

# My lessons from a hologram while wearing sky blue Crocs

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Marketing departments have no choice in this new and fast-moving economic paradigm but to assume more control and influence over the sales and customer experience.



From communicating solutions via social media to facilitating the purchase via e-commerce, most of our efforts are shifting towards creating and optimising all the metrics our marketing is measured against.

As a result, engaging with content or scrolling through a newsfeed feels more like a street market where every vendor is shouting out the quality of their solutions with "Special price just for you!".

While shoppers may stop at some that they find attractive, they tend to skip many, block advances, and sneak their way around to avoid being pestered. I've been part of this evolution, and as a digital marketing strategist, I've been incentivised to recommend more hard-sell content and tactics that 'move the needle' on all metrics. I started with elevating search-page rankings, and delivered information about a solution via display ads, always ensuring we add the 'buy now' call to action. This felt fine; it felt positive. I was seemingly helping to remove barriers to completing a purchase, using data to create more effective and personalised communication, and steadily increasing click-throughs and conversion rates in line with benchmarks. Yet, something felt off about this process. I was doing my job, but was I adding value to the end user? I found the answer while watching *Blade Runner 2049* in which a giant hologram accosted a person on his way home, telling him about a product he already had (NSFW).

However, in that same scene, the character engaged with the 'ad'. Luckily for the advertiser, the character had a strong connection to the visual depicted in the hologram. It was something he identified with. People give attention to things they identify with. In our industry of buying attention, brands play a role in people's identities. They can popularise certain identities through their messaging, stories and characters portrayed in their content. The projected identity triggers resonance, which contributes to brand salience and influences the rest of the customer experience.

When people find something that they identify with, it feels good. It's validation of something they have invested in. While people still have a rational approach to completing the purchase – which is where the customer experience work helps – how they feel about the brand behind the purchase comes first. The purchase is more likely, following a positive feeling towards the brand.

I recently went through a similar purchasing experience. I am now the proud owner of a pair of sky blue Crocs.

Three years ago, I baulked at these classic clogs, labelling them as ugly and made for old people who discarded the desire for suaveness. What changed in three years?

I settled into my 30s and became more at peace with my identity. Society also changed – 'ugly' rebranded to 'striking'. More specifically: I saw people other than old folks wearing Crocs. I wanted sandals that looked more appealing than a rubber door stopper. My partner suggested Crocs. She then commented that they were 'overpriced', but my mind was already made up. I rationalised the purchase concluding they're:

- Quality – proven by the many feet wearing them

- Comfortable – proclaimed in defence of their appearance
- Stylish – affirmed by the youthful advocates

But what does the Crocs brand have to do with my identity? What did I sense about Crocs that made me feel good about them? My investigation led me to their website where I found this mission statement: "We believe everyone should be comfortable in their own shoes." I identify with that (part of my motivation to work at an advertising agency is the flexible dress code policy). I hadn't seen this mission in their advertising. I saw it in a commitment to make the same 'ugly' shoe. That commitment proclaimed, "We value comfort, even at the expense of popularity, so we guarantee this shoe delivers."

This is that something I felt was off about advertising. The understanding that we wield this power over identity and how intentional I have been in its use. What identity is your brand popularising? Are you portraying it intentionally?

And are you adding value to the end user as a result? Shaping your promoted identity in line with your mission appears to be a step in the right direction (assuming your mission is more considered than being 'number one' in your industry). Your mission should inform your brand messaging and the resulting brand experience.

So why do so many briefs articulate their problem as "Our pages are quiet and we need to tell people about our products". Let's change those last words to, "We need to show our audience who we are and what we believe in so they can feel positive towards us". So how do you apply this? Be brave. Declare your mission, ensure it adds value to the people you serve, and promote that mission in every way available to you. That's where a portion of your marketing budget should be allocated; with the measurable outcome being a positive lift in who your brand resonates with, their associated feelings, and the story they transmit on your behalf.

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