

Why it is important for B2B brands to find their why: A case study of Akamai Technologies

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Kim Salem-Jackson is the Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer of Akamai Technologies, the cloud company that powers and protects life online. She is a data-driven, global marketing executive, whose career has been focused on advancing brands and activating marketing as a growth engine, as well as amplifying marketing's effect on the business. Kim is passionate about leading purpose-driven teams and empowering them to their highest potential. Previously, she served as Akamai's Senior Vice President, Global Marketing & Corporate Communications, where she led global field marketing, customer marketing, channel marketing, events, corporate communications and the sales development organisation. Before that, Kim held marketing leadership positions at Informatica, IONA Technologies, Pegasystems, Houston Street and KHJ Interactive. Kim also serves on the Board of Directors of the Akamai Foundation, which is dedicated to supporting programmes to attract more diversity to the technology industry, providing disaster relief and humanitarian aid globally, enabling volunteerism to the local communities, and promoting environmental sustainability through investments in alternative energy.

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Afdhel Aziz is the founder and Chief Purpose Officer at Conspiracy of Love, a certified B Corp and Minority Owned Business, where he is on a mission to solve one of the biggest problems facing individuals and companies in the 21st century: how to find purpose and meaning in their work and unlock the power of business to do good in the world. Conspiracy of Love works with Fortune 500 companies like Adidas, PepsiCo, Mondelez and Sephora. Mr Aziz is also the co-founder of content incubator Good is the New Cool, as well as co-author of *Good Is the New Cool: Market Like You a Give a Damn* and the follow-up, *The Principles of Purpose*.

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Abstract

Soon after being named EVP and CMO of Akamai Technologies in March 2021, Kim Salem-Jackson realised that the brand was missing its 'why' — the reason it exists beyond profit. Working in partnership with Afdhel Aziz, Chief Purpose Officer at the purpose consultancy Conspiracy of Love, Salem-Jackson introduced a new purpose statement for the company: 'We make life better for billions of people, billions of times a day.' This paper analyses how the tech company selected its brand purpose, the strategies employed to bring leaders and employees along on the journey in an engaging and authentic way, and the unique role marketing plays in activating purpose for all stakeholders to drive growth and profitability.

Keywords

purpose, mission, vision, B2B, marketing

INTRODUCTION

When Kim Salem-Jackson was named EVP and CMO of Akamai Technologies, a US \$3bn+ cloud company, her goal was to have the company show up bigger and more boldly in the marketplace. She and her team were ideating on a new brand campaign, but it kept falling short of greatness. What they realised was that they were missing their compelling ‘why’ — the powerful, foundational reason why their company exists.

To provide some history, 25 years ago Akamai founders, Tom Leighton and Danny Lewin set out with a clear purpose: to solve the ‘worldwide wait’. They invented a fundamentally better way to deliver internet content with geographically distributed servers that made the web much faster and more reliable for users. Today, Akamai has expanded its business to include security and cloud computing solutions.

Salem-Jackson and her team understood that it was important to create more clarity and renewed inspiration around their purpose and mission for their continued success, and to remind themselves and their external stakeholders of the value they bring to the world.

This is in line with a larger trend they saw, where the COVID-19 pandemic had caused many employees to take a step back and reflect on how they could contribute in a positive way to the world around them. They hoped that expressing their shared ambition would further unify and energise all their stakeholders to realise their positive influence in the world and give the company even greater alignment and focus as they continued to evolve to meet the needs of the fourth Industrial Revolution and the rise of new technologies like AI, IoT, the metaverse and so on.

It was time to re-establish Akamai’s market leadership and rediscover what its purpose was for this new age. To help with this extraordinary journey, they brought in purpose consultancy Conspiracy of Love to help uncover and rearticulate their purpose and mission through a process of interviews, surveys and workshops with executives, employees, customers, prospects and stakeholders.

LET US START WITH WHAT PURPOSE IS

Purpose describes not *what* a company does but *why* it exists. It tells stakeholders and society at large how a company adds value to the world while creating financial returns for all stakeholders.

Why purpose is so important

Research shows that purpose-driven companies are more successful because they positively influence all stakeholders across the globe.

- **Employees.** In the wake of the Great Resignation, employees are one of the biggest agents of purpose, hungry for more meaning in their work. A Deloitte study found that purpose-driven companies showed 40 per cent higher levels of workforce retention than their competitors and reported 30 per cent higher levels of innovation.¹
- **Loyal Customers.** A recent global study shows that customers are 4.5 times more likely to champion a company with a strong purpose and recommend it to others.²
- **Prospective Customers.** That same study shows that customers are 4 times more likely to buy from companies with a strong purpose.³

- **Investors.** More than ever, investors are also valuing purpose in companies. In fact, 90 per cent of investors say they want to invest according to their values (Source: UBS global research). And it is extremely important to younger investors. In a survey of millennial investors around the world, 77 per cent of them say that environmental, social and governance concerns are their top priority when considering investment opportunities.⁴
- **Society.** In fact, everyone now expects companies to articulate their positive societal commitments. Globally, 67 percent of people agree that it has become more important that the brands they choose make a positive contribution to society, beyond just providing a good service or product.⁵
- **Market Leaders.** And, finally, research shows that purpose-driven companies are market leaders. About 83 per cent of companies that overperform on revenue growth link everything they do to purpose (Source: Google & SAP). Moreover, 41 per cent of Fortune 500 CEOs say solving social problems should be ‘part of their core business strategy’.⁶

What makes a good purpose statement?

A great purpose statement describes the positive influence an organisation can have by applying its unique capabilities in the service of society, articulated in a powerful and compelling way. In other words, purpose lives at the intersection of a company’s ‘superpower’ and what the world needs (Figure 1).

Today’s most successful companies are thriving because they can articulate to the world in an inspiring way why they exist and how they are having a positive influence on people’s lives.

- Tesla is not just building electric cars; it has set out to ‘accelerate the world’s transition to renewable energy’.⁷
- Microsoft is not just producing computer software and related services; it is ‘empowering every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more’.⁸
- And Google is not just creating internet-based services; it is ‘organizing the world’s information to make it accessible and useful for everyone’.⁹

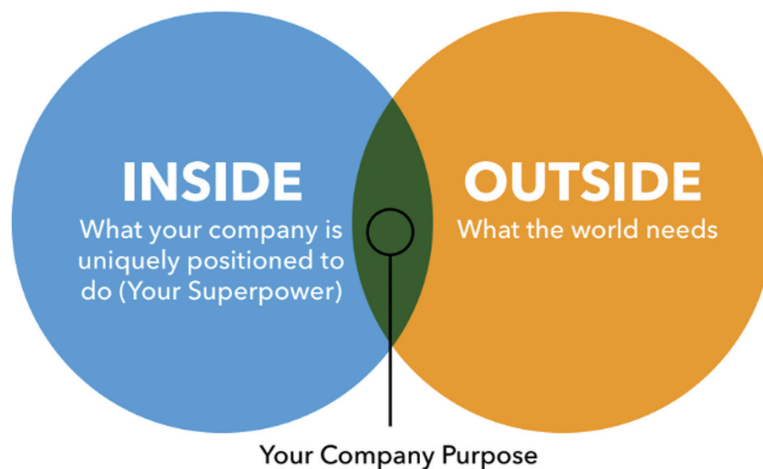


Figure 1 Purpose: at the intersection of a company’s superpowers and what the world needs

Rediscovering Akamai's purpose

In order to understand Akamai's superpower and how it can be of service to the world, Conspiracy of Love conducted extensive research, including the following:

- Interviewing dozens of stakeholders (Akamai leaders, employees and customers)
- Conducting a written survey that went to all Akamai employees
- Holding workshops with diverse groups of internal participants to uncover how their own personal purpose could ladder up to the company's purpose. The workshops allowed them to ground purpose in business strategy and future growth potential and ensure they drive business value through purpose.
- Doing extensive research on future trends in their industry and the world at large. This allowed them to help the company think about how they provide societal value in the future through their superpowers, which shaped especially mission (power and protect life online) and vision (a safer and more connected world).

THE RESULTS OF THEIR RESEARCH WERE VERY CLEAR

One of the big revelations was that Akamai's superpower was not just its technology — its edge network and its global scale — but its unique culture: driven by scientific rigour, tenacity and relentless problem-solving, allowing them to tackle the toughest challenges of the internet.

From an external perspective, the consultancy explored the increasingly important role that the internet plays in all aspects of our daily lives. Increasingly over the past two decades, and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the internet had become the single most important piece

of global infrastructure, enabling billions of life experiences every day, from banking and shopping to working and learning from home, to staying in touch with loved ones. And with the ever-growing Internet of Things, the rise of Blockchain and generative AI, and the ever-increasing threat of cyber-hacking, a fast, reliable and secure internet was becoming a basic necessity of human life.

Expressing the effect that Akamai's superpower can have in this new world led to its purpose, mission and vision.

Purpose — *Why* Akamai exists and the contribution it makes to the world —

'We make life better for billions of people, billions of times a day'

Mission — *What* Akamai does every day in the service of its purpose —

'We power and protect life online'

Vision — The outcome Akamai seeks to deliver to the world —

'A safer and more connected world'

BRINGING PURPOSE TO LIFE — INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

Having this renewed clarity about their purpose and *why* they do what they do has been incredibly powerful for Akamai.

That is why being bold and intentional about *how* they can continue to live up to it and turn purpose into action both externally and internally are so important.

The purpose, vision and values manifested in two ways: externally, to their customers and society, and internally, to their employees.

BRINGING PURPOSE TO LIFE EXTERNALLY

This renewed purpose would go on to guide everything Akamai does, including

setting a bold vision, detailing a tangible mission and crafting a new inspirational brand campaign platform, Life Online. The campaign centres on elevating its communications beyond what Akamai does — its unique combination of security, edge capabilities and cloud computing — to what they make possible. The message directly aligns with their company purpose — to make life better for billions of people, billions of times a day, and its mission to power and protect life online (Figure 2).

They launched this campaign coinciding with their 20th anniversary tribute honouring the legacy of their co-founder Danny Lewin who tragically lost his life during the terrorist attacks of 11th September, 2001. Through the campaign they told the story of Akamai's unique role in the world; the campaign magnified their unique role in the world by showcasing their customers' stories and highlighting the many ways billions of people live, work and play online every day.

In conjunction with this campaign they hosted a contest where Akamai awarded US \$1m in products and services to the

future of the winner of the Life Online challenge, Bloomfield Robotics, a plant sciences artificial intelligence start-up working to solve global food production challenges by scaling agricultural technology platform with Akamai edge computing and security capabilities.

Overall, the reaction of the campaign from their customers and industry influencers was fantastic. It drove incredible visibility — with over 202 million impressions, 468 thousand clicks, 61.8 million people viewing the video and a 3.6 lift in brand awareness. Also, the work was instrumental in helping their clients understand that the future lifts the relationship from transactional to transformational and positioned Akamai as a thought leader in the technology space.

Figure 3 shows a snapshot of results we saw through the campaign.

BRINGING PURPOSE TO LIFE INTERNALLY

Embracing its purpose internally was important to delivering on the promises



Figure 2 Bringing purpose to life through the life online campaign



Figure 3 Results of the life online campaign

it makes externally, so the company's goal was to inform, inspire and empower everyone at Akamai to continue bringing purpose to life.

- In countless ways, employees were already living their purpose at Akamai every day, from how they empower customers to change people's lives to how they engage communities through the Akamai Foundation. The Foundation is dedicated to encouraging the next generation of technology innovators by supporting Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education, with a focus on the pursuit of excellence in mathematics in grades K–12. Grants focus on equal access to quality education in STEM with grants supporting programmes designed to attract more diversity to the technology industry. In addition, the Akamai Foundation provides disaster resilience, relief and humanitarian aid globally and enables volunteerism by connecting employees to the communities in which Akamai operates.

- To make sure they amplify all the ways they live up to their purpose today and in the future, they developed a new way to share stories about how Akamai employees all over the world are contributing to making life better for people everywhere.
- They encourage employees to share their purpose stories in blogs and meetings. They have created 'Living Our Purpose Awards' that recognise individuals and teams who truly live and breathe our purpose to make life better for billions of people, billions of times a day.
- To turn their purpose into action in how they volunteer their time, the Akamai Foundation is working on new ways to engage their already very active Akamai volunteers. They create volunteer challenges. And local teams around the world get together to volunteer.
- One of Akamai's biggest assets is the power of their people. Akamai is made up of a vibrant culture and a global community that cares about enriching the environments in which they live and work globally. They like to say,

'If it's dreamable, Akamai volunteers make it doable.'

- All Akamai employees have 16 paid volunteer hours a year, which renew on an annual basis. These hours provide the opportunity to get out into their communities and give back in a way that is most meaningful to them.
- And, finally, it was important that they established a strong connection between their purpose and mission and the employee experience, which includes how they attract, select, hire, retain, develop and support their employees. For example, with recruitment, they include their purpose, mission and values in every job description. Their purpose and mission guide decisions about everything from how they educate and develop their employees and make resources available for people to develop themselves to how they construct and operate their workspaces and real estate.

CONCLUSION

Akamai's company purpose has evolved into guiding principles that drive their actions both internally and externally. They recognise that fulfilling their purpose is an ongoing journey of learning and living their purpose in all they do. Their goal is to inform, inspire and empower everyone within the organisation to foster a purpose-driven culture. True marketing excellence, as they have

come to understand, revolves around serving rather than selling. By redefining their purpose, they have done just that.

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