



International think tank announces 2005 Top Brands With A Conscience

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The Medinge Group, an international think-tank on branding and business, today releases its second annual 'Top Brands With a Conscience' list. In the Group's opinion, these brands show that it is possible for brands to contribute to the betterment of the society.

The international collective of brand practitioners meets annually in August at a secluded location outside Stockholm, Sweden, and collaborate on the list, judging nominees on principles of humanity and ethics, rather than financial worth. The Brands With A Conscience List is evaluated on criteria including evidence of the human implications of the brand and considering the question of whether the brand takes risks in line with its beliefs. Evaluations are made based on reputation, self-representation, history, direct experience, contacts with individuals within the organizations, media and analysts and an assessment of the expressed values of sustainability.

This year, the group singled out the following for recognition:

Dilmah Teas
Flexcar
Grameen Phone
John Lewis Partnership
Paolo Soleri
ROMP
Semco
Working Assets

Company profiles and web links:

Dilmah Teas

www.dilmahtea.com

Headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka. A genuine charitable model has founder Merrill J. Fernando leaving all his money to a foundation governed by

a group of trustees and dedicated to serving those most in need. A culture of helping community and workers is a cornerstone of the business philosophy.

Flexcar

www.flexcar.com

Founded in 1999 as a public/private partnership supported by King County, Washington and the City of Seattle, Flexcar provides members with access to a fleet of more than 300 vehicles located throughout major metropolitan areas. It is now the nation's oldest and largest car-sharing company, operating in over 20 cities. A nationwide membership of 20,000 subscribe to the program which reduces, air pollution and energy consumption, and encourages use of public transit as it contributes to sustainable communities.

GrameenPhone

www.grameenphone.com

GrameenPhone is the largest telecommunications operator in Bangladesh with some 2.1 million subscribers (October 2004), over 90% of subscribers using mobile to mobile services. The company has worked to improve the infrastructure of Bangladesh both in terms of social construction projects and also through helping UNICEF in the development of primary education. However, it is the Village Phone Program which has been most significant, originaed in 1997 by Grameen Telecom and Grameen Bank, which is a micro-credit lending institution. The success of Village Phone has served as a template for developing countries in Africa.

John Lewis Partnership

www.johnlewispartnership.co.uk

The John Lewis Partnership is not a Limited Company. It is a partnership among 60,000 employees who are far more involved in decision making and benefit sharing than other organisations in the same markets. The company, a major retailer in the UK, has department stores operating under the value proposition of 'Never Knowingly Undersold' as well as a second sub-brand named the Waitrose grocery retail chain. The partnership's constitution says that they '...must take all reasonable steps to minimise any detrimental effect our operations may have on the environment, and to promote good environmental practice.'

Paolo Soleri/Arcosanti

www.arcosanti.org

Arcosanti is a prototype community in Arizona, just north of Phoenix, founded in 1970 by Paolo Soleri. It posits a broadly-based solution to environmentally appropriate living, encompassing frugality, miniaturization, population growth, efficiency, urban evolution, pollution, conservation, transportation, net energy utilization, social interchange, privacy, food production, preservation of natural habitats, aesthetics, affordable housing, global warming, ultimate recycling, education and world awareness. The community is supported by

Soleri's consulting, a bakery, manufacture and sale of unique metal bells and ceramics, and a performing arts center.

ROMP

www.romp.uk.com

ROMP is a growing UK fashion label laying bare its entire value-chain, sharing ethical responsibility with its customers. "We actively seek to make elegant clothes beautifully and thereby to enhance and then protect the values of good animal husbandry, environmental respect, and civilised labour law. We wish to reward at source... to open up our systems of production to full traceability so that no practice is hidden from our customers..." By deconstructing every business process, ROMP achieved the first Soil Association certification for Organic Leather, at the same time redefining 'Organic' as being about selfless enactment of change in the world.

Semco

<http://semco.locaweb.com.br/ingles/>

Semco is really the story of Ricardo Semler, who inherited control of his family's Brazil-based business, and set about changing every element of the operation to incorporate worker participation. His recent book, *Maverick*, describes how he shared all information, including all salaries, enabled employees to choose their own wages and bosses, set their own hours, even choose their own IT. He eliminated the role of CEO, and made other innovations. For nearly 25 years, Sr. Semler's leadership has generated increased productivity, long-term loyalty and phenomenal growth.

Working Assets

www.workingassets.com

Working Assets was established in 1985 to help people make a difference through everyday activities like talking on the phone. When customers use one of Working Assets' donation-linked services (Long Distance, Wireless, Credit Card or Online), the company donates a portion of the customer's bill to nonprofit groups. The objective is to build a world that is more just, humane, and environmentally sustainable. In 2003 over \$3 million was donated after evaluating hundreds of nominees.

In 2002 The Medinge Group published a brand manifesto of eight statements encapsulating their vision of healthy brands for the future. In 2003 the group authored a collection of essays entitled "Beyond Branding" which explored the ways in which brands could add value within alternative business and social models.

Tim Kitchin, a spokesman for the group, said last year's 2004 Top Brands list was intended to be a catalyst for other companies to become more human and more humane. "Brands are the rallying point for the positive empowerment of all connected with the organization," Kitchin said. "We are trying to influence businesses from inside –and outside- to accelerate positive change. We believe this kind of conduct can only add value, both for the companies and their stakeholders. "

In January 2005 the Medinge Group will launch a speakers and experts bureau accessible through their web site www.medinge.org

Announcing the 2005 Top Brands With A Conscience, Stanley Moss, a member of The Medinge Group, remarked that the list is intended to demonstrate compassionate branding is a winning strategy for business today. "Every year we learn of successful experiments in transparent, sustainable, humanistic branding. The best companies, and those which thrive, demonstrate their conscience by their actions. This year's list spans the globe in scale and location, but are universal in their positive commitment to humanity and its needs."

Jack Yan, one of the group's founders based in New Zealand commented, "The future of mankind depends on how successful businesses are—but commerce will cease to work if businesses become too profit-focused. Business is in danger of becoming cyclical and in a few years, we'll have forgotten the push for social responsibility that we made at the beginning of the decade. By selecting companies annually, we aim to remind the world that the best brands are those that connect with people on a deeper, more profound and human level—and do more than generate wealth while harming others."

Johnnie Moore, a fellow member said, "Far too often, the idea of brands has become associated with wishful thinking, exploitation and deception. We've set up Brands with a Conscience to highlight the point that is possible for brands to be of genuine value. We hope this process will provide a higher standard against which to judge organisations in the future."

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Related links

The Medinge Group www.medinge.org
Medinge Säteri www.medinge.com

Related documents

The Medinge Group Fact Sheet
The Medinge Group Q&A
'Top Brands With A Conscience' Criteria
2005 Top Brands With A Conscience Committee
The Medinge Group Brand Manifesto
The Medinge Group Members Roster

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