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When a diaper isn't just a diaper

What's the purpose of a diaper? Well, to keep baby bottoms dry, of course.

But what's the purpose of a diaper brand? Can a brand of diapers even have a purpose?

If the brand is Procter & Gamble's Pampers, it has a purpose that has informed P&G's research, marketing, advertising, promotions and even charitable efforts for the Pampers brand. And that has helped drive sales of Pampers products, now at about \$8 billion a year, pushing it to the top of P&G's billion-dollar-brand list.

The purpose of Pampers, conceptualized through cross-department meetings and P&G's vaunted consumer research, is to be a partner with mothers in the physical, social and emotional development of their children.

High-falutin' stuff for a diaper.

But that's exactly the kind of thinking that P&G's former chief marketer, Jim Stengel, wants to infuse into the entire discipline of marketing.

Stengel, recently retired from P&G after 25 years, wants to be a change agent, and his vehicle is Jim Stengel LLC, equal parts think tank and consultancy, pushing the idea of "purpose-based marketing" through the wide-ranging field of marketing.

Few people in the country are more qualified than Stengel to drive this change. As P&G's global marketing officer, he was in charge of the world's largest advertising budget.

Marketing must begin with a purpose, Stengel says, and it should be more than just improving sales. It should be a long-term strategy focused on consumers' needs that influences all other work involving the brand.

Once P&G figured out it wanted to be a partner with parents in childhood development, that led to the creation of diapers that feel better, to research that found babies sleep better when wearing diapers (significant in some developing countries where children go without diapers), to a rich Internet site that features articles and other information from childhood experts and to new products such as Pampers Stages.

It also led to a partnership with UNICEF in which, for every package of Pampers sold, P&G donates the cost of one vaccine to combat tetanus, still a big problem in developing countries.

That program has not only done a lot of good, funding more than 45 million tetanus vaccines, it's been good for business, earning Pampers on-air plugs from Oprah and a public endorsement from former President Bill Clinton.

From an office in the LPK building downtown, Stengel is working on ways to spread his message. He's writing a book, planning to create the Purpose Institute, modeled after the Aspen Institute think tank, and is talking with several major universities (including University of Cincinnati) about a position that would allow him to teach and advance this thinking.

All driven by a purpose - to re-orient marketing to make a difference in people's lives.

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