

# Lady Gaga Shows Companies How To Make A Comeback

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[Lady Gaga](#) is back. After the disappointing performance of her [ARTPOP](#) album in 2013, most people were ready to write the former pop and dance music sensation off. She no longer made the headlines and record and concert ticket sales failed to impress. But today, Lady Gaga is back in full force. Her latest album, [Joanne](#), sold over a half million copies in the U.S. in a few short weeks; she's headlining [Coachella](#); and she has been named the new face of [Tiffany and Co.](#) Her resurgence to popularity offers valuable lessons to companies that have suffered from a downturn.



Lady Gaga's performance during the halftime show of Super Bowl LI re-introduced the pop star to millions of people. (Credit: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/Getty Images)

Lady Gaga took five actions that show companies how to make a comeback:

## 1. Acknowledge the need to change.

As the saying goes, "The first step is admitting you have a problem." While Lady Gaga didn't make a public announcement that she knew she had to make a change, it's pretty clear that she experienced an awakening of sorts and made a deliberate decision to change course. In an [interview](#), she talked about how she decided to do

things differently. Explaining her approach to *Joanne*, which is named after her aunt who died at age 19, Lady Gaga said, “This transition in my career is me embarking on a new journey with Joanne in my heart, and I’m hoping I can connect with the world on a deeper level.”

Sometimes it seems companies have a hard time admitting they need to make a change. By holding onto legacy systems, people, and ways of thinking, they aren't able to make a clean break with their past. But as Lady Gaga shows, clearly setting your sights in a new direction is the first step in getting there.

## **2. Introduce innovations that leverage your core strength.**

Lady Gaga took on new projects that offered something new while at the same time leveraging her most powerful asset, her voice. Her jazz collaboration with legendary crooner [Tony Bennett](#), which produced an album (Bennett's second #1 of all time) and PBS special televised concert, was a brilliant move — not only because the unlikely pairing piqued people's interest to check her out, but also because it showcased her impressive vocals. It was the exact type of innovation she needed to offer a new kind of value *and* reinforce what made her so exceptional in the first place.

Companies could use a similar type of approach to jumpstart their businesses. Many companies recognize that they need to stop doing what Albert Einstein famously described as insanity — doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results — and start innovating. But oftentimes they pursue new developments that reach beyond their capabilities and/or detract from their uniqueness. Instead, they should follow Lady Gaga's lead and look for ways to leverage their core strength in new ways.

## **3. Target your appeal.**

It was pretty clear that if Lady Gaga wanted to return to pop star status, she would need to appeal to people beyond her loyal fan base. So she set her sights on winning over mainstream America. That's why singing the national anthem at Super Bowl 50 and then delivering the game's halftime show performance this year were critical comeback moments for her. Both performances introduced — or re-introduced — Gaga to millions of fans. Her appearances on such a grand stage re-established her connection with a mainstream audience and she crafted her performances to remind people of the positive traits (like fun, inclusive, and spectacular) that they previously associated with her while avoiding the negative ones (like weird).

In the same way, companies aiming to stage a comeback should identify the people who they need to reach out to. And in most cases, it's not the biggest audience like Super Bowl viewers — it's usually a specific group of key influencers who can be reached with targeted efforts. Companies should strategically design communications and experiences to connect with the people who are critical to their future success and to emphasize the values and attributes that those people find appealing.

## **4. Prompt reconsideration with high-profile, on-brand actions.**

With attention at such a premium these days, just getting people to notice you is half the battle for any undertaking. Many companies use stunts to get people's attention — think Red Bull's stratospheric space dive — but most of these tactics end up seeming self-serving to today's skeptical consumers and the attention they generate is usually short-lived.

Lady Gaga took a different approach — she got people to pay attention to her by surprising them in a very purposeful way. The Sound of Music medley she performed at the 2015 Oscars and the tribute to David Bowie at the Grammys less than a year later formed a powerful one-two punch in getting people to take notice because the performances challenged people's notions of her and also demonstrated the range of her talent. They made an impression that lasted well beyond the events.

Companies can borrow a page from her playbook and stage high-profile events or activities that convey the key

brand message.

## **5. Build a loyal community before you need it.**

The last of Lady Gaga's actions was actually the first she took — one that started well before the comeback, actually at the beginning of her career. She cultivated a community of fans and followers by engaging with them personally and regularly. Her "Little Monsters," as they're called, number in the tens of millions — but it's not just their size that's impressive. Their support for and loyalty to Lady Gaga exceeds what most celebrities enjoy. They actively promote and defend her, they stood by her during the downturn of her career, and they have fanned the flames of her revival with social posts, videos, public gatherings, and most importantly record and concert ticket sales.

Lady Gaga enjoys such devotion from her community because she was first devoted to them, spending hours engaging with them personally through social media, calling out to them individually and inviting them on stage during concerts, and advocating for people and causes that are important to them. Companies should seek to develop emotional, personal, sustainable relationships with customers from the get-go. If they wait until they start losing appeal or suffer a setback to engage with people deeply until they start losing appeal or suffer a setback, it will be too late.

Lady Gaga's appeal may remain polarizing — people may love her or hate her — but [Everyone should recognize the successful comeback Lady Gaga has made and seek to learn from it.](#)

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