



THE RISE OF LIVING BRANDS

BREATHING LIFE INTO BRANDS
THROUGH HUMAN TOUCH
AND INTERACTION



Imagine a brand that doesn't just speak, but sings, dances and dreams.

A brand that lives and breathes as we do – true to its nature, but never afraid to take risks. A brand animated by the same stuff as us. Attuned to the world and the people in it. **A brand so alive and kicking it demands to be looked at and never forgotten.** A brand that has gone from a concept in a design studio to **real, authentic experience** in the world.

Welcome to the world of Living Brands.



“The best brands are more than just products or services; they're personalities, with their own character, values, and quirks. They're alive in the minds of consumers.”

**Sir Richard Branson,
Founder of the Virgin Group**



THE BATTLE FOR ATTENTION

How many brands have you encountered today? Chances are, a lot. We are living in an era of overload. At all times, we are influenced by the stories brands create, whether we like it or not.

On average, people are exposed to between 6,000 and 10,000 advertisements a day¹.

But a greater quantity of content does not necessarily equal a greater diversity of content. As audiences become increasingly tired of this sea of sameness, they may choose to ignore and filter their interactions with brands.

To capture attention, brands must break through this constant, repetitive noise, and build genuine connections with their consumers.

For decades branding has been centred on vying for our attention by interrupting the content we are paying intentional attention to, in the hopes that we will pay unintentional attention to a specific brand message. But **people don't want to be interrupted**, and increasingly have the ability to control and filter these interruptions². Nor do they want to be deceived by 'native ads'. But what can brands do instead to capture attention?

Is there a way for brands to transition from the annoying, meaningless interruption to an experience, and become the experience itself?

Plenty of nonsense statistics have abounded in recent years about the length of our attention spans, some even comparing it with that of a goldfish. However, human attention spans are not the fleeting, fickle phenomena that many would have us believe. Anyone who has worked hard on a project and found themselves in a 'flow' state, or binge watched a TV show, or become immersed in their favourite novel for hours at a time will know they have a capacity for sustained periods of attention if the content or activity is interesting enough.

The challenge for marketers is navigating "our incredible, magnificent power to ignore"³. This power is vital; because of it, we are able to tune in and out of conversations, become lost in thought, and ignore external stimuli if necessary. It is this that contributes to our ability to focus, and is not necessarily a symptom of a short attention span. Attention is a resource that is "always, necessarily being 'spent'"⁴. **What we're battling is not attention scarcity, but attention selectivity.**

¹Emilia Kirk, 'The Attention Economy: Standing Out Among the Noise' Forbes, May 2022 23.

²Afdhel Aziz and Bobby Jones, Good is the New Cool: Market Like You Give a Damn, Regan Arts, 2016.

³Tim Wu, The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads, Atlantic Books, 2017.

⁴ibid.

Pablo Picasso,
artist

**“Art washes away from the soul
the dust of everyday life.”**

AUDIENCE DIS-ENCHANTMENT

According to a report by Wunderman Thompson Intelligence, we are living in the age of re-enchantment. The pressures of work, grind culture, politics, war and climate change have caused people to feel numb to everyday experiences, and disillusioned by the possibilities brands can offer them. As Morten Albaek, CEO of Voluntas Investment, observes:

“The fact of the matter is that consumers don’t trust marketing”.

A 2021 survey found that more than 80% of people consider trust a deciding factor when choosing a brand, but only 34% trust the brands they use⁵. But it’s not all bad news. The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer found that brands were the most trusted institution globally with a 59% trust level⁶, beating NGOs, media, and governments to the top spot. However this is still below the 60% trust level. Here lies a golden opportunity for brands as people all over the world look to business leaders to tackle today’s challenges and offer the hope and enchantment they crave.

Audiences want to be transported, and have unique, awe-inspiring experiences. More than three-quarters of people surveyed say they “just want to feel something, to feel alive”, and 61% of people said they wanted brands to help them feel intense emotions. However, 70% of people surveyed said they couldn’t remember the last time a brand did anything that excited them⁷. Clearly, brands are not tapping into this latent desire for aliveness. But isn’t this the very essence of what a brand should do – understand what their target market needs or wants, and provide it? With limitless media and experiences on offer, ignoring the need for re-enchantment is only going to prompt consumers to look for something more compelling to spend their attention on.

If audiences want to be enchanted, brands are going to have to learn how.



⁵Christine Alemany, '3 Ways Marketers Can Earn – and Keep – Customer Trust', Harvard Business Review, June 3 2022.

⁶Edelman Trust Institute, '2024 Edelman Trust Barometer', January 2024.

⁷Wunder Thompson Intelligence, 'The Age of Re-Enchantment', May 23 2023.

“To be irreplaceable, one must always be different.”

Coco Chanel,
founder of Chanel



FEEL THE FRISSON

Frisson is derived from the French and means “a sudden feeling or sensation of excitement, emotion or thrill”⁸ It’s also known as aesthetic chills, or that moment when a piece of art or music hits home. If you’ve ever had goosebumps when listening to a song, or experienced a lump in your throat when watching a scene in your favourite series, then you’ve experienced it. It’s the moment when art seizes hold of your body and makes you feel truly alive – full of awe, despair, ecstasy and longing.

According to psychologists, we are most likely to experience frisson when our expectations are in some way violated. This is because our minds have evolved to anticipate and predict future outcomes based on what we know about our environment and what has happened previously.

When experiencing art, our expectations are governed by cultural norms and sometimes by the rules set by the creator. When these are

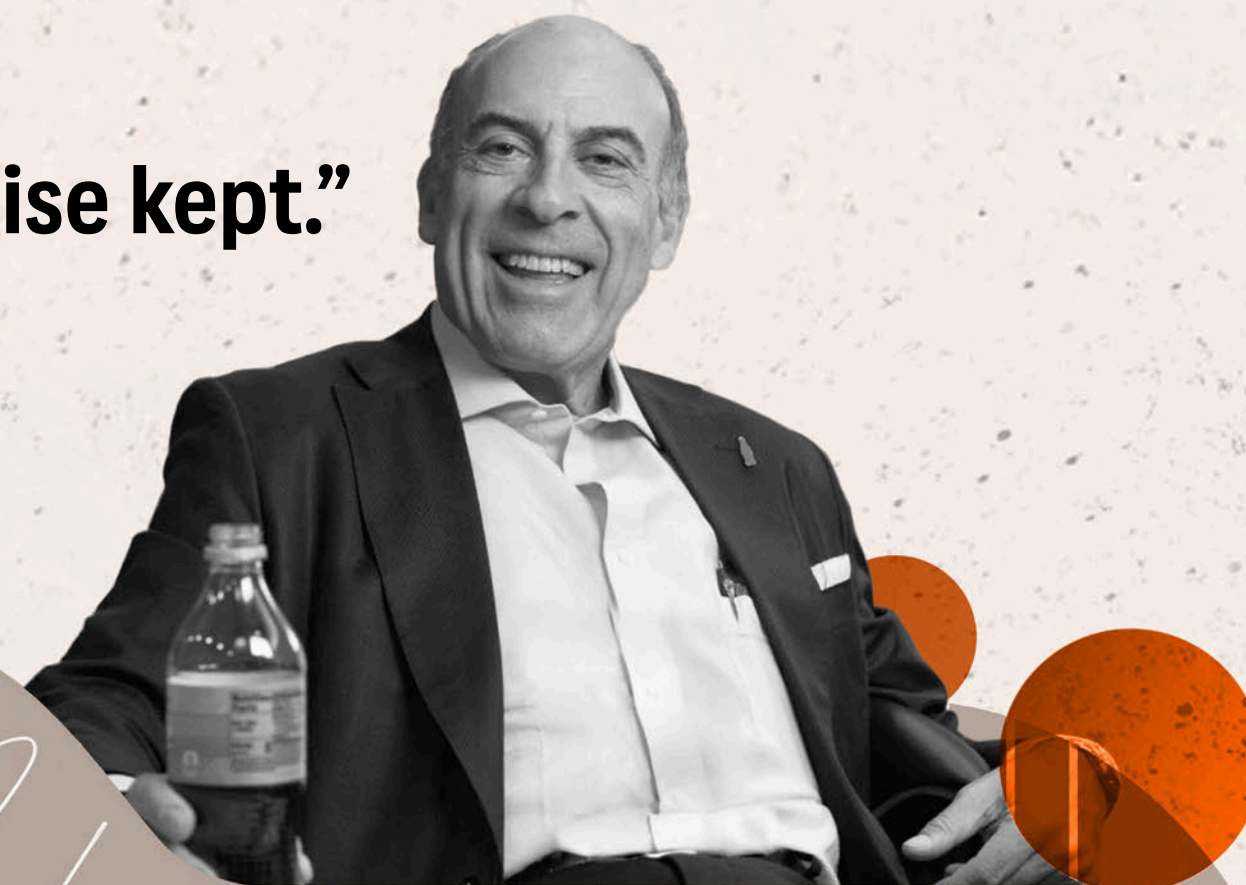
flouted, whether we like it or not, we stop – we sit up and listen. We feel that something important is happening. Something that demands our attention.

Is there a way for brands to draw on these aesthetic theories in order to capture the attention of their audiences? General consensus has it that “good ads hit you with novelty or familiarity, two things that pique your brain’s attention”⁹. However, in the age of re-enchantment, familiarity clearly isn’t going to cut it.


⁸Sam Gilberg, ‘This 715-song playlist is scientifically verified to give you the chills, thanks to “frisson”’ Big Think, August 22 2023.
⁹Shane Snow, ‘Science Shows: Humans Have Massive Capacity for Sustained Attention, and Storytelling Unlocks It’, Forbes, January 16 2023.

“A brand is a promise. A good brand is a promise kept.”

Muhtar Kent,
Ex-CEO of The Coca-Cola Company



THINK PURPOSE



We are starting to have an idea of what captures audience attention, but what makes a brand live for a long time? Increasingly, it is good brands that go the distance. That's good not as in successful but as in doing good in the world. You might say, good = good. These days, consumers have taken **Anna Lappé's famous maxim to heart: "Every time you spend money, you're casting a vote for the type of world [you] want to live in."**

And there are statistics to prove it. According to the 2015 Cone Communications Millennial CSR Study, **91% of millennials would switch to brands associated with a cause.** Similarly, the Fuse Gen Z Report on Social Activism and Cause Marketing found that 85% of Gen Z consumers are more likely to purchase from a brand that supports a cause over one that does not.

That means, **brand purpose is crucial for survival for the next two generations of consumers¹⁰.**

When it comes to brand longevity, failing to have a purpose or social conscience can have major implications. 42% of consumers said they would walk away from brands who didn't align with their beliefs, and 1 in 5 of these would never come back¹¹.

Brand purpose is the foundation of what a brand is and why it is necessary in the marketplace. **According to Accenture, a company with a carefully considered purpose is more likely to be a "living business", one that sees sustained growth through what it terms "hyper-relevance" – continually evolving to address consumer needs.¹²**

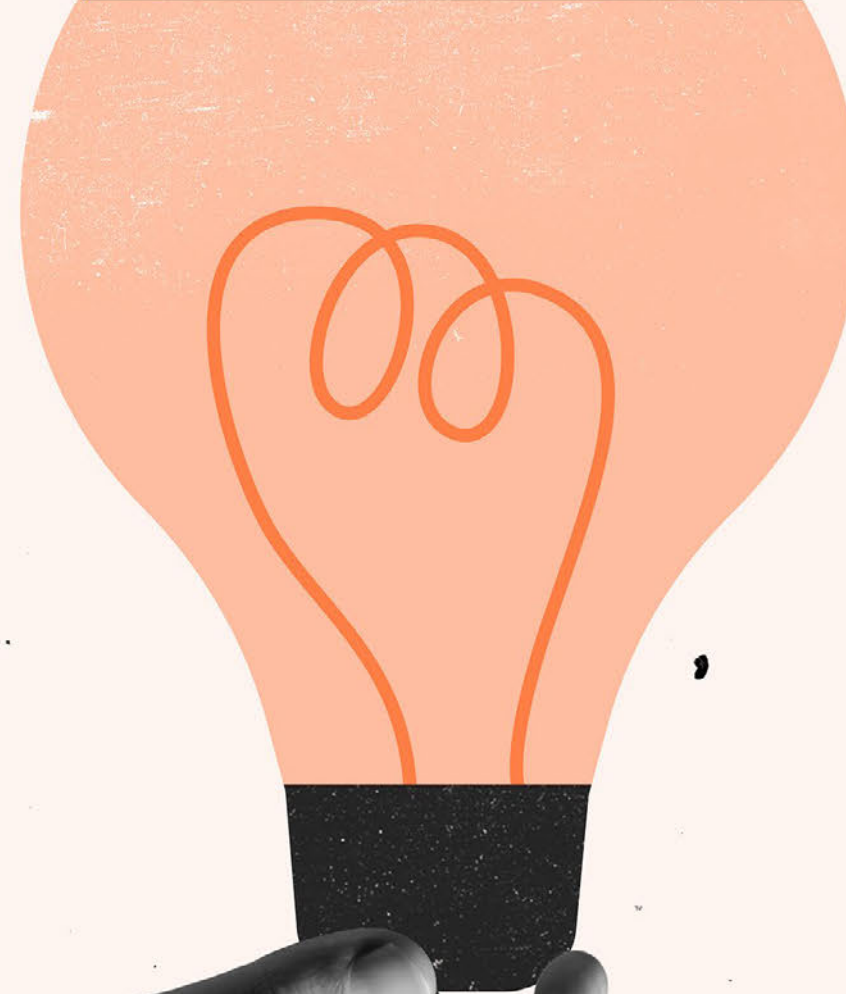
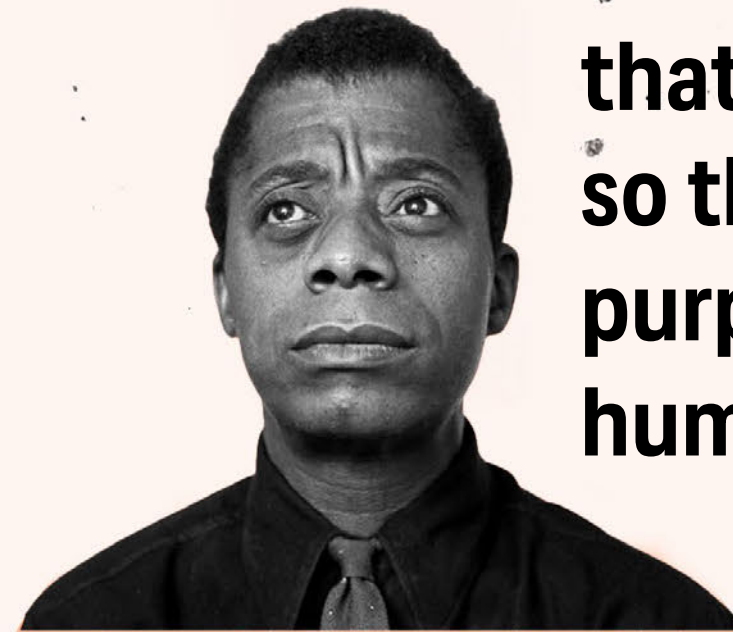
¹⁰ Aziz and Jones, Good is the New Cool.

¹¹ Accenture, 'From Me to We: The Rise of the Purpose-Led Brand', December 5 2018.

¹² ibid.

“The precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through that vast forest, so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place.”

James Baldwin,
writer and civil rights activist



BECOMING HUMAN



Increasingly, as an escape from fakery and phoniness, audiences are also looking for brand experiences that seem real and authentic.

For brands that can effectively demonstrate their ‘humanness’ there is a statistical advantage. According to a 2018 report, it is 20% more likely that these brands will be recommended by their customers, 19% more likely that they will be loved, and 17% more likely that they will convert compared to non-human brands¹³.

Perhaps most importantly, 57% of consumers say they would be more loyal to a brand that they see as human¹⁴. That’s a large proportion of people, and is relevant to all sectors, showing that the concept of ‘humanness’ should be top of the agenda when it comes to crafting a new brand identity.

Ultimately, customers reward brands that can demonstrate a sense of humanity, whether that is through their communications, their people (the literal ‘living brand’), their personality, or something else. And these brands are 1.9 times more likely to satisfy their customers¹⁵.

That means when it comes to long term loyalty, living brands are top of the league.

¹³ Nicholas Phelps, ‘How Human is Your Brand: The Importance and Impact of Human-Like Brand Communication’, Forrester Consulting and Braze, October 2018.

¹⁴ Phelps, ‘How Human is Your Brand’.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

**“A brand is a living entity,
and it is enriched or undermined cumulatively overtime,
the product of a thousand small gestures.”**

**Michael Eisner,
former chairman and CEO
of The Walt Disney Company**





THE AGE OF LIVING BRANDS

Audiences want difference. It is this difference which sets them alight and offers the re-enchantment they are seeking. It is this which turns an ad into a work of art that truly affects its audience and demands to be remembered. But audiences also want to trust the brands they build relationships with. As we have seen, humanity and purpose are top of the agenda when it comes to building relationships with generations of customers.

This results in an interesting paradox: to be a living brand we must be safe, but exciting? Dependable, but unconventional? Perhaps it is as simple as this: catch attention with difference, keep attention with trust.

Perhaps brand relationships should follow the pattern of human relationships. After all, we are all completely unique, but become familiar over time as we get to know one another. Think of it like falling in love – we meet someone and are utterly enchanted by them. Overtime, they become more familiar. It is then our relationship goes from one of infatuation to love.

But what do we mean when we talk about living brands? Put simply, a living brand appears to us as a living entity. After all, brands, like humans, are complex structures in

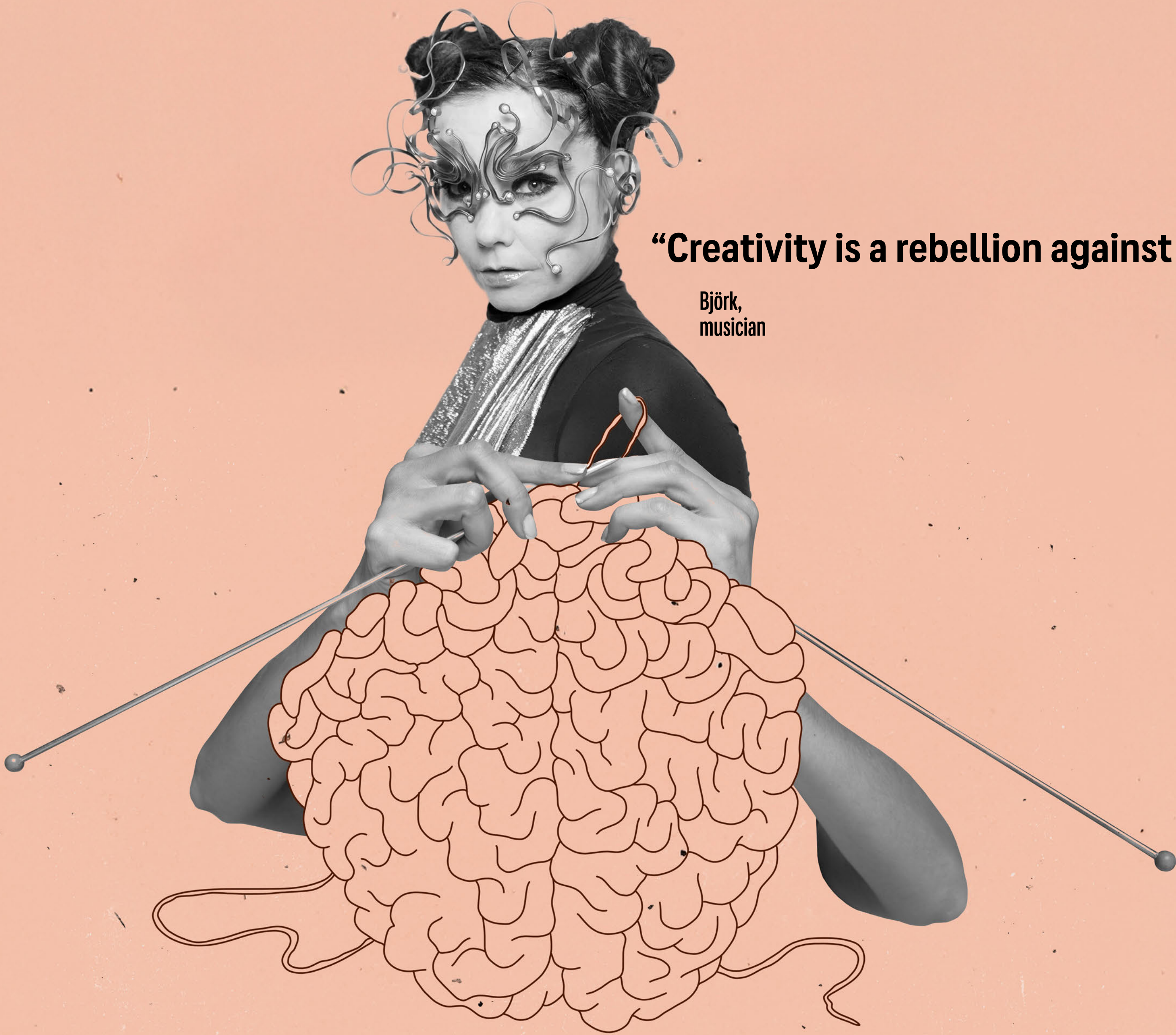
which numerous interdependent parts work together to sustain a state of being.

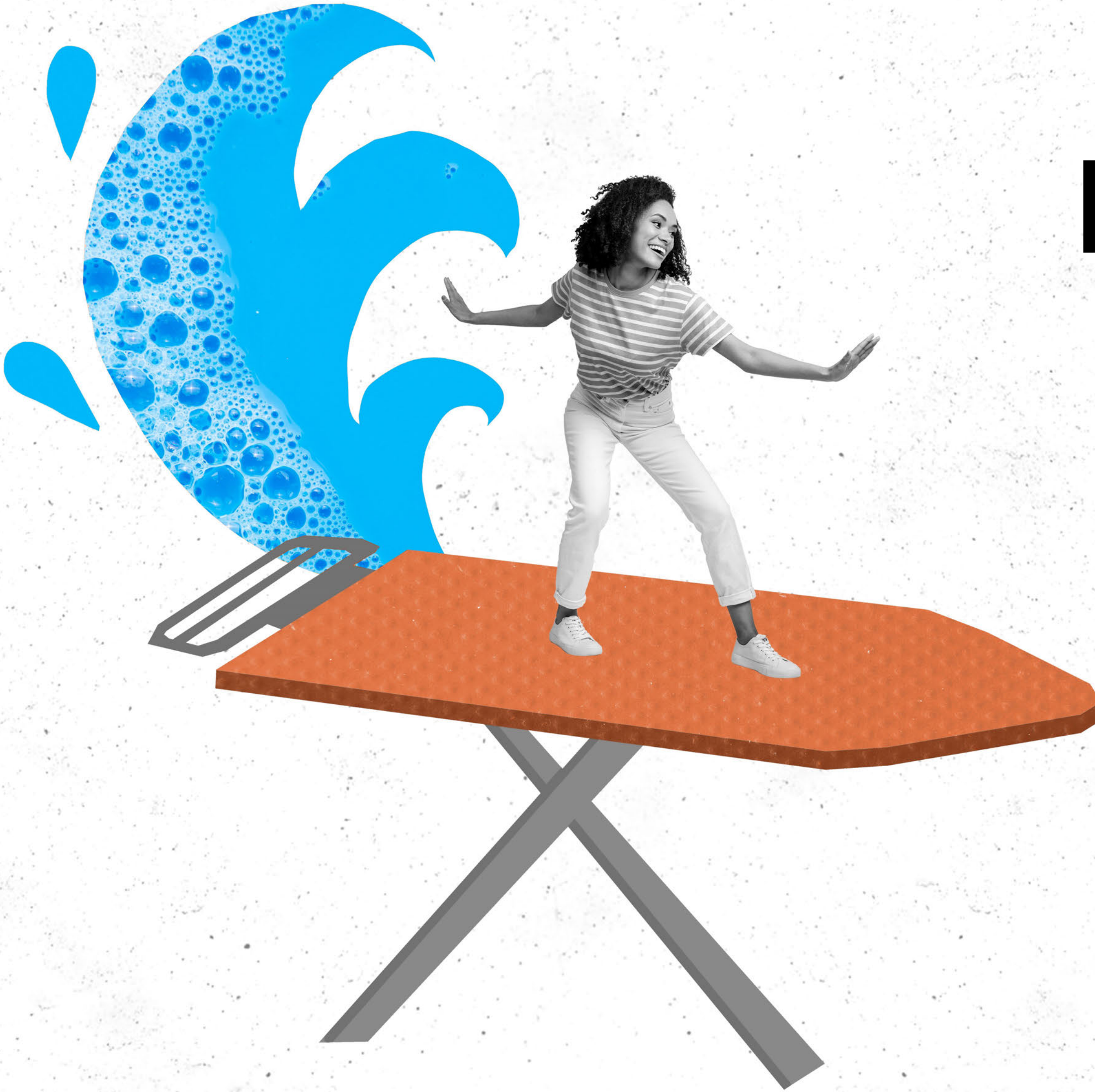
A successful brand will respond to stimuli, adapt to changing times, while maintaining a consistent sense of selfhood and personality, just as we do as we move through life.

Living brands seem real to their audiences. Both employees and customers feel the brand as a true, lived experience. And like life, these experiences do not always follow the patterns we expect. They are new, exciting, sometimes unpredictable. **These brands tap into the innate instincts and behaviours that govern human life, connecting with us on a profound and primal level. They think like us, and help us feel more like ourselves. More dynamic, more fulfilled, more alive.**

“Creativity is a rebellion against stagnation.”

**Björk,
musician**





LIVING, BREATHING, MAKING WAVES

In a world that chases authentic experience, living brands are the new marketing imperative. However, creating life is not a simple step-by-step process. Sometimes, you just know when a brand is living. And you certainly know when a brand is not.

A company may feel its brand ticks all the boxes, whilst still never creating that authentic, human experience for its audience. Likewise, a brand may barge in with nothing more than an unforgettable story and personality, and feel totally right and totally human from day one. For some, a sense of aliveness takes time to cultivate and build; for others, it is an irrepressible force.

After all, **every living being is unique, and so is every living brand.**



5 STEPS FOR CREATING A LIVING BRAND THAT CUTS THROUGH THE NOISE

In today's attention economy, it's no surprise that 7 in 10 marketers are preoccupied with winning attention. But visibility alone isn't enough. Another 64% are equally concerned about brand trust – and with good reason. Consumers increasingly base their decisions on whether a brand aligns authentically with their values.

**The real challenge isn't being seen,
but being believed.**

A successful brand doesn't sit on the sidelines of culture, but interacts with it, moves with it, and sometimes even shapes it. They are living brands – driven by purpose, powered by emotion, and built on real, human-to-human connections.

Here's how to create a brand that not only survives in today's chaotic landscape, but thrives in it.



1. UNDERSTAND ATTENTION

Attention is a resource, and these days consumers are much more careful with how and where they spend it. No one wants to waste theirs on content that doesn't offer value. And, crucially, we all have the power and ability to redistribute our attention quickly and easily. It's not about scarcity, it's about consumers becoming increasingly discerning and suspicious of brand messaging.

Long gone are the days when marketers could barge into a consumer's life and interrupt their day with a clever advertising slogan. **Now, there is choice; people don't need to look at your content. The trick is making them want to.** To seek it out because they know it will offer them something relevant, stimulating, and real. If your brand content is as exciting, experiential, and culturally-resonant as genuine content, you will go beyond being an interruption, and become the thing itself.

Think of your content as an invitation, not an intrusion. Tap into our innate curiosity and affinity for storytelling to draw people in, creating shared cultural moments that feel authentic, resonant, and true.

2. BRING BACK THE MAGIC

In an era marked by doomscrolling, hyper productivity, and existential uncertainty, audiences crave small moments of wonder.

They feel numb and emotionally fatigued, but that doesn't mean they are disinterested in what you have to say. To get through, brands need to spark strong emotions like joy, nostalgia and awe. Open your audiences eyes to a world of possibility – make them feel real again.

To create magic, the most memorable brands often borrow from the world of art and culture – think surreal visuals, poetic copywriting, or immersive experiences that transcend the transactional. Studies have shown that the deep emotions people feel when experiencing art, music, or storytelling are associated with memory-making, suggesting that by cultivating wonder, you may make your brand more memorable too.





3. SURPRISE YOUR AUDIENCE

Surprise isn't about shock value, but about disrupting expectations in a meaningful way.

When we sense the familiar about the unfold and then it doesn't, our brains light up. That moment of cognitive reorientation is attention-grabbing, and it's also the root cause of aesthetic chills.

Think about how you could subvert convention in your category. Is it humour where seriousness is expected, or intimacy when a large-scale view is the norm? Challenge the mental shortcuts that our brains use every day to save on time, and make your audience pay genuine attention.

Look to brands like Oatly or Liquid Death who have thrived by refusing to align with the other brands in their categories, but always begin with substance, not gimmicks. The surprise should be encoded in your brand's DNA, not tagged on for clicks.



4. STAND FOR SOMETHING

Purpose is no longer optional, but it's also not a performance. The problem today is that while plenty of brands claim to stand for something, too many conflate belief with branding. **When purpose is reduced to a campaign message, it feels hollow. When it drives decision-making, it inspires.**

If your brand is big on sustainability, that belief should shape how you plan, produce, and promote – not just what you say. Audiences can tell the difference. Their belief and trust in your brand will only be won through consistency, integrity, and real action.

Think of purpose not as layer of messaging on top, but the logic beneath every move you make. In a world shaped by uncertainty, people want to align with brands that have a clear stake in the future. Brands that lead with values are more resilient, more trusted, and less reliant on chasing trends. They don't need to reinvent themselves with every new campaign, because they already know who they are.



5. BE REAL

We live in a world of artifice and fakery, and brands have a responsibility to bring back some humanity into the conversation. But ‘authenticity’ is thrown around with such frequency by brands that are anything but authentic, the word has all but lost its meaning.

Honesty is key here.

In the age of synthetic content and generative polish, showing up with the right level of honesty, at the right moment, for the right reason, can be crucial. That might mean:

- Sharing the thinking behind a controversial decision.
- Publishing work-in-progress instead of only finished case studies.
- Admitting trade-offs when values conflict (e.g., sustainability vs affordability).

Studies have shown that communicators who share some weaknesses openly are more likely to resonate with audiences. This is a behavioural bias known as the Pratfall Effect – where imperfection increases likeability.

To tap into this phenomenon, try layering your brand with human markers, and avoid the temptation to capitalise on AI’s efficiency and polish. Doing so will only increase audience distrust and disengagement. **By all means, use AI as a tool, but always retain that innate mark of human to elevate the authentic connection you have to your audience.**



KEEPING UP WITH CHANGE

Over half of marketers also worry about keeping up with change.
The good thing is, this isn't about constant reinvention,
but about knowing who you are.

**By building from a place of authenticity, truth and humanity,
your brand will not need to chase the latest trend or fad, and
in place of short-term hype will be rewarded with long term
brand loyalty.**

A living brand doesn't react to culture, but creates its own.

It lives by a consistent internal logic, while staying responsive to the
world outside. By prioritising real human connection over clever
messaging, and purpose over performance, you have the power to build
a brand that grabs attention and keeps it – a brand that is relevant in
the current moment, and remains so over time.

It will be human, with a strong belief system and a rich emotional
landscape – leading with purpose, speaking with heart, and never
losing its place in the conversation.

At All About Brands, we've been breathing life into major local and international brands for over 17 years. It's our reason for being, our driving force. We know living brands have a vital role to play in our changing world, helping markets navigate seismic shifts, and connecting with audiences in a new way.

Embodied, adaptable, and multi-dimensional – this is the era of the living brand, and this is where they are born.

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