

4 lessons retailers can learn from Mattel's 'Barbie' activations

Article

Barbie is having a moment. In anticipation of the “Barbie” movie releasing July 21, Barbie-maker Mattel has unleashed a **steady stream of brand collaborations**, from **pink electric toothbrushes** to an **Architectural Digest tour** of Barbie's Dreamhouse.

Here are four things brands can learn from how Mattel is using these collaborations to breathe new life into the Barbie brand.

1. Let the data guide you

Mattel took Barbie's Dreamhouse from toy to reality by renting it out on Airbnb. But the idea to create a life-size Dreamhouse didn't start with the "Barbie" movie. The Malibu home was first put up for rent in October 2019 to **celebrate Barbie's 60th anniversary**.

Now the house is up for rent again, but it's been Ken-ified, **revamped with everything Ken** loves while Barbie makes her motion picture debut.

The original Barbie Dreamhouse was introduced by Mattel in 1962, three years after the Barbie doll hit the market. Over the years, the **design has changed a bit**, but one thing has remained the same: the Barbie Dreamhouse is a moneymaker.

A new Barbie Dreamhouse is sold every two minutes, according to the toymaker. In addition, Dreamhouse owners buy twice as many Barbie toys as non-Dreamhouse owners, Lisa McKnight, the global head of Mattel's Barbie and dolls portfolio, told The New York Times.

2. Meet consumers where they are

Forever 21 launched a **Barbie clothing line** earlier this year. "This is our fourth time collaborating with Barbie," said CEO Winnie Park at last month's CommerceNext event. "And with this one, we wanted to [launch] simultaneously in the metaverse and in real life."

The collection, and its digital counterpart on Roblox, features 76 pieces across clothing, swim, sleepwear, and accessories.

"For us, Roblox is a strategy that helps us meet consumers where they are," said Park. "It's coexisting. It's not a commercial venture. We want to engage, not market, to customers."

3. Go outside of your comfort zone

Gamers may not be the typical audience for Barbie fans, but that didn't stop **Mattel from partnering with Xbox** on exclusive in-game content for racing game Forza Horizon 5, custom controller faceplates designed around outfits Barbie and Ken wear in the movie, and a series of videos that spotlight women in gaming.

Any brand delving into in-game advertising must be cautious about not distracting from the experience. Over a third (35%) of desktop gamers said ads negatively affect their experience,

compared with 55% of gamers who said that product placements in games make the experience “more real,” per a Comscore survey as reported by Digiday.

These kinds of activations (which promote the Barbie brand but don’t overwhelm players) may be the sweet spot for brands looking to reach gamers.

4. But don’t forget what you’re best known for

At the end of the day, the Barbie brand is nothing without its dolls. With a new universe to promote, Mattel has released a line of **Barbie The Movie dolls**, featuring dolls, outfits, toy cars, and a replica of the Barbie Dreamhouse from the movie.

Last year, Barbie generated \$1.49 billion in worldwide gross billings (Mattel’s metric for comparing its businesses), nearly a quarter of the company’s total. That number was down 11% from 2021.

With this latest line of dolls, Mattel is aiming to revive the Barbie brand with new characters while also reminding consumers why they love it: It gives children (or even adults) the chance to use their imagination to become the president, live in a Malibu Dreamhouse, ride in a shiny pink convertible, or whatever it is they dream of.

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