

Authenticity Gap Executive Summary

By Jim Donaldson

Since the launch of the Authenticity Gap report four years ago, companies' desire to be positioned as genuinely authentic has moved from being an afterthought to becoming essential.

Growing public expectations for greater transparency can make companies panic and think the answer is releasing data. Unfortunately this doesn't make a company more authentic; a company becomes authentic by addressing its inauthenticity.

The Authenticity Gap report is a tool that aims to unearth that. Plotted against the Nine Drivers of Reputation, it goes beyond simply looking at customer experience by mapping it against their expectations. It covers 20 industries over seven sectors and is conducted by tapping into engaged consumers, people we've sampled due to their experience, expertise and opinion.

The data unearths fascinating results; since we last released this report, the news industry has in many ways become its own story. Discussion of 'Fake News' is now front and centre of public debate, while traditional media titles have continued to face extraordinary challenges to their business model.

●● *We've seen politicians and companies scramble to claim the mantle of authenticity as voters and customers seem to care less about what leaders do and more about their perceived character and intentions.* ●●

Not only that, but with a growing sense that policy makers are failing to effect real and necessary change and a greater sense of globalisation, a company's purpose continues to be an important factor for its reputation. 'Doing right' is one of our Nine Drivers but actions to close gaps in the other Drivers can help define who you are as a business.

By examining the difference between consumers' expectations of a company's behaviour against nine stated Drivers of reputation, and the consumers' experience of that company, we see the difference between how they expect a company to behave, and how they actually feel a company has behaved based on what they have seen, heard or felt to be true.

This allows us to see where companies are exceeding or differentiating, meeting or failing expectations. The Authenticity Gap is where they fail expectations.

●● *The Nine Drivers are tangible, action oriented measures that companies and organisations can work on to drive authentic relationships. Closing that gap enables clients to increase their authenticity.* ●●



Key findings

The bulk of the research breaks down into industry specific data. It unveils some interesting results, some of which are more surprising than others. There is no sector or company without authenticity gaps. Each have areas they need to prioritise and work on to meet the expectations of their audiences.

The findings also make clear the scale of the challenge for companies as they seek to meet consumer expectations as Britain leaves the European Union. In the Food and Agribusiness sector in particular, value for customers and consumers is more important than ever. With food inflation on the rise and UK shoppers beginning to feel the strain, food companies and supermarkets will need to find ways of navigating and explaining to consumers the economic realities of price rises.

●● *As a whole, better value is considered the single most important expectation in the 2017 study across industries.* ●●

In the Fintech industry we see expectations of 'Innovation' being met but both 'Doing right' and 'Customer care' have wide authenticity gaps, highlighting that the industry is pushing forward on innovation but forgetting about its users. This might be a good time for Fintech companies to pause and see how banks communicate 'Doing right' and start to emulate that to become leaders.

There is also an increased expectation that technology companies should be doing 'the right thing'. Yet of the 18 technology companies we surveyed there was a significant gap in expectations. Only two companies are exceeding expectations and four are broadly matching. While expectations differ from industry to industry, this is perhaps a result of the bigger conversation of privacy and whether these technology companies are seen to be holding too much information about consumers.

●● *Communicating purpose and raising understanding of data use will be the wisest path to help reduce this gap.* ●●

How we can help

At FleishmanHillard Fishburn we believe expectations of your performance are just as important as your actual performance.

This report allows us to provide insights into a company's reputation. Armed with these insights we can help steer a company's communication or behaviour to improve their authenticity, with the knock-on effect of improving their reputation.

It's not just your company's reputation you need to worry about though. Your industry's expectations define opinion and by leading in one or two Drivers you not only show leadership but you also help to raise the bar.

If you want to find out further information about our Authenticity Gap report or to discuss how we can help you with your reputation, email: authenticitygap@fhflondon.co.uk

