

PURPOSE REIMAGINED:

ENDURING VALUES
FOR LASTING IMPACT

October 2025

INTRODUCTION

Purpose isn't dead.

If anything, it has become the quiet engine of long-term performance. And public expectations of companies are swinging back upward around the world. The **HAVAS Meaningful Brands** shows that 70% of consumers believe brands should be doing much more for the good of society and the planet, and 61% say companies should use their power to drive change. Conscious life-style choices are gradually moving from the margins to the mainstream, with consumers scrutinizing brands not just for function and price but for how they create value for business, people and society. The report found that dynamic brands invite participation, spark interpretation and let audiences help complete the story — building deeper, more enduring relevance. These global signals show that purpose is not a passing fad but a durable driver of trust and resilience, setting the stage for how brands approach purpose.

Only a few years ago, purpose was celebrated as the safest, most effective way for brands to connect with consumers, investors, employees and communities alike. During the global pandemic, it became a powerful unifier, sparking a wave of corporate commitments.

But the mood has since shifted.



INTRODUCTION

Purpose today sits at the intersection of cultural flashpoints and economic realities.

The United States remains a visible theater for these tensions. Debates over climate action and corporate activism often start there, creating headlines that reverberate globally. The beginning of 2025 brought a new flashpoint when sweeping **U.S. executive orders** on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) forced multinationals with American operations to reassess how they communicate and operationalize their values. Similar debates are emerging in other markets, from Europe's tightening environmental, social and governance (ESG) disclosure rules to Asia-Pacific's fast-moving climate and labor standards, underscoring that purpose is being tested in diverse ways around the world.

Together, these developments illustrate how purpose is no longer a safe harbor but a proving ground. The global conversation on purpose is now shaped as much by how companies hold their

commitments as where they operate. Multinationals are weighing the legal, reputational and cultural implications of every stance — **even of silence** — while consumers, investors and employees watch closely from all sides. Companies are adapting with different tactics: some are shifting from high-profile campaigns to measurable impact, while others are doubling down on transparency to reinforce trust.

After several years of intense public scrutiny, the pendulum has finally swung from purpose-washing to purpose-fatigue.

Yet, while headlines focus on pressure and politicization, research tells a different story. Companies with a clear, lived sense of purpose continue to **outperform** peers on innovation, growth, talent retention and resilience. Meanwhile, consumers are sending mixed signals. The majority of job seekers say purpose is essential to job satisfaction, and **younger workers** especially prize it. However, fewer than a third actually changed their purchasing habits because they **disagreed** with a company's stance on politics or current events.



INTRODUCTION

Five years of purpose in focus

Purpose has been part of HAVAS Red's DNA long before it became a boardroom buzzword. Over the past five years, we have explored how companies can move from aspiration to action — listening to clients, thought leaders and industry signals to understand how purpose continues to evolve.



From Pledges to Progress: Proving Brand Purpose in 2021

We showed how brands were moving beyond well-intentioned promises to demonstrate tangible results.

Five Ways Brands Can Do Corporate Purpose on Purpose (2022)

We shared five practical strategies for embedding purpose authentically and effectively.

Purpose Gets Personal (2023)

We examined the shift from sweeping, save-the-world causes to purpose that touches everyday lives.

(Re)Defining Purpose: Shifting from Ideas to Impact (2024)

We highlighted how to turn purpose from a communications exercise into a true operating principle.

Each year built on the last, charting how purpose has moved from rhetoric to reality — becoming more measurable, personal and embedded in core business strategy.

In 2025, our newest white paper picks up that thread. With a landscape marked by purpose fatigue, political pushback and rising demands for proof, it explores how companies can keep purpose anchored yet fluid, turning it into a stable engine of performance and trust.

INTRODUCTION

Today, consumers are speaking with both their wallets and their apathy. The latest **HAVAS Meaningful Brands** report found that 78% of brands could disappear overnight and most people wouldn't care — five points higher than a year ago. Nearly half of consumers (46%) have also cut ties with brands they see as failing society or the planet.

The rules of relevance are shifting. In 2025, purpose must be anchored in enduring values and adaptive to fast-changing realities — ready to withstand political crosswinds, cultural shifts and market shocks.

This year, we turn to what comes next: Making purpose the operating system for performance and trust. Across conversations with clients, communicators and purpose scholars around the globe, along with our Redsters internally, we heard a consistent message: All stakeholders want purpose woven into their day-to-day work and brand interactions. Purpose must therefore be credible and action-first, resilient enough to navigate skepticism, yet responsive to new expectations.



As **James Wright**, Global CEO, HAVAS Red Network & Global Chair, HAVAS PR Network, notes,

“The next decade will reward substance over spectacle — brands whose operations and people prove their message before their marketing does.”

That shift is already underway as audiences look for companies that live their purpose, not just narrate it.

Unless it is embedded in everyday practices, purpose can easily “**go underground**,” becoming rhetoric without resonance. Operationalizing purpose also requires more than an inspiring mission statement. The **missing link** between purpose and performance lies in how leaders at every level engage with their teams internally and key stakeholders externally: having the confidence

and competency to talk about purpose, connect it to day-to-day actions and reinforce it with consistency.

Purpose becomes sustainable when it's not just a corporate platform but a lived, ongoing dialogue — one that builds clarity, cohesion and trust across the organization.



1

**THE BALANCE
OF ANCHORED
YET ADAPTIVE**

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Purpose today must be both resilient and responsive. It is a strong and steady core that guides decision-making as well as a flexible framework that adapts to shifting realities.

The challenge for brands is to keep those two forces in balance — anchoring purpose in enduring values while adjusting how it shows up as culture, politics and markets change.

This is not about rebranding. It is about deepening alignment. When purpose is embedded in everyday choices — from product design to hiring to supply chain — it becomes a source of strategic clarity and

long-term resilience. The [Benevity 2025 State of Corporate Purpose](#) report illustrates the stakes: companies that maintained strong purpose communications saw double-digit sales gains, while those that retreated faced sharp stock declines.

Strong purpose is not a soft asset; it is a competitive advantage.

Enduring purpose starts with a clear, lived set of values — ones that span markets, resonate across generations and hold up under pressure. They guide decisions when public opinion shifts or new regulations emerge. As [Benevity](#) warns, corporate silence creates brand risk, while companies that remain true to their core values can drive measurable upside in loyalty and growth.



Building sustainability brick by brick

The LEGO Group balances its enduring mission to inspire creativity and learning with bold moves to meet new sustainability expectations. From investing in plant-based and recycled materials to introducing circular reuse programs and packaging changes, [LEGO](#) steadily adapts to climate and consumer pressures. In recent years, it has accelerated regional manufacturing and expanded digital engagement to meet shifting market needs, illustrating how a clear purpose can guide practical evolution without losing focus on long-term goals.

THE BALANCE OF ANCHORED YET ADAPTIVE



People remember actions that are rooted, not reactive.

Outdoor clothing brand Patagonia's famous decision to transfer 98% of its shares to fight climate change — declaring "Earth is now our only shareholder" — exemplifies what anchored yet adaptive purpose looks like. It turns a founding mission into an evolving governance model, proving that enduring values can adapt boldly to new imperatives. Similarly, consumer goods giant Unilever's Sustainable Living Brands — which grow 46% faster than the rest of its portfolio — show how consistent purpose can drive both market and social performance.

Anchored purpose however is not static. It must flex to reflect cultural shifts, stakeholder expectations and local realities. Transparency may be required in Europe, while discretion can help navigate polarized debate in the U.S. Global purpose statements must therefore be translated into market-specific programs and messages without losing their unifying intent.

Adaptability also means being crisis ready. Climate disruption, geopolitical instability and digital misinformation will continue to test corporate character. These modern crises demand constantly updated, flexible strategies that can counter "narrative warfare" and misinformation in real time. Yet nearly a quarter of U.S. companies lack **any crisis plan**, and almost half have one that is outdated. In the social-media age, speed, direct CEO engagement and human judgment — not canned statements — are decisive.

Crisis preparedness is the ultimate purpose test where region-specific strategies, clear impact documentation and rapid, values-based decision-making separate brands that merely talk about purpose from those that live it.

For business leaders, marketers and communicators, the imperative is to guide this evolution meaningfully, not reactively. People managers must be equipped to translate strategic purpose into operational reality, ensuring that purpose is felt in daily work and decisions. When purpose is anchored in values and expressed through adaptive action, it becomes a true operating system for performance and trust.



2

**THE SHIFT FROM
MESSAGING TO
MEANING**

THE SHIFT FROM MESSAGING TO MEANING

For years, purpose often began with a splashy campaign or an executive quote designed to trend. Those days are over. Purpose without proof isn't strategy — it's performance. In a world where trust is hard-won and quickly lost, stakeholders are no longer impressed by polished messaging unless it is backed by measurable change.

**Beyond the hashtag,
proof is the new pitch.**

Companies in the top quartile of purpose alignment within the S&P Global 1200 posted 58% higher revenue growth and 63% greater returns on invested capital than their peers, according to the [CECP 2025 Corporate Purpose](#) report. Yet a separate [Lynxeye Purpose Index™](#) survey of 17,000 respondents across eight markets found that only 15% of companies are actively investing to deliver on their stated purpose. The gap between rhetoric and reality has never been more visible.

Stakeholders are noticing. A bold statement shared on LinkedIn while employees remain in the dark. A crisis plan polished while the root issue goes untouched. An impact report designed before impact is delivered. Audiences are not cynical — they are observant. They have seen enough brands overpromise and underdeliver to know the difference between a story and a strategy.



BE • DO • SAY:

A simple framework
for authentic purpose

The “Be • Do • Say” model offers a practical lens for aligning purpose from the inside out:

1

BE

Define who you are and what you stand for.
Your values and behaviors set the
foundation for credibility.

2

DO

Demonstrate those values through
consistent action. Invest, measure and
adapt before communicating.

3

SAY

Communicate only once your actions
create genuine impact — letting proof lead
the story.

This progression helps organizations ensure
that their words reflect their deeds —
preventing “purpose drift”
and strengthening long-term trust.

THE SHIFT FROM MESSAGING TO MEANING

Real leadership starts with action first, words later.

Consider YSL Beauty's "**Abuse Is Not Love**" initiative. It didn't begin with a glossy brand film — it began with NGO partnerships, internal training and multi-market infrastructure to support survivors of intimate partner violence. The brand only started talking about it once the work was underway and results were real. This sequencing built credibility that no ad campaign could match.

The future of purpose is not just about doing and saying the right thing — it's also about meeting people's deeper needs for trust, transparency and participation. Brands that invite stakeholders to

co-create solutions, rather than simply consume stories, are building the kind of emotional resonance that endures.

The stakes are rising and consumers reward companies that are actively investing to deliver on their purpose. They are nearly **three times more likely to pay a premium**, try new products and forgive mistakes when they believe a brand is making a positive difference. The missing link between purpose and performance is how leaders embed purpose into everyday dialogue and decision-making, in- and outside company walls.

This is more than a communications challenge. It is a call to hard, often unglamorous work: shifting resources, holding uncomfortable conversations and winning boardroom buy-in. If your social impact commitments do not affect how you spend money, design products or treat people, they are not purpose. They are PR.

In this environment, neutrality is no longer neutral and silence is no longer safe. The next generation of brand power will come from what companies are willing to change, not what they choose to say.

They also need to move fast, then explain. In volatile moments, companies can't wait for perfect consensus or the "right" headline — they have to decide, resource and execute, then communicate with clarity. As Bank of America's **Brian Moynihan** put it, the job is to move faster, put the right people in place and lead "from the outside in" so actions land where they matter most; the message should follow the work, not precede it.

You don't campaign your way into trust, and you don't trend your way into credibility — you earn both through action.

The message for leaders is simple but demanding: Change first. Speak when there is something to report, not merely something to announce. That is how purpose moves from messaging to meaning — and from cost center to competitive advantage.

TURNING PURPOSE INTO PRACTICE

The operational shift is clear:

Proof before promotion.

Initiatives must be funded, staffed and measured before they are marketed.

Integration over isolation.

Purpose cannot sit in a silo — it must influence product strategy, sourcing and people practices.

Transparency as default.

Reporting must show commitments, progress, successes, setbacks, lessons and next steps, not just highlights.

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together, with fingers interlaced. The hands are illuminated with dramatic lighting, featuring a strong red glow on the right side and a blue glow on the left side, creating a high-contrast, moody effect. The background is a solid dark red color.

3

PROOF POINTS AND STAYING POWER

PROOF POINTS AND STAYING POWER

Purpose has always been about aspiration. But in today's polarized, AI-enabled marketplace, credibility is earned with evidence.

Leaders can no longer rely on evocative language or clever campaigns alone, they need hard proof that their purpose is delivering value for business and society alike.

Data that speaks builds stories that last.

Purpose-driven initiatives must now be backed by metrics that demonstrate business impact — ROI, stakeholder engagement, innovation outcomes

and resilience indicators. The [Lynxeye Purpose Index™ 2025](#) found that brands with deeply embedded purpose show more consistent growth and stronger transformation results than their peers.

Accountability is the next test. The era of “corporate social responsibility” is giving way to “[corporate accountability](#),” where companies are not just responsible but answerable for ensuring their operations enrich society. This shift raises the bar from feel-good programs to verifiable obligations built into core strategy and governance.

But data alone is not enough. Business leaders must harness data not just to measure impact, but to shape emotionally resonant narratives that anticipate stakeholder needs.



When the story outruns substance

Nike has long been admired for using consumer and product data to inform inclusive design and to create feedback loops between brand values and audience sentiment. But its recent missteps show how quickly credibility can erode when the story outpaces the substance. The athletic apparel giant's “[Winning Isn't For Everyone](#)” campaign was widely criticized for tone-deaf messaging, and its [RepTrak reputation score](#) dropped more than seven points in a single month, with all key reputation drivers — from innovation to workplace culture — declining. The lesson: A campaign is only as strong as the data and actions behind it. Brands cannot rely on past equity or sophisticated analytics if present-day behavior tells a different story.

PROOF POINTS AND STAYING POWER

Even as the business case strengthens, the public mood can shift. Brands once hailed as purpose trailblazers — think **Patagonia** — are now treated as exceptions rather than exemplars in some markets. Political headwinds and cultural cynicism can give companies cover to reverse course when the pressure mounts. Purpose needs structural staying power to survive those swings.

Forward-looking leaders are therefore locking purpose into their business model. The expanding community of B Corps — more than 10,000 globally — signals that embedding purpose into governance is becoming mainstream. These companies are redefining accountability by baking social and environmental goals into how they operate, not just how they communicate. By codifying purpose commitments in governance documents, linking them to executive incentives and setting measurable targets that are reviewed at the board level, CEOs can make purpose hard to unwind, even when external conditions tempt backtracking.

The takeaway for communicators and executives is clear:

Purpose must be anchored in measurable business outcomes, not just lofty intentions.

Data should also do more than prove impact — it should help craft stories that inform, inspire and deepen trust. And those commitments must be written into the company's DNA so they endure leadership changes, market volatility and shifting politics.

In an era when attention is fleeting and skepticism is high, proof points create permanence. They turn purpose from a headline into a legacy — one that continues to drive growth, attract talent and protect reputation long after the next trend or political cycle has passed.





4

FROM TOP-DOWN
TO ALL-IN

FROM TOP-DOWN TO ALL-IN

Purpose used to be declared from the top and broadcast to the market. Today, it spreads — or stalls — inside the organization first.

Employees are now the frontline ambassadors of purpose, shaping how customers, business partners and communities experience a brand every day.

A sense of purpose is a powerful magnet for talent. The [Deloitte Global 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey](#) shows that 89% of Gen Z and 92% of millennials consider purpose important for job satisfaction and well-being, and around 40% have rejected roles or projects on ethical grounds. Purpose is not just an HR talking point — it is a career filter for the next generation of leaders. But attraction is only half the equation. Regular dialogue about purpose, equitable relationships and autonomy can also [boost employee commitment](#) by up to 10%.

Employees decide every day whether to carry a company's purpose into their customer interactions. That makes internal activation as critical as external storytelling. It means:

- **Two-way dialogue.**
Employees help define how purpose is lived, not just receive memos about it.
- **Equitable leadership.**
Leaders at all levels model consistency between words and actions.
- **Autonomy with accountability.**
Teams are empowered to act on values in real time, especially when serving customers or navigating local community issues.

From values to values creation

U.S. electronics retailer [Best Buy](#) doubled its return on invested capital and quadrupled its stock price after aligning store-level leadership with corporate purpose. The retailer has embedded its mission — enriching lives through technology — deep into store operations and leadership development. This focus on human-centered leadership and employee empowerment has fueled sustained growth well beyond the initial comeback story. By treating purpose as an operating system for everything from customer service to cost discipline and getting all levels in the organization on board, Best Buy has turned values into a durable competitive advantage.

FROM TOP-DOWN TO ALL-IN

Employees are not just “the brand’s most vital asset,” they are **part of the brand experience** itself — proponents of the promises a company intends to keep. From tour guides on college campuses to frontline associates in retail stores, customer service reps who troubleshoot issues in real time and drivers or field technicians who represent the brand in homes and across neighborhoods, employees who are engaged and empowered influence every other stakeholder group they touch directly or indirectly, from customers to partners, investors and entire communities, amplifying trust and reputation.

When purpose is felt inside, it shows outside — sparking customer loyalty and regulatory readiness that no campaign can buy.

In volatile times, employee advocacy also provides a protective buffer. Research from the **Benevity**

2025 State of Corporate Purpose report shows that companies with strong internal purpose communication were more likely to maintain or grow customer traffic even during boycotts or crises. Employees who are trusted to represent the company’s values can help maintain service quality, defuse misinformation, and rebuild credibility quickly.

The bottom line for leaders is simple: Purpose cannot remain a top-down directive.

It must be co-created, lived and championed across the organization. When employees are genuinely engaged, purpose becomes a shared operating system — one that attracts talent, inspires innovation and safeguards reputation when it matters most.



A man in a dark suit is walking away from the camera on a zebra crossing. The crossing's white stripes are prominent against the dark background. A large, white, stylized number '5' is superimposed over the man's back.

5

**LINKING PURPOSE
AND PROFIT**

LINKING PURPOSE AND PROFIT

Profit is nothing to apologize for. In fact, the best proof of purpose is a thriving business.

The notion that purpose and profit pull in opposite directions has been debunked: purpose-led companies consistently outperform peers in innovation, resilience and stakeholder loyalty. [The Purpose Premium](#) report by Deloitte shows that organizations that integrate purpose into strategy and operations see stronger growth and more durable stakeholder trust. Purpose is not a trade-off — it is a competitive advantage that pays dividends for shareholders and society alike.

This lesson resonates globally. [Amit Bajaj](#), President of Tata Consultancy Services, put it succinctly: “TCS has carved its place as a pioneer of emerging technologies like AI — which is disrupting industries globally — and we are set to create one of the largest AI-ready workforces in the world.” His perspective shows how an India-headquartered company views purpose not as a statement but as a growth strategy — investing in talent and technology that strengthen competitiveness and social impact alike.



Beauty that pays back

Purpose, when fully embedded, becomes a growth engine rather than a cost center. Consider Dove's long-running “[Self-Esteem Project](#),” which tackles body image pressures and mental health challenges worldwide. For nearly two decades, Dove has partnered with educators, psychologists and youth organizations to reach more than 100 million young people with free confidence-building resources.

The results are as commercial as they are social. By standing for a more inclusive definition of beauty, Dove has earned deep consumer loyalty, strengthened pricing power and kept the brand fresh in a crowded personal-care market. Its message of authentic self-worth resonates across cultures and generations, helping Dove weather market challenges.

LINKING PURPOSE AND PROFIT

Other brands are charting similar paths. Companies noticed for their “**conscious capitalism**” strategies are reframing purpose as a driver of innovation and market share — from retailers that reward circular design to tech firms investing in equitable access to AI. Each demonstrates that long-term value creation flows from values lived every day, not just from quarterly promotions or charitable add-ons.

For communicators and executives, the mandate is clear:

- **Connect purpose to performance.**
Make the financial case visible by tying purpose goals to revenue growth, productivity gains, and cost savings.
- **Integrate across operations.**
Ensure purpose informs everything from product design and hiring to supply chain and governance.
- **Report with rigor.**
Share transparent metrics that show how purpose-driven choices create lasting value for shareholders and society.

Purpose and profit are not opposing forces. They are mutually reinforcing when leaders treat purpose as a strategic asset — an operating system that drives innovation, loyalty and sustainable growth. The companies that recognize this now will be the ones still leading, and still trusted, when today’s market cycles fade.

LOOKING AHEAD:

Filling the cup in the Thirsty 30s

The next decade will demand more than bold promises — it will reward brands that replace hype with humanity and transform consumption into conscious connection. As we move from the “Raging 20s” into what James Wright calls the “Thirsty 30s,” audiences are shifting their focus from spectacle to substance, from storytelling to story-living.

This new era calls for companies to “fill the cup” — to meet people’s deeper needs for transparency, participation and shared progress. Purpose will be defined less by what brands say and more by how they listen, adapt and invite communities into the narrative.

Those that pair performance with authenticity, innovation with inclusion, and action with empathy will not only earn attention but sustain it. The brands that lead the Thirsty 30s will be remembered not for what they sold, but for how they made people feel seen, heard and valued — proof that purpose, when lived fully, can replenish both business and society.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Purpose is no longer
a marketing accessory.

It is an operating system for performance and trust — one that must stay anchored in core values and adaptive to shifting realities.

This year's signals are unmistakable: stakeholders expect companies to prove impact, move quickly and keep purpose alive in everyday decisions, not just in annual reports.

The most durable brands will treat purpose as both compass and engine. They will hard-wire it into governance and incentives so that it outlasts leaders and market cycles. They will invest in measurable outcomes and transparent reporting that can stand up to scrutiny, even when politics or public sentiment change direction overnight.

Real leadership means acting first and communicating second. It requires bringing employees inside the strategy so they can carry purpose outward to customers, investors and communities. And it demands linking purpose to profit in ways that demonstrate that values and value creation are not competing goals, but two sides of the same growth story.

The bottom line: Keep purpose anchored yet adaptive. Back every commitment with proof. Empower employees as its frontline ambassadors. And make the financial case explicit so purpose is understood as a strategic asset, not a cost center.

Companies that meet these tests will not only weather skepticism and polarization — they will earn the trust, loyalty and resilience that define long-term success.



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