# David Banner Reveals How Brands Can Crack the Cultural Code

As creators and artists increasingly drive consumer trends, brands must look to them to set the tone for what's cool and relevant.

But in the race to show up authentically, some brands are missing the mark, according to Grammy-nominated rapper, producer, and entrepreneur David Banner.

"If you want to market to Black people, why not trust Black people? If you want to market to women, why not trust women?" he said. "I don't know why people in corporate structures want to be cool [and] think they're cool. Just cut the check, let me go do what I do, and watch what I bring back."

In addition to his musical success, Banner is a public speaker, activist, and the founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of A Banner Vision, a multimedia production company that has worked with brands including Gatorade, Disney, Marvel, Gillette, and Pepsi.

On Tuesday (April 29) at ADWEEK House Miami, the multi-hyphenate sat down with Nue Agency's Jesse Kirshbaum to discuss his "art"-ivism and why cultural representation matters for brand relevancy.

## Branding as an “art”-ivist

Through his activism and public service, Banner said he prides himself on being a “beacon of light.”

In 2005, he created Heal the Hood, a Hurricane Katrina relief fund and concert that he said was the largest urban relief show at the time. However, brands like MTV and BET didn’t believe in the magnitude of the effort, he said, so he pivoted to public speaking while still releasing music.

“There’s a common thread in all of these things that we do, especially as it pertains to Black culture, and it’s being able to find people in these communities that we can bring together, and I think that’s my superpower now,” said Banner.

He is also unapologetically himself, something that he said has worked both for and against him throughout his career.

In 2010, Banner wrote and produced an original song for Gatorade’s “Evolve” campaign, which he helped ideate with TBWA\Chiat\Day LA. The artist said that the brand wanted the ad to be “cool” and relate to kids, especially in the Black community.

However, his experience working on the ad still upsets him, as PepsiCo, the sports drink’s parent company, had him redo the song 12 times before buying a throwaway track.

“The thing that hurt me with [that] situation is I had put them years into the future, but at that particular time, I wasn’t a big enough artist for them to jump off the mountain with me,” he said. “The problem is, you have people who want to be cool instead of really making a dope product. That’s what I realized a long time ago.”

When it comes to Banner’s individual brand strategy, he said he operates “on the edge.”

“From a marketing standpoint, I always try to put myself in a place that’s risqué but based in as much research as I can possibly have [to] move the needle,” he said.

The exec believes that for brands to authentically resonate with certain cultures and communities, they need to hire creatives who reflect the consumers they are trying to reach and ultimately release some creative control.

*Correction May 5 at 11:50ET: The description of the throwaway track has been changed.*

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