

How insurgent brands are using humor, virality, and community to outpace competitors

Article

While making up just 2% of US market share in their categories, the 97 companies on Bain's [Insurgent Brands 2024](#) list captured nearly 20% of incremental category growth last year, per

the firm.

While Bain attributes this growth to volume expansion, price increases, and stealing share from larger competitors, we think there's more to the story.

Here are some growth drivers behind three insurgent brands, with lessons on what others can learn from their successes—or mistakes.

1. Don't be afraid to have fun with your creative

Founded in 2011, Dude Wipes has grown from a scrappy brand funded on “Shark Tank” to earning a projected \$120 million in sales in 2023.

The product resonates with consumers because it appeals to their sense of humor, as seen in its first-ever brand campaign last August, partnering with [creative and strategic agency](#), Curiosity.

- The “Drop Your Drawers” ad features men with their pants down to show off their clean underwear, while another focuses on men learning better bathroom hygiene.
- The campaign rolled out to select cities before going national in January, per MediaPost.

“We love using bathroom humor, it gets to people's core and makes just about anybody laugh,” co-founder Ryan Meegan told Inc.com. “We use humor to disarm the subject and the type of rudeness of being a flushable wipe, and really target people's inner appreciation for bathroom humor, while also taking care of their hygiene and cleanliness.”

The lesson: Over half (53%) of consumers say that funny commercials resonate with them most, per CivicScience. Brands that can make consumers laugh may be the ones that earn their [loyalty](#).

2. Create a community to foster loyalty

Skincare brand Bubble has gained popularity, particularly among [Gen Z](#) consumers, due to its efforts to involve them in its brand.

- The brand uses Geneva, a group-chat app popular among Gen Zers, to gather customer feedback.

- Bubble also has a brand ambassador program, open to consumers as young as 13, which provides products, discounts, and other perks to spread brand awareness.
- Last September, Bubble introduced a college ambassador program to target students at universities.

“Everything we do is 100% driven by our community,” Bubble founder Shai Eisenman told Forbes. “We have conversations with our community daily on a chat. Whatever they want to create, we test and if it doesn’t have a 90% acceptance rate, we won’t launch the formulation.”

The brand new moisturizer, Cloud Surf, was an idea that came straight from its community of consumers, many of whom are Gen Z.

“They told us they needed a moisturizer between Level Up and Slam Dunk,” Eisenman said. “They helped us choose the packaging and they gave us the name. We couldn’t think of a good name so we asked our community. It has an almost cloud-like super light formulation.”

The lesson: Consumers want to feel heard by the brands they love. Giving them a space to provide feedback or share ideas can go a long way to creating loyal customers. Plus, it can also help brands develop more relevant products and marketing campaigns.

3. Social media fame is powerful but unreliable

Home cleaning product The Pink Stuff went from a relatively unknown brand in the UK to worldwide success in just a handful of years—all thanks to social media.

“We don’t spend money on traditional advertising,” Henrik Pade, a managing director at parent company Star Brands, told The New York Times. “It’s fully viral.”

So far, that plan seems to be working.

- Sales of The Pink Stuff have quadrupled since 2018 to reach about \$125 million a year, according to owner Star Brands.
- Hashtags about The Pink Stuff are viewed by about 20 million people weekly.
- The product is now sold in 55 countries and available at retailers like Walmart, The Home Depot, and Amazon.

The nature of social media virality is fickle, and The Pink Stuff may need a plan for when the buzz fades.

“The goal should be loyalty, not virality,” Marina Cooley, a marketing professor at Emory University, told The New York Times. “Virality is dangerous because it’s fleeting, there’s no stickiness to it. People are excited by the first interaction and then look for the next viral thing.”

The lesson: Social media is a powerful tool for brands to increase awareness and get consumers to give their product a try. But it’s not a substitute for a brand strategy—it’s just one part of the mix.

The fine print: Bain defines insurgent brands as those that generated more than \$25 million of annual revenue in tracked channels, have grown more than 10 times their category’s average growth rate over the past five years, and maintained at least 10% growth over the past two years while remaining independent or having been acquired by a large consumer packaged goods company only within the past two years.

This was originally featured in the Retail Daily newsletter. For more retail insights, statistics, and trends, [subscribe here](#).