

Why Marketers Need To Stop Following Trends And Start Advancing Movements

CMO Network



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If you want to build a great brand, stop following trends. While there are short-term benefits to riding the coattails of another brand's innovation, that approach won't lead to significant growth. Great brands spot powerful ideas on the horizon that resonate with their core values, and they discover ways to *advance* those ideas. That's the secret of growth: being proactive by anticipating or leading cultural movements.

Trend following may be the simplest and most direct way to attract attention and raise short-term revenue, but following someone else's lead usually causes a company to stray from its own brand identity and ultimately to create products and services that are inconsistent with its values and culture. Trend following also encourages novelty seeking which kills off true innovation. If you simply jump on bandwagons, it's unlikely you'll ever chart a new course.

Connect with the larger culture in ways that lead to more sustainable influence and impact. Try to determine where society is heading and explore how your brand can add value in ways that are aligned with that direction. And as you forge ahead, make sure you remain true to your brand and what it stands for and maintain the emotional connections you have with your customers.

Lead the Charge

[Lady Gaga](#) not only maintains the emotional connections she has with her fans but also rewards them for their loyalty. She's a pioneer in the movement toward personal celebrity engagement, and she's redefining what it means to be a recording artist. When she sensed significant developments at the intersection between new communications technology and the democratization of the music and film industries, she recognized an opportunity to connect more directly with her fans. She was among the first people to tally one billion views on her YouTube channel, and as of last year she had more than thirty-four million followers on Twitter and more than sixty million on [Facebook](#), making her one of the most-followed celebrities and the biggest advocate for personal celebrity engagement.

Last year, she upped the ante even more when she invited some of her most faithful fans to release the long-awaited track list for her new album, *ARTPOP*. She asked them to paint the song titles on a building wall and tweet a photo of one of the titles every five minutes, which she later re-tweeted—giving the spotlight to her dedicated fans. And then she did something else that no recording artist had ever done: She released *ARTPOP* as a mobile phone app and launched it with extra music, films for each song, games, fashion updates, chats, and more. The *ARTPOP* app moved her relationship with fans to a new realm and further advanced the personal engagement movement in music culture.

Look Into the Future

To become a great brand, practice recognizing patterns among different sources and deciphering what they mean. Identify powerful new ideas by using the following strategies:

1. Scanning. After scanning the media, cultural developments, and other great brands in and outside its category, Maclaren created the BMW Buggy, a high-performance stroller, to appeal to the growing number of stay-at-home dads and dads in same-sex marriages. As a result of its observations, the stroller-maker discovered new consumer attitudes and behaviors and found a way to engage with them.

2. Listening. Any marketers worth their salt keeps their ears tuned to social media chatter, but it takes a specific kind of listening to identify cultural influences that can be advanced into a movement. Carefully listen to your social networks, noting who's prompting a discussion and asking why. Topics continually change, but the communities that influence topics and those communities' underlying values tend to be more constant and have more impact. For example, The Harlem Shake is long gone from cultural hit lists but INDMUSIC, the network that generated all its buzz, remains a powerful force in the monetization of independent music.

3. Forecasting. Some of the developments that can affect your business the most may come from fields unrelated to yours. Had those in the rental car market been monitoring developments in mobile technology, they might have seen how their business model would be seriously disrupted by Uber and [Zipcar ZIP NaN%](#). Search the databases of firms like Cassandra Daily and PSFK that forecast trends. Look for common themes among innovations and consider how your business might put these new developments to work for your customers.

By seeking to advance cultural movements, you gain a real understanding of what's going on in society and can consider whether the role your brand is playing should remain the same or how it should change.