

The Business of Fashion

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Case Study

The Essential Brand Marketing Guide

By Diana Pearl
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Building emotional, even inspirational, connections to a product is more critical than ever in fashion and beauty. In today's hyper-competitive, crowded environment, marketing strategies that make brands stand out and stay culturally relevant need a mix of old and new tactics.

Executive Summary

Today's brands need to be more than just a label on a sweater or a logo on a shopping bag.

It's in part a reflection of the deepening convergence of fashion and beauty with everything from sports to music to pop culture generally, enabling brands to touch so many different aspects of consumers' lives. In turn, consumers have high expectations of the brands they choose to let into their lives — whether it means aligning around social and political causes or amplifying certain lifestyles or aspirations.

“The brand is where actual value is created, and where customers feel that there's a value because there's more to it than just what's in the box,” said Tiffany Rolfe, global chief creative officer of advertising agency R/GA.

Beauty and fashion products with recognisable, emotionally resonant brand identities behind them, often synonymous with a lifestyle or persona, will stand out. Ralph Lauren's visual embrace of Americana, from cowboy-style Western to New England prep, for example, permeates every aspect of the brand, from its ad campaigns to its brick-and-mortar stores to its products. That identity has turned it into the quintessential American fashion brand.

But how can a brand stand out in today's fiercely competitive, crowded market, as customers have become choosier about their discretionary purchases? This case study shows how brand marketing holds the key to creating the essence of a brand: by conveying a brand's values and identity to consumers. It's not about a one-off runway show or pop-up, rather an ongoing trajectory reshaped over time. Effective brand marketing not only builds an identity, but also creates communities of loyal customers and even opens new markets and other opportunities for business growth.

In some ways, it's easier to invest in building a brand earlier on in a company's lifespan — there's minimal overhead, fewer employees and less oversight on spending. Founders with a strong intuition can execute on their vision and take risks that end up paying off. Take J.Crew: The brand was able to establish itself with its visual-heavy catalogues when it was still a family-run business in the 1980s and 1990s. Once it took on a majority investment, that vision began to falter. (Though it later resurged under the direction of chief executive Mickey Drexler.)

The challenge is to maintain that vision even as other factors begin to play more of a role in a business' direction. Companies that are under pressure from investors or shareholders to shore up the balance

sheet may find themselves de-prioritising brand marketing investments, whose impact isn't always immediately evident in near-term sales growth. But the strongest brands can see the bigger picture and know that investing in brand marketing is worth the time and cash.

Recent years have seen many brands lose that vision as they prioritised performance marketing. The boom in performance marketing, which began in the early 2010s, was driven by the rise of more novel and cheaper marketing methods, where brands pay for their marketing initiatives based on the results, such as clicks or conversions on social media and search. It was a slam-dunk way for brands to simultaneously acquire customers and build their businesses rapidly. Even today as social media ads become more costly and less effective, performance marketing is critical for fashion and beauty companies.

But as this case study shows, brand marketing too needs to be part of the mix to create closer, longer-lasting connections with customers, regardless of a company's age or size.

With seemingly endless products to buy, it's the brand that makes the difference. Consumers will spend upwards of \$10,000 on a Chanel bag not because the quality is so superior to its \$2,000 counterparts, but because of the strength of the brand.

“When you hear that brand name, you want a clear, focused idea and story to come into your head,” said Allen Adamson, chief executive of marketing agency Metaforce and adjunct professor at New York University's Stern School of Business.

Companies profiled in this case study are striving for deep, long-lasting connections with customers, as they strategise around in-person and digital events, social media and often old-fashioned advertising on TV, radio and billboards. French luxury label Jacquemus has written the playbook for modern brand building by demonstrating how to bring a brand's online persona to life offline. The story of another luxury label — heritage brand Coach — shows the importance of evolving and modernising brand identities to remain relevant. And two young brands — Dae Hair and Hill House Home — have proven the power of using community to build a brand in a short amount of time.

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History and Context

When Brands Come to Life



Tiffany & Co. continues to reap the benefits of the 1961 film "Breakfast at Tiffany's," which has created an aura around the brand's identity. Getty Images / Paramount Pictures.

The fashion industry has played a significant role in shaping brand marketing as we know it today. From runway shows to ad campaigns in glossy magazines to Hollywood product placements, the industry has for years proven to the world how a brand can be much more than what appears in a shop window or is taken home in a gift-wrapped box.

A quick glance through fashion history reveals the power of a strong visual identity – Louis Vuitton's brown and tan monogram-covered print (launched in 1896), Gucci's horsebit (launched 1955) or Prada's triangle (launched in 1913). Brands have learned how to meld a whole range of sensory and emotional cues,

which evoke a certain lifestyle or ethos to ultimately create an affinity with shoppers.

Sometimes, the best brand marketing moments aren't even created by the brand itself. Think Audrey Hepburn outside of Tiffany & Co.'s Fifth Avenue store in "Breakfast at Tiffany's," a scene that continues to pay brand-building dividends for the LVMH-owned jeweller – in the revamped New York flagship, LVMH kept plenty of references to the film, including a "Breakfast at Tiffany's" menu selection at the store's cafe. And while advertising has certainly helped, the decades-long success of Chanel No. 5 benefitted from its cultural cachet – Marilyn Monroe famously said the fragrance was all she wore to bed at

night. It's not just Hollywood that plays an indirect role in marketing: UK brands such as Barbour and Burberry are granted permission to use the British Royal Arms emblem on labels and packaging to indicate a product's use in the Royal household.

Beyond luxury, the art of brand marketing has taken shape in the mass market, also drawing on emotional and aspirational resonance. Though Nike first captured consumer attention with its "swoosh" logo and waffle-soled running shoes in the 1970s, it has since built a pool of elite sports stars to help its products be associated with high performance, even among customers who might only ever aspire to run a few minutes on a treadmill or shoot a few hoops with friends.

Exhibit 1: Brand Loyalty: Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

Combined, the six components of brand loyalty are critical for building long-lasting emotional connections with consumers.



Source: BoF analysis

Nike has even created personas around products, tapping basketball legend Michael Jordan to put his name behind a sub-brand. Bold ad campaigns have also helped give Nike a reputation for being willing to have a point of view, even if it means stoking wider cultural debates, like its 1995 campaign featuring HIV-positive runner Ric Muñoz and its 2018 ad starring NFL player and activist Colin Kaepernick.

Hearts and Minds

What fashion brands have learned over time is that marketing must tap into customer emotions to build affinity and loyalty. But as with all matters related to human emotions, that is easier said than done. Consumers are processing many subjective sensations and environmental cues every time they encounter a brand.

And amid all these encounters today, a whole new generation of customers is creating a broader interpretation of marketing through ongoing dialogues with brands. Gen-Z has played a big role in amplifying social media as a key brand-building channel. US makeup brand E.l.f., for example, took off after it experimented with TikTok during the platform’s early days, creating catchy songs that users would add to their own videos. Danish apparel label Ganni has become the poster child for “Scandi style” at home and abroad not just with its products, but by highlighting its loyal, social media-savvy followers whom the brand dubs #GanniGirls. For bold brands like these, devoted fanbases can be a goldmine.

“If you know who you are, have a real purpose to exist, and are showing up in a way that is standing out or disrupting a

category, you can build a brand incredibly quickly and make an impact,” said Ruth Bernstein, chief executive of Yard NYC, a creative agency that has worked with brands like Rothy’s, J.Crew and Athleta. “It is not about time; it is about impact.”

Challenge

The Right Message, in the Right Place and at the Right Time

Making an impact through marketing has become easier in some respects, harder in others. With more channels than ever for brands to vie for consumers' attention, brands have a plethora of building blocks with which to create their marketing strategies. But they also can never stop identifying novel ways to make their brands stand out as social media fuels consumers' appetite for more and more content.

For much of the 2010s and the early 2020s, brands have leaned on performance marketing methods to reach consumers. They have used tactics like affiliate marketing, where they offer a commission to influencers, traditional publishers or other businesses that market their products, or search marketing, where brands pay Google and other search engines for the traffic directed to their site. In 2023, US brands are expected to spend \$72.33 billion on social media ads; by 2027, that number is expected to reach \$85.31 billion, according to data from Statista Market Insights.

Performance marketing also began giving companies a clear understanding of whether such advertising was delivering anticipated financial returns — for starters, they only paid for the results received. In addition, data tallying the number of clicks and impressions in analytics software provides near real-time insight into customer behaviour and spend. That sort of immediate transparency wasn't something that traditional marketing metrics had ever been able to provide.

But the dangers of relying too heavily on performance marketing started to emerge. By the time the 2020s rolled in, costs were rising. There were also growing risks as brands left too much of their marketing in the hands of third parties like influencers who didn't always have the depth of knowledge of brand codes and vision as in-house teams. And social media platforms could be unreliable, changing their algorithms seemingly on a whim, making even organic content a risk.

Another jolt for brands reliant on performance marketing happened in 2021, with the widespread lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. Consumers were no longer confined to their laptops and phones at home to connect with brands. Online marketing was still important, but so too were all the in-person events and shopping touchpoints that brands had put on hold during lockdowns.

In some circles, this might have seemed like a victory for brand marketing, which was often sidelined by performance marketing. But the reality then and now

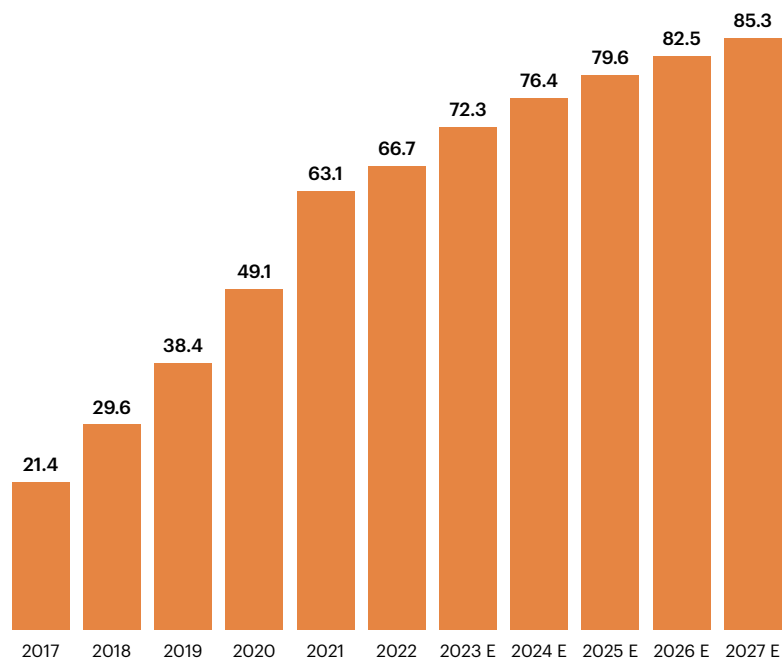
is that a new brand marketing playbook is needed in recognition of the reality that brand marketing and performance marketing must now work in tandem.

Timing and speed are important, said R/GA's Rolfe. "That's what is going to allow your brand to stay relevant," she explained. "If you try to keep it so rigid and are too precious with it, it will not be able to adapt as the world around it changes."

Exhibit 2: A Decade of Splurging on Social Media Ads

Brands will continue to invest more and more in performance marketing to reach consumers quickly.

US social media ad spend (2017–2027 E)
USD (billions)



Source: Statista Market Insights

Strategy

The Anatomy of a Brand

01 — Capturing a Brand's Personality Online and Offline



Simon Porte Jacquemus' personal story is at the foreground of Jacquemus' brand identity. Jacquemus.

Building an independent fashion brand is tough, standing out in the French luxury market, which is dominated by decades-old, conglomerate-backed brands, is even harder. But Simon Porte Jacquemus has managed to do just that.

The brand's climb was slow and steady until it set off like a rocket ship about five years ago. Products like its teeny-tiny Le Chiquito and Bambino bags not only became viral sensations, but set industry-wide trends. It's gained insider and consumer attention for events like its runway shows, set in spectacular locations ranging from wheat fields to salt marshes. In 2022, it reached \$200 million in sales; it's well along the path from buzzy emerging label to bonafide powerhouse.

At the centre of that growth, however, is a personal story that's been effectively conveyed to consumers.

"It's a guy from the south, who lost his mother, who used to love fashion, coming with ideas and dreams," said Bastien Daguzan, the brand's chief executive, referring to the brand's personal connections to Jacquemus' life story. "So he decided to make this dream happen."

Founder in the Foreground

Jacquemus the person and Jacquemus the brand share much more than a name.

The brand is intrinsically associated with Jacquemus' personal life. There are references throughout the brand to the South of France — its 10th anniversary fashion show was staged in the lavender fields in Valensole, France, a quintessential Provençal location, an hour's drive from his hometown of Marseilles. This influence is seen throughout the assortment as well: Jacquemus' Spring 2015 collection was inspired by La

Grande-Motte, a beach resort the designer frequented as a child, and products like dresses featuring beach umbrella-esque stripes and extra-wide-brimmed straw hats provide more nods to the region.

"Strong codes around the Mediterranean lifestyle are a key determinant element of Jacquemus," said Daguzan, who joined Jacquemus from Paco Rabanne in May 2022 while Jacquemus continued as creative director. "We are not afraid to put the codes at the centre of the company."

In luxury, Jacquemus was at the forefront of harnessing social media. The designer uses Instagram not just as a channel for the brand, but as a personal page, too. He shares life announcements, such as the adoption of his dog Toutou or his engagement to his partner, Marco Maestri, and documents simple day-to-day moments, like a selfie in his office mirror or a plate of cherries he ate for breakfast.

“He understood from the beginning the role of Instagram and how to interact with the community in a really poetic way,” said Daguzan. “It’s sharing a lifestyle and creating desire around that.”

As consumers bought into that lifestyle, the brand has leveraged not only the social media presence of Jacquemus himself, but also the followers of the brand.

“People want to be there, not just to buy. ... They want to be part of it,” said Daguzan. “Twenty-five percent of the customers who buy Jacquemus take a picture with [the item]. They are the main ambassadors.”

Jacquemus the brand is also about continuity. It imbues its in-person, offline experiences with the same day-to-day authenticity and storytelling as it does online.

“They are taking what is in fashion — the idea of, ‘If you know, you know’ to ‘If you know, it’s because you were there,’” said Daniel Gonzalez, creative director at Remezcla, a creative agency and digital publication focused on Latin American culture.

The brand has put its own twist on showing collections off the traditional fashion calendar, hosting events in unique, exclusive locations that

Exhibit 3: Jacquemus’ Runway Repertoire

The French brand has developed a reputation for staging envelope-pushing fashion shows, set anywhere from the Palace of Versailles to a beach in Hawaii. Here is a comprehensive look at the brand’s runway shows to date.

<p>2013 October 6, 2013: Jacquemus’ first runway, showing its SS14 collection</p>	<p>March 28, 2019: Opening of the café Citron in collaboration with Caviar Kaspia in Paris</p>
<p>2014 February 24, 2014: Fashion show for the AW14 collection ‘La Femme Enfant’</p> <p>September 23, 2014: Fashion show for the SS15 ready-to-wear collection in Paris</p>	<p>June 24, 2019: The 10th anniversary fashion show for the SS20 ‘Le coup de Soleil’ collection in the lavender fields of Valensole in Provence</p> <p>November 30, 2019: Celebration of Jacquemus’ 10th anniversary with ‘La Braderie,’ the brand’s first physical retail event in Paris</p>
<p>2015 March 3, 2015: Fashion show for the AW15 collection at Paris Fashion Week</p> <p>September 29, 2015: Fashion show for the SS16 collection ‘Le Nez Rouge’</p>	<p>2020 January 18, 2020: Fashion show for AW20 ‘L’Annee 97’ collection at Paris La Défense Arena</p> <p>July 16, 2020: SS21 fashion show collection ‘L’Amour’ in wheat fields outside Paris</p>
<p>2016 March 1, 2016: Fashion show for the AW16 collection ‘La Reconstruction’ in Paris</p> <p>September 27, 2016: Fashion show for the SS17 collection ‘La Santons de Provence’</p>	<p>2021 July 1, 2021: AW21 fashion show collection ‘La Montagne’</p> <p>2022 March 10, 2022: SS22 fashion show collection ‘Le Splash’ in the Moli’i Gardens in O’ahu, Hawaii</p> <p>May 2022: Immersive ‘Le Bleu’ pop-up installation in Selfridges, London</p> <p>June 27, 2022: AW22 fashion show collection ‘Le Papier’ at the salt marshes of Aigues-Mortes</p> <p>December 12, 2022: Fashion show for SS23 ‘Le Raphia’ collection in Le Bourget</p>
<p>2017 February 28, 2017: Fashion show for the AW17 collection ‘L’Amour D’un Gitan’</p> <p>May 12, 2017: Exhibition ‘Marseille Je t’aime’ at the Musée d’Art Contemporain</p> <p>May 14, 2017: Fashion show for the SS17 collection ‘Les Santons de Provence,’ part of the project ‘Marseille Je t’aime,’ for the OpenMyMed festival</p> <p>September 25, 2017: Fashion show for the SS18 ‘La Bomba’ collection at the Picasso Museum, Paris</p>	<p>2023 March 2023: ‘Jacquemus Obsessions,’ an immersive pop-up, in Galeries Lafayette in Paris</p> <p>May 11, 2023: Celebration of second ‘Été’ capsule collection with launch of Lake Como pop-up</p> <p>June 2023: Launch of Jacquemus’ pop-up beach boutique in St. Tropez</p> <p>June 26, 2023: Fashion show for AW23 ‘Le Chouchou’ collection at the Palace of Versailles</p>
<p>2018 February 26, 2018: Fashion show for AW18 ‘Le Souk’ collection. Jacquemus announces launch of menswear line</p> <p>June 26, 2018: First fashion show for menswear SS19 collection ‘Le Gadjo’ at the Calanques de Sormiou in Marseilles</p> <p>September 24, 2018: Fashion show for SS19 ‘La Riviera’ collection at Paris’ Italian embassy</p>	
<p>2019 February 25, 2019: Fashion show for AW19 menswear collection ‘La Collectionneuse’</p>	

“[Jacquemus] understood from the beginning the role of Instagram and how to interact with the community in a really poetic way. It’s sharing a lifestyle and creating desire around that.”

— Bastien Daguzan, Jacquemus CEO

contribute to the overall aesthetic around the brand. Settings include the Camargue salt marshes in the South of France (for its Autumn/Winter 2022 collection), a beach on the Hawaiian island of O’ahu (Spring/Summer 2022) or the gardens of Versailles (Autumn/Winter 2023). They’re usually set outdoors, as well, providing better light and a more engaging backdrop.

The brand’s experiences aren’t limited to invitation-only shows. Before branching into its own brick-and-mortar shops, it opened pop-ups within the walls of some of the world’s best-known department stores, including Galeries Lafayette in Paris (March 2023) and Selfridges in London (May 2022).

These pop-ups included over-the-top, surreal, playful elements for which the brand has become known. The Galeries Lafayette pop-up featured a giant version of its popular Bambino bag and a similarly large toaster with toast popping out printed with the brand’s logo. The Selfridges space, called “Le Bleu,” featured bright-blue installations themed around water, including a mock swimming pool.

The pop-ups also encourage customers to linger with, for example, a photo booth, flower stand and coffee shop. While the execution of each individual space varies, there are shared traits: bright, monochromatic features that photograph well for visitors’ social media posts and areas inviting interaction with the brand beyond purchasing clothes and bags, like a penny-arcade machine stocked with cups of popcorn.

In keeping true to its Mediterranean lifestyle roots, Jacquemus also engaged with local shoppers by, for example, holding a branded takeover of a beach in Ramatuelle, France, with bright yellow striped beach chairs and umbrellas in the summer of 2023, and opening pop-up shops in St. Tropez as well as Portofino and Lake Como in Italy.

As other digitally native brands are now realising, such distinct in-person experiences can cement a customer’s long-term affinity with a brand. Jacquemus’ ability to bring what made the brand pop online and social media into the “real world” has further strengthened its identity. As there are more channels than ever for brands to activate, consistency across those channels is key to building — and maintaining — a strong brand identity.

“Our lives are so digital and so disconnected; driving the power of something that happens in the real world is just that much more meaningful,” said Jon Haber, co-founder of creative agency Giant Spoon, which specialises in experiential marketing for brands from Stitch Fix to HBO.

In-person experiences have fuelled the fervour around Jacquemus, which the company believes will help it move further into the luxury market and build a wider customer base.

“We have a really great community [of] younger clientele and we love that,” said Daguzan. “But we also need to tackle a more classical luxury clientele in order to make the brand more long term. We cannot depend on one customer only.”



Jacquemus’ pop-up shops have launched in a variety of locations, including in Mediterranean towns such as Portofino, Italy. Jacquemus.

02 — Revitalising a Brand’s Personality With Authenticity

Coach’s 80-plus-year history is a story of a company that has rediscovered the value of its original self — a luxury brand rooted in New York City.

It began as a family-run atelier in Manhattan in 1941, making everything from handcrafted leather wallets to baseball gloves, which evolved into a stable of men’s accessories. Then, in the 1960s, it became more widely known for its women’s handbags. The business remained small even as its products were sold nationally in an expanding network of department stores. It was around the time that it was owned by Sara Lee Corporation in the 1990s, that Coach started to capture international attention, spurring it to go public in 2000.

It wasn’t long before Coach lost its way and its lustre as it followed a path that spelled decline for many of its American luxury peers, overextending itself in outlet malls, driving a cycle of never-ending discounts and a tumble in consumers’ perception of Coach as a high-end brand. All the while, European luxury players were growing, making it more difficult for Coach to keep up.

Change is now afoot. Coach, under parent company Tapestry, is trying to regain its place among the luxury elite. After years of lacklustre performance, its sales have begun climbing again, and it hit record revenue of \$6.7 billion in 2022, representing 73 percent of Tapestry’s revenue. Playing a part in its renaissance has been its ability to reconnect with its roots, through a brand marketing mix that has injected a modern edge to a traditional identity.

A Creative Approach

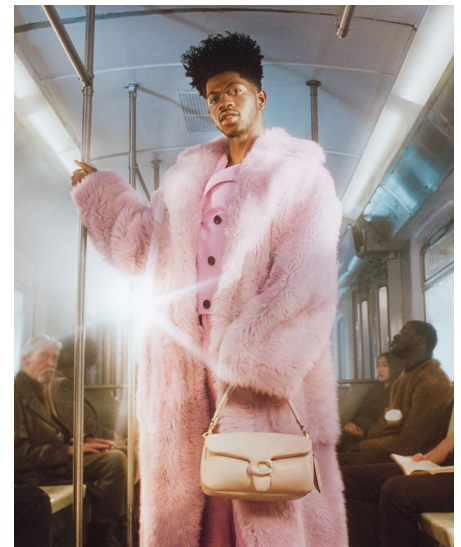
When Stuart Vevers joined Coach as its creative director in 2013, it was the start of a new era for Coach. His idea wasn’t to chase the popularity the brand once enjoyed by recreating the past, but to figure out its place in the modern market, he told BoF.

“Coach can be a genuine, authentic alternative to traditional European luxury,” said the British designer. “But it’s very important that we approach it in an authentic way, [that] we embrace the things that make us unique. Being an American house, founded in New York

City, that’s part of who we are and we are able to show up in a different way.”

Time was needed to bring this vision to full fruition and it wasn’t until 2020 that Coach’s new-old approach became clear. It launched its multi-channel campaign, Coach Forever, which featured clips like a 1970s-inspired short film starring actor Michael B. Jordan, musician and actor KJ Apa, and model Kaia Gerber in a newscast about animals taking over New York City, and Rickey Thompson shilling Coach wares in an infomercial.

Coach TV, which debuted in February 2021, was the next iteration. Similarly, the campaign featured lighthearted videos using local New York City haunts as the backdrop. Amid Covid-19 lockdowns, the campaign struck a chord with customers seeking an antidote to the prevailing sombre zeitgeist. With in-person events still on pause, the brand also showed its Autumn/Winter 2021 collection through a series of Coach TV videos.



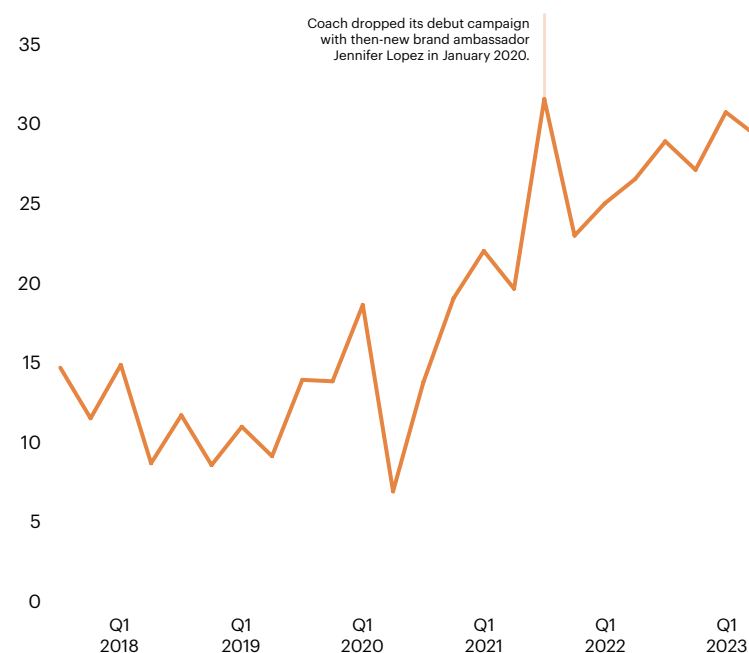
Coach has worked with celebrities such as Lil Nas X in campaigns that showcase the brand’s New York roots. Coach.

Exhibit 4: Coach’s Comeback

After undergoing a brand revamp, the company’s earned media value — a measure of word-of-mouth buzz — steadily climbed.

Coach earned media value (Q1 2018–Q1 2023)

USD (millions)



Source: Tribe Dynamics

public library location near Bryant Park, with a collection inspired by Vevers' early days in the city in the 1990s.

All this was done with careful collaboration with the marketing team, which is now led by global chief marketing officer Sandeep Seth.

"Sandeep and myself both enjoy disruption and change. That's where we connect the most," said Vevers. "In a way, it's giving that space to really partner, focus on where our strengths lie, and then come together and create something amazing."

Moving On

Coach's ability to evolve its brand identity will be tested again as it aims to become part of fashion's sustainability story. In April 2023, it announced plans to launch Coachtopia, a sub-brand that will promote circularity by creating new products from material scraps. It is a pivotal moment for the brand, particularly after a TikTok post went viral in 2021, revealing how it destroyed damaged and unsaleable goods. Coach

discontinued the practice shortly after, but not without reputational damage.

It is too soon to say what role Coachtopia can play in restoring its reputation. Particularly important for the Gen-Z consumers that Coachtopia aims to target, Coach's brand marketing will need to strike an authentic, purpose-driven note as a brand that, to date, isn't associated with sustainability.

To earn credibility in the space, Coach employs a tactic that younger consumers are increasingly asking for: allowing consumers a say in the production process. It consulted with its target demographic — Gen-Z — and hired partners like Gen-Z-focused consultancy Juv Consulting to bring their perspectives into the brand's creation.

That process will continue even after Coachtopia's launch, said Joon Silverstein, head of Coachtopia and senior vice president for global marketing, creative and sustainability at Coach. She added that in creating that two-way communication between brand and

consumer, Coachtopia will evolve as a community-centric brand. Its second collection, in fact, was created with the help of a team of student designers.

"We're opening the dialogue," said Silverstein. "We're in some ways, letting go of total control of the brand definition and saying that we're on a journey, and that we're involving our consumers in that."

Embarking on these forward-thinking projects while retaining core elements that have always existed for the brand has proved a successful formula. "There's a fixed and fluid part of every brand," said Bernstein. "The iconic products are what's fixed, but then you add fluid, the surprise, and they extend the expression and excitement. You keep that engine going, you keep it exciting."



Through sub-brand Coachtopia, Coach aims to promote circularity and earn credibility with Gen-Z consumers. Coach.

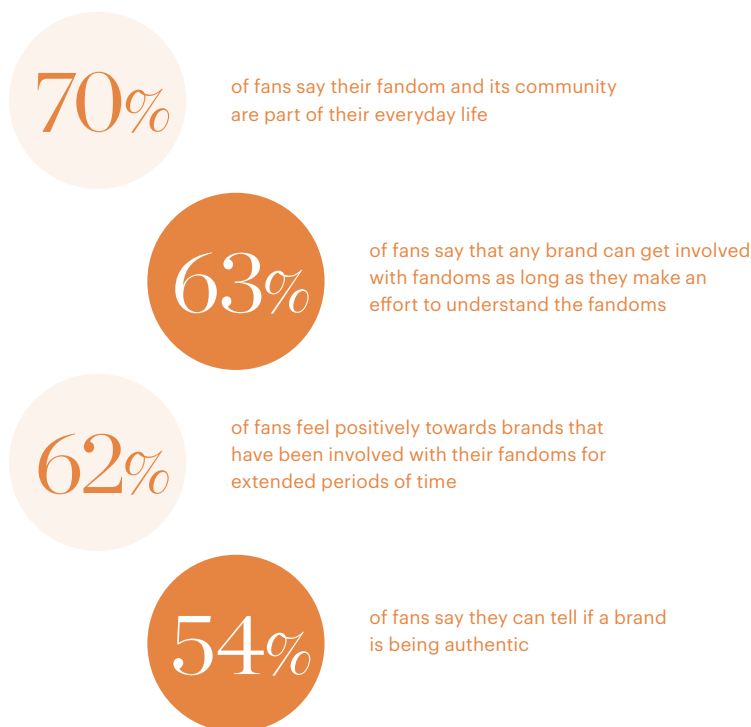
03 — Letting the Community Take (Some) Control



Hill House Home founder Nell Diamond, who grants freedom to influencers to define how they present the brand, says that community cannot be scripted. Hill House Home.

Exhibit 5: Of Fandoms and Followers

Global survey respondents reveal the role of communities and brands in their lives.



Source: Anatomy of Hype

One of the most critical shifts in brand marketing playbooks is the focus on community. No longer can brands be built using rigid, one-directional methods, like billboards or radio adverts. These days, a brand-building strategy is just as likely to be conceptualised and executed by customers than in a marketing department.

In some cases, a community emerges around a brand unexpectedly, for example, following a viral post on social media. The opportunity then for the brand is to decide how to leverage that moment for the longer term.

Take Hill House Home, a homeware company that began dabbling in apparel a few years after its 2016 launch, offering stay-at-home loungewear from its New York base. In 2019, it launched the “Nap Dress,” a garment which came in multiple styles designed to be comfortable enough for the couch but dressy enough for the everyday (the most popular, the “Ellie,” features a ruffled sleeve, tiered skirt and smocked bodice). It showed early indicators of promise, with a tartan-printed run selling out during the 2019 holiday season.

It was during the Covid-19 lockdown, though, that the dress went truly viral, as consumers craved a still-comfortable outfit that was a step up from their tie-dye sweatsuits. Sales for the dress shot up, and fans of the product dubbed themselves “Nap Dress Nation” — a

group of the brand's most loyal fans have created a Facebook group, which now has over 8,000 members. Founder Nell Diamond's own public profile has risen as well, with her Instagram offering another touchpoint for the brand, which has seen its revenue increase 300 percent for three consecutive years since 2020. Hill House now has a growing community of customers as well as an expanding portfolio of dresses and other apparel.

Power in Numbers

A community not only can support a brand, but also amplify its message, said Amber Fillerup Clark, a beauty and lifestyle influencer who founded her own clean hair care brand, Dae Hair. From the Arizona-based start-up's early days in 2020, Fillerup Clark had a targeted strategy to develop her brand through a national network of ambassadors — not only full-time content creators but also customers she sees are posting about the brand.

A cornerstone of her strategy is to get products into the hands of as many potential ambassadors as possible through a gifting programme. That way, when a product starts to generate interest on social media — as was the case with its Cactus Flower 3-in-1 styling cream, whose hashtag has nearly 12 million views on TikTok — potential ambassadors will already be familiar with it.

She also believes paying influencers for their help in promoting the brand is important. "For so long, brands' attitude was, 'We're getting free exposure already, why would we pay you?' That's where brands got it wrong, because that's exactly when you want to pay someone," she said, adding the amount varies according to the project they align on. "We want to support our supporters."

Today, the brand works with approximately 500 influencers a year and is one of Sephora's fastest-growing hair care labels, having closed an \$8 million funding round in late 2022.

In Control

While the founders of Dae and Hill House Home have followed different paths to community-building in some respects, they do have similarities in others, including how much and when to let their brand-builders be in the driver's seat.

At Dae, Fillerup Clark said the company will determine where and when a campaign with an influencer appears, but it will usually hand the rest over to the creator. That means the end result can be anything from a styled product shoot to an off-the-cuff unboxing video to a behind-the-scenes of a Dae campaign shoot. "[Influencers are] all in the place

we are because we're creative, so when a brand takes that away, it loses its fun," she said. "I just want it to feel natural for them." She said it also helps to ensure authentic messaging as well as longer-lasting relationships with influencers.

This echoes Diamond's views. "I don't think you can script or structure community. It's about actively listening to a group of people who might like your product, the early adopters, and then not getting in the way," she said.

But both entrepreneurs are also clear that ultimately, control over the brand's future rests with them, not the community.

"One of the difficult things about becoming a viral hyped brand is that people have a preconceived notion of who you are," said Diamond. "That can be incredibly positive, it can be neutral, and it can be like, 'Well, that's not for me.'"

Diamond personally leans into brand marketing just as much, if not more than the Hill House Home community. While she may have moved on from the early

days when she answered all the customer service emails herself, she still maintains a direct dialogue with customers. That's one reason why ahead of every major drop, she hosts a "Nap Room" chat on the brand's site where she'll livestream and answer questions about the new products.

And while Fillerup Clark consciously avoids being front and centre of Dae's branding — for example, her name doesn't appear on the brand's Instagram and few images of her can be found on the brand's feed — she has still infused the brand with her vision and personality, right down to packaging, with earthy hues inspired by the deserts of the US southwest.

Having a viral moment "might give you a quick buck for a year, but it's not going to give you a lasting brand," she said. "I didn't want to have my following to be a crutch for the company," she said. "I want it to be a big brand that in 10 years, is still in Sephora thriving, and I can feel really proud of it."



Dae Hair's packaging echoes founder Amber Fillerup Clark's vision and personality, with hues inspired by the deserts of the US southwest. Dae Hair.

Looking Ahead

Nowadays, it's clearer how brand marketing and performance marketing must coexist. As Seth of Coach put it: "What brand building does is creates an emotional space in the subconscious ... of the consumer. Then when someone is ready to buy the product, that's where performance marketing plays a role. Both are very critical, as long as you place the right message at the right place."

However, having expertise across this short- to long-term spectrum can be a challenge for brands and their CMOs, particularly if they have been heavily focused on performance marketing, according to Peri Hansen, senior client partner at recruitment and consulting firm Korn Ferry. Going forward, she predicted, more companies will seek out marketers who can strategise holistically about how to make their brands come to life.

"Increasingly, we're hearing from CEOs [who are looking for a new CMO], 'Let's find the person who can shape the experience, and the evolution of the brand will follow,'" said Hansen. It's less about finding a traditional brand marketer than someone who embraces all forms of marketing and ways to amplify what a brand is about.

Rapidly evolving technologies like generative AI will likely play a role. It is still early days for the technology — and the skills creatives need to harness the power of these tools, said Nima Abbasi, a partner at Maison Meta, a creative agency that teamed up with retailer Revolve in 2023 for a billboard campaign in California whose models and accompanying collection were all AI generated. At this juncture, he said, "There is a real lack of understanding of what you can do with generative AI, what you can't do and how you do it."

At the same time, brands should be cognisant that not all new technologies take off — in 2021, brands were rushing to get into NFTs and explore virtual fashion in the metaverse. Cut to today, the NFT bubble has burst and a mainstream embrace of the metaverse seems far off.

Events, too, will play an important role in this post-Covid world, as brands look to connect with customers in person. Haber said that brands should craft their event strategy to satisfy a number of factors: There can be small-scale events to build a presence in neighbourhoods or local areas, and then large-scale events to generate publicity at big-ticket events like SXSW in Austin, Texas.

Going forward, brands will need to look at their customers not as a group they're talking to, but talking with. Customers are a more visible part of a brand's story today than ever. Their images and videos populate social media feeds, their reviews are consulted before a new consumer makes a purchase and their loyalty can take a brand from viral hit to lasting success.

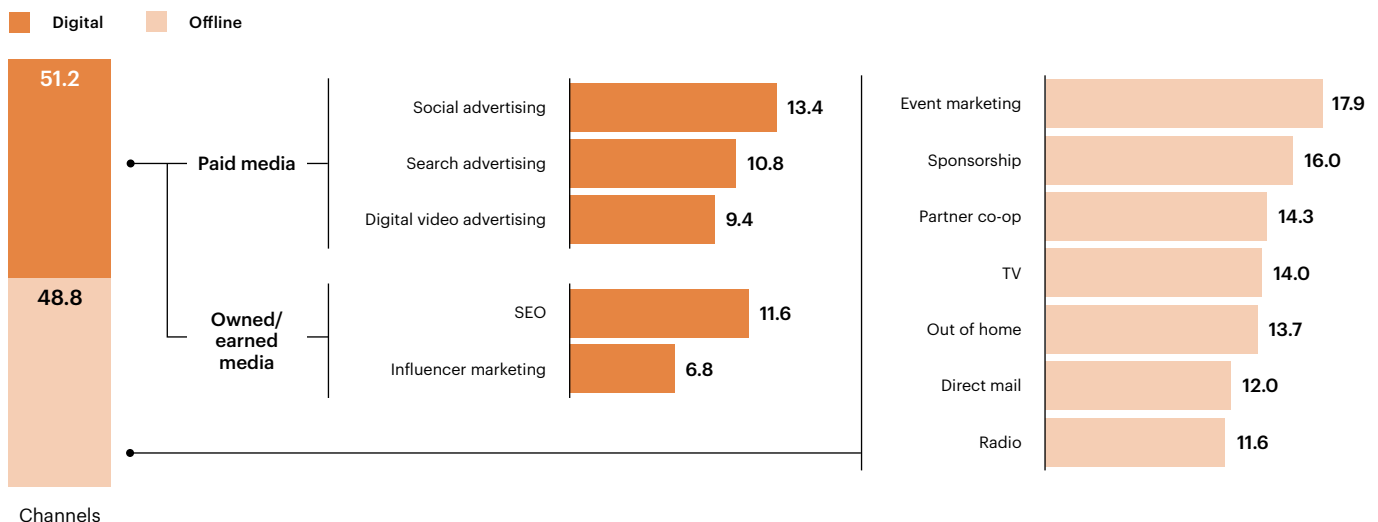
Becoming a true community should be seen as the ultimate goal in today's ecosystem — creating a brand that customers don't just want to shop from, but they feel they're a part of. "Community means that you've elevated from a product to a brand and now that brand means something to multiple people who want to connect with each other," said Sarah Engel, president of January Digital, a strategic consulting and digital media company. Put another way, when customers are as invested in the success of a brand as it is, that's where true loyalty begins.

Exhibit 6: Follow the Money

A Gartner survey of retail CMOs found that brands spend slightly more on digital advertising than offline formats, with event marketing, sponsorships and partnerships the most popular channels to spend on.

Retail CMOs' marketing investments by channel (2023)

Mean percent of budget



Source: 2023 Gartner CMO Strategy and Spend Survey

Further Reading

- The Business of Fashion, [The Complete Playbook for Generative AI in Fashion | Case Study](#)
- The Business of Fashion, [How to Build a Profitable DTC Brand | Case Study](#)
- The Business of Fashion, [How to Build an Independent Beauty Brand | Case Study](#)
- The Business of Fashion, [A New Model for Building Independent Fashion Brands | Case Study](#)
- The Business of Fashion, [Introducing the Brand Magic Index](#)
- The Business of Fashion, [How Brands Measure Buzz](#)

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