



# VISIT TO THE INAUGURAL ANTHROPOLOGY CONFERENCE

Anthropy was dubbed by its founder John O'Brien as a "unique moment in time, to change the national narrative, consider the qualities we live by and build a positive, equitable, sustainable, successful future." The significant ambition was matched with the venue, the megastructures of the Eden project, the first time it had ever been made available for a private event. John had chosen it to ensure that guests had shown a commitment to change by traveling to a remote location.

With 1,165 delegates from across civic society, politics, and business, the purpose of the event was to create a blueprint to build a more harmonious and human-centric future and outline 'a vision for Britain'. Content for the gathering was themed around four key questions, all pertinent to the leaders of today and those hoping to shape the future:

- **People** – What is the quality of life we want in Britain for the next thirty years?
- **Place** – What qualities of place and planet do we need to achieve that quality of life?
- **Prosperity** – What qualities do we wish to see in a good economy and in the best of businesses and public sector organizations?
- **Global Perspective** – What qualities do we want to express to the world, to help solve shared issues such as poverty, climate change, and human rights?



Greeting us as we entered was a sign asking us to 'leave our egos and silos at the door', and that's what happened. It lowered barriers and created an optimistic atmosphere of collaboration. I was only able to make a small proportion of the 197 sessions, but here are the key themes relevant to businesses in pursuit of positive change.

**Businesses play a significant and tangible role in the transformation required to protect our environment and create positive social change.**

- There was widespread feeling that we cannot wait for regulation or legislation to take the lead.
- Speaking about the Better Business Act, Mary Portas described business being one of the major societal structures that can create real, concrete change for the future, stating that 'it can and should be a force for good.'
- Marketing and advertising will play a significant role in shaping the future we want. The 'persuasion' of marketing even in small actions can tip the balance and permits policy makers to take the massive action required of them.
- Citizens need a simpler set of choices to adopt more sustainable lifestyles (perhaps using the EAST framework to make them Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely, as well as offering trade-offs and easy to understand rules to adopt.

**Businesses and companies can grow sustainably by adopting or re-orienting around a purpose that is a greater than simply profit maximisation.**

- By realigning to principles such as focusing on employees, or 'People, Planet and Profit' or even adopting the principles in the

new British Standard for Purposeful Business (PAS-808)  
businesses can ensure their output drives a positive future for all.

- Growth and purpose are not mutually exclusive and success stories like Ella's Kitchen or COOK show that purpose driven businesses can be fuelled by and are dependant on growth.
- Existing structures can hold this back – markets can exacerbate short term-ism – (e.g., the average tenure of a share held on the FTSE is 27 seconds) and shareholder value can lead to short-termism. Many of the challenges we face require long term solutions.
- There is also evidence that purpose-based businesses are more likely to be able to ride through times of economic uncertainty.
- To remain relevant and attractive, businesses will need to pivot to new citizen behaviours – by 2031 Gen Z will outspend Millennials and companies should prepare to meet the values and needs that they will bring with that purchase power.

**We need to ensure that we remain committed to social purpose and move towards greater inclusivity and equality of opportunity through the economic downturn.**

- The cost-of-living crisis is palpable, and this means that many businesses will have to work this into not only their interactions with their customers but also how they position things like sustainability.
- Many businesses evidenced the alignment of the reduction in consumption or more sustainable purchase habits with behaviour in a harsh economic climate.
- Brands and businesses have an opportunity to help their customers in tough times and will reap rewards for doing so, for example Iceland's micro-loans scheme that helped 40 thousand people afford their weekly shop in the first week of being live.

**There are new media organisations springing up to cater for more considered news or a more responsible way of sharing content**

- Notably the likes of the 'The News Movement' by ex-BBC News editor Kamal Ahmed, Tortoise the slow news podcast, or the Good News Movement. Many of these start-ups are a response

to social media and are looking to drive greater connections with their audience and win out in a new media landscape.



**Companies and brands are still fearful of being called out for 'greenwashing', but this should not lead to inaction.**

- Honest and open conversations with supply chain and agency partners are crucial to highlight risk.
- "You have to acknowledge hypocrisy.... don't let perfection be the enemy of the good" Richard Walker – Iceland Foods.
- 'We don't have time for everyone to be Patagonia' and so even small steps are encouraged.
- A Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) will start to see more rigour in assessing company targets and claims in this area from 2023.

**"Nothing About Us Without Us!" was issued as a rallying cry for greater inclusion and inviting those not currently represented into the decision-making process**

- "Those in leadership positions right now have excelled in the current system. Those we need in leadership positions to create a new system come from outside those leadership groups." Annamarie Phelps Chair IWG Women and Sport
- Young people were seen as crucial to helping solve the challenges and inequalities we see in the world today and we need more action to get them into discussions on the future.
- Legislation is currently being debated to that could mean that the Office of Budget Responsibility consider the wellbeing and the future generations principle in their work, and this could be extended to businesses too (Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill).
- Several companies touted the value of a shadow or challenger board made up from some of the younger members of their

organisation to ensure a diversity of voices in the decision-making process – something we are embarking upon here at MG OMD.

## **What does that mean for us in marketing and media?**

Distilling the outtakes from Anthropy, it became clear that as marketers and media professionals, we can play a pivotal role in shaping the future we want to create and overcome some of the challenges facing our society. Marketing's key role as the gateway to reaching people means we are well-placed to connect with audiences on the things that matter to them and to shape the brands and businesses we work for.

- Marketing and advertising can benefit society by creating and reinforcing positive actions
- Employing the techniques of behaviour change and promoting positive societal actions and behaviours such as circular economic actions, we as marketers can play a significant part in shaping a more sustainable society and delivering better outcomes.
- In media planning, we can work together to test product demand, and messaging, and find audiences for new, more sustainable products.
- It can be daunting, but we're here to help you navigate the rules
- With well-publicised callouts for greenwashing and overstating claims this area can feel like one fraught with risk, but we are here to help you find the right messaging and connect you with the wealth of resources in this area and ensure you are on the right side of the rules and consumer opinion.
- There are actions we can all take now!
- We have many tools at our disposal to measure and reduce the impact of our marketing. From choosing media partners with a purpose and positive impact such as WeAre8 or implementing carbon calculators to decarbonise plans we have the opportunity to implement changes in the short term.



## **What does that mean for us in marketing and media?**

Distilling the outtakes from Anthropy, it became clear that as marketers and media professionals we can truly play a pivotal role in shaping the future we want to create and overcome some of the challenges facing our society. Marketing's key role as the gateway to reaching people means we are well-placed to connect with audiences on the things that matter to them and to shape the brands and businesses we work for.

The setting could not have been more powerful a place to discuss business transformation and regeneration. The Eden project, a former porcelain quarry that has been reimagined into an ecological oasis is a great example of the success that can come from a strong vision and inspiration for the journey that many businesses are embarking on.

**Tim Pritchard is our Head of Content and Responsible Media**, and would be delighted to follow up on any of the points in this article.

