

## Dick Maggiore: Businesses, markets ride pendulum of change

By [Dick Maggiore Special](#) to The Canton Repository

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Americans elected Barack Obama, then eight years later elected Donald Trump. The pendulum swung and, by virtue of the [differences](#) between Obama and Trump, it is reasonable to deduce that the further the swing in one direction, the more powerful the swing back to the other.

Change is constant in society, and the degree to which companies succeed in marketing themselves to their customers depends in large part on how well they recognize and address the inevitable twists and turns.

Business and marketing experience pendulum swings. Rarely do they settle back to what might formerly have been known as the norm. Rather, the pendulum is energized by forces that create powerful actions and reactions

To look at this from another perspective, we turn to Oliver Wendell Holmes. He said, “A mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.”

Once the bell has rung, can we really un-ring it?

We need to add the third dimension to the pendulum? Yes, the pendulum swings back and forth — in two dimensions. But, here might be the key: While it swings, it also spirals up, in or out. That is, the entire pendulum is moving while it swings — the third dimension.

Holmes was right. We can't possibly go back to exactly the way it was — in presidencies or in business. It's because the context has changed. Nothing is the same as it was. We're never exactly the same as individuals or as a society.

Companies traditionally have succeeded in selling to us by explaining the attributes of their products and services. Crest toothpaste has fluoride and will fight cavities. Tide has more whitening power. FedEx will absolutely get your package delivered overnight.

But today we want more than product attributes. We've come to expect the attributes. They alone may no longer be enough of a differentiator. It's because the pendulum has swung to a place it never exactly was before. We've evolved.

We care about things beyond the actual product or service. We care about what the company stands for. We care about what the company is doing. Is the company responsible? It's often more tied to the company's DNA, its "why," the reason it exists beyond making money.

We also care about more about the experience. This explains why Starbucks gets so much more money for a cup of coffee. We'll even wait in long lines at Starbucks and still feel "the experience."

Mathematicians might argue that the pendulum should have swung back to the middle — know as the regression to the mean. Problem is, it doesn't. The pendulum swings to a new place. This can be better explained by psychology and sociology.

## **Social responsibility**

Today, we care more about supporting companies that are socially responsible, such as with the environment and sustainability. It's more about meaning and authenticity. This is attractive to the company's customers and its employees.

Millennials exemplify many of these changing priorities, but they have become important in all age groups.

Companies known for advocating corporate social responsibility in various ways include Ben & Jerry's, Starbucks, Ikea, Zappos, Patagonia, Unilever, TOMS along with others in a fast-growing list.

We must guard against taking on polarizing issues to avoid alienating significant numbers of our customers. In fairness, some very successful companies have taken on highly charged issues. Starbucks and Chick-fil-A are companies that took stands on the left and the right, respectively, and have remained very successful.

We call these longer-term societal changes, or pendulum spirals, trends. They can take years to develop and last for decades. We're in the midst of the health and wellness trend. Organic. Natural. Artisanal. No sugar. No preservatives. No fat. More protein. More "from the farm." Niche brands over big brands.

We're also trending back to tradition and family. The distinction is that family doesn't mean today what it meant in 1960. Compare "Leave It to Beaver" with today's "Modern Family" or "Black-ish." Similarly, consider today's context whether you are a bank, hospital, airline or a university and align your messaging to the shifting pendulum.

We aren't and never will be who or what we used to be. This changes the way businesses communicate and behave. Behavior and communication must be in full alignment. Transparency. Honesty.

## **Revival for 'local'**

As we go back to our roots, might we go back to supporting local businesses? We're seeing a revival in locally owned businesses in several cities.

But it's not business as usual. Local businesses have to do things differently. Consumers are trending toward a more personal, higher-touch experience with higher expectations in areas where online sellers excel. Convenience. Selection. This suggests going narrow and deep.

Toys R Us, with its 735 big and beautiful stores and 30,000 jobs, is going out of business. Walmart and Amazon delivered a two-punch knock-out. Will this void open new doors, perhaps for locally owned businesses? Or will Walmart and Amazon fill the gap?

These questions and more abound as marketing swings to the beat of current trends and tastes. Answers and opportunities aren't always what they were in the past. One thing we know for sure is the pendulum will continue to swing in all three dimensions.

But, if you just want a little taste of the "good" old days, you might catch an episode of "Ozzie and Harriet" on MeTV (or try YouTube).

*Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of [Innis Maggiore](#) founded in Canton in 1974 and today the nation's leading positioning ad agency, building strong brands for companies in competitive markets here and across the country.*