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How brands like Unilever, McDonald's and WPP are responding to Australia's bushfire crisis

By **Shawn Lim** - 13 January 2020 22:49pm



The long-lasting effects on the environment and those affected will be something businesses still need to deal with.

The ongoing bushfires crisis in Australia, which started in June 2019, is showing no signs of stopping and has already burned more than 10.7 million hectares (26m acres), killed almost a billion animals, destroyed over 5,900 homes and buildings, and claimed 29 lives.

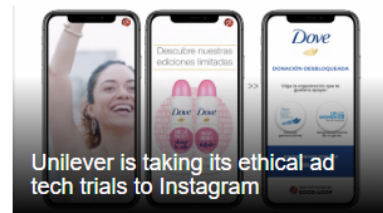
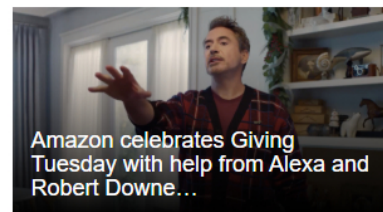
As exhausted firefighters and volunteers struggle to fight the flames, domestic and international businesses have joined foreign countries, politicians, celebrities and athletes to provide aid and donations.

Unilever Australia, for example, is working with its longstanding partner Foodbank, to donate thousands of its products to help provide some essential food, personal care and home care items to displaced families and frontline workers and volunteers.

The FMCG giant has so far donated more than \$400,000 worth of Rexona deodorant, Tresemmé shampoo, Radox body wash, Lipton Ice Tea, Drive laundry detergent, Continental Cup-a-Soup and Vaseline products.



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Its other brands like T2, Ben & Jerry's and Vaseline have donated \$60,000 in cash to the Australian Red Cross and \$10,000 to Foodbank and supporting customer donations through its Ben & Jerry's retail network.

"Like many Australians and people across the world, our team at Unilever are heartbroken by the devastating bushfires across the country. We believe that business can play an important role in relief and recovery efforts and we want to help those communities that have been affected get through this incredibly difficult time," a Unilever spokesperson tells The Drum.

"We are grateful to Unilever employees who are volunteering with the first responder services and we have offered them extended paid leave while they volunteer. We extend our sincerest thanks to all emergency workers and volunteers working so tirelessly to battle fires and help communities. We will match Unilever employee personal donations to charities working on relief efforts."

In addition, Unilever is looking at how it can work with its retail partners and suppliers, in particular, small businesses that may be impacted, to offer its support in any way it can.

"The power of brands with purpose has never been clearer. We believe in using the strength of our brands and our operations to advocate for broader positive change, connect with and inspire people, and make a difference," the spokesperson adds.

Agencies too, are chipping in and doing their part. Channelzero, an independent media and creative agency, is speaking to all its relevant clients about how it can help in terms of products with a profit contribution that the agency can get out there to support firefighting efforts, animal welfare, or rebuilding local infrastructure.

Based on the responses the agency has received so far, it has also offered its creative services pro bono.

"As the old saying goes, 'principles are only principles when they cost you money', Dan Machen, the head of strategy at Channelzero tells The Drum. "Park the commercials and get stuck in. Businesses should see the current bushfire crisis for what it is: a bereavement."

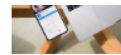
"Which it is in terms of the loss of life both in human terms, animal losses, and loss of homes both in terms of houses and the ecosystem that supports millions of species across large areas of Australian bushland."

He adds: "Therefore the way to respond is to start from a position of deep compassion and a sense of 'what can our organisation do to help?' either at a business or personnel driven initiatives like clothes, or toys and tucker drives."

Sir Martin Sorrell's S4 Capital Australia teams have also been volunteering, collecting food and supplies.

DDB Australia meanwhile, funded a campaign called "The Burnt Christmas Tree" to raise funds for the Australian Red Cross and their ongoing efforts to help people prepare for, cope with, and recover from disasters, together with its clients McDonald's, Volkswagen Group and Westpac.

The tree was crafted entirely with logs, branches and shrubs sourced from bushfire-affected areas of New South Wales. The tree is also decorated with



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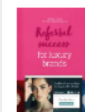
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burnt objects like a farm gate and bicycle and is topped with a star fashioned from a burnt-out bike wheel.

These objects exist alongside signs of regeneration, including banksia seeds that require fire to sprout. While the public is viewing the tree, they are encouraged to listen to an audio tour reflecting on the experiences of Australians whose lives have been thrown into chaos by the fires.



"The first thing a brand should do is look honestly at their motivation for getting involved. We are looking at the largest ecological disaster Australia has ever faced with unprecedented recovery time," Dom Hickey, head of planning at DDB Australia tells The Drum.

a cash donation, brands need to consider carefully if they are really helping before they get involved."

Hickey points out that while everyone wants to help, how he or she help is important. She says if a brand can do something useful and can respond to a specific need for goods and services, do it.

However, if they cannot do something that is really needed, she notes the next most helpful thing is cash, pointing to how Qantas is using their infrastructure to help in a meaningful way, moving equipment and firefighters across the country.

What's a no-no for businesses?

What businesses should avoid doing, however, is offering to donate profits to find ways to drive business without the money actually going to those in need, says Darren Woolley, founder and global chief executive of TrinityP3.

He notes it is better to say an X amount of money from each sale will go to the fire funds, as there are a number of scammers who have been called out on social media for fake fundraising.

"The message from the authorities is that they do not want people rushing into the affected areas as this would only create a potentially more dangerous situation. Businesses are being asked to extend paid leave to those volunteer firefighters in their employ," he tells The Drum.

"Organisations are asking for funds over the donation of food, clothing, etc as the logistics of providing it to the most needed areas is way too hard. So the responsible way is to either act to support your employees who are volunteering or to find ways to raise and donate funds."

He continues: "The opportunity is for those businesses that have a particular focus to support particular groups in need - farmers, wildlife, domestic animals, etc - set up fundraising to assist particular groups in need that are relevant to your business or of significance to your customer base. For example, Pet Food looking after dogs and cats or rural products donating to farmers or banks supporting rural businesses etc"

Tobias Wilson, a Singapore-based Australian and the vice president of growth for Asia Pacific at S4 Capital's MediaMonks concurs with Woolley.

He warns that profiteering in any way, shape or form would be considered gross misconduct. If any brand or agency is even remotely thinking about using this catastrophe for their own gains then they need to stop immediately.

In addition, he says the data is resoundingly conclusive that consumers prefer brands that stand for something and actually do something about it.

Referring to Tourism Australia's decision **to pause its Kylie Minogue-fronted campaign**, he says: "If you think your campaign could even be a little off-colour, put it on ice for a while. Repurpose those resources to the cause. Step up, stand up and do something."

Nick Foley, the president for South East Asia Pacific & Japan at WPP's Landor advises businesses to do the reverse of what they normally would do to drive brand awareness.

He says this is not about claiming to be the largest donor and it has everything to do with brands genuinely leaning in and behaving in an egalitarian manner.

"The worst thing is when a donation is made and then a brand is seen to act in an opportunistic manner. Australia is badly scarred by recent events and any brand seen to be behaving opportunistically, or in a transactional manner, will no doubt feel the wrath of a nation that is still reeling from the severity of these fires," he explains to The Drum.

"Give to those in need and expect nothing back. Under no circumstances should this be seen as an opportunity to drive favourable publicity. Furthermore, any company that has volunteers serving in the fire service, the state emergency service or the army reserves should do all that they can to continue to pay their staff whilst they are serving the community."

What lies ahead?

If and when the fires die out, the long-lasting effects on the environment and those affected will be something businesses still need to deal with. For example, Wilson says he was shocked to find out the children of Mallacoota prefer brands that stand for something and actually do something about it.

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"Once the fires are out, there are 100's of towns and communities that will need to rebuild, so anything businesses can do to help them by either offering resources or by simply getting to these towns, buying local and helping pump some money back into the local ecosystem will help immensely," he adds.

In the long term, this crisis is a clarion call to think more about the environmental impact for everyone in every sector, says Machen, who also pays tribute to the volunteer firefighters for their great and indomitable character of Australian people.

Issuing a sombre reminder, Hickey says: "Unfortunately, the worst is yet to come for this disaster. Don't get involved without really understanding how you expect to help or being committed for the long haul."

If you are keen to help the victims of the bushfire crisis in Australia, here is a list of ways to help.

This article is about: Australasia, Unilever, Climate Change, McDonald's, WPP, S4 Capital, DDB Australia, Ddb, Digital, Digital Advertising, Events, Social Media, Marketing



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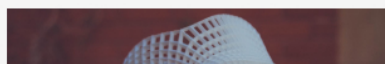
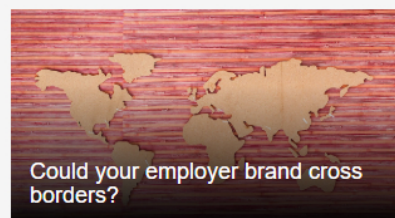
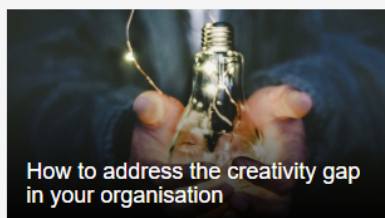
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