Building a Framework for Authentic Real-Time Brand Strategy That Works

This post was created in partnership with Monks

Key takeaways

- The ability to move fast requires alignment from more departments than just marketing.
- A real-time strategy doesn’t mean brands must participate in every trend.
- Marketers with boundless curiosity and a commitment to change will be better prepared to navigate the future.

Real-time brand strategy is more complex than being the first to notice something and react. Putting frameworks in place so your brand can step into relevant cultural conversations in an authentic and timely manner takes planning, good partnerships, and the right infrastructure.

During an ADWEEK House Advertising HQ Group Chat, co-hosted with Monks, industry leaders shared details about what a successful real-time brand strategy requires.

(L-R) Monks’ Linda Cronin, MassMutual’s Kristin Lane, Bragg Live Food Products’ Rona Williams

Capturing unexpected moments

James Stephens, global head of brand at Monks, kicked off the discussion by stressing the importance of having the whole team in sync. “Breaking down those silos such that we’re all totally aligned on what our vision is, what success looks like, what we’re going to explore together—and what creative, media, strategic metrics we’re all going to explore and experiment with—is how you build a real-time brand,” he said.

His colleague, Linda Cronin, EVP of media at Monks, added that when the entire organization understands the brand, it allows for a quicker response. “Because when you go to the legal team

and say, ‘I want to do this,’ they already know why—they get it,” she shared.

(L-R) Shipt’s Emily Kirkpatrick, Monks’ James Stephens, Sundial Media & Technology Group’s Kirk McDonald

Making real-time decisions

One topic the speakers addressed is how to identify when a real-time moment is right for your brand.

Rona Williams, senior director of strategic innovation at Bragg Live Food Products, noted the delicate balance of being both nimble and cautious. “If you know your consumer, you’re able to move quickly in some instances,” she explained. “In other areas, you need to take a beat and refer back to your framework.”

At MassMutual, where Kristin Lane serves as head of brand marketing and customer growth, the team follows the so-called Coca-Cola formula, which consists of putting 70% of marketing investments into things they know will work while setting aside 20% for new channels and experiences they want to try out. The remaining 10% goes toward big swings that have no guarantee of paying off. Quite frequently, however, “those 10% pieces become part of the 70% the very next year,” shared Lane.

Knowing when not to act is equally important for real-time brands, added Florina Manusis, executive director of media and influencer marketing for North America at Estée Lauder. “Oftentimes, brands feel so pressured to be in the conversation and have an opinion and say the right thing,” she said. “Sometimes it’s okay not to. Real-time doesn’t mean being reactive.”

(L-R) Acast’s Greg Glenday, ADWEEK’s Kendra Barnett

Building authenticity with the right partners

Another theme of the conversation was how the right partnerships can introduce a brand to new audiences.

“Why are podcasts and creators doing so much better and helping brands get there faster?” asked Kirk McDonald, CEO of Sundial Media & Technology Group. “The reality is their relationship with their community is so much more intimate and allows you as a brand to come in with the unlock codes for the conversation.”

Emily Kirkpatrick, VP and marketing chief of staff for Shipt, agreed, adding that brands risk losing authenticity when they don’t trust their influencers to make the right creative

decisions for their audience. “When we’re working with these influencers, we’re really not redlining too much,” she said. “It takes a lot of restraint.”

(L-R) Estée Lauder’s Florina Manusis, Monks’ Linda Cronin

Real-time success stories

Kirkpatrick described how her team leapt into action after seeing a TikTok video of a woman complaining that a rival shipping company didn’t deliver a portable crib she needed while on vacation. “We stepped in, had that and more delivered to this person, and instantly she got on TikTok and started talking about it,” shared Kirkpatrick. “It drove 4 million followers overnight.”

MassMutual’s Lane shared how a simple idea became a big hit.

“I love signs that do things and animate and have a meaning,” she said. “When we put the MassMutual sign over the Red Sox scoreboard, we used the five dots in our logo as a ball and strikes counter. The fans just got it. They loved it.”

Greg Glenday, CEO of Acast, described how a branded podcast with U.K. soccer player Peter Crouch and the beer company Brew Dog came to life. Crouch had been telling stories on his own popular podcast that sometimes involved going to the pub with friends, and mentioned that Brew Dog was his favorite beer. Brew Dog then invited him and his friends to record a whole new podcast at their brewery. Next, Brew Dog created a beer for Crouch called LaOut (a combination of lager and stout). “That’s his brand that they now sell,” said Glenday. “The first batch sold out. It was supposed to be a gimmick, and now it’s a real thing.”

To wrap up, Monks’ Stephens shared what he believes will be the common denominator for future real-time wins. As he put it: “I think the great marketers of the future will be the most curious people, the ones that just constantly want to learn.”

Featured Conversation Leaders

- Kendra Barnett, Senior Tech Reporter, ADWEEK
- Florina Manusis, Executive Director, Media and Influencer Marketing, North America, Estée Lauder
- Linda Cronin, EVP, Media, Monks
- Greg Glenday, CEO, Acast
- Kristin Lane, Head of Brand Marketing and Customer Growth, MassMutual
- Emily Kirkpatrick, VP, Marketing Chief of Staff, Shipt
- Kirk McDonald, CEO, Sundial Media & Technology Group
- James Stephens, Global Head of Brand, Monks
- Rona Williams, Senior Director, Strategic Innovation, Bragg Live Food Products

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