3 Takeaways From Kantar’s 2025 Brand Summit

A volatile economy is no excuse.

Brands like Snickers, Don Julio, Arby’s, and Rubbermaid have to continue growing even as consumers are spending less.

At market research firm Kantar’s Brand Summit event on May 15, the parent companies of those storied brands, including Mars Wrigley, Diageo, Inspire Brands, and Newell Brands, revealed their strategies for growing in a time of tariffs and economic uncertainty.

ADWEEK was on the ground there. Here’s what we learned.

Use a large portfolio to drive individual brand growth

Mars Wrigley has a huge portfolio of brands that includes Snickers, Twix, and Extra gum.

The company’s brand marketers convene to define what it wants the parent company Mars Wrigley to stand for, according to Molly Hayes, the company’s head of global human intelligence.

To drive growth overall, each brand must understand what role it plays within the parent company broader portfolio.

“What is the overlap, and what do we need it to do in our environment?” she said.

To get to this, however, marketers need to understand how

their brands are perceived by consumers, and what consumers want.

Christine Hasbun, Diageo's vp of North America consumer planning, said that understanding is the first step to growth, as it informs brand strategy and execution.

You can't drive sales without building brands

In times when companies are cutting costs, they often focus on initiatives that are meant to drive sales directly.

But Hasbun warns against shifting budgets entirely to initiatives focused on sales, at the expense of brand building.

"I don't think there's such a thick wall between those two," she said. "I actually think that wall is very porous."

She continued: "If you're thinking about putting some sort of sales activation out in the market and putting investment behind it, you also need to consider that you have to build your brand at the same time."

To do this, Hasbun said brands should be consistent with reinforcing their brand positioning and messaging. And for Diageo, which is in the spirits industry, she also emphasized the ability to be emotive in its advertising—"because we're in a very emotional category," she said.

Remember your message, and don't get distracted by disruption

It's really hard to stay certain in uncertain times.

Mashu Sainz, vp of insights and analytics at Newell Brands, which owns Rubbermaid, Sharpie, and Yankee Candle among others, said that everyone in an organization should know what the company is focused on.

Zeroing in on the current strategy can help people in a company avoid stressing too much over external unknowns they can’t control, like tariffs and AI, Sainz said.

“We’re not running away from change anytime soon,” she said. “It’s here to stay. Disruption is on a daily basis.”

Jordan Cusner, Inspire Brands’ senior director of consumer insights and research, echoed that sentiment.

The company’s portfolio includes several food chains like Arby’s, Buffalo Wild Wings, and Dunkin’. Cusner said that the parent company sometimes struggles to let its brands’ marketers know how to promote its product offerings and brand message in shorter TV ads.

“It’s a balancing act because there are certain parts of our ads functionally that we cannot move away from, but [it’s] how do we infuse the brand love and importance in a way that doesn’t disrupt and distract from the message,” he said.

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