Erdoğan), climate protection (e.g., Trump), and social welfare systems (e.g., Putin) under the rug in their own countries?”* The beverage producer also criticized that the summit would interfere with the population's fundamental rights, that restrictions for residents and tradespeople were to be expected, and that homeless people would be expelled from the city center. Erdoğan's placement in this row of undesirable guests particularly displeased people with Turkish roots but that was fine with managing director Mirco Wolf Wiegert in order to convey the company's message. *“Showing attitude also means losing customers sometimes,”* he explained last year in an interview with [Capital](#).



When the road is rocky, but success proves you right

The examples listed are intended to reinforce my message to you: purpose is mandatory, attitude is on-top performance – at least one option. With the duty, you stay in the race, but the podium places are awarded to the on-top performer. Quite simply. And finally, a few facts for all the doubters and those who have reservations:

- Patagonia's sales have multiplied over the last decade and now stand at a good billion US dollars.
- In 2020, the turnover of the nu company rose to around seven million euros, which means that the Leipzig-based company was able to triple its turnover compared to the previous year.
- Shortly before the corona pandemic, the turnover of fritz-kulturgüter GmbH, founded in 2002 with the money from two terminated building society contracts, was estimated at approx. 50 million euros.
- The story of Hydrophil is very similarly: When the company was founded in 2013, it was still laughed at as an "eco weirdo", but the bamboo toothbrushes and many other Hydrophil products are now also available in the large drugstore chains such as dm, Rossmann, Mueller and Douglas.
- Even in the first corona year, sales at Vaude still grew by 8.7 percent to around 110 million euros in the meantime.

Proof enough that a clear and well-formulated attitude can lead to economic success today more than ever? Whereby Antje von Dewitz would certainly correct me on roughly this wording: Thank you for the flowers, but don't look at the sales figures, but at our [Common Good Balance](#), if you want to evaluate our success as a company. She has a point – and a crisp attitude.

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