Reformation's Monica Lewinsky Campaign Reflects Power, Purpose and Promise



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'Conscious consumerism,' the commitment to making purchasing decisions based on social, economic and environmental impact, is on the rise. 63% of Gen Z say they will only purchase brands that stand with them on issues, and 90% expect brands to be involved in causes that improve the world. Gen Z is the fastest-growing and most racially diverse generation and is expected to account for 40% of consumers. They choose brands that authentically reflect their identities and align with their values.

That's why brand purpose needs to be embedded at the

foundation of all brands' ethos and in their advertising. It goes beyond the products and services offered; it is a reflection of what a brand stands for and its impact on the world.

One brand that has consistently incorporated its values and ethos into its campaigns is Reformation, an eco-friendly women's apparel brand known for its commitment to sustainability, philanthropy and social impact, all of which are at the core of its DNA.

Most recently, the brand featured former White House intern-turned-activist Monica Lewinsky for its "You Got The Power" workwear campaign. Reformation also partnered with Vote.org for the collection and created a user guide to promote voter registration. It will donate a portion of the proceeds from the collection to the organization.

The goal behind the campaign is to remind people that they have the power and need to vote this year. This is the third election in which Reformation has launched a voting advocacy project to encourage customers to vote.

Let's look closer at how Reformation stayed true to its purpose-driven brand with a campaign that simultaneously empowers women and elevates the importance of voting.

Empowering women

Over the last decade, Lewinsky's activism and advocacy for anti-bullying and women's rights have made her a role model for many Gen X and millennial women, a core consumer group of Reformation, in addition to Gen Z. In this campaign, Lewinsky can be seen wearing a collection of strong silhouettes and suits and reminds people that they've "got the power."

Through this campaign, Reformation introduced Lewinsky to a socially conscious Gen Z and leveraged her influence to send a powerful message about the intersectionality of women and

politics.

Building a purpose-driven brand and campaign

Reformation's partnership with Lewinsky emphasizes the importance of brands embedding a purpose into the foundation of their ethos. By doing so, brands can build a deeper connection with consumers, create trust and build loyalty along the way.

One of the elements of Reformation's campaign that stands out is its tangible impact. By donating proceeds from the "You've Got The Power" sweatshirt to Vote.org, Reformation walks the walk and turns its words into action.

Why brand purpose matters

Reformation's collaboration with Lewinsky is just one example of how purpose-driven branding can drive business success and also have a positive impact on society. A key component to accomplishing that is authenticity, which is especially essential when trying to appeal to Gen Z consumers. Brands with a clearly defined brand purpose will find that it's not just a good thing to have, but it is also good for business.

For Reformation, sustainability is at the core of what the brand does. From planting trees for employee birthdays to creating carbon-neutral women's wear and launching its textile-to-textile recycling program, RefRecyling, Reformation regularly updates its commitments to environmental impact.

Previously, the brand launched a partnership with online consignment and thrift store ThredUp, offering an Upcycle Kit for customers to send their old clothes from any brand for a shopping credit. Initiatives like this provide conscious consumers the opportunity to recycle and shop with a brand dedicated to minimizing its environmental footprint.

According to ThredUp's Impact Report, 61% of Gen Z consumers

look for secondhand items before buying them. More than 50% say they're more likely to purchase from a brand that offers secondhand merchandise alongside new. ThredUp's Resale Report states that the global secondhand market is expected to double by 2027 and reach $350 billion.

Lessons for marketers

Reformation's "You Got The Power" campaign serves as an example of purpose-driven advertising done right. It has captured consumers' attention, empowered women, elevated the importance of voting and put brand values into action for all to see.

Here are a few things for marketers and brands to consider and ask themselves when building out their campaigns and brand purpose:

- Authenticity is key. Is supporting this purpose a way of bringing brand values to life?
- How can the brand support the consumer?
- What are other ways to bring these purpose-led initiatives to life? And does it make sense for the consumers or will it alienate them?

Even with the ever-evolving landscape of consumer expectations, marketers need to remember that brands can be agents of change. How does your brand embed brand purpose into its ethos?

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Physical Retail Is the New TV

Introducing the Adweek Podcast Network. Access infinite inspiration in your pocket on everything from career advice and creativity to metaverse marketing and more. Browse all podcasts.

In-store retail media is ready for primetime. Expect 2024 to be the year that digital screens propagate across brick-and-mortar retail.

Currently estimated at less than $300 million in the U.S., in-store advertising is finally ready to accelerate, with Walmart, Kroger and Tesco announcing the expansion of their in-store media networks this year. A recent Merkle study found that in-store media is now the No. 2 area of retail media investment and a top focus of 33% of retailers—up from just 9% in 2022.

As this happens, physical stores will begin to emerge as the "new TV"—a mass-reach advertising vehicle ideal for national brands. Digital surfaces inside retailers' four walls—whether at the front of the store, checkout, endcap, smart cart or cooler doors—deliver much of what brands want and what linear TV has lost: fast reach, high attentiveness, younger audiences and cultural relevance.

As brands continue to struggle with linear TV's decline, they should commit to investing 5% of existing linear TV budgets in in-store media by 2025.



Physical stores will become a major media channel

The linear TV ad market is still over $65 billion—a level that's remained static over the past decade. As supply among key demographics has roughly been cut in half, demand has stayed constant, leading to a doubling of CPMs. That's because these dollars haven't had somewhere better to go. With in-store retail media, now they do.

Of course, in-store advertising isn't a perfect substitute for linear TV advertising—the context isn't conducive to extended storytelling and the full range of sight, sound and motion. Still, it delivers many of linear TV's primary benefits, including dayparting and geoparting. And what it may sacrifice in 30-second storytelling, it makes up for with greater format flexibility, contextual narrative and cultural cachet.

One of in-store retail media's earliest incarnations—the Best Buy "TV Wall"—was introduced in 2011 as a way for national brands to reach shoppers in a high-visibility, high-attention and high-intent environment. Often serving as extensions of national brands' TV ad campaigns, TV wall ad buys lean into mid- and upper-funnel marketing objectives like awareness and

aren’t just about driving a purchase on that shopping visit.

In this era of media fragmentation, the number of true common cultural touchstones is dwindling. Outside of major tentpole events like the Super Bowl, the Olympics and the Oscars, physical stores are among the last remaining bastions that can quickly deliver tens of millions of eyeballs.

The top U.S. retailers have a unique audience reach of 100 million per month, on par with the top broadcast TV networks. They also reach the “unreachables,” the coveted “money demo” that now barely watches linear TV. And unlike social or programmatic, retail ad inventory offers scarcity and brand safety in a premium environment. These branding benefits come with the bonus of contextual relevance and proximity to the point of purchase.

The smartest brands already get this. Go into virtually any retail store with digital screens and you’re likely to see Apple ads. It’s not just at retailers where Apple products are sold, but also in grocery stores and drug stores nationwide.

National brand budgets—not shopper marketing—should fund in-store ads

Stunningly, many brands still fail to see the big picture, relegating in-store media to shopper marketing—or comparatively tiny digital out-of-home—budgets. This massive channel isn’t even on the radar of most national brand teams, nor do they have strategists with an in-store media remit. Organizational dynamics are getting in the way of what should matter most to brands: marketing effectiveness.

Emerging media channels are often held back by the lack of inventory scale and measurement to justify large investments from national brands. This has certainly been true of connected TV, which wasn’t counted in Nielsen TV ratings and has had minimal ad-supported inventory until recently. Now measurement is catching up right as Netflix, Prime Video and

Apple TV+ embrace ad-supported models.



In-store retail media isn’t lacking in reach, and recent advances are delivering scalable sales lift measurement and in-store audience metrics. We are one step closer to the in-store equivalent of Nielsen TV ratings, which would facilitate the movement of national media investment. Additionally, the tech is adopting some of the advancements of digital, such as programmatic targeting and closed-loop measurement, and has the potential to generate new customer and brand opportunities that integrate natively with shoppers’ smartphones, opening richer app, loyalty and promotional experiences akin to shoppable ads on CTV. So, the eventual impact could be far greater than just content and ads on screens in stores.

National brands need to break their overreliance on linear TV eventually, so why not now? By committing budget to this channel as screens roll out in stores nationwide this year, they can aggressively test and learn to understand how in-store advertising works. And it can be done even as programmatic and measurement capabilities mature. In-store retail media can be planned through scaled direct ad buys, much in the way that linear TV is today.

As physical stores get ready for primetime, brands should start preparing for The StoreFronts.

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Influencer Marketing Needs to Adapt: A Cautionary Lesson From Tarte Cosmetics

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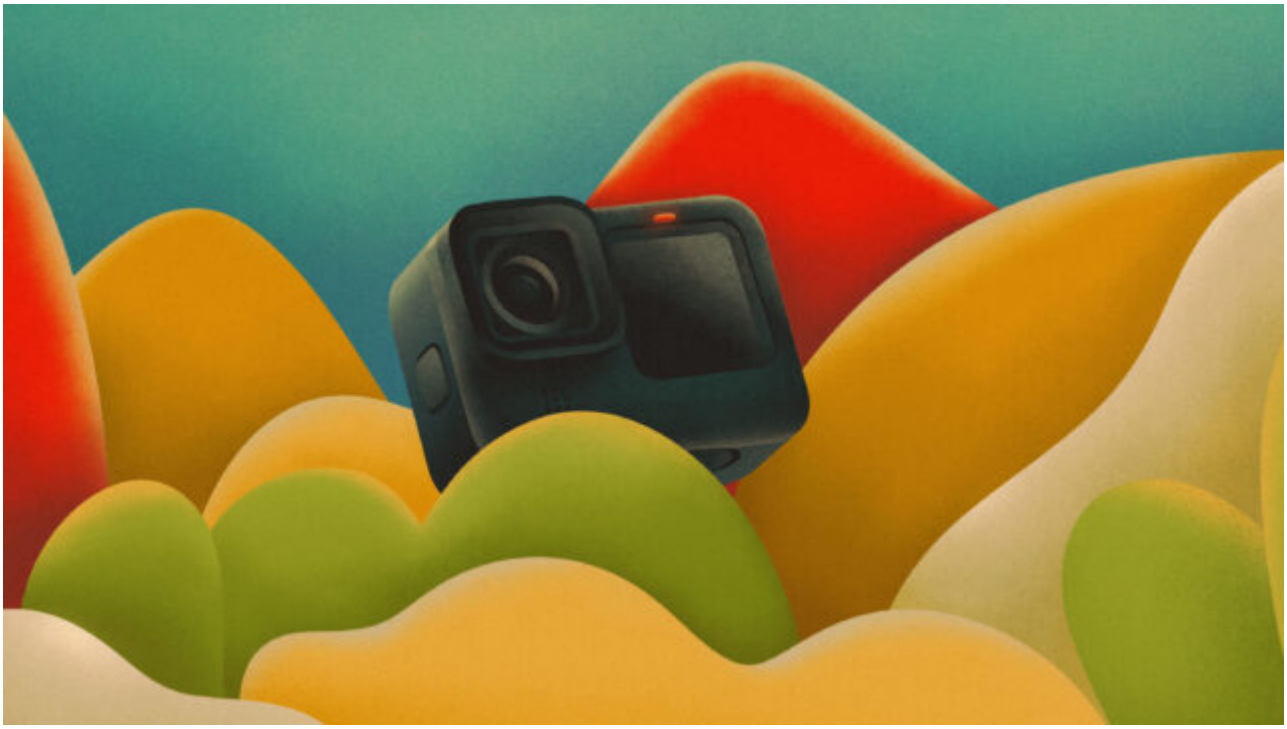
The influencer marketing recipe is well-established. Select influencers who attract a certain audience and fly them out to a tropical location for sun, fun and product placement. Organic reach across social, particularly TikTok, Instagram and YouTube are off the charts. Marketing = sorted.

Except, that doesn't work anymore. What once was aspirational is now exclusionary, making customers (whose spending makes these types of trips possible) feel invisible due to their lack of followers.

Tarte Cosmetics is learning this the hard way through the backlash it's receiving for its "Welcome to Trippin' With Tarte" campaign, specifically the trip they sponsored for 30 social media influencers to Bora Bora. The trip consisted of

flights on private jets for influencers and their plus ones, a four-night stay at the Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora and rooms filled with gifts upon arrival.

The subsequent social posts by the influencers have sparked a wave of negative feedback online from Tarte consumers.



The sentiment of exclusion is exacerbated by influencers on the trip using Fergie's song "Glamorous" for their TikTok featuring them on the private jet for the trip. Specifically queuing up the lyric "if you don't have no money, take your broke ass home" really drives home the point that this is a parade of haves, and yet this display was created to make people want to hand over their purses to Tarte.

You know, the broke people at home watching TikTok. According to the comment section, that will not be happening.

Now, a once passionate customer base can't wait to find a new product to purchase instead. Here are three brand lessons from the Bora Bora influencer trip that Tarte Cosmetics is learning the hard way.

Consumers want relatable

As an audience, we've made it clear we want relatable content. We're busy watching all 50 episodes of Reesa Teesa's story and going down other rabbit holes of people's lives.

We want stories and connection. There is nothing relatable about seeing people who can afford a product getting whisked away on an all-expense paid trip just to get more product, while the rest of us try to get through our day. In reviewing comments, the one influencer that everyone was rooting for was Samantha Jo and her mom on the trip. She comes across as having fun and grateful for the trip. In one word: relatable.

Virality is not always positive

Tarte CEO Maureen Kelly has been here before, explaining in an exclusive to Glossy last year after the brand's Dubai trip that the marketing budget is spent specifically on these trips and nurturing relationships with influencers. The major defense for these trips is the organic mentions they receive.

The trips always seem to go viral, but the problem is that virality is not an immediately positive thing. The "all press is good press" sentiment is alive and well for these activations, but it ignores a crucial perspective—the customer.

It's worth noting that Tarte has stated that two of the people involved in the trip were customers who won a giveaway. This is a great start but it's not enough when there are micro influencers and diehard customers who regularly create content, buy products and love the brand. This just proves that if you wanted to, you would. If you wanted to treat your customers, you would.

There are areas of disconnect in influencer culture

For Tarte, the influencers are creating brand-specific content, but it’s not landing when their customers and 78% of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck. And those customers who are struggling don’t just consume content on social, they create it too, capturing just as much attention as some of the influencers on the trip.

In 2024, brands need to understand that influencers aren’t the only creators on social. Devoted and/or disappointed customers are just as likely to get visibility for their videos sharing their experience. The backlash against influencer culture as we know it continues, with many seeing it as disconnected from regular people’s everyday experience.

One TikToker shared her thoughts on the negative reaction, saying it’s rooted in jealousy. She’s not entirely wrong, but jealousy is an output regardless of the sentiment. It’s not a bug; it’s a feature. These brand trips are built from inspiring jealousy. The feeling of jealousy that will hopefully turn into aspirational purchases to try to emulate the person and their lifestyle.

However, that jealousy can just as quickly turn into vitriol when the content instead makes them feel taken for granted or underappreciated as a consumer.



Rewriting the playbook

Regardless of sentiment, we can’t deny it gets people talking. For brand trips like this, the common rationale is validating mentions and earned media (like this article, for instance), but it’s a sign of a growing struggle facing advertising and influencer marketing as a whole.

Views and mentions don’t necessarily correlate to revenue. The industry feels stuck in an attention economy, meanwhile we continue to see layoff after layoff. The boardroom may say they want mentions, but they make cuts based on revenue.

Tarte is alienating the customer and making it clear that this type of treatment is out of reach, all while it’s the Tarte customer’s purchases that make these trips possible. It’s a reminder that they are paying for a lifestyle that is given to someone else, and they will look for a brand that can deliver the customer experience they want.

It’s only a matter of time before a brand steps up to celebrate their customers and do the opposite of Tarte’s brand playbook.

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B2B Influencer Marketing: It’s Not Rocket Science

> Announcing! Brandweek is headed to Phoenix, Arizona this September 23–26. Join us there to explore the future of marketing, discover cutting-edge strategies and network with the best in the business.

B2B advertising is boring. That’s what nearly half of business buyers told PR Web in a 2018 survey. And it seems to have gotten worse since then.

In 2023, The Power of Provocation discovered that a staggering 82% of business decision-makers considered B2B marketing monotonous and repetitive, while a mere 1% believed it demonstrated a meaningful understanding of the human experience. This signals a massive opportunity for B2B marketers to redefine their approach, and the ideal place to start is on social media.

While creative campaigns are often synonymous with platforms like Instagram and TikTok, LinkedIn has emerged as an unexpected yet powerful player, especially for B2B marketers. Recently, we tested the waters ourselves with our first LinkedIn creator campaign for Hootsuite’s Social Media Career Report, and the results were astounding: 1.2 million

impressions, 20,000+ engagements and over 8,100 link clicks within the first few weeks.

Here’s what we learned.

Why LinkedIn?

LinkedIn boasts a user base of 875 million, with 48.5% of U.S. users engaging at least once a month. An impressive 40% of LinkedIn visitors organically engage with a page every week, and 50% of brands are perceived as “higher quality” after advertising on the platform.



It’s not just about the numbers; LinkedIn offers a unique community of creators spanning various industries, making it an ideal platform for B2B influencer marketing.

What works in B2C can shine in B2B

When we think about social media influencers and creators, our first thought doesn’t always go to LinkedIn. But perhaps it should.

Here are some core tenets that we’ve applied to our social marketing on LinkedIn and the results are showing us … it’s

working.

Humans are humans.

LinkedIn’s users are diverse. Someone who buys makeup on TikTok at night could be a marketing director by day. Preferences don’t clock out at 9 am. What works in B2C can shine in B2B. At Hootsuite, simplicity is our gold mine, and influencer strategies are no exception.

K.I.S.S: Keep influencer strategies straightforward.

My journey through working with influencers in toys, whiskey and streetwear taught me this very concept. Know your audience, align with the influencer’s tone and provide value.

Do your homework.

Before partnering, check if an influencer’s crowd matches yours. Chat with them as you would with any media outlet. Who follows them? What content flies high? You want your sponsored post to fit naturally within their feed.

We piloted our first LinkedIn influencer program last year. We sifted through creators’ social feeds to ensure the fit was natural. We found an opportunity to create an authentic partnership that spoke to their community of followers and aligned with their regular content.

If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.

Influencers know their turf. If their style aligns with your brand, let them take the reins. Narrow down your list, then step back and let them do their thing.

Provide freedom within fences.

Give influencers creative space, but set clear goals and boundaries. This balance allows them to bring their creativity to the forefront while ensuring ROI remains a priority. The

post should first and foremost provide value to their audiences.

Did someone say ‘free?’

Leverage the allure of freebies. Take a lesson from the streetwear playbook—people, including influencers, love free stuff. Offer freebies that add value to your audience for remarkable returns at a fraction of the cost.

Play the long game.

Successful influencer campaigns should be viewed as a beginning, not a means to an end. Forge lasting bonds to establish deeper ongoing partnerships that will reap stronger brand loyalty and build connection twofold.

Redefining B2B marketing

We’re not just competing with peers on social platforms, but with creators and B2C brands on those very platforms. So, how does one stand out? By building authentic bonds with the audience.

Every interaction involves a human, whether in B2B or B2C. Success on social comes down to understanding your audience, delivering value and fostering a two-way relationship. Keep your objectives simple, stay true to your brand and let influencers do their magic.

Building relationships transcends traditional marketing boundaries and emphasizes an understanding of your customers’ needs and aspirations. Success hinges on delivering authentic value, creating a two-way dialogue and building a human experience. In this era of constant digital noise, personalized and relationship-driven B2B strategies cut through the clutter and ultimately create a lasting impact.

By embracing simplicity, staying true to the brand identity and empowering influencers on social to work their magic

within clear boundaries, B2B marketers can redefine what it means to be a “B2B marketer.”

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True Inclusion Is Defined by Long-Term Commitment

> Experience ADWEEK House at Cannes, June 16-19. We’re celebrating 45 years of reporting with Now and Next—a creative opportunity for brands to define who they are and their future in the industry. Register .

Given that Women’s History Month and International Day of the Girl take place every year, I often doubt the DEI commitment of companies that start asking about events and solutions that “engage women” a month or two before those moments.

True DEI champions are currently talking about plans with clear repercussions for 2034; true leaders see inclusion as table stakes for future-proofing their business, not as an altruistic, performative marketing campaign.

As the lead of The Collective, a women’s advocacy group in sports and music, March and October always seem to be the busiest months between speaking engagements, opinion pieces and general celebrations of women and girls. But all too often, it’s only those months. And that’s an intersectionally relatable issue.

Gone are the days when “let’s go, girls” was just a rallying cry. The entire Western world’s economy is shifting to women being the current and future wealth holders. Gen Z women—the most powerful economic generation yet—are not only steering purchase decisions but will own two-thirds of the wealth in the U.S. by 2030. Additionally, they, along with Gen Z men, believe in and will spend on companies that authentically make the world a better place.

Oh, and they care about equality and equity beyond March and October. And they remember if that’s the only time you talked to them about it.

To truly win their hearts, a brand must build credibility first and foremost; that means intersectionality and supporting inclusion outwardly as well as celebrating it internally. Only when your own house is in order can you think about being a trusted advisor to consumers dipping their toe into inclusion or monetizing your brand’s position on it.



Commitment demands long-term structure

80% of Gen Z consumers expect companies today to help solve the world’s biggest issues, and 92% will reward them with

purchases. Still, for many companies, even those already prioritizing inclusion, evolving from a product- or service-focused marketing history to one that regularly wraps in their worldviews can be a daunting proposition. That’s why brands often fall into the trap of performative support.

Setting tangible, achievable objectives with consistent structural support gives you a place to start and grow from. In creating the environment for true change, you allow for culture shifts constantly, and once you realize you’ll never be ahead or in control of culture, you attain the grace to have flexibility in achieving your goals.

One place to start is creating an internal council of employees who are interested and committed to creating an inclusive ecosystem. This group can simply create appropriate and timely reminders of cultural events and what they mean to different groups. At minimum, it helps educate individuals on beliefs and events they may not have been exposed to and hopefully will open minds a bit further.

Repeatedly at the top of Most Inclusive lists is Progressive. For over 15 years, it’s built a large dedicated team (of eight) singularly set on creating programs, education and opportunities for employees through leadership and job-based training as well as courses in self-awareness. Progressive also provides specialized initiatives, like its Multicultural Leadership Development Program, and specific boot camps designed to increase diversity and equity. It’s a company where the values are reflected in the output, due to the capital and resources it puts behind its DEI structure.

Commitment demands shared access

True inclusion does not seek competitive advantage. However, inclusive access builds and sustains your company’s credibility over the years and through the storms.

Create and share freely with those a little further behind you, in terms of employee programming, diverse vendor and supplier lists, formal and informal partnerships, and any playbooks and toolkits you develop to make your company more inclusive. Do this right, and in 10 years, your company, its customers, partners and greater industry will be better off.

Accenture has long been committed to equity and inclusion, executing on a robust strategy that helps support and educate its more than 738,000 employees. In fact, it has spent over $1.1 billion on learning and development opportunities, is actively supporting the LGBTQ+ community with 120,000 Pride allies across all countries of operation, and is increasing accessibility through 32 centers established for disabled talent to access the tools, technology and support to be successful in their roles.

For a better 2034, ask: How can we, as a company made up of individuals, create and consistently share best practices with our industry? How can we ensure that while we may be competitors in business, we are allies in the fight for equity and inclusion?

Commitment demands transparent investment

Investing in equity and inclusion measures is not about singular programs or employee resource groups. Appropriate funding demonstrates to your employees that you are serious about the access and accountability you established to align with your stated goals. Investment allows for partnerships and educational programs to be developed with full effect and creates more reasons to tell the stories of inclusivity that matter most.

To create lasting change, start with an audit of your investment in recruiting and hiring practices; this may require external expertise but sets up your company for long-term diversity.

Ally Financial demonstrated significant success in retaining and advancing people of color, as noted in its 2022 report. Ally has not only created educational outlets for its employees and customers with great success (reportedly over 40% of its employees joined an ERG), but it has used its partnerships across women's sports as a call to action for other brands to level up in their support of women, women athletes and women's sports. Andrea Brimmer, its CMO and a former athlete, committed more than 45% of the company's sports marketing budget in 2023 to women's sports.



As an industry, we've mistakenly operated under the impression that intent is where solutions live. We've since learned, from the world speaking to us loud and clear, that impact supersedes intent. That means moment-to-moment tactics will never create the impact you want. If the existing industry approach was enough, we'd have created much more change by now.

As we turn a corner as an industry toward true DEI focus, we recognize that progress starts with long-term commitment and is nothing without it; if you don't have a long-term plan, you don't have a plan at all.

Giving depth and marking tangible progress in diversity isn't a monthly celebration. It requires work, planning, goal-setting, partnership and accountability. You'll know you've achieved success when Women's History Month, Pride Month and Juneteenth don't feel like obligations or surprises, but rather opportunities to celebrate and commemorate the diverse ecosystem you have carefully crafted.

Recommended articles
https://www.adweek.com/agencies/true-inclusion-long-term-commitment/

To Drive Macro Business Changes, Think Micro

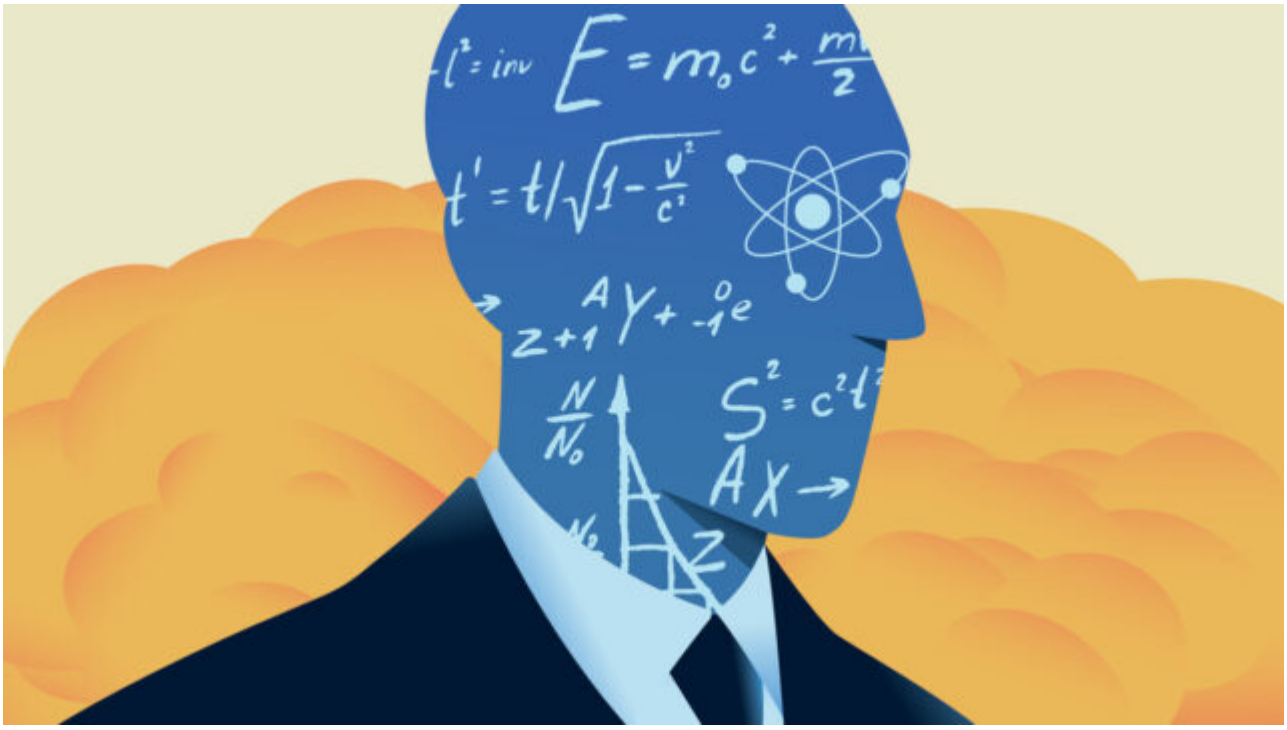
> Experience ADWEEK House at Cannes, June 16-19. We're celebrating 45 years of reporting with Now and Next—a creative opportunity for brands to define who they are and their future in the industry. Register .

How do you turn a ship when thousands of tons of water are pressing on the rudder creating a force far greater than the ship's engines can withstand? This was the seemingly impossible challenge solved by the wonderful engineer, Buckminster Fuller, in the 1940s.

The answer was something surprisingly small. A six-inch piece of metal, a tiny rudder, attached to the big rudder and applying just enough pressure to make it turn. So the little rudder turned the big rudder and that, in turn, began to move

the ship. This engineering marvel was named the “trim tab.” A tiny element that, when applied at the right place in a system, will have an outsized impact.

As brand teams strive to deliver their strategies in 2024, it’s easy to get swept up in the notion that big changes require equally large processes. And while big initiatives are often necessary and powerful, we mustn’t overlook the power of the micro shifts that, in the case of the trim tab, can turn the ship around.



That said, we are all guilty at times of succumbing to the pressure to make big bets to drive growth in a tough business environment. But big bets require big investments and can bring similarly big risks. In drawing inspiration from the trim tab, businesses can locate their places to disrupt the system to have an outsized effect.

Such “trim tabs” exist across all complex systems (businesses included) and locating them can have a huge positive impact. Just as trim tabs change the flow of water, so we need to change the flow of information, money and power.

What success can look like

New technology can bring about these changes in flow. Just as Photoshop changed the way we processed images—aiding sales of Macintosh computers along the way—so generative software such as Stable Diffusion or ChatGPT will alter the way images and text are generated, with implications for both creativity and staffing.

Ozempic and other diet drugs will affect healthcare by reducing the number of obese people, but also, potentially airlines, as they have to carry less weight on take off. Even innocuous technological innovations, such as the Oyster card on London's Underground network enable easier travel and, importantly, effective planning as travel flows can be more easily evaluated.

Technological change tends to operate by changing processes. But what if we simply change the processes themselves? Often process interventions are even more subtle, yet further reaching.

We all know about changing the defaults, for example, where people were automatically opted in, rather than automatically opted out, on pension provision in the U.K.. This changed participation from 36% to 71%, meaning that 400,000 more people were enrolled in a pension than would have been previously. This led to over £114B in pension savings over 10 years and reduced savings gaps across income, occupation and age groups.

Researchers have also shown that by changing the order in which various options were presented when specifying a new car, buyers spend more €1,482.37 per car. Introducing a five-point checklist at Johns Hopkins reduced the incidence of infections in a type of intravenous catheter that goes into the heart from 11% of cases to zero, a simple process change that they estimated saved 43 infections, eight deaths and $2M

in costs.

In all of these cases small, relatively innocuous changes, have produced big effects. When looking for potential small changes within your organization, you need to apply a level of discipline to your approach. There are behaviors you can adopt so, as we head into planning for next year, you can resist the pressure to focus only on big bets and think small instead.

How to locate your own ‘trim tabs’

By looking for some of these leverage points (places within a complex system), you too can locate a small shift that can lead to big changes.

Listen to the system

Lean into internal and customer feedback. Engage employees at all levels for their insights into where small changes can lead to improvements. Often, frontline employees have valuable perspectives on pain points and opportunities. Analyze customer surveys and pay attention to recurring requests or complaints that could highlight a leverage point.

Wheels within wheels

Sometimes the most powerful effects are seen when one process feeds into another (just as when the trimtab movement feeds into the rudder, which feeds into the ship). Look for linked processes as you can benefit from leverage effects, magnifying your initial effort.

Go pattern-spotting

Use statistical tools and trend analysis to identify patterns that may suggest leverage points. For example, identifying a feature that significantly improves customer retention can be a leverage point for overall growth. Conversely, removing a bottleneck can unleash new opportunities.



Embrace controlled experimentation

Small-scale tests and pilot programs aren’t just a good way of testing campaigns or product innovations. Apply the same “test and learn” mindset in new areas such as internal ways of working and other organizational redesigns. Asking willing teams to test some new approaches and theories is a good way of making them active and engaged participants in the planning process.

While we may not all possess the engineering prowess of Buckminster Fuller, every organization harbors the capability to seize upon the small, to deliver big change. Though not all of us want to turn the ship around or set a new course, we may still want to enjoy a better journey.

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Don’t Let Trends Distract You From Connecting With ‘Unreasonable’ Customers

> Announcing! Brandweek is headed to Phoenix, Arizona this September 23–26. Join us there to explore the future of marketing, discover cutting-edge strategies and network with the best in the business.

Today’s marketing so often fixates on the latest trends, chasing the next novel concept—I can’t be the only one fatigued by endless conversations and articles about AI and its impact on our work. While machine learning undeniably accelerates mechanical processes and provides quicker access to enhanced consumer data, marketers should pay equal attention to the extensive research that has given us deeper insights into emotional intelligence—the “why” behind consumer behavior.

Yale psychologist Dr. John Bargh explains that human decision-making operates beyond the boundaries of conscious rationality and emphasizes the significant role of subconscious and preconscious processing in shaping our perception of our surroundings and influencing our choices. I’ve found that marketers have trouble accepting this concept because it challenges conventional beliefs and runs counter to our personal experiences.

That misunderstanding isn’t all that surprising, according to Dr. Bargh; he notes that we seldom recall instances where we were unconsciously influenced, leading us to believe heavily on our sense of rationality. Consequently, we tend to assume that others operate under the same rationality, affecting how

we engage and communicate with them. But, as marketers, the danger of clinging to an outdated perspective of human behavior leads to flimsy consumer research and even worse consumer messaging.

To connect with customers and gain insights into their decision-making processes, it's imperative that we shed our bias toward assuming rationality, both in our customers and ourselves. To emphasize this notion, I like to use the word "unreasonable" to identify a more modern understanding of consumer behavior based much less on reason than we typically think. Here, I identify a few basic principles of the unreasonable consumer mindset and how marketers can apply them to study and communicate with their audiences more effectively.



People consume their beliefs

According to University of Toronto's Dr. George E. Newman, people involuntarily assign an intangible value to things that are meaningful to them. From Tom Brady's sand to Scarlett Johansson's used tissue and Robert Downey Jr.'s chewed gum, that value can be well beyond the functional usage of the

thing itself. Strong brands generate a similar kind of power—consumers value strong brands much more highly than their functional utility.

Whatever your product or service, consumers assign added value to that thing depending on the psychological need they're trying to satisfy. The need could be belonging, by choosing a brand that helps them "fit in," or maybe stability, by choosing a brand with a feeling of nostalgia. The key to creating this value is uncovering the "unspoken truth," the underlying consumer motivation or need. Then, identify what your brand stands for—a single-minded idea that fulfills the unspoken motivations or unmet needs. If done successfully, you'll have a brand with intangible value above and beyond other brands, maybe even providing pricing power.

People will act to reinforce their self-image

One of the strongest underlying motivations for any human is centered around a person's self-image. We humans spend most of our days thinking about ourselves. We're concerned that people are talking about us, or we're concerned that they're not thinking about us at all.

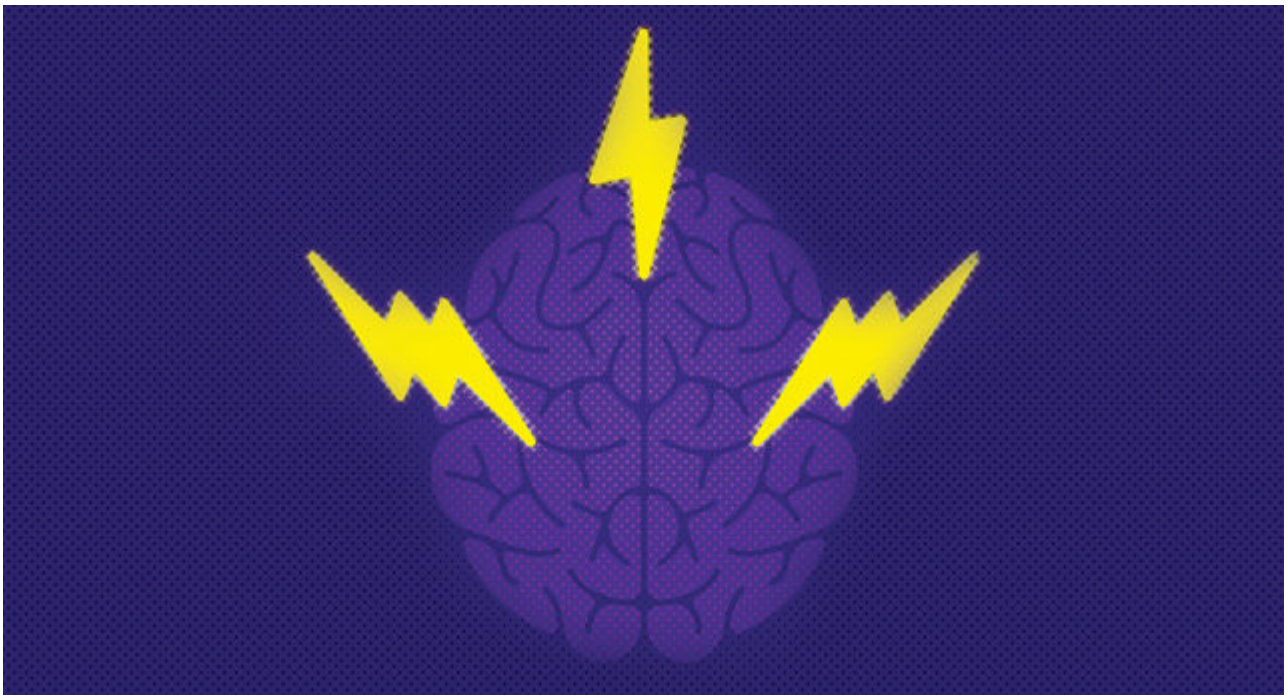
Remember this when crafting your brand's expressions. Too often, we encourage people to love our brand, but consumers need to see the brand through their own experience. A brand should be crafted in a way that allows them to love themselves and reinforce their own self-esteem. Think about the defiant, cult-like loyalty of Diet Coke drinkers or the way Jeep has become a lifestyle.

This becomes increasingly important during inflationary times. UC Irvine's Dr. Tonya Williams Bradford suggests in her research that being emotionally connected to a brand, where a consumer sees the brand as a part of them, makes them less likely to trade out of that brand for a cheaper version of it.

The advice here is simple. Make sure your brand's expression is congruent with how your audience wants to see themselves. Do they need to see themselves as powerful? Smart? Open? In control? Youthful? Unique? Creative? If you can't identify how your brand connects with someone's self-image, you have some work to do.

Context affects experience

Context can affect someone's literal experience of an event—or trust of a company or industry. Dr. Tiffany Barnett White from the University of Illinois notes that the most effective way for a disruptor to erode trust in long-time industry leaders is to alter the context of someone's experience by illuminating category "crimes," creating an opening for a new way of doing business. Dr. White says that if done effectively, this positioning can erode trust in the leaders and rack up trust points for your disruptive brand, citing how Ally Bank's 2009 launch campaign effectively poked holes in the practices of traditional banks.



Whether you have an inherently disruptive brand or not, take control of the context of your competitive set, even if it might mean leaning into the negatives about a category. And, because context is so critical, it means that marketers must

pay attention to anything and everything that might influence their customer's perception, even though the customer might say that it doesn't matter.

While it's easy to get sucked into the latest tech trend, shiniest new platform or cultural phenomenon, marketers should keep their attention on deciphering the emotions and motivations that guide consumer behavior—on why people do what they do. If we come to an understanding that the people we're selling to are inherently unreasonable, we'll be better prepared to create brands that more effectively engage and connect with them.

Recommended articles
https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/dont-let-trends-distract-you-from-connecting-with-unreasonable-customers/

Thanks to Gen Z, Deeper Connections Will Become the Currency of the Future

> Don't miss Commerceweek, February 28–29 in NYC, to explore the technology and trends fueling commerce. Get strategic insights from leaders at The New York Times Advertising, Turo, TikTok and more. Register.

There are two types of ecommerce: empty and connected.

Empty ecommerce gets you to checkout fast but gives no reason

to return. Connected ecommerce adds value emotionally, materially or both while delivering the same seamless purchase journey.

Why is connection important? Because Gen Z are social shoppers. They use social and websites for inspiration, think highly of influencer and peer recommendations, and expect businesses to take a stance. To be social is to be connected.

For the next era of ecommerce, how businesses connect with customers will determine if they are driven by near-term transactions or lifetime customer value. Here are the five engines that fuel organic brand love, as well as examples of companies that know how to leverage connection to create real customer engagement among Gen Z and other audiences.



Strive for that 80%

Great customer service solves problems, but Gen Z prefers to solve their own. Most (88%) customer service journeys start in self-service, and 52% of Gen Z won’t buy from a brand with bad self-service.

Chewy anticipates this desire by centralizing FAQs, order

status and 24/7 agents on their app and site. When self-service is exhausted, Chewy’s agents serve as an extension of the brand values. They send bereavement flowers after a pet’s death. They answer calls and emails warmly, ready to earn trust and deliver results.

This dedication to service is partly why Chewy’s net sales per active customer grew almost 15% to over $500 in 2023. Eighty percent of people feel emotionally connected when problems are solved, and Chewy goes beyond.

Be inspirational

More than half (51%) of Gen Z use sites as a source of inspiration. Taking advantage of this inspirational intent calls for rich storytelling and exceptional UX writing. From product descriptions to product photography, all content should work to communicate why the product satisfies the customer’s needs.

Mammut, an outdoor apparel company, stands out among competitors with their art direction and product storytelling. The brand weaves rich video and shoppable images in landing pages, putting the product in the context of its use. Their product pages are built to meet customer needs instead of just offering sterile technical documentation. Mammut successfully puts its product in context, using visually compelling content that reflects where its customers aspire to be.

Recognize the value

Gen Z is the most likely to make purchase decisions based on values and principles. Pangaia, a “material science brand masquerading as a fashion brand,” weaves sustainability, innovation and a higher purpose into its ecommerce journey. Inspired by Gen Z and Gen Alpha, their business model sells sustainable apparel in the short term and B2B textiles in the long term.

The site is garment-forward, connecting each garment with a sustainable textile and story. Though a smaller brand, their focus and approach indicate a new class of brands that are sustainable from the start. In a world where greenwashing, pinkwashing and the like are being called out, brands like Pangaia have a real place to shine.

The paradox of choice

In a market of infinite options, Sourcerie does it differently. Instead of selling a marketplace of skincare, they sell personalized skincare routines backed by over 300,000 reviews.

Most Gen Z (93%) consider reviews in their purchasing decisions; by starting review-first, Sourcerie bypasses that barrier to purchase. They pair curated recommendations with UI language that explains the accuracy of matches. This knocks down another barrier to purchase: confidence.

Sourcerie’s approach leverages the contemporary expectation of social validation with personalization to deliver a service that is often mired by confusion. This value-add, in a world of TikTok and brand ads, restores a feeling of authenticity to the skincare realm.

Real recognizes real

A brand’s community impacts how 92% of Gen Z feel about it and can lead them to purchase more often. With this in mind, Gen Z favorite Telfar took the opposite approach to other luxury fashion brands—they engage in conversation with their community. Their response to bots and resellers scooping up their iconic shopping bags was to create a Bag Security program that allows consumers to preorder the in-demand bags.



The community is present at every touchpoint. A Telfar shopper can be featured to promote drops, or a communal favorite can be featured as a model. This dedication to community has created results to the tune of $7 million for a single product drop.

The numbers are excellent because this kind of authenticity can’t be faked. It takes an acute awareness of the community’s lived experiences. Real recognizes real.

Strategically using these five tactics will be the difference between earning mere short-term gains and increasing customer lifetime value. The businesses that graduate from empty to connected ecommerce will not just survive but thrive in this shifting commerce landscape. As the market evolves and Gen Z’s influence grows, deeper connections become the currency of the future.

Recommended articles
https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/gen-z-deeper-connections-currency-future/

What to Do When You Lose Your Biggest (and Only) Agency Client

> Subscribe to Adweek's Europe News Update for trending news, inspiring creativity and strategic insights every Thursday.

It was my first "real" vacation since the pandemic. On the morning of day three, I got a text from the CMO of a client of mine for the past thirteen years. My only client, in fact. I managed a team of 120 people who were the brand's digital AOR.

"Can u talk tomorrow morning?"

The call came, and it was swift. The details are unimportant, save for the fact that the brand was consolidating all its agencies under a single holding company, one to which we did not belong. Thirteen years of partnership terminated, accompanied by six months' notice and a transition period.



I kept asking myself: How could they do this? They love us! Our work is so, so good. I've known some of our clients for over a decade. I've been to their homes, I've met their children. We were partners! Not the typical client/agency relationship. It was like a divorce between two people who still loved each other.

After the initial shock and denial period, I had to shift into the acceptance phase and create a plan to move forward. If you're going through the same thing right now, I encourage you not to beat yourself up and to do the following five things.

Be as honest as possible with your team

Everyone will have tons of questions and you won't have all the answers, and that's ok. But the more honest you are, the more you will be trusted to do what's right. Consider weekly status meetings with the team, as well as weekly update emails to your management and finance people. Everyone will (or they should) appreciate it.

Mourn the loss

It's ok to cry. But consider putting some time boundaries around the pity party—it shouldn't go on for months.

Transition with dignity

Transition in the most professional, thorough and honorable way possible. Insist that your team aggregate all necessary materials, document everything and treat everyone on the new team with respect, even if they don’t show you the same.

Have a senior-level project manager oversee the entire transition operation, as it requires more rigor than you may think. You owe all of this to your clients, your team, the work and everyone’s reputation. It won’t be fun but just do it.

Scenario plan immediately

Everything takes much longer than you think it will or should. For example, finding new jobs for team members within the agency or the broader holding company. You will end up reaching out to other team leads, discipline leads, agency directors and resource managers—which all takes time (and multiple meetings).

Also, pitching new work to staff the team against can take months, so move quickly (and get your Business Development team involved asap).

Lead by example

Some days I was better at this than others. Some days all I could do was watch pottery videos and do the massive jigsaw puzzle we had in the center of our office. But I finally realized that the team was watching me do this and that it was unprofessional and full of self pity. So, I focused on moving forward, working hard and finding new things to celebrate. Again, some days were better than others.



What was next for me? Stay and be moved to a new account? Be assigned to a bunch of business development pitches? Leave and go to another agency?

An incredible opportunity presented itself. It’s exciting, hard and terrifying all at the same time. I don’t believe in adages (turn lemons into lemonade and all that) but I can say it’s true that when one door closes, another one opens.

Recommended articles
https://www.adweek.com/agencies/what-to-do-when-you-lose-your-biggest-and-only-agency-client/

A Gen Z Marketer’s Playbook for Engaging Advertising

> The evolution of digital marketing isn’t slowing down—and neither should you. Connect with a community

> of brand pros and content creators at Social Media Week to learn how to keep pace with the trends, challenges and technology. Register now to save 35%.

Gen Z consumers are notoriously ad-averse, with 99% hitting “skip” on ads and 63% using ad blockers to avoid advertising. So how can brands grab their attention in 2024?

As a Gen Zer who works in advertising, I want to share insights into how we view ads. It’s not as simple as Gen Z being turned off by ads. We’ve just lost interest due to the lack of innovation around how we see ads today. Marketers need to evolve their strategies, frameworks and creativity to keep up with a constantly changing generation.

Turn-off signals in ad copy are disruptive

Brands often sell intangible assets through advertising. Gen Z consumers want to know what tangible things you are selling and why they should choose your product over other brands.

We as marketers have created this world of advertising that only we understand, but our work is created for people outside our bubble. There is a disconnect between marketing and audiences.



When the ad starts with “You should buy this!” or “Are you looking for the next…,” these are immediate turn-off signals: phrases used in ads that tell the viewer this is an interruption and should be skipped. Evolving the way marketing speaks to audiences is key.

Some of the best ads don’t have monologues and instead grab attention with visual creativity, while keeping the product or service the focus. Say goodbye to persuasive monologues and hello to innovative ways to communicate.

Customer experiences are key for brand credibility

It’s hard to trust corporations, knowing that their main objective is to generate revenue. Gen Zers tend to believe an ad based on what their peers say about it.

Three words come to mind when deciding what products to buy: convenience, culture and cost. Is the product convenient? Is it going to give social capital? Is it affordable?

Often what secures the purchase is seeing what others are saying about it. Brands have an opportunity to leverage this tendency by building a strong community that advocates on their behalf.

Gen Z communities are eager to know about the latest products, discovering them through viral videos that pique interest and invite participation. Gen Z is curious to know if the product works but is also excited to participate in something that their peers are doing on social media.

These two things often lead to proving that the product works in the eyes of Gen Z. Because that viral video has generated thousands and sometimes millions of customer-experience stories, that validates the product's credibility and increases trust and potential to purchase.

Brand values matter as much as the product

When building loyalty, practice your brand's purpose consistently. Be more than your products. Advertise who you are just as much as what you sell. The brand's character is more than the logo, color scheme or catchy slogan.

Culture is the most relevant topic on Gen Z's mind, so if you're trying to get our attention, being present in culture is a great way to start. Some brands strategize staying relevant by following social trends, but there is an opportunity for brands to do more and be more in culture.

[embedded content]
In 1995, Nike created the "If You Let Me Play" ad as a part of the "Just Do It" campaign targeting sexism in sports. In the ad, Nike addressed the benefits of women being accepted in organized sports in a culture where organizations thought otherwise. In this example, Nike leaned more into its brand purpose to address a major issue of the late '90s. The "Just Do It" campaign became one of its most memorable to date.

How does a brand reflect its values in the marketing space? By marketing them. Brands can become more visible to Gen Z if they spend more time in culture expressing their values. Culture is a great way a brand can gain social capital that it

can use to become a leader.

Great creative is remembered

Creativity is key. Most brands don’t have a memorable creative style. Gen Z wants to experience brands through campaigns. This can be captured in a specific videographic style that is consistently used, such as all ads in a campaign having a futuristic setting. These are exciting ideas that Gen Z would remember and look forward to.



When people encounter your brand, it should not feel the same compared to competitors. Apple and Samsung both make smartphones, but their creative marketing approach couldn’t be more different. Brands can operate more as architects, building brand experiences that are unique and differentiating for Gen Z through advertising.

Brands can learn a lot from Gen Z’s favorite artists, TV shows and fashions, which are constantly evolving and creating unique experiences that connect us. Marketing can do the same.

Recommended articles
https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/gen-z-marketer-playbook

-engaging-advertising/