



How Cult Brands Hinge on Buyers' Beliefs

HOW LEVERAGING BRAND CULTURE
IMPACTS CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The background of the entire page is a grayscale, halftone-style image showing several hands cupped together, supporting a globe. The hands are positioned around the globe, with fingers pointing upwards and outwards, creating a sense of collective support and care.

WE BUILD CULT BRANDS

ANYONE WHO VISITS the Creative Energy website will quickly realize that our team is motivated to engage and inspire brand loyalty in every campaign and story we tell on behalf of our clients. The statement “We Build Cult Brands” is our core value promise for every brand we work for, no matter what industry, segment, product, or function they serve. We believe that a position and promise that inspires a target audience and taps into their core belief system is the quickest and most effective way to develop brand loyalty that is sustainable.

So, what is a “cult brand?” Many in our industry would consider a cult brand one that has created a viral campaign position that connects to a community and is shared among their spheres of influence. Others might consider a cult brand one that has been so well established and defined that their followers will show devotion to the company without the need for regular engagement or cultivation. While both of these examples may present some aspects of what could be a “cult brand,” neither one gets to the real core of what Creative Energy is talking about when we say we build cult brands.

In our experience, a cult brand is much more than cleverness and manipulation of emotional condition. It’s a collaborative effort that invites all participants to share their experience and take ownership of some common vision that is intimately

connected to a shared identity. In short, it’s culture. So, what is culture? We’re talking about the sociological narrative that ties a group of people together. Dr. Nicki Lisa Cole, Ph.D. is a sociologist who gives a compelling definition of the kind of culture we want to engage for our clients in [an article she recently published](#).

“In brief, sociologists define the non-material aspects of culture as the values and beliefs, language, communication, and practices that are shared in common by a group of people. Expanding on these categories, culture is made up of our knowledge, common sense, assumptions, and expectations. It is also the rules, norms, laws, and morals that govern society; the words we use as well as how we speak and write them (what sociologists call “discourse”); and the symbols we use to express meaning, ideas, and concepts (like traffic signs and emojis, for example).”

So, when we say we build cult brands, we’re promising our clients that we will help them develop a sincere set of sustainable values and promises that they can use to communicate and inspire their brand loyalist targets. Building a cult brand is a holistic approach to building brands that is sustainable and evolves organically with your core brand loyalists. It can be an intimidating process to undertake for brands.



CREATIVE ENERGY has been working with clients for nearly thirty years to help them create compelling brand positions that inspire real brand loyalty. The fact that we've continued to work with global brand leaders in several volatile markets for decades—while the average agency relationship with a client is around 3.2 years—is a testament to the value and profitability our perspective on buyer behavior has provided. We recognize that creating real brand culture takes a lot of discipline and energy. Most clients want to know that the process is going to result in real growth and profitability before committing to what we do.

We know our program is a bit different from the current trend of “project work” that many agencies are required to take on in order to survive. While our difference is what makes us who we are and has brought us the success we've enjoyed, we know that it has cost us work and the opportunity to do some fun projects with great brands in the past. So, we decided to build this case study that outlines the “why” behind our novel view on creating real brand culture for companies in hopes to better explain our position and why we push for deeper insights when working with our clients.

It started with the development of two critical surveys to help us understand the true intent of consumers in endorsing brands with their loyalty, and also a survey to gauge the insight and beliefs of our own clients in regards to brand culture and loyalty.

For the consumer survey, we created a series of quantitative and qualitative questions that we used to clearly understand some foundational indicators in how a person engages with a loyal brand differently than other products and services they may purchase. This survey was distributed to participants across the United States without any targeting from more traditional demographic definitions. Our belief is that culture, as we define it, is not limited by age, race, gender, or socioeconomic indications. We had over a thousand survey participants that represented every major section of our country, generation, race, gender, and economic level. The results of this survey, which are the main focus of this article, not only verified what we've been seeing in

our own work, but also inspired us to go even deeper in our development of true brand culture. We're extremely grateful for all those that elected to participate in this survey. The second survey was developed to better understand the perspectives and position on the client side. We created a questionnaire that was distributed to our own clients in order to evaluate their value and vision for brand culture as it relates to their internal business processes and profitability. We were very encouraged to see how many of the answers our clients provided aligned directly with what we were hearing from customers as well. There were several areas where there was a gap between the two, which gives us an opportunity to help our clients and their consumers better understand one another and work together to improve their shared cultural position.

The data collected in these surveys was then evaluated and tested by our own internal strategic team in order to create this case study. The article is focused on helping the reader understand the current brand environment that exists in the U.S. and what the expectations are on the consumer side if you want to earn their loyalty. We will also share some powerful insights that people shared that show how valuable it can be to invest in creating true brand loyalty between your company and your followers.

OUR GOAL IS TO MORE CLEARLY EXPLAIN WHY CREATIVE ENERGY WORKS SO HARD TO HELP OUR CLIENTS CREATE MESSAGING AND CAMPAIGNS THAT ARE NOT ONLY CAPTIVATING TO AN AUDIENCE THAT HAS BECOME DEEPLY SKEPTICAL AND JUDGMENTAL OF AD MESSAGING, BUT ARE ALSO SUSTAINABLE OVER THE LONG TERM BECAUSE THEY ARE DIRECTLY TIED TO NON-NEGOTIABLE BELIEFS WITHIN THE BRAND LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATION.

Being sincere, consistent, and empathetic in all your messaging is how you create real brand culture that can weather the storms of social scrutiny.

WHAT IS THE REAL VALUE IN CULTIVATING BRAND LOYALTY?

Building compelling brand strategies that engage and create sustainable brand loyalty is not a small, nor an inexpensive, task. It requires a top-down evaluation of a company's internal belief system and mission for their own workers, partners, and end-users. It requires an honest perspective on what their brand value and brand promise will be to all levels of their organization. There needs to be buy-in at the executive level about real values that are relevant to their target market audience, or it cannot be sustainable. Taking a position in order to elicit a short term publicity recognition will quickly be uncovered by consumers and employees that can sabotage positions that are not practiced in all areas of a brand.

If a brand is going to undertake the task of building a cult brand position, it needs to have some measurable data

that there is a return on investment that makes the work worthwhile. We've believed in the value of brand culture development for decades, and have seen that the industry has consistently confirmed our beliefs in buying behavior, and how it is tied to culture.

In 2020, Patricia Rioux wrote an article for Forbes entitled "[The Value of Investing in Loyal Customers.](#)" It's a great article that gives some unbiased validation to how the modern buyer is engaging with brands and choosing to invest in companies they believe in. In her article, there seem to be four areas of valuation that a brand should consider when developing a brand culture strategy that can pay off with valuable and long-lasting dividends.



CUSTOMER CONVERSION

In a study, [Marketing Metrics](#), the probability of **selling to an existing customer is up to 14 times higher** than selling to a new customer.



CUSTOMER RETENTION

Bain & Company and Harvard Business School reported that **increasing customer retention rates by only 5% can increase profits by 25% to 95%.**



PRODUCT PURCHASE EXPANSION

An [article by Jessica Huhn](#) of Business 2 Community found that **existing customers are 50% more likely to try new products and spend 31% more, on average, compared to new customers.**



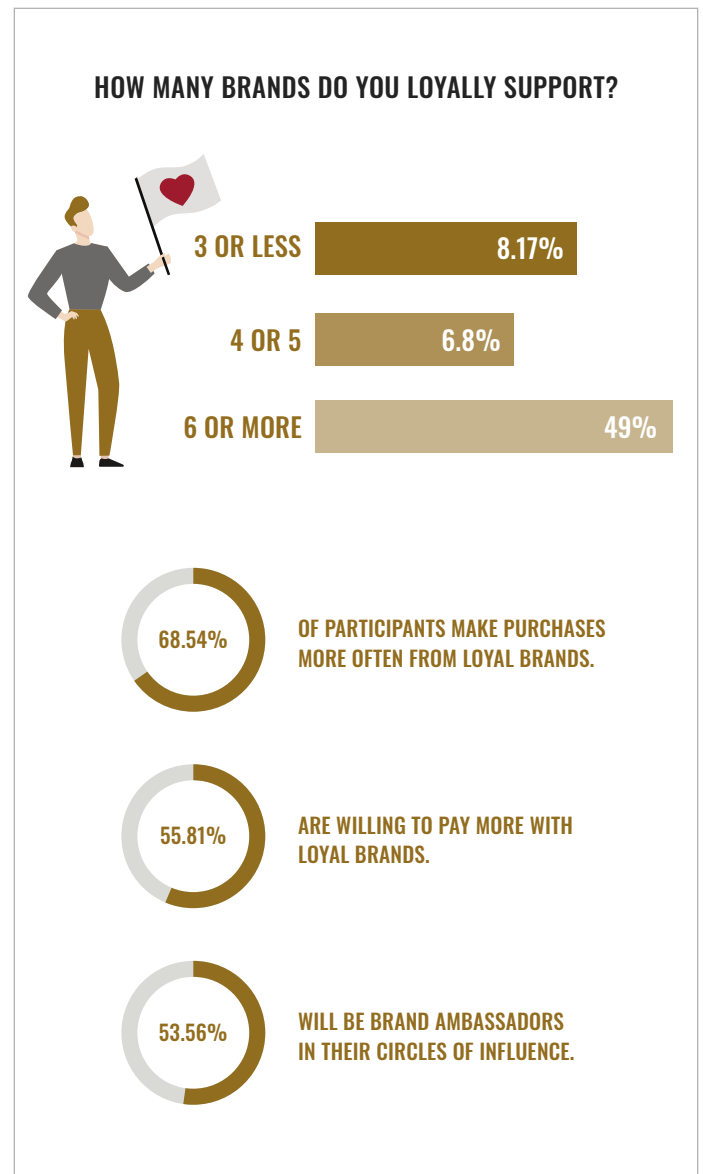
COST OF ACQUISITION

A [report by Hubspot](#) found that **new customer acquisition costs have increased by almost 50% in just the past five years.**

UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF A LOYAL BRAND BELIEVER IS CRITICAL TO CREATING A VALUE POSITION THAT GETS REAL RESULTS.

We saw similar insights in our survey when asking participants to share their own experiences with brands and what brand culture means to them. 81.58% of respondents agreed that company culture directly impacted brand loyalty in their buying decisions. Interestingly, in our client survey, only 57% of company respondents agreed with this statement.

We also found that buying behavior was drastically influenced by brand culture and loyalty as well. Here's a graphic that summarizes our findings:



AS MENTIONED ABOVE, one of the more powerful tools to grow business and profitability is through improving customer retention. Not only are these brand supporters more open to being marketed to by the brands they believe in, it is also drastically cheaper to influence their purchase decisions and promote new products to these customers than cultivating new ones. The best way to retain loyal brand customers is through building brand value and a brand promise that is relevant, relatable, and gives target customers an invitation to collaborate with the company. Creating brand ambassadors by providing well-developed content through blogs, social media, and video storytelling is a powerful way to inspire loyalty and advocacy by your brand followers.



[Watch full video](#)

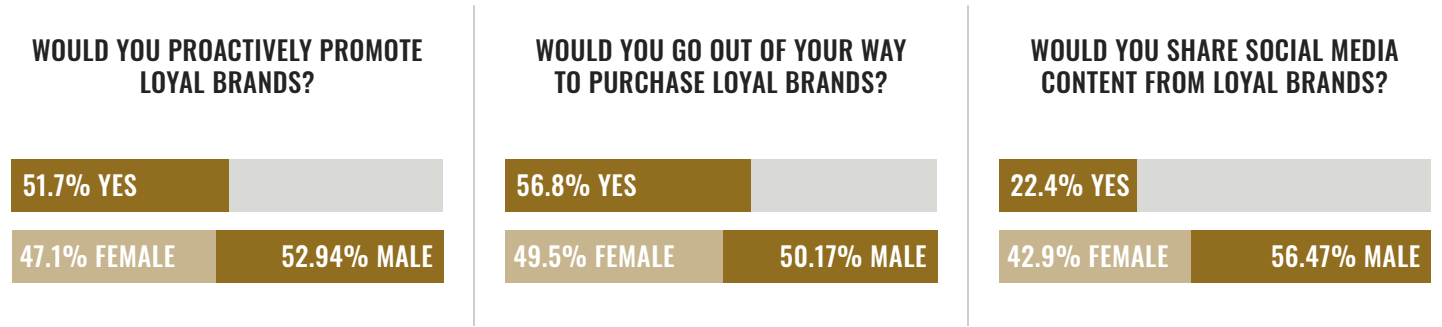
ANOTHER POWERFUL BENEFIT of investing in building your brand equity with customers is stabilizing market loss through disruptions in performance. In short, sometimes we all screw up, even global companies can have moments where product quality, service, or publicity can fall short of their standards. If this is systemic, then it can be the death nail to trying to develop real brand culture, so that's got to be addressed immediately. However, these issues are more often related to momentary issues within the manufacturing process or a complicated service problem that results in an unsatisfied customer.

The good news is that, if you have created a brand culture around your business and are quick to resolve the issue in accordance with your brand culture promises, you are far less likely to lose that customer than if you hadn't properly engaged with them on a deeper level. In our survey, we asked participants how likely they were to use a product or service from a brand they believe in again after a poor experience

as compared to a poor experience with a brand they had no attachment to. Participants were four times more likely to continue to support loyal brands that had an issue as compared to non-engaged brands.

There is also the consideration that one of the most powerful and effective sales and marketing strategies since the dawn of modern business is tied directly to your ability to create effective brand culture—the dynamic and compelling influence of word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth marketing is still the holy grail of creating real momentum for your brand and market share. The power of inspiring an audience to talk about your brand with those they interact with, or wear merchandise proudly that promotes your brand is incredibly important to aggressive growth. Are modern shoppers, who are inundated with advertisements and marketing messages, still willing to promote brands with their friends and family? Here are some of the answers we received that confirm they absolutely are.

THE VALUE OF BRAND AMBASSADORS



WHEN CONSIDERING THE COST to develop and maintain a unique brand culture position that attracts and inspires your customers, it's important to consider how valuable "proactively promoting" your brand can be from your brand advocates. They can create a tone of free content that relates to your brand that money just cannot buy. It's a new kind of earned media that is incredibly powerful to influence new customers to your products and services. Having user generated content that engages customers from a relational perspective can be one of the most efficient and organic paths to market share development as well as margin retention.



LOYAL BRAND SUPPORTERS are also much less prone to being impacted by “retail path manipulation” that may give retailers (both online and physical) more power over brand decisions than you’d prefer. End cap displays, digital advertising, and shopping algorithm targeting can require constant spending in order to earn prime location for your products. However, if you’ve invested in an effective brand culture position campaign, your loyal brand customers are much less likely to be influenced to purchase from your competitors based on retail merchandising. You retain much more control over your own purchase path by engaging with your customers directly and encouraging buy-in.



While 22.4% may seem low for brand loyalists to be likely to share your social media content, that comes down to standard audience behavior. People rarely want to feel like they are trying to sell their friends, family, and followers on a product—even a product they may believe in. They are much more likely to create their own content that comes from a more sincere place within their experience with a brand. It’s also tied to what kinds of content you may be creating. If the majority of your content focuses on the sales proposition, you are much less likely to have followers expose that to their own followers.

If, however, you set aside a percentage of your content to relevant social and global issues that align with your brand position and promise, then you can greatly improve the engagement and dissemination of those stories that will still direct new audiences back to your brand. Also, let’s be honest, most social media professionals would still give just about anything to report content engagement and sharing at a rate of 22.4%. That’s still a huge win compared to more traditional brand strategies.

THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT CULTIVATING BRAND LOYALTY IS CRITICAL TO BUILDING A MARKET STRATEGY THAT WILL ENDURE IN THE LONG TERM.

Customers want to believe that the way they choose to spend their hard earned money matters beyond an exchange for goods and services. It’s at the very center of why we develop brands around our products and services in the first place. Companies want to be proud to have their brand names well respected in the marketplace and have their customers celebrate the work the brand is doing.

Building brand culture requires discipline, foresight, and regular interaction with your customers. Having an agency partner that not only understands the process of creating brand culture is crucial to getting it right and making the most of every market opportunity.



CREATIVE ENERGY HAS BEEN PROMOTING THE VALUE IN BRAND LOYALTY AND BRAND CULTURE FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS.

We know not only how valuable strategic brand positioning can be for your business, but what the process is to help you develop it properly from the very beginning. There are certain things that need to be understood about modern shoppers that must be taken into consideration when building a vision for your brand.

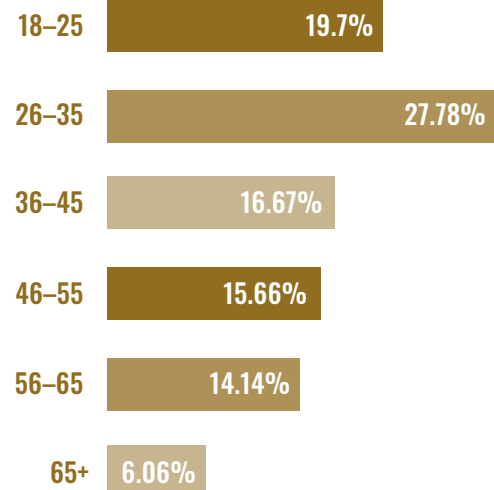
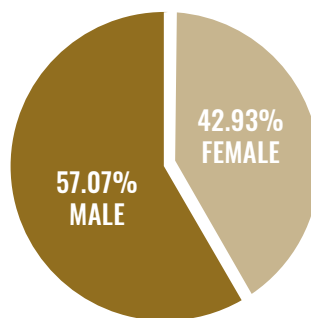
IS BRAND LOYALTY DEAD?

There are certain things that need to be understood about modern shoppers that must be taken into consideration when building a vision for your brand. One of the things we get asked most often is whether or not we really believe that modern shoppers are as brand loyal as past generations. There is a common belief that consumers today are less interested in brand value—that they are driven by the basic economy of price and features. However, in 2020 we saw many headlines where consumers were taking brands to task due to their corporate culture and social directives. Many large brands have had to navigate a greater pressure and scrutiny by their consumers to make decisions beyond the bottom line in order to earn business. That, to us at least, sounds a lot like loyalty and accountability that's based on brand culture.

There are many industry research firms that have confirmed that modern shoppers are becoming more brand loyal year over year. However, this loyalty is being earned by brands that are gauging their success in new ways. We wanted to hear directly from our survey participants what their perspective on brand loyalty is in the current environment. What we found is that 68% of surveyed consumers believe that people are as brand loyal, or more brand loyal, than they've been in the past.

Some would say that brand loyalty is generational as well, but when we evaluated our own survey data, we found that brand loyalty behavior is not tied to any specific age, gender, or region. Below is an infographic that explains the breakdown of respondents.

BELIEVE PEOPLE ARE MORE BRAND LOYAL (BY GENDER AND BY AGE)



AS YOU CAN SEE from our findings there is very little difference in perspective between the men and women that answered on which direction brand loyalty is currently moving. It's nearly a perfect split between the two, and both agree on consumers wanting to believe in the brands they support.

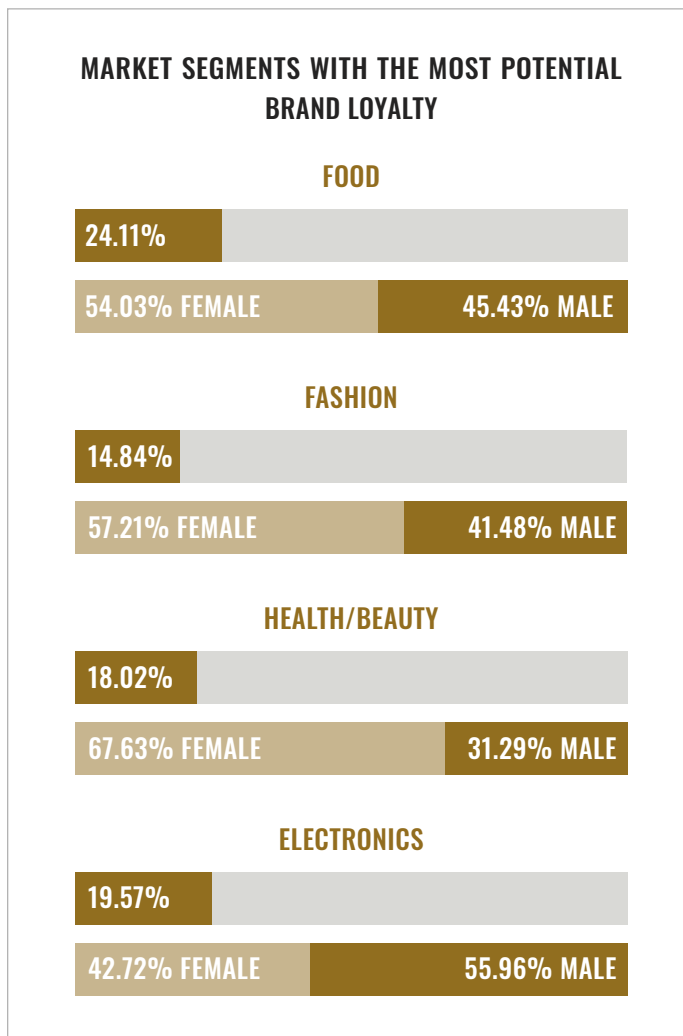
Age, on the other hand, does seem to impact buyer behavior. It doesn't, however, show a clean target of one generation

that should be focused on in order to garner brand loyalty. That requires a much more complete picture of a brand's specific brand position and promise in order to properly develop a target plan. As you can see from the responses we received, all generations are well-represented up to age 65 and above. There is, of course, the swell of brand loyalty value in the key consumer age group (shoppers between the ages of 26 and 35).

IT IS SO IMPORTANT to recognize that if you target strategic messaging and tactics on a very niche message that engages this one age group, it has the potential to alienate or be irrelevant to your other potential customers. In many cases, it may be easy to see that this age group is the easiest to influence, but remember that they still only represent 28% of the market overall.

DEMOGRAPHIC MARKETING CAN LEAVE BRANDS AND THEIR AGENCY BLIND TO BIGGER PICTURE THINKING. INSIGHTS OUTSIDE OF DEMOGRAPHICS ALONE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BECAUSE THEY COULD UNCOVER AN ENTIRELY NEW POTENTIAL CUSTOMER GROUP.

We also asked participants to tell us what market segments they have the most brand loyalty within. While there were many markets that were represented, there were four that clearly had the greatest potential to impact buying behaviors with sound brand practices. Below is a graphic of what we found.








THE COMMON THEME of all four of these segments that enjoy higher brand loyalty is their relationship with a consumer's identity. These are all segments that provide products and services that consumers relate closely with their own quality of life and personal worldview. It's not surprising, then, that consumers would spend more time researching and discussing brands within these categories in a much more invested manner.

You can also see that only one of these segments has any real imbalance in their consumer base as it pertains to gender. Health and beauty, which has historically focused the majority of their messaging toward women is seeing two thirds of their audience reached. That leaves a third of their potential audience either neglected or completely alienated from their brand position. Having a deeper understanding of how modern shoppers behave can help improve brand loyalty by inviting a greater number of consumers to engage with products and services.

The difference in beliefs about these segments by generation is also interesting. We broke down responses by age and found even more support for our perspective on brand value.

MARKET SEGMENT LOYALTY BY AGE

					
	FOOD	FASHION	HEALTH/BEAUTY	ELECTRONICS	AVG LOYALTY
18–25	12.37%	20.09%	12.59%	13.91%	14.74%
26–35	19.09%	27.07%	24.46%	23.51%	23.53%
36–45	13.71%	14.41%	15.11%	16.89%	15.03%
46–55	18.82%	16.59%	17.63%	15.23%	17.07%
56–65	17.47%	11.79%	16.19%	14.24%	14.92%
65+	18.55%	10.04%	14.03%	16.23%	14.71%

AS YOU CAN SEE, brand loyalty is well represented by every generational segment we surveyed. Shoppers in the 26–35 age range seem to be doing the heavy-lifting in supporting brands they believe in, but they are far from a majority, if we look at these top four market segments. If we look at the averages for these segments, we can see that 46–55 is actually the second most engaged generation when it comes to developing brand loyalty—rather than the 36–45 as might be expected. While there are many factors that can influence this discrepancy, it's likely due to changes in a person's season of life. Many people in the 36–45 age range may be changing jobs, starting their family, purchasing homes, or going back to school for an advanced degree—or a combination of several of these life events. These factors can mean that they are dealing with a more strict budget and may not have as much discretionary income to put towards supporting their favorite brands.

It's also important to consider the relationship your brand has with those over 65+. While they are, on average, the smallest represented group according to our survey, they are only slightly less engaged than the highly coveted 18–25 age group. So, why are they so often disregarded when it comes time to build a brand strategy?

There are several factors, but most of them are related to the complication that this group represents a perspective that trends towards values and convictions that may be waning in relevance. This disparity may be further compounded if your brand position and promise is in any way politicized or founded on social trends that may not relate to an older audience. However, building a solid marketing strategy that is relatable and attainable by a wider audience by focusing on more human personality traits, and fewer hot button topics, can produce a bigger and more diverse group of brand loyalists that influence a much more dynamic community of brand prospects.

AFTER ALL, WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED THAT CONSUMERS OVER THE AGE 65 WERE MORE BRAND AWARE THAN 18–25 YEAR OLDS WHEN IT COMES TO PURCHASES LIKE ELECTRONICS AND FOOD?

THE FACT OF THE MATTER is that the potential to garner brand loyalty has not diminished at all, and in many ways is higher than it has ever been. With the proliferation of social media, access to corporate information online being higher than it has ever been, and consumers that are more passionate about their economic support being tied to their own social

worldview, companies and brands can have a huge impact on their loyal brand supporters through a unified and consistent brand messaging strategy that resonates with the greatest number of consumers with like-minded perspectives. Building brand loyalty is more valuable than in any past economic era, and the benefits of investing in solid strategy can be historic.

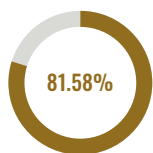
WHAT DO BRAND BELIEVERS VALUE?

We've established that modern shoppers are willing to become brand loyalists and all the value you can capitalize on by inspiring brand culture for your business. What are the things that are of most value to your customers when they are evaluating your brand? While fully understanding and developing your unique brand value position requires some specialized research and consultation, there are a few

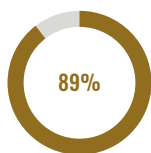
current areas that a large number of your valued customers are considering when they choose brands to support. These can be organized into two tiers that need to be discussed. The first tier is what we call the "foundational" values that every successful brand has in common. Luckily, our survey of end-users and our client survey were in near perfect alignment on these three pillars.

WHAT ARE THE COMPANY TRAITS THAT ARE CRITICAL TO BUILDING BRAND LOYALTY?

PRODUCT QUALITY

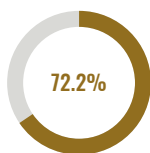


SHOPPERS AGREE

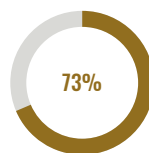


CLIENTS AGREE

CUSTOMER SERVICE

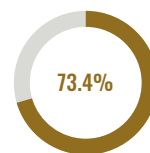


SHOPPERS AGREE

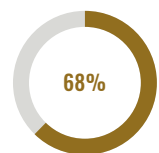


CLIENTS AGREE

PRICE



SHOPPERS AGREE



CLIENTS AGREE

AT CREATIVE ENERGY, we consider these three traits the "cost of entry" in order to build a compelling brand culture position. We don't consider these as things that create brand culture as much as we believe that if you're not successfully delivering on these expectations, then you probably shouldn't bother trying to build brand culture around your business. You have to get these right.

THIS IS BUSINESS 101 STUFF, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY ARE LESS IMPORTANT.

THE THREE PILLARS

Three classical columns, likely representing the pillars of a brand, are shown against a textured, brown background. The columns are made of stone or concrete and have fluted shafts. They are positioned in the lower half of the page, with the title 'THE THREE PILLARS' above them.

PRODUCT QUALITY

Product quality (or service quality if that is what better relates to your business) is the first step to having anything to say in the marketplace at all. You can't create a great brand position and promise on the back of a product you don't believe in within your own organization. How can you expect to inspire customers to have a belief system regarding your brand if you don't first prove your own beliefs?

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service falls out of product quality. If you have a product you believe in, then you are going to want to stand behind that product. That doesn't mean that there won't be times when you fall short of customer expectations. There will always be times when customer expectations may be unrealistic, or when internal disruptions directly affect your ability to perform at the level you have set. The point is always in how you respond at the customer level. Having a core brand position that is established upon your own internal mission, vision, and values gives you a playbook on how to handle these situations and allows you to interact with unhappy customers from a healthy position. Not having a clear brand identity may put you in a situation where unhappy, or even toxic, customers can push you to compromise on things that erode your brand promise or position. A healthy customer service system has to be based on realistic and relatable performance expectations. Think of some of the largest and most successful brands in the world. In many cases, it is the things they won't compromise on that sets them apart from their competitors, not the things they will compromise in order to placate some customers.

PRICE

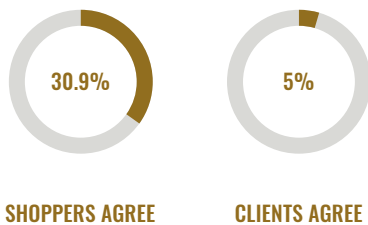
Then there is the price. There are so many points of consideration that impact the end price of a product or service. As we've established earlier, price is much more sustainable with engaged brand loyalists than it is in the open market. That doesn't, however, mean that your brand believers are willing to pay unreasonable prices without a clear and transparent understanding of where and how the difference in price is impacting your brand culture, society, or the world as a whole. You can't build brand loyalty around a premium price for a product just because you want to make more money. Your price needs to come from a place of common understanding of how you spend your money as a company on the product quality, customer service, and—in many cases just as importantly—the areas we call “structural” values within your company.

If the three traits we've discussed above are “foundational” in the way you might build a building, then these next set of values are all the important things that you will build on that foundation for your brand. These are the things that will give your brand culture form, function, and expression.

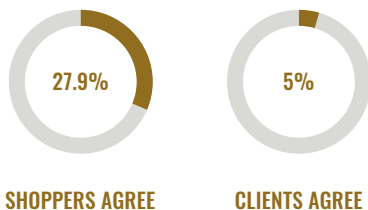
IN OUR SURVEY, we asked participants to share the things that are most important to them when they engage a brand on a cultural level. In the graphic below, you can see what those values are, and also how we discovered some substantial discrepancies between the views of shoppers and the views of our own clients.

Real brand loyalty is tied to internal and external corporate behavior. These are the areas that were most important to shoppers in our survey.

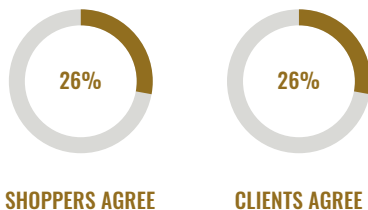
WORKPLACE QUALITY



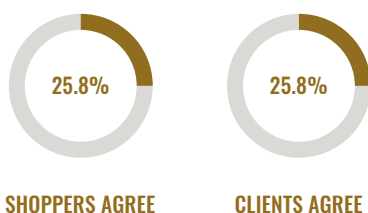
ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY



INNOVATION



SOCIAL ADVOCACY



These are the things that most companies need to spend more time evaluating and developing within their organization.

SHOPPERS WANT TO VERY CLEARLY SEE THE TIE BETWEEN YOUR PRODUCT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE QUALITY POSITION BACK TO A FULLY REALIZED CORPORATE STRUCTURE.

If the foundational traits we discussed earlier are the areas that all successful businesses have to start with, then these are the traits that customers have said offer the most effective and dynamic opportunity to differentiate your brand culture from the marketplace.

The first thing you might notice in the graphic is that workplace quality ranked highest for shoppers and lowest for our clients. These are very successful brands that have had years of effective brand development with Creative Energy. However, there is still a need to regularly evaluate areas of opportunity to grow and respond to buyer expectations. Internal corporate culture has never been more relevant or scrutinized by consumers than it has been in the past few years. People are much less willing to turn a blind eye to a company's internal corporate behavior even if they make quality products and offer amazing customer support. It is so much easier now to do research on a company and learn first hand from their past and existing employees what kind of culture they've adopted internally.

IF YOU WANT TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE BRAND CULTURE WITH YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE, YOU NEED TO CONSIDER HOW YOUR INTERNAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES WOULD BE RECEIVED IN THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION.

This could include areas like workplace safety controls, hiring practices, advancement opportunities, continued education programs, and a vast host of other areas wherein you exemplify your brand promise and position within your own organization.

EMPATHY IS THE MAIN CONTRIBUTING FACTOR to building a solid workplace culture that will assure your customers and resonate with brand loyalists. The more human your internal policies are perceived by those that you want to build brand equity with, the easier it will be to build a relationship. Again, it's incredibly important to start with a solid understanding of your company's core values and vision so you know what areas you can compromise and what areas you will defend. There will be times when people may want to create pressure on your company to conform to a viewpoint that may not align with your company position. Having a well-established and articulated set of values that are sewn throughout all your marketing, advertising, public relations, internal, and partner communications will give you a much better position from which to defend your company positions.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS ARE ALSO OF HIGH IMPORTANCE TO LOYAL CUSTOMERS.

From manufacturing to packaging, engaged shoppers want assurances that the brands they support share their value in creating more sustainable business practices to improve our environmental footprint. Many companies struggle to understand how to interlace an environmental message within their brand messaging. With so many brands for the last few decades pushing their environmental initiatives to the forefront just to be met with scrutiny and accusations of

inaccuracy in these practices, it can be intimidating to build a position that is realistic, sustainable, and compelling to their followers.

The new standards have moved from recycling or efficiency practices to a measure of overall carbon footprint for a company. The goal is to at least be carbon neutral (having no net increase in carbon dioxide emissions released to the atmosphere) or even attaining a negative-carbon footprint (having processes that net a position where less carbon dioxide is released to what is taken in). This can be a costly change in the traditional manufacturing process for most companies. However, remember that we've already established that engaged brand believers are willing to pay a higher price for products and services that align with their own convictions—in effect subsidizing some of the investment being made by their brands.

This may not be viable for your company, but it's important to work with your advertising and marketing agency to craft a story that includes an environmental position. Whether it is sourcing raw materials from more sustainable sources, improving energy efficiency at your facilities, improving packaging to create less waste in landfills, partnering and supporting third-party environmental organizations, or all of the above, it's no longer an option on whether or not you will be environmentally responsible in your business practices if you want to create effective brand belief.



INNOVATION is an area that is probably no more surprising to you as it has been to our own clients. Continual improvement in product offerings, customer service, and manufacturing process are core to healthy growth and success. For customers, however, innovation takes on some new aspects that must be considered by companies that want to create a positive impact on the buying experience. If your innovations revolve around internal efficiencies to improve profitability it can be difficult to inspire brand belief from customers. They want to support companies that value innovation through the lens of the end-user. For example, if you create a new mobile app that offers your company a more efficient way to communicate—and sell more products to customers—without offering practical value to the user in a way that aligns with your brand position, then it will likely not perform as well as you like.

A truly innovative company will demonstrate that all their improvement decisions are based largely on improving the lives of their customers and the world as a whole. Starting with a clear understanding of your customer's pain points and limitations is the best way to assure that your investments in innovation can be leveraged into a strong brand message.

ONE QUICKLY GROWING AREA of corporate cultural evolution is in regards to social advocacy. This is not a new concept, but it is becoming increasingly important to consumers as they make brand loyalty decisions. Social advocacy includes aspects of workplace culture and environmental advocacy, but it takes a much more holistic approach that is directly integrated into brand position and brand promise. Having a well-developed social advocacy position for your brands is where your messaging and marketing becomes much more human. Social environment is always evolving and can be fairly capricious in response to cultural changes.

SOCIAL ADVOCACY CAN BE BOILED DOWN TO FINDING THEN COMMUNICATING YOUR CORE BELIEFS AND VALUES AS A COMPANY AS THEY PERTAIN TO THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

In the modern marketplace, it is becoming harder for corporations to grow and gain support while refusing to express their social position on important topics that directly affect their consumers. Through the social upheaval of 2020, it became abundantly clear that silence and separation from the core social discourse that was happening was viewed by many consumers as a culpable offense. Many activists and



social equality advocacy groups targeted large corporations demanding them to share their position on current issues. Many of these companies either remained silent—and were assumed guilty of impropriety—or crafted vague messaging that was seen as pandering or opportunistic. The best way to keep your brand from being painted into this corner is to have the discussion now with your brand experts and establish a real position that is empathetic, proactive, and sincere. Creating a response that you have to live with while under fire is not a tenable position for a healthy brand. You can see from our client responses that this is an area that many progressive brands are spending a great deal of time and resources to get right. We are working hard to help companies create a brand position that they can proudly invite their loyal customers to embrace and engage.

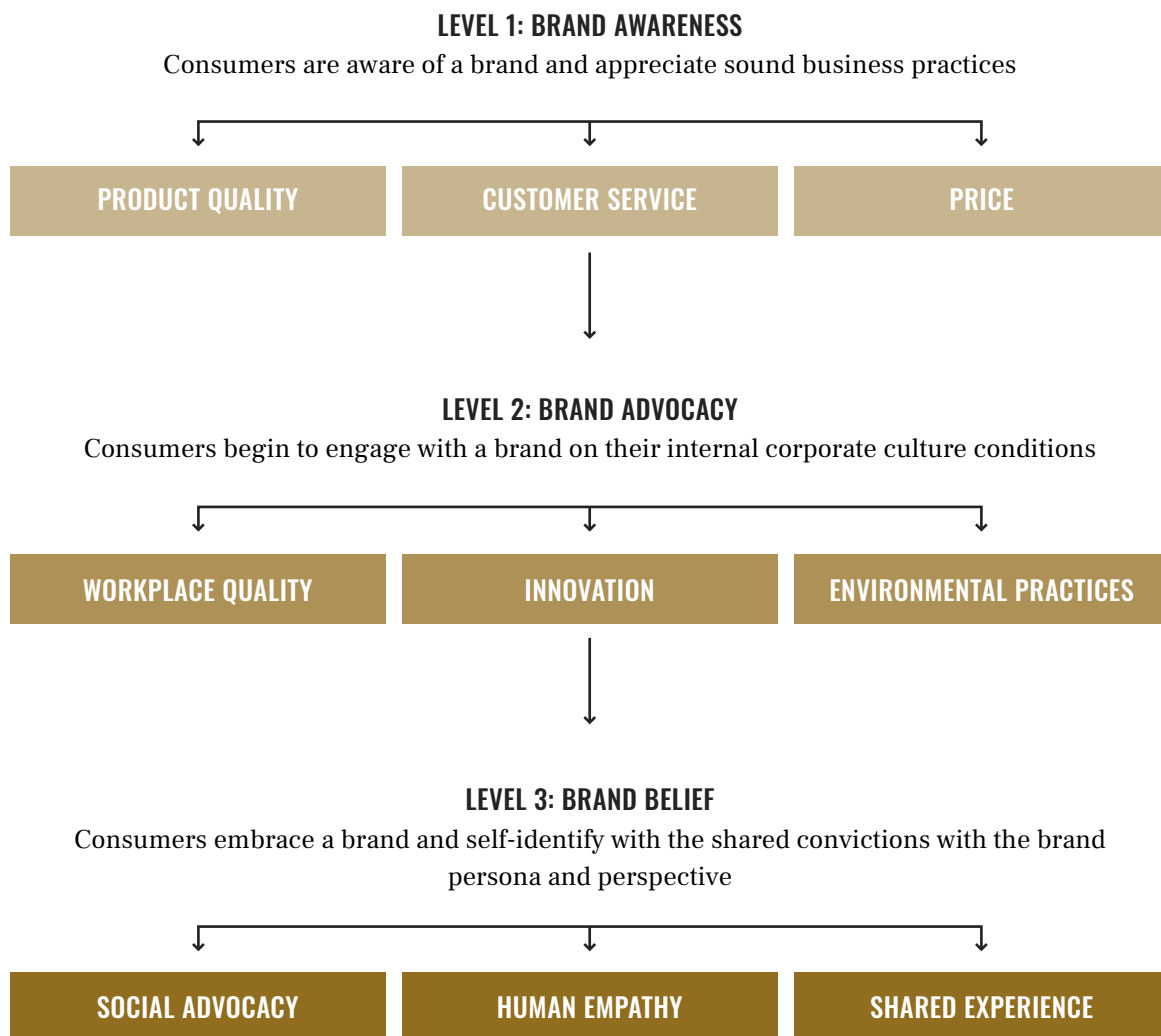
All of these things that our shoppers shared they value a loyal brand for are big issues that can be intimidating to understand and execute effectively. The core point is to realize that all of these areas are based on an honest and open human experience. Modern consumers have access to a wealth of information about the products and services they support these days, and their expectations are that these companies value the same things they value. Again, empathy is going to be the greatest tool a brand employs in earning the support and loyalty of their customers.

IN CONCLUSION

The fact is that brand belief is even more important in today's marketplace than it has been in the past. Creative Energy has been talking about the importance of building a strong brand value position that aligns with a well-researched target audience for nearly 30 years. It is assuring to hear from a large group of consumers that has no point of reference for our agency, or the work we do, that agree with our perspective on brand development. Breaking out of traditional advertising strategy

to create a unique path for your brand to interact with loyal brand believers is an arduous task but can also be incredibly rewarding. Having the ability to invite your customers to take ownership of a brand culture that resonates with them and is tied to a set of core values that your internal team is passionate about is a powerful resource to ensure long-term growth and success.

THE ROAD TO BRAND BELIEF



THE GOAL SHOULD ALWAYS BE TO DIRECT THE CREATIVE STORYTELLING AROUND YOUR BRAND WITH RELEVANCE AND INTERESTS OF YOUR CONSUMERS.

Brand belief is tied directly to the ability to create brand humanity. Humanity is not tied to age, race, gender, income, or region. Those aspects only create unique perspectives on many similar life experiences. Creating space in your brand promise and position for anyone to embrace your core values is the best way to foster a dynamic brand culture that can help you grow and improve your business in an ever-evolving marketplace.

CREATIVE ENERGY HAS BEEN PARTNERING with national and international brands for nearly thirty years in order to help them create messaging that resonates with their target audience from a perspective of shared experience. Our internal passion for creative work that fosters real measurable results for brands that want to invest in their audience in a very human way has been the focus and driving force of our success as an agency.

We are firm believers that there is nothing more profitable for a company than investing in a direct relationship with their customers. As with all relationships, it may take time, investment, and humility to create a healthy collaborative engagement with those that you are wanting to encourage to purchase products or services under your brand. However, if you inspire genuine belief from a sincere shared perspective, your audience will not only support your business with their hard-earned money, but will champion your brand to others and expand your story as they interlace it with their own experience. Growth, market stability, and winning innovation will all be the products of a well-cultivated buyer belief system.

IF YOU'RE READY TO START BUILDING YOUR OWN BRAND CULTURE, WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

Reach out to our team and let's start your brand belief story today. As we've shown through this article, your customers are waiting to hear from you now!

