The Gustavson Brand Trust Index reveals what constitutes consumer trust in 2022 by Venus Tamturk

A beautiful thing usually happens when a company or organization gains consumer trust: it is inspired to build on that trust, with greater society benefitting in the process.

Such was the case in 2022, with the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA)—long recognized for its integrity—once again being named the most trusted brand in Canada, followed by other distinguished brands: Band-Aid, Home Hardware Stores Ltd. for third spot.

These are just some of the findings of the eighth annual Gustavson Brand Trust Index (GBTI)—the only study done on that trust, with greater society benefitting in the process.

The Index highlights the importance of a company standing up for its values through its words and actions.

For the 2022 Index, GBTI’s team gathered data from almost 8,200 consumers regarding 412 brands (both national and regional) during the month of January.

Key factors considered included consumer perceptions of brand integrity, social responsibility, ability to perform core functions and interaction with consumers.

Top 10 takeaways from 2022

01. Canadian consumers distrust dominant technology brands—and yet use them more than ever.

02. Trust in all information sources is at record lows, but traditional media continues to be more trusted than social media outlets and search engines.

03. Trust in Canadian airlines is declining. Air Canada and Porter Airlines benefited from the short-lived optimism of the early days of the pandemic, while WestJet’s scores have gradually declined since 2018.

04. A&W’s focus on waste reducing packaging innovations, sustainable food practices, water and energy conservation and giving back to communities has been paying off.

05. Trust in packaged food brands is eroding after a surge in demand last year due to home seclusion and pantry loading.

06. Costco achieved GBTI’s highest employee treatment score, while Uber is at the bottom of the list.

07. Since the inception of GBTI, consumers (especially those in Quebec) have been consistently more loyal to local brands. The trust hierarchy is: local brands first, followed by Canadian origin brands and then global brands.

08. Canadians have a strong ability to detect greenwashing, and take it seriously.

09. Grocery stores were found to be the most trusted category, while the media is least trusted in the post-pandemic world.

10. Millennials and Gen Z (aged 18-35) recognized Patagonia as the most trusted brand in Canada.

Gustavson alumni inspire others every day, all around the world. It’s no surprise, therefore, to see four of them recognized by two significant UVic awards over the past year: UVic’s Distinguished Alumni Awards and the business school’s Spirit of Ali Award.

UVic’s Distinguished Alumni Awards recognize alumni who have made vast impacts in our communities—leaders in their fields or humanitarian pioneers. These awards honour graduates in three categories: the Presidents’ Alumni Awards, the Emerging Alumni Awards and the Indigenous Community Alumni Awards.

At Gustavson, we were proud to see three of our alumni recognized from among the many outstanding nominees: Derek Juno, Cory Stephens and Damineh Akhavan.

Derek Juno, social entrepreneur and speaker, is the vice president of business development for the social enterprise Dollar Donation Club, which is a turn-key micro giving program for individuals and businesses. Previously, Juno served as executive vice president of Moalhara, a non-profit committed to ending youth hunger. Juno founded Elysium Retreat, which offers a two-day personal development retreat package.

BC: How did the Gustavson School of Business shape you as a person?

DJ: One of the many things I really appreciated about my UVic commerce education is that it gave me the understanding that you don’t have to put business students into a few narrowly defined boxes. I realized through my studies that I could be a businessman who also fights to make the world a better place. The business status quo should be changed and innovated on.

BC: What do you hope you and your work will ultimately accomplish?

DJ: I hope the work that I do over my lifetime inspires people to live a more impactful, grateful and fulfilling life. I also hope to help change the status quo of businesses so we can protect and preserve our planet for as long as possible. 

Photos: Courtesy of Derek Juno
The Spirit of Ali Award was established in 2021 in honour of Gustavson’s beloved former dean, Dr. Ali Dastmalchian, who was an integral and dedicated member of the Gustavson community for over two decades and passed away in 2020. The Spirit of Ali Award recognizes Gustavson alumni who have uncovered their true potential, taken risks, inspired collaboration and conquered significant challenges to achieve their success.

CORY STEPHENS
Category: Indigenous Community Alumni Awards
UVic degree and year: BCom ’96

Cory Stephens is passionate about developing and supporting the growth of local communities. Stephens is program manager and learning enhancement officer for the Indigenous Advancement of Cultural Entrepreneurs (I-ACE), a program co-founded by TRICORP and Gustavson that provides Indigenous entrepreneurs with mentorship, knowledge and skills to successfully launch Gustavson that provides Indigenous entrepreneurs with starting their careers?

What advice would you give young people just starting their careers?

CS: Follow your passion and never give up. Failure is one of the greatest opportunities for learning on your journey towards entrepreneurial success.

BC: What do you hope you and your work will ultimately accomplish?

CS: Active development and participation of Indigenous peoples in Canada’s economy, led by First Nations’ entrepreneurs who are guided by values and principles of sustainability and a connectedness to the environment.

DAMINEH AKHAVAN
Category: Presidents’ Alumni Awards, AND
Gustavson’s Spirit of Ali Award
UVic degree and year: BEng ’93, BS ’06, MBA ’11

An advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion, Damineh Akhavan is passionate about the advancement of women and other marginalized groups in STEM fields. Akhavan is a senior engineer at Viking Air Ltd., in addition to being the founder and CEO of Global Women in STEM Inc., a corporation committed to promoting equal opportunities for women and other underrepresented groups. Akhavan received both the Distinguished Alumni Award and Spirit of Ali awards this year.

BC: What was the moment you realized your career calling?

DA: In 2007, I had the pleasure of meeting with Dr. Ali Dastmalchian, who was Gustavson’s dean at the time. I was 27 years old, had recently experienced two life-changing, career-path-altering health events, and was trying to figure out if the MBA program was the right fit for me.

We talked about our similar backgrounds, my career path and the events of the past six months. I expected a generic response—instead, he looked at me with a grin and asked: “So in all of that, what is your true calling?” At the end of that meeting, we agreed that the MBA program would be the right fit; however, it took us five or six casual discussions for me to realize that the reason behind most of the work I do as an engineer—and beyond my engineering work in the community—stems from a dream I had as a child to be an astronaut and to fly all the underprivileged people on earth to the planet I had discovered on the spacecraft I had built.

BC: What do you hope you and your work will ultimately accomplish?

DA: Life is short, and we are only on this planet for a finite time. I hope during my time here, and with the work I do as a professional engineer and as a champion for the underrepresented in our community, I can inspire others to do better and be better for ourselves, others and our planet. We are all in this together.

SAM MOD
Category: Spirit of Ali Award
UVic degree and year: BEng ’05; BS ’06; MBA ’11

Sam Mod, Victoria-based tech entrepreneur, is the CEO and co-founder of FreshWorks Studio, an award-winning firm that designs and develops custom apps. Their business grew from two employees in 2016 to 105-plus by May 2022, and continues to grow.

BC: How did the Gustavson MBA program affect you?

SM: I came to UVic as an immigrant to pursue my MBA with a decent student loan and an ambition to land a good job. With the exposure that the MBA program gave me to business leaders, mentors and entrepreneurs, my mindset and approach shifted from “job-seeker” to the slightly more adventurous “entrepreneur.”

BC: What does the Spirit of Ali Award mean to you?

SM: Ali had an ability to inspire others to dream and encouraged me in my time at UVic. Winning the Spirit of Ali award was extra special for me as Ali’s family was present in the audience and I truly got a chance to absorb the warmth, love and passion with which he lived his life.

BC: What do you hope you and your work will ultimately accomplish?

SM: I’m truly inspired by the stories of successful entrepreneurs and community change-makers. It’s an honour and a privilege to be leading the amazing, diverse team at FreshWorks. I sincerely hope my story of coming to Canada as a student job-seeker immigrant to a job-provider entrepreneur inspires the next generation in Canada and across the globe to challenge the ‘business as usual’ mindset.