How Top Brands Turn Local Connection Into National Reach

This post was created in partnership with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Key takeaways

- When going digital, staying true to the brand that loyal customers have come to love is integral.
- Activations need to be hyper-relevant and personalized to a brand's audience.
- Even a national brand can find a way to connect with consumers on a more specific, localized level.

From neighborhood activations to citywide movements, today's most resonant brands are proving that community is the ultimate growth channel. They are scaling brand impact by fostering trust, culture, and collaboration at the regional level.

During an ADWEEK House Brandweek 2025 Group Chat co-hosted with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC), a panel of industry leaders explored how local relevance can build national reach and lasting growth.

(L-R) Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s Kim Yates, ADWEEK’s Will Lee, Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s Jackie Choice

Maintaining brand authenticity in the shift to digital

Kim Yates, chief commercial officer at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, kicked off the conversation by addressing the recent news that the publication will no longer have a printed newspaper.

“Becoming a fully multimedia, modern media company, fully digitized digital media company is the goal, and rolling that out to our loyal customers has been something that we’ve learned a lot from,” Yates shared.

She said the newspaper is maintaining communication and

connection with subscribers by doing special things like giving certain loyal customers iPads and teaching them how to view the digital version of the publication. The newspaper has also launched several different brands within the Atlanta Journal-Constitution umbrella to connect with the local community, including high school football and Black culture.

“Tapping into different connections within the portfolio of brands has been really important with our evolution instead of hyper-focusing just on the AJC brand,” Yates explained.

Jackie Choice, head of B2B marketing at Atlanta Journal-Constitution, emphasized the importance of separate voices for each community and authenticity for each brand’s core audience.

“Speaking specifically to B2B, it’s really important for us to make sure that while we’re trying to connect brands to these audiences, we are also authentically representing ourselves within them,” Choice said. “Because nobody wants to do business with someone who’s not walking the walk.”

(L-R) The Weather Company's Rebecca Hogan, United States Olympic and Paralympic Properties' Matt Wikstrom

Creating local activations for brands

Rebecca Hogan, head of integrated communications at The Weather Company, shared that weather is inherently local and needs to be personalized and hyper-relevant to consumers.

"It's not only how we're reaching our own audiences through our channels, but also how we're connecting brands to our audiences. A lot of brands advertise on our platforms or use our weather targeting data to leverage weather insights to make sure they're delivering the right content, the right message based on that person's interest, where that person is in the world, and the type of weather they're experiencing,"

Hogan said.

Matt Wikstrom, chief of partnership sales at United States Olympic and Paralympic Properties, discussed the local impact of the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles and how the organization is supporting the community by subsidizing local youth sports and offering accessible game tickets.

He noted the 2028 Olympics will be the largest event in history, describing it as “the operational equivalent of seven Super Bowls a day for four straight weeks.”

Wikstrom added that for brands, the Games offer the ability to tell a story.

“If it’s Honda, which is our automotive and mobility partner, how can they showcase their electric vehicles as moving stakeholders around the Games? Or if it’s Delta, they’re actually flying our athletes to the Games.”

(L-R) BODYARMOR’s Tom Gargiulo, Ammunition’s Jeremy Heilpern, Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s Kim Yates

Balancing national campaigns with local engagement

Jeremy Heilpern, founder and CEO at Ammunition, shared how a brand can resonate with local consumers. He gave the example of an HVAC company having a cooling message in the South vs. a heating message in the North.

“It’s really thinking about what’s that message, where does it show up, and why should I believe the thing that you’re saying?” Heilpern explained. “I think localizing it to that region, whether it’s from a messaging standpoint or it’s from a just visual standpoint, that resonates with me. It looks like what I expect.”

Tom Gargiulo, CMO at BODYARMOR, added that local is a critical element of his marketing mix. He pointed out that the brand is in a unique context with both flashy NFL players but also being on-site for athletes at a local fun run.

“A big part of our strategy is collecting assets that really resonate with everyone and that can relate to that small mom-and-pop bottler all the way to the big multinationals,” Gargiulo said.

To resonate, Yates advised brands to listen to their audiences. “The only way you can be authentic is if you listen.”

Choice agreed and highlighted the listening sessions the Atlanta Journal-Constitution is conducting with its local partners as it evolves its digital strategy.

“Across the board, listening in Georgia and Atlanta right now, it’s critical, especially as we make this shift and figure out how to support B2B and B2C with digital.”

Featured Conversation Leaders

- Jackie Choice, Head of B2B Marketing, Atlanta Journal-Constitution
- Tom Gargiulo, CMO, BODYARMOR
- Jeremy Heilpern, Founder and CEO, Ammunition
- Rebecca Hogan, Head of Integrated Communications, The Weather Company
- Will Lee, CEO, ADWEEK
- Matt Wikstrom, Chief of Partnership Sales, United States Olympic and Paralympic Properties
- Kim Yates, Chief Commercial Officer, Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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