

How the best brand mascots build buzz

Article

Duo is going to the Super Bowl. McNugget Buddies are back. Grimace never left. The most exciting brand mascots respond to and play off of existing energy, transforming display and out-of-home ads into social media conversations. Here's how some of the biggest brand mascots are building buzz.

Grimace embraced his social story

When **McDonald's announced Grimace's birthday** over the summer, the quick-service restaurant could not have expected TikTokers to post videos pretending the purple monster was killing them. While McDonald's didn't go so far as to represent Grimace as harmful, they embraced the chaotic content, **posting a picture of Grimace** reacting to the trend.

Since this summer, #GrimaceShake has racked up **3.9 billion views on TikTok**. Even though Grimace's narrative took a turn, McDonald's playfulness allowed the brand to ride out the storm and benefit from the buzz.



Photo: McDonald's on X

Duo has a clear identity

Language learning app **Duolingo's mascot Duo** has also developed a memeified “evil” identity due to the platform’s persistent practice reminders that come from the voice of the owl. Duolingo has leaned into **the mascot's aggression**, but they never take the joke too far. Duolingo’s **style guide** describes the owl as helpful, motivating, and slightly awkward, and that he is never negative, threatening, or overly creepy.

“Be scrappy,” Duolingo’s CMO Emmanuel Orssaud said at Marketing Brew’s The Brief back in May. Orssaud said 70% of marketing should be reactive, quick work.

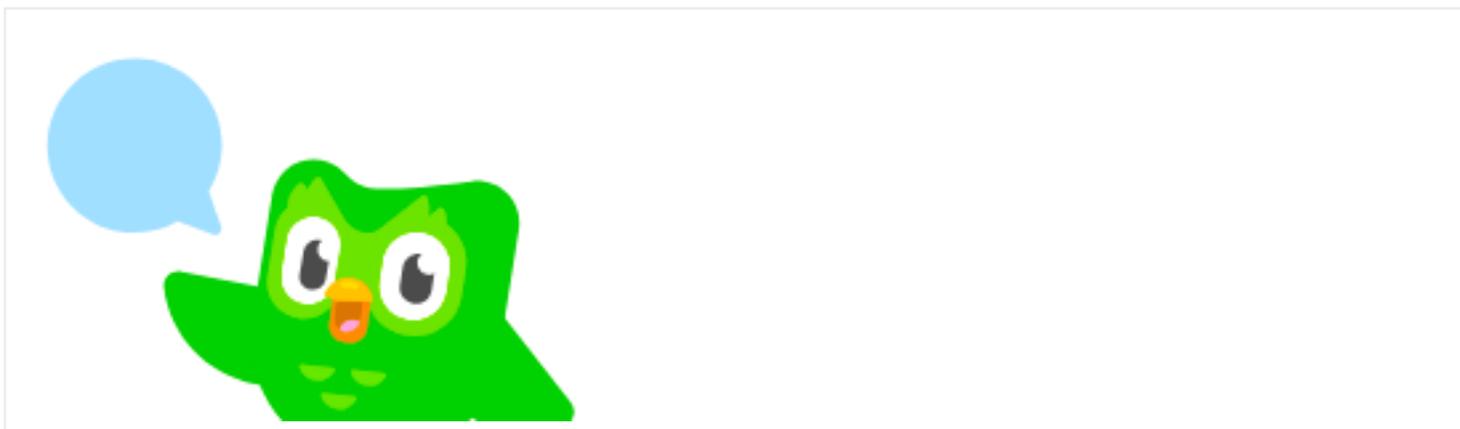


Photo: Duolingo

The Spongmonkeys are bold

Quiznos announced in October that it would **bring back the Spongmonkeys**, “a pair of eternal creatures who love nothing but the subs and maintain an ever-positive attitude,” Quiznos’ CMO Brett Philip told MediaPost. Quizno’s goal was creating a conversation. “We don’t claim that everyone loves them—but they are undoubtedly memorable, and some have conjured a tremendous following,” said Philip.



Photo: Quiznos

Pop-Tarts is innovating on what a mascot can be

Last week, **Pop-Tarts announced** the first ever edible-mascot, stating in a press release, “when the final whistle blows, transform into a game-winning snack for the victors.” The announcement sounds like Pop-Tarts will be handed out at the Pop-Tarts Bowl game, but the fairly simple mascot move is sure to attract attention.



Photo: Pop-Tarts

McDonalds is throwing it back

Following the success of the Grimace shake, McDonald's is bringing back another old mascot — **the McNugget Buddies**, first introduced in 1988. It's unclear if these anthropomorphic chicken nuggets will pack the same cultural punch as their colleague, Grimace, but McDonald's is wise to take ideas from its storied brand history.



Photo: McDonald's

M&M's played off of controversy

M&M's spokescandies were a source of controversy last year after the brand updated some of the characters' appearances. The company found a way to play off of that conversation by putting the playful personas on pause ahead of the Super Bowl and then bringing them back for a star-studded ad. The campaign acknowledged controversy surrounding the brand without alienating fans along the way.

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