

[Skip to content](#)**MW** Marketing Week[Latest](#) [Disciplines](#) [Career Development](#) [Strategy](#) [Reports](#) [Jobs](#) [Mini MBA](#)  
[Events & People](#) [Newsletter](#)

## Patagonia on why brands ‘can’t reverse into purpose’ through marketing

Anchoring its brand firmly in environmental activism, Patagonia is committed to take an unconventional, mission-driven approach to retail success, explains European marketing director Alex Weller.

By [Charlotte Rogers](#) 18 Jul 2018 3:09 pm



For its latest campaign Patagonia is raising awareness of the threat being posed to wild rivers in the Balkans.

Patagonia has staked its entire reputation on being a brand that lives its purpose – from its products and company culture all the way to its support of more than 1,000 grassroots environmental organisations around the world.

Since 1985, the outdoor wear brand has donated 1% of sales to the preservation and restoration of natural environments, awarding more than of \$89m to causes. Then in 2002 Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard established the non-profit corporation ‘1% for the Planet’, an alliance of businesses that donate 1% of their total annual sales to grassroots environmental groups.

The company’s three-strand mission statement – to build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm and use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis – informs every aspect of the marketing strategy.

Patagonia is an unconventional brand not only in the way it rejects the trappings of mass consumerism, but also in the way it thinks of fashion. European marketing director Alex Weller believes the word fashion carries with it connotations of buying a product for its

aesthetics or to keep up with the latest trends, a consumption dynamic Patagonia “actively resists”.

You can't reverse into a mission and values through marketing. The organisations that are struggling with this are probably the ones that are thinking about marketing first.

Alex Weller, Patagonia

Instead the brand wants to be known for the transparency of its supply chain, promoting social justice for its workers and creating durable products that, where possible, are made from recycled, fair trade or organic materials.

“Could you say that Patagonia is an unconventional brand in the way that it connects and communicates with its community? Yes we are. Could you also argue that people are choosing to buy Patagonia clothing purely for the way it looks? I think the answer to that question could also be yes,” Weller tells Marketing Week.

“What we want to make sure is that when somebody is faced with the opportunity to buy a piece of clothing from Patagonia they understand why we exist as a company, how we have chosen to bring that product into existence, what they need to use that product for and how they will – with our support – care for that garment. Those are the dimensions we think about when it comes to selling our product.”



The Patagonia store in Manchester.

As a result Patagonia does not do a lot of advertising, aside from campaigns aimed at its core climbing, skiing and surfing communities or when it has a wider supply chain innovation to communicate, such as around fair trade sourcing.

Weller explains that marketing within Patagonia is focused on “building a movement” based on the values it shares with its communities, a connection that cannot be achieved through traditional above-the-line advertising.

“It’s community building and we’re very much focused on doing that socially online, physically in the real world and we invest as little as we can in paying to talk about what we do and who we are,” he adds.

[READ MORE: Why brands need to bring their purpose to life internally, not just externally](https://www.marketingweek.com/2018/07/18/patagonia-you-cant-reverse-into-values-through-marketing/)

Retail is, however, very important to the company. While its store estate is not large, Weller describes it as a “very viable” commercial part of the business. The brand uses its stores as a means of interacting with its community and communicating more broadly about its values.

Having opened its latest store in Manchester in February, Patagonia will continue to “thoughtfully” open stores, says Weller.

“There definitely isn’t an aggressive store expansion programme for the sake of having lots of stores on the high street, but where we believe we can have a meaningful presence and serve the local community through the lens of sport and environmental activism, then we will look to open retail,” he adds.

## Rejecting mass consumerism

Unafraid to take a stand against mass consumerism, [Patagonia famously rejected the global discounting event Black Friday](#) in 2016 by donating 100% of sales on the day to environmental organisations.

European marketing director Alex Weller explains that the idea behind the anti-Black Friday campaign was never to be deliberately disruptive. Rather, it was an example of the brand approaching Black Friday in a way that communicated its brand values.

“The idea of Black Friday is that you reduce your price aggressively and you make it possible for lots of people to buy lots more stuff in a very short space of time. The idea of encouraging purchase purely based on a reduced price point goes completely against the philosophy and values of a company like Patagonia,” Weller tells Marketing Week.

“We will never engage in something like Black Friday for what it is, but of course there is an opportunity for us to creatively bring our own mission and values, our own purpose, to the fore during that moment.”

The idea came from a junior graphic designer in the web team called Taylor Cox, who 10 days before Black Friday suggested that Patagonia funnel all its sales into the 1% for the Planet grant pot, but call the campaign 100% for the Planet.

The concept quickly spread from Cox, to his boss, to the CMO to the owner. Going live with the global campaign little over a week later, the assumption was that Patagonia would generate sales of between \$2m and \$4m. The actual figure exceeded \$10m.

The idea of encouraging purchase purely based on a reduced price point goes completely against the philosophy and values of a company like Patagonia.

Alex Weller , Patagonia

“The reality was that yes there was a sense of urgency, there was a need to communicate something that was big and profound, but that it wasn’t there for the sake of being disruptive,” stresses Weller.

“It was there to communicate our deep commitment to the community of NGOs we support and to make a clear political statement that we are in business to help save the planet. It’s that straightforward.”

[READ MORE: If purpose is so important to brands why are so many failing to measure its impact?](#)

Weller believes a sheer lack of will is preventing other businesses pursuing more values- and mission-driven strategies that use their businesses as a platform for good.

“It’s the will of the ownership and it’s the will of the organisation to use this important platform as a brand to do more than generate profit,” he says.

“You can’t reverse into a mission and values through marketing. The organisations that are struggling with this are probably the ones that are thinking about marketing first. The role of marketing is to authentically elevate that mission and purpose and engage people in it, but the purpose needs to be the business.”

## Democratising activism

This has not been the easiest year for brands taking a stand on social issues. In June, beauty retailer [Lush was severely criticised](#) for its #Spycops campaign, which protested against undercover police officers being trained to infiltrate activist groups.

Patagonia prefers to take a much more nuanced approach, choosing to champion causes it believes have a pressing impact on the environment, no matter how obscure. In March, the brand went live with its ‘Save the Blue Heart’ campaign, focused on preserving the pristine beauty of the Balkan river network in Eastern Europe.

Weller explains that Patagonia realised it had an opportunity to put a largely hidden issue on the global agenda, focusing on biodiversity protection and debunking the “myth” that all hydropower is inherently a green, renewable energy source.

Patagonia targeted its efforts at the financial institutions that fund the roughly 3,000 hydropowered projects in the Balkans region, creating a full-length documentary on the subject and presenting a 120,000-strong petition to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in June.

Patagonia’s next mission is to connect its customers directly with NGOs through a new digital platform called Patagonia Action Works. Launched earlier this year in North America and with plans to roll out to Europe in spring 2019, it aims to offer a way for consumers to engage with grassroots organisations either by donating money, volunteering their skilled labour or joining events, protests or marches.

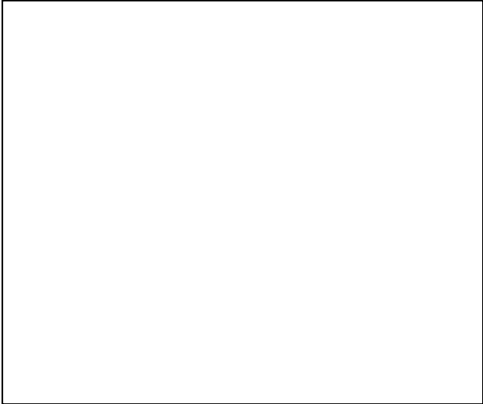
“We really do believe that there is an opportunity to democratise activism. Most people will acknowledge that the circumstances we face in relation to the environment aren’t great and want to be able to do something, but possibly are not quite sure what to do and how to do it,” says Weller.

“Giving them the opportunity to directly take action and use their resources in defence of issues that they care about is the next frontier for us as a company.”

18-7-2018

Patagonia: You can't reverse into purpose through marketing

View more on these topics [Analysis](#) [Retail](#) [Brand](#) [Purpose](#)



Recommended

[Mark Ritson: Lush’s moronic #Spycops campaign is a new low for brand purpose](#)



Lush has only alienated consumers with its poorly judged #Spycops campaign, which has nothing to do with the brand as well as being of no benefit to society.

[Brand Positioning](#) [Brand Purpose](#)  
By [Mark Ritson](#) 5 Jun 2018 4:10 pm

[If purpose is so important to brands why are so many failing to measure its impact?](#)

[Meet the brands investing in talent retention to create a pipeline of future leaders](#)





Some 60% of brands dedicated to social  
the opportunity to actually engage to  
creating a by speaking of emotional  
brand and in this way they are  
pulling up to the importance of  
investing in their employees' long-  
[Brand Purpose](#)

By [Charlotte Rogers](#) 23 Apr 2018  
7:00 am [Professional Development](#)

By [Charlotte Rogers](#) 17 Jul 2018  
7:00 am

[Why brands need to bring  
their purpose to life  
internally, not just  
externally.](#)



Latest jobs

Having a brand purpose is all very  
well, but if consumers are going to  
be believe it is genuine brands must  
communicate the values internally  
first.

[Brand Purpose Team Management](#)  
By [Portia Woollen](#) 27 Jun 2018  
12:00 am

[Customer Insight  
Consultant](#)

London  
By [Portia Woollen](#) 10 Jul 2018  
12:00 am

[Marketing Assistant](#)

London  
By [Portia Woollen](#) 10 Jul 2018  
12:00 am

[Senior Marketing Officer](#)

[Marketing Co-ordinator](#)



Sheffield, South Yorkshire  
By [Portia Woollen](#) 10 Jul 2018  
12:00 am

Kinnerton Confectionary Limited

London (Central), London  
(Greater)

By [Portia Woollen](#) 25 Jun 2018  
12:00 am

### [Brand and Content Director](#)

London  
By [Portia Woollen](#) 15 Jun 2018  
12:00 am

Regent's Park, London  
By [Portia Woollen](#) 2 Jul 2018 12:00  
am

### Featured Recruiters

### Latest from Marketing Week

[Marketers' hiring plans fall to lowest level yet as economic concerns bite](#)



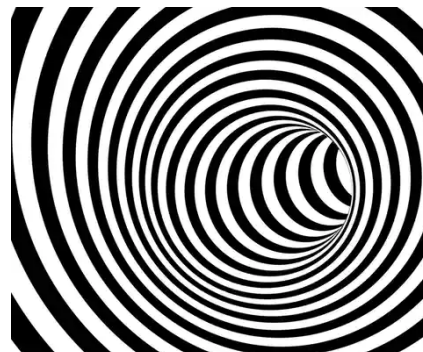
A lack of commitment to changing headcounts comes as businesses raise concerns about rising prices and increasing competitiveness.

['Relentless' digital growth boosts UK marketing budgets](#)



Marketers continue to display a noticeable drive towards digital-based advertising, according to the latest IPA Bellwether, however budgets for main media advertising

[Mark Ritson: Three reasons having a digital prefix will stunt your career](#)



Marketing was always going to absorb digital, it was never going to be the other way around, so when marketers label themselves with the



## [Economic Trends Marketing Trends](#)

By [Ellen Hammett](#) 18 Jul 2018 3:00 pm

begin to recover after a bumpy start to the year.

## [Economic Trends Marketing Trends Media Strategy](#)

By [Ellen Hammett](#) 18 Jul 2018 12:01 am

dreaded D word all they're doing is limiting their career progression.

## [Careers Digital](#)

By [Mark Ritson](#) 17 Jul 2018 5:39 pm

## [Why Cadbury won't 'throw the baby out with the bathwater' when it comes to innovation](#)



Cadbury's senior brand manager says its important to think about product development while also supporting its core brands as it launches a £3m campaign for Twirl.

## [Advertising Product Development](#)

By [Molly Fleming](#) 17 Jul 2018 3:27 pm

## Explore Marketing Week

### [Personal Development](#)



By [Samuel Joy](#) 30 May 2017 4:45 pm

### [Agency Relationships](#)



By [Samuel Joy](#) 30 May 2017 5:00 pm

### [Mark Ritson](#)



By [Samuel Joy](#) 30 May 2017 5:04 pm

### [100 Disruptive Brands](#)

### [Media Strategy](#)

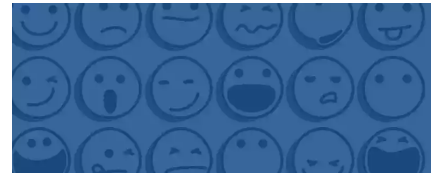
### [Customer Experience](#)



By [Samuel Joy](#) 13 Dec 2016 4:30 pm



By [Samuel Joy](#) 30 May 2017 5:06 pm



By [Samuel Joy](#) 30 May 2017 5:08 pm

## [Digital Transformation](#)

## [Team Management](#)



By [Samuel Joy](#) 30 May 2017 5:09 pm



By [Samuel Joy](#) 30 May 2017 5:11 pm



## Menu

- [Latest](#)
- [Disciplines](#)
  - [Advertising](#)
  - [Brand Positioning](#)
  - [Content Marketing](#)
  - [CRM and Loyalty](#)
  - [Data & Analytics](#)
  - [Design & Branding](#)
  - [Digital](#)
  - [Direct Marketing](#)
  - [Market Research](#)
  - [Pricing & Promotions](#)
  - [Product Development](#)
  - [Programmatic](#)
  - [Social](#)
  - [Sponsorship & Experiential](#)
  - [Targeting & Segmentation](#)
- [Strategy](#)
  - [Agency Relationships](#)
  - [Brand Purpose](#)
  - [Brand Reputation](#)
  - [Brexit](#)
  - [Consumer Trends](#)
  - [Customer Experience](#)
  - [Digital Transformation](#)
  - [Diversity](#)

- [Economic Trends](#)
- [Employer Branding](#)
- [GDPR](#)
- [Marketing Effectiveness](#)
- [Media Strategy](#)
- [Regulation](#)
- [Shoestring Marketing](#)
- [Events & People](#)
  - [Mark Ritson](#)
  - [Marketoologist](#)
- [Career Development](#)
  - [Leadership](#)
  - [Personal Development](#)
  - [Professional Development](#)
  - [Team Management](#)
  - [Mini MBA Programme](#)
  - [Reports](#)
  - [Employer Brands](#)
  - [Vision 100](#)
  - [Webinars](#)
  - [Marketing Podcast](#)
  - [Knowledge Bank](#)
  - [Jobs Site](#)
- [Contact](#)
  - [Newsletter Sign Up](#)
  - [LinkedIn](#)
  - [Twitter](#)
  - [Facebook](#)
  - [Instagram](#)
  - [YouTube](#)
  - [Subscribe to the Magazine](#)
  - [Contact the Team](#)
  - [Advertising Information](#)
- [Brands](#)
  - [100 Disruptive Brands](#)
  - [Adidas](#)
  - [Aldi](#)
  - [Apple](#)
  - [Asda](#)
  - [Coca-Cola](#)
  - [Diageo](#)
  - [Facebook](#)
  - [Google](#)
  - [John Lewis](#)
  - [Lidl](#)
  - [Marks & Spencer](#)
  - [McDonald's](#)
  - [Morrisons](#)
  - [Nike](#)
  - [Procter & Gamble](#)
  - [Sainsbury's](#)
  - [Samsung](#)
  - [Tesco](#)
  - [Twitter](#)
  - [Unilever](#)



Type anything and hit “enter”



[My account](#) or [Sign out](#)

- [Twitter](#)
- [Linkedin](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Advertising Information](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Cookies](#)
- [Newsletter](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [Website Terms and Conditions](#)

© 2018. All rights reserved.

built by [interconnect/it](#)

*Centaur Communications Ltd (a member of the Centaur Media plc group)*

*Wells Point, 79 Wells Street, London W1T 3QN. Registered in England No: 1595235*