

# The Burden of Trust

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## Abstract



Often taken for granted, the trust that a consumer places in a brand and product is not easy to gain and even harder to win back once that trust has been tested.

In the wake of the Nana's frozen fruit hepatitis scare, we launched an independent online community to uncover what it means to be trusted as a brand and how "trust" breaks down in a consumer's mind across a broad range of categories from cars, airlines, energy providers, healthcare and of course food and drinks.

## Background & context

Trust is learnt from a young age from those around you. Your parents' ability to trust in people, and brands, determines how 'at ease' you feel yourself. The fantasy world of superheroes forms the basis of our ideals between right and wrong when we are young and begins to define what trust looks like in the real world. As adults, we look to real life superheroes within our community to define the notion of trust and all that embodies the essential building blocks that create what we refer to simply as trust.

## Key research findings

For trust to exist, a number of building blocks are necessary. Without them, consumers are unlikely to fully trust your product or service. Underpinning the seven identified building blocks are the perceived consequences if the trust placed in a product, brand, service or even person is broken.

The level of expectation placed in a brand, product or service contributes to the perceived level of trust required. The higher the investment of finances, time or emotional energy input required resulted in a higher expectation of trust to exist. There is an inter-dependence of these three factors that change depending on a number of criteria that determines the level of trust expected.

Trust varies significantly by category and many of the most trusted categories are everyday products that consumers have developed a strong connection with on each of the seven building blocks of trust. There are some categories that inherently lack trust. It is these categories that need to work harder than any to gain even a small amount of trust amongst consumers.

Not only is the level of trust granted by a consumer to a product, brand, service or person important, there is an intersecting element of the perceived importance of trust that plays a role in the overall

sense of trust. In a number of categories, we see a large gap develop between importance of trust and the level of trust given. This is a real challenge where you operate within a category where trust is deemed important yet your brand or product fails to achieve a sufficient level of trust.

Pushing ‘trust’ as a selling point, especially when you are already the big player in a category can come off as arrogant or an attack on the values of smaller companies. This was no more evident within our research than with the advertising tactics of the big four Australian banks. There were a number of experiences with brands, products and services that highlight the importance of tone as well as message understanding when looking to advertise just how trustworthy you are.

Consumers will reward their trust where they feel it is appropriate and it has been earned and not a moment before that. This reward is a double edged sword that can ultimately be your downfall. Being trusted by a consumer comes with responsibility. The responsibility that you will not let them down. You need to pedal harder than ever before to keep that trust, especially as other people and other brands will look to undermine the trust they hold in you.

## In conclusion

Whilst trust is often rewarded with loyalty to your brand, product or service, it does come with a number of pitfalls to be wary of. It is not enough to simply maintain, you are expected to improve, often leading to an endless cycle of renovation, innovation or cost cutting.

We embarked on this journey to explore brand trust to understand if it was possible to mend broken levels of trust. It would appear, that the old adage that ‘Time heals all wounds’ holds true in most circumstances of broken trust. As time moves on, we place less emphasis on why our trust was broken allowing a new level of trust to be rebuilt. This is especially true when you were not directly impacted by the incident that seemed to “break” your trust.

In closing, the most pertinent advice we can give a brand is: “When in doubt, tell the truth.”

## Want to know more?

This white paper is supported by a full length presentation that incorporates the independent research and experience of the researchers at pod research & strategy. We would be only too happy to organize a time to present the full version to you.