



# 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 day<sup>1</sup>.**

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 interruptions<sup>2</sup>. 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"<sup>3</sup>.** 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'"<sup>4</sup>. **What we're battling is not attention scarcity, but attention selectivity.**

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup>ibid.



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 use<sup>5</sup>. 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 level<sup>6</sup>, 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 them<sup>7</sup>. 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.**



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

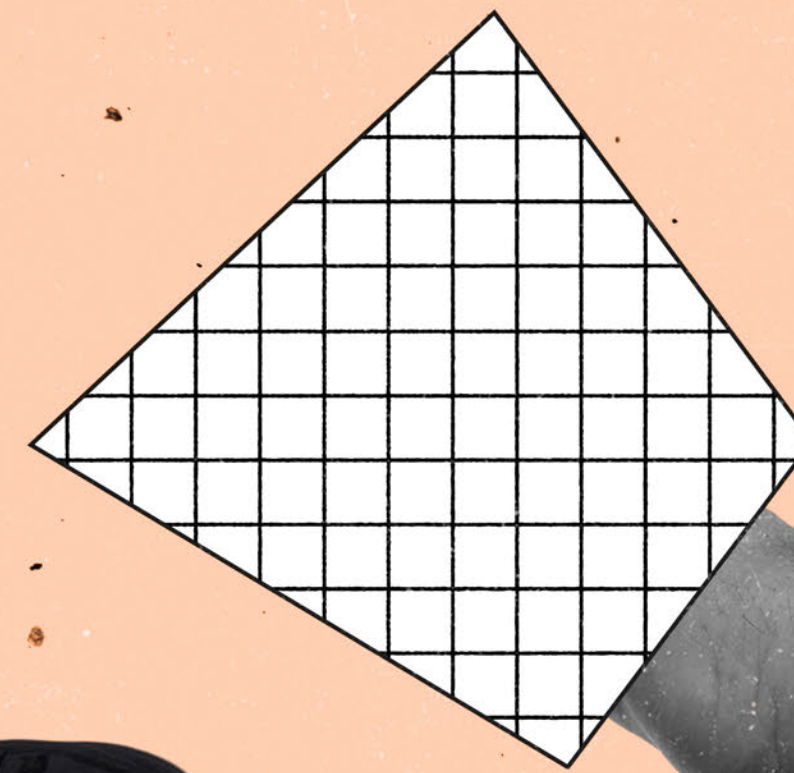
<sup>6</sup>Edelman Trust Institute, '2024 Edelman Trust Barometer', January 2024.

<sup>7</sup>Wunder 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”<sup>8</sup> 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”<sup>9</sup>. However, in the age of re-enchantment, familiarity clearly isn’t going to cut it.

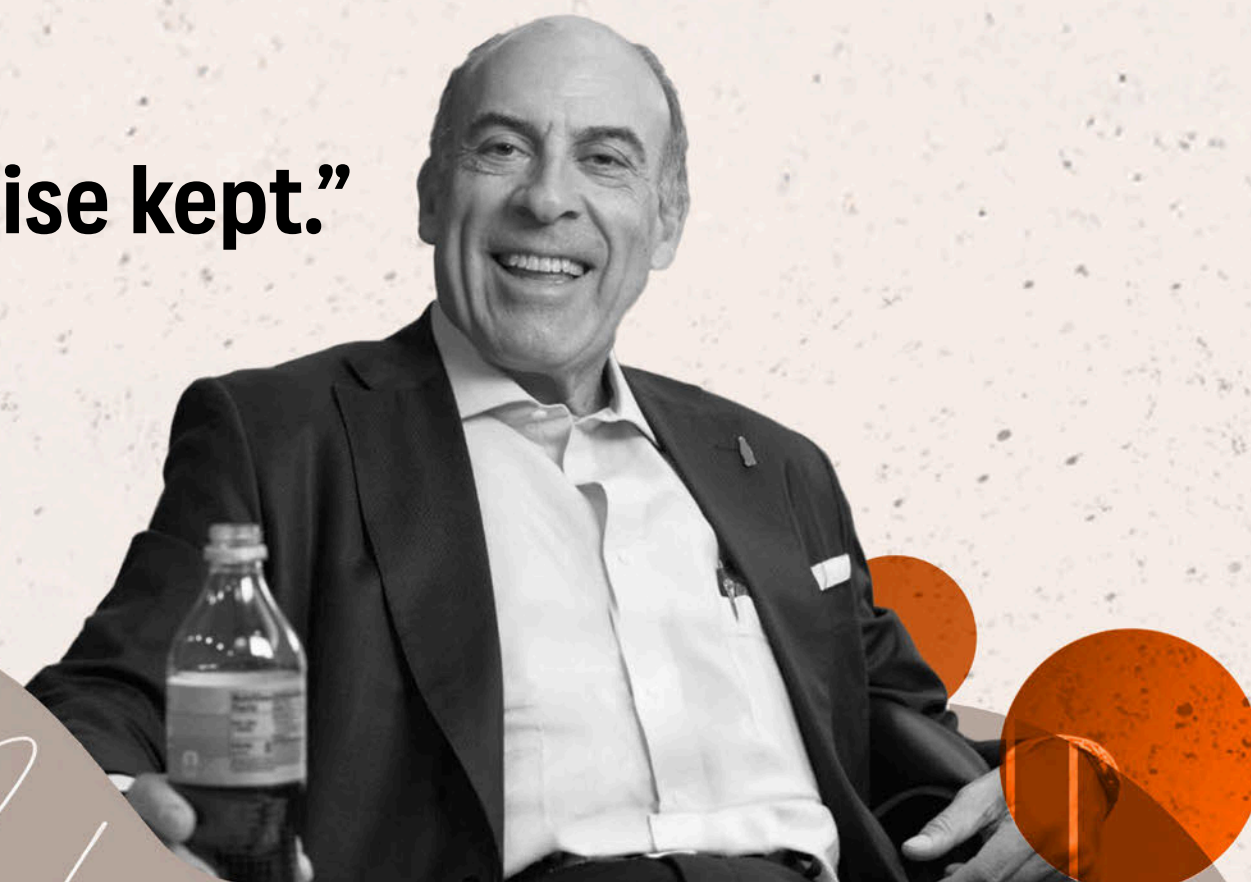
<sup>8</sup>Sam Gilbert, ‘This 715-song playlist is scientifically verified to give you the chills, thanks to “frisson”’ Big Think, August 22 2023.  
<sup>9</sup>Shane Snow, ‘Science Shows: Humans Have Massive Capacity for Sustained Attention, and Storytelling Unlocks It’, Forbes, January 16 2023.





**“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 consumers<sup>10</sup>.**

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 back<sup>11</sup>.

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.<sup>12</sup>**

<sup>10</sup> Aziz and Jones, Good is the New Cool.

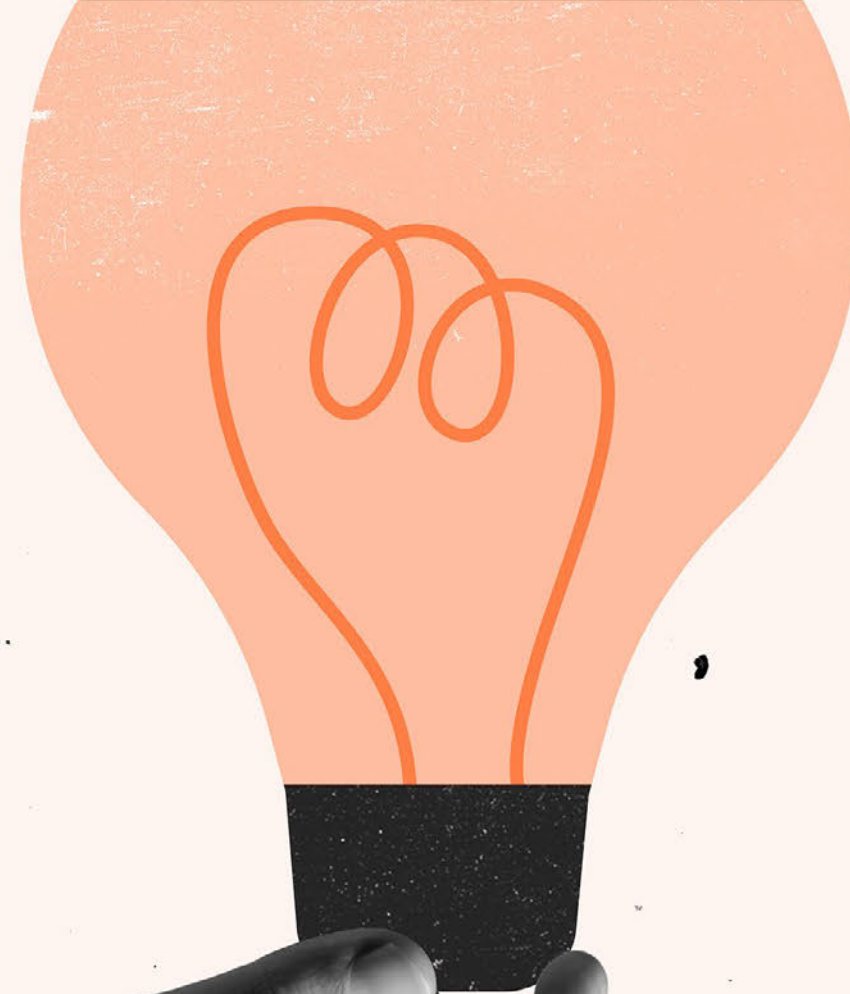
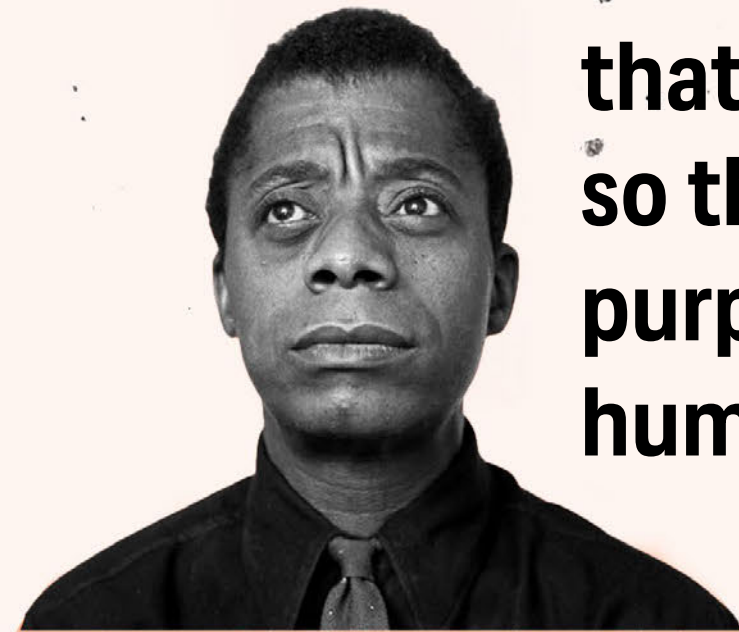
<sup>11</sup> Accenture, 'From Me to We: The Rise of the Purpose-Led Brand', December 5 2018.

<sup>12</sup> 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 brands<sup>13</sup>.

Perhaps most importantly, 57% of consumers say they would be more loyal to a brand that they see as human<sup>14</sup>. 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 customers<sup>15</sup>.

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

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

<sup>14</sup>Phelps, ‘How Human is Your Brand’.

<sup>15</sup>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.**

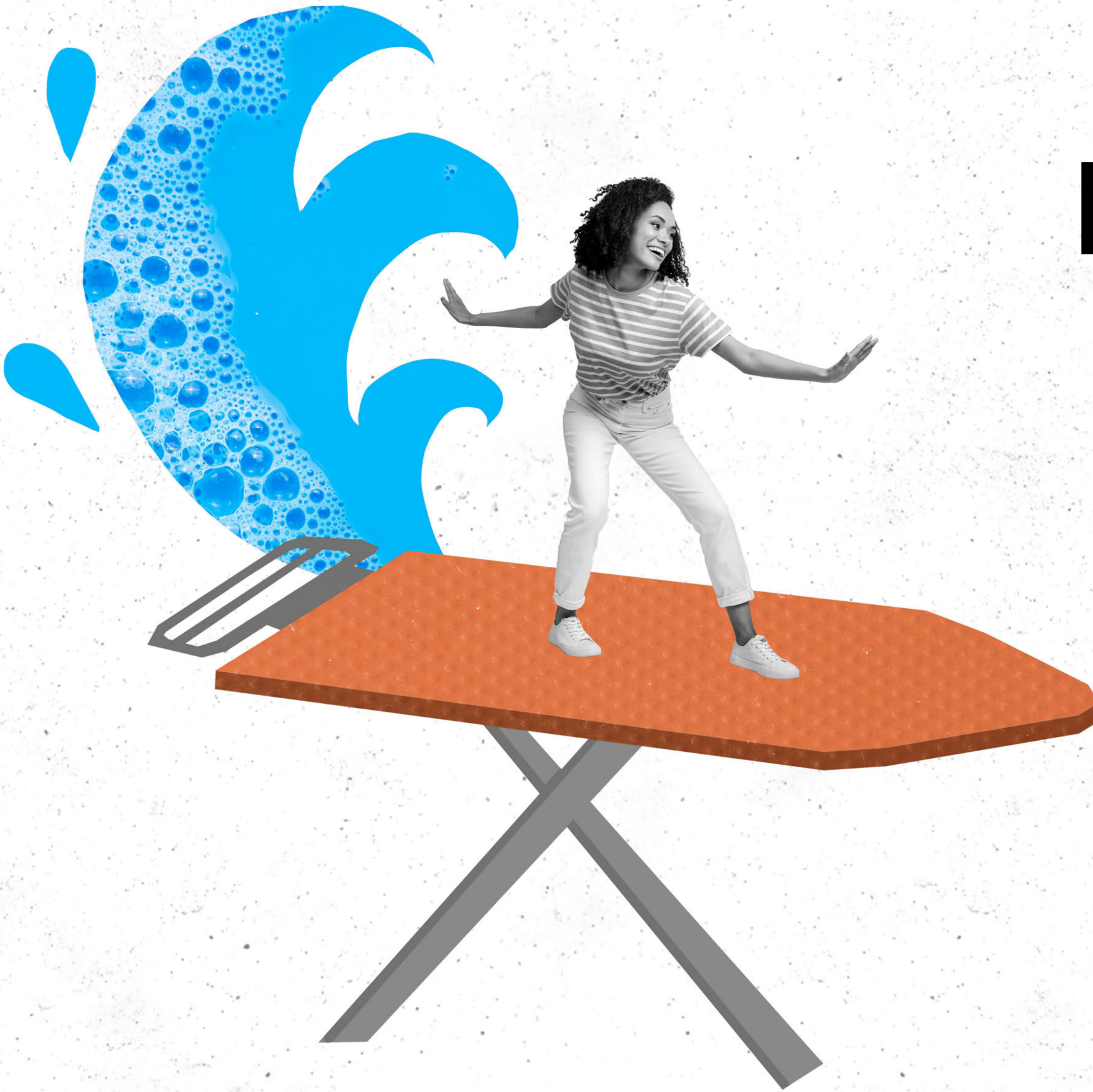




**“Creativity is a rebellion against stagnation.”**

**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.**



**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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