

Legacy in the Making

(RED)

Launched as an innovative model in 2006 by U2 frontman and activist Bono and lawyer and activist Bobby Shriver, (RED) was an idea born out of necessity: to generate private-sector money for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS. Along the way, while helping solve a problem, the industrious brand innovated the way philanthropic brands behaved and disrupted the entire notion of what it meant to create products for good. Recently, *The Legacy Lab* had the opportunity to speak with **Deb Dugan**, the CEO of (RED), about how innovation and change-making continues to live at the heart of everything the brand does, and about how the greatest way for (RED) to leave its enduring mark in culture may be to put itself out of business someday.



sector. After the Global Fund was founded in 2002, in the following four years it had received \$5 billion from the public sector but just \$5 million from the corporate sector.

(RED) was created to be a smart and resourceful solution to a very real problem. And very quickly, it became apparent that it was changing the mind-set around how business and philanthropy intersect. By getting some of the world's most iconic brands to all partner together for good under one umbrella name in a provocative, fast-paced and entrepreneurial way, (RED) created disruption in the space.

Prior to (RED), you had a select group like Newman's Own®, and Ben & Jerry's® Ice Cream, that were each doing their own initiative for good. But (RED) was rare in the scale of its ambition, optimism and transparency.

(RED) believed that if it could ride the marketing smarts of the brightest and best minds in those partner companies, it had a chance to present the issue in a non-earnest and fresh way, in order to attract people to it. That would be good for companies and their sales, and at the same time drive more money to the AIDS fight while

What is the origin story of the (RED) brand?

■ (RED) was founded by Bono and Bobby Shriver in 2006 to solve a problem: There wasn't enough private-sector money flowing into the

Global Fund to Fight AIDS. The Global Fund has a public and private charter. In order to maintain financial contributions from the public sector, including various country contributions, there also needed to be a continuous stream of money coming in from the private

helping to keep the issue of AIDS at the top of the political agenda.

So (RED) launched in the U.K. in 2006 with American Express® and hot campaigns featuring Elle Macpherson and Gisele Bündchen. The next series of (RED) products, made with the Gap®, launched shortly thereafter. In October, Oprah turned her show (RED) and she and Bono hit Michigan Avenue in Chicago where Gap, Apple®, Armani®, Converse® and Motorola® stores all featured their new (RED) products. In part because of (RED), the idea of 'products for good' has become almost a marketing norm, and a model of success for numerous charities which have since launched.

It's telling that 10 years on, at the World Economic Forum this year, (RED) was back at Davos—where it all began with Bono and Bobby—announcing a total of \$350 million raised for the Global Fund, new financial commitments of at least \$25 million going into 2016, and that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation would match every dollar raised by (RED) in 2016, up to \$50 million.

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In 2016, (RED) will be celebrating its 10-year anniversary. Are you happy with what the brand has achieved so far? Are you hopeful about the prospects for the present and the future?

■ There are some very positive things happening around us, though the AIDS crisis still needs an enormous amount of attention.

Mother-to-child transmission of HIV, which is not as much of an issue in the United States and Europe anymore, persists in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2002, 1,500 babies were being born every day with HIV, and typically, without access to treatment they wouldn't live to see their second birthday. Now, that number is down to 400 a day, and according to the United Nations, we can get that close to zero by 2020. When that happens, the cycle of infection is broken and we see the beginning of an AIDS-free generation.

Another positive sign of the impact we are having is that when you look at corporate America, you realize that every company now has to do good. Corporations now have to be innovative about how they approach social good in the same way they have to be innovative about new products. This changes the definition of what it means to create shareholder value. Companies like Patagonia® and Warby Parker® benefit from being good corporate citizens that can attract employees, in addition to consumers, who want to be a part of a higher brand purpose.

Ultimately, I'm very positive about the fact that the millennial generation is so engaged with brands that stand for good. They will switch a brand preference to support a cause they care about, they will advocate for the brands they believe in on their social channels, and most will even take a cut in pay to work at a socially responsible company that aligns with their personal values. Those younger than 18, the up-and-coming Gen Z, are even more idealistic. Collectively, these young people are tuned into what's happening around the world. They give their time, they give their money, they aspire to be on boards of organizations that are making a difference. I find this young group very inspiring when I think about the future of our planet.

Understanding the importance of this young generation of consumers for brands like yours, how does (RED) stay relevant to them?

■ When it comes to inspiring action, it always starts with connecting and engaging around a shared moment of interest.

When I think about what affected me when I was growing up, something that inspired me to do good, it was Live Aid. Music moved me to do my part for victims of famine. For my kids, they've experienced firsthand 9/11 in New York City. Then the marathon bombings in Boston, where they were attending college. What is their world-view now?

So (RED) needs to fish where the fish are to reach and inspire youth. How do we reach the person who plays video games in their basement and has no immediate interest to save the world? We always ask how can we connect around a shared moment of creativity to inspire their latent participation.

Think about the person who wanders into the Apple Store and buys the (RED) iPod® versus the white one. Maybe they know about (RED) and think, 'This is for good and I feel good about that.' Maybe they don't know what a (RED) product is, but when they come home and open up the package they learn about the AIDS fight and say, 'Now I feel good about the choice I made.' Or it could be that somebody else says to them, 'You got the (RED) one, so you must care about AIDS.' Then they, in turn, think, 'Should I care?' So, they go to our website to learn more. Once on our site, they could choose to follow us, to buy more (RED) products, to come to an upcoming event or to sign a petition. So we have the opportunity to transform latent interest or basic consumer activity into possible activism. We try to track people's paths to (RED) and give them a place to start caring.

We focus on developing incredibly compelling content, engaging and interactive experiences, and apply visual storytelling to everything we do. As I understand it, there are more than 1.6 billion photos uploaded to the web every day. And there are now more mobile phones than there

are people on the planet. We have to employ the technology of the current generation to give our audience the tools to get involved.

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You have inferred the application of digital, mobile and social media for (RED). Can you elaborate a little bit more on the importance of these contemporary channels in your work?

■ Under the heading of fishing where the fish are, we definitely put a focus on creating firsts in social media. (RED) came into existence the same year as Twitter came to be in 2006. We worked with them to turn Twitter (RED) every time someone used the hashtag #RED. We were the first not-for-profit to have over one million followers on both Twitter and Facebook. We set a world record on Vine when the platform first launched, and today we continue to innovate with partners like Snapchat and Instagram to create content and moments that

are unique. We take risks in pursuit of making meaningful connections. (RED) is intentionally a provocative thought leader in the social media space. This, in terms of cultural currency, means everything for our young audience.

When (RED) launched, it began with a series of noteworthy branded products. How has the range of offerings evolved over time to advance your work?

■ We started out with products for good. We created products with some big iconic brands like Apple, Gap, Converse and Amex. Over time, we evolved to add experiences for good. As an example, in 2008, Damien Hirst curated an extraordinary (RED) contemporary art auction at Sotheby's, featuring donated works from artists including Jeff Koons, Antony Gormley and Marc Quinn, raising more than \$40 million. More recently, Jony Ive and Marc Newson collaborated for another rare auction at Sotheby's, this time auctioning unique and customized design pieces. In total, the event raised \$46 million to fight AIDS, including a dollar match from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2014, Bank of America® ran a Super Bowl commercial featuring the U2 song "Invisible." Viewers were prompted to download the track, for free, during and after the game and, with every download, \$1 would go to the Global Fund. In just 36 hours, (RED) generated more than \$3.1 million to fight AIDS. EAT

(RED) DRINK (RED) SAVE LIVES is a newer campaign that lets restaurants, bars and food trucks go (RED) for the month of June. When it started, the chefs completely took over (RED)'s Twitter and Instagram feeds. We had an incredible '(RED) Supper' for 1,000 people on a pier in New York in the rain with The Roots playing. We created an emoji food fight. It was the top trender on Twitter nationwide. It was hugely engaging for our audience. In 2014, Apple turned the App Store and 25 fan-favorite apps (RED) for two weeks around World AIDS Day. It set the web on fire and generated more than 1.4 billion social media impressions.

Today, we continue to look for those innovative new ideas. We don't aim to do the traditional thing. Instead, we seek to ask, 'What is provocative, engaging and highly creative?' We've definitely evolved far past being defined only by physical products for good.

It's interesting to hear about a not-for-profit that talks about so much experimentation. What role does risk-taking play in the success of building the (RED) brand?

■ We pride ourselves on being cultural curators. The ideas that we pursue are vetted for cultural relevancy whether in technology, art, design, music or any other aspect of our audience's lifestyle. We try a lot of stuff, and we sometimes fail. For example, in the past, we tried something with a movie

that didn't work well. We tried a gaming program where it was too hard for people to donate. But we iterated and we moved forward. We definitely make mistakes in working so aggressively to be the first at something. But failure doesn't matter so much if you learn fast and move on to the next successful opportunity. People remember the good things.

Nonprofits, especially, do have a great fear of risk. When you've got a large board of directors and a public audience watching what you do, you can expect to be chastised. But to be in the game, you want to be relevant. It is imperative that (RED) breaks the mold, innovates and has an entrepreneurial spirit in order to do good in the world.

How does the (RED) brand stay cool? How does the team at (RED) help to make sure that you are driving the cultural agenda?

■ First, we prioritize who we partner with. So we do wind up saying no to a lot of brands that approach us. And in whatever we do, we aim to be big. All that we do is leveraged for maximum impact. Sometimes we say no to events that are either not big enough or provocative enough for our ambition. We are crazy selective in what we do. We always ask, 'Is it big, is it breakthrough? Will it capture people's attention? Will it be awe-inspiring?' It's hard to put what cool means into words, but our team is very in tune with the brands

and ideas that do and do not fit with (RED).

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We pay close attention to what is happening in the world around us. We work to understand not only what is trending but also why. We don't just wind up in the latest and emerging channels—we wind up doing something innovative in those channels.

We aim to make sure our collective actions have real meaning and enduring impact on a cultural level.

Do the founders continue to stay involved with building the (RED) brand story?

■ Bobby and Bono are both very proud that (RED) is evolving consistently with the vision they had from the start. They remain involved and constantly challenge the team about what we should be doing and what it means to be (RED) now that we are entering year 10.

"I have let my passions dictate my career, and in so doing, I feel that I am translating my passion into a purpose and moving from being a leader to building a brand and personal legacy."

What does your leadership team aspire for the legacy of (RED) to be?

■ It's maybe a funny way to look at it, but part of our brand legacy is that we should be so successful that we do put ourselves out of business.

In very broad terms, when it comes to philanthropic and charitable activities, some are apt to say that it's all doom and gloom. But there is a lot of success happening now. In the last 20 years, extreme poverty has been cut in half. Malaria deaths have been reduced by 75 percent. Infant mortality has been cut in half. And the number of babies born with HIV from mothers who have HIV has been cut in half too. These are all afflictions that have been with us for a long time, but because of so many people working together to do the right thing, tremendous social change has occurred.

Specifically, at (RED), we are so goal-focused and impact-obsessed in the fight against AIDS that, again, in

2020, in alignment with UN goals, we aim to be near zero on mother-to-child transmission. And by 2030, we hope to be at a point where we can see the end of the AIDS epidemic. We want to put ourselves out of business—shutting the door. That should be our enduring legacy. In the meantime, I hope our legacy is that we keep awareness of what's happening with AIDS top of mind and drive the funding needed to combat the disease.

(RED) has a lot of innovation on deck. I hope that in 15 to 20 years, we maintain our position as the brand that continues to change the face of philanthropy.

As a successful brand, and as a leader who is succeeding in building a vital legacy, what advice do you have for others aiming to achieve the same thing?

■ As a brand, always be authentic in your communications. (RED) talks *with* our followers and not *at* them. We listen very hard. We believe in the quality of engagement more than quantity. For us, it's not about how many you are reaching but about how strong the ones you are reaching are connecting.

As a leader, be passionate. In my career so far, I was a teacher, a lawyer on Wall Street, a record label executive and a president of publishing at Disney®. My hobbies and passions have always been my jobs. For me, it makes perfect sense that I am a part of the (RED) team as it combines all of my passions and skills. I am making deals with companies. I am doing

brand marketing that I learned so well at Disney. I am deeply ingrained in the creative world, applying my skills from having worked with musicians and authors. I have let my passions dictate my career, and in so doing, I feel that I am translating my passion into a purpose and moving from being a leader to building a brand and personal legacy.

In 10 years, (RED) has evolved from being an ambitious idea about how to solve a worldwide health problem into a thought-leadership brand that is changing the way philanthropy is practiced on a global basis. (RED) has mobilized a large and growing community of activists around its goal of helping end AIDS. It has found constantly surprising ways to engage old and new fans to (RED) via products, services and experiences. The (RED) story is not just one of having high ambition but also one of inspiring authentic participation. Through (RED), partner brands and end users alike, those who desire to make a change, are given a platform to do so. In total, in its pursuit to make AIDS a part of the past, (RED) persists as a still-vital part of the present and future.

BY MARK MILLER

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