

08.19.26

TAPPING INTO TRENDS: **A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO ASSESS TREND** **RELEVANCE & BRAND FIT**



 **HIEBING**



***THE BIGGEST RISK
ISN'T MISSING A
TREND.***

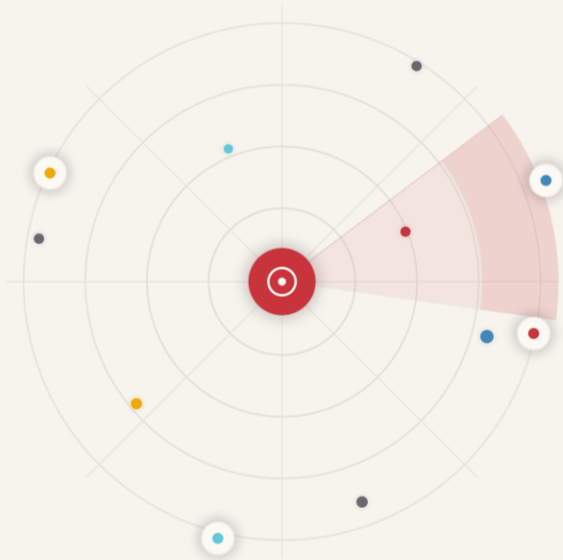
IT'S FORCING ONE.



OVERVIEW

Trends move fast.

Smart decisions move impactfully.



TRENDS CREATE PRESSURE

Social moves fast, and the expectation to participate is higher than ever



NOT EVERY TREND DESERVES A BRAND RESPONSE

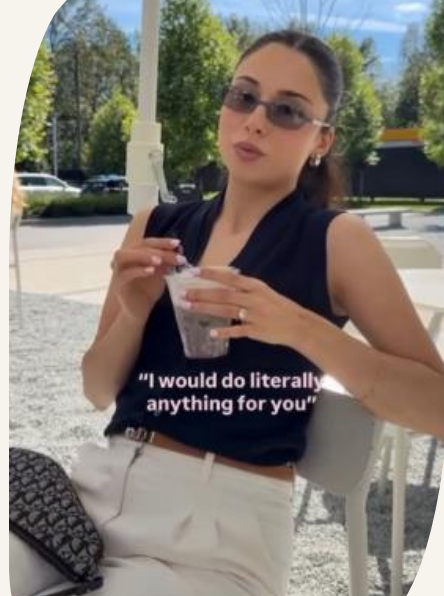
Relevance comes from knowing what aligns with your audience, brand and goals



THIS SESSION IS ABOUT MAKING SMARTER CALLS

We'll explore a practical approach for evaluating trend relevance, brand fit and timing before jumping in





WHAT IS A TREND?



WHAT YOU'LL WALK AWAY WITH



Reframe

Shift from chasing what's popular to using trends with a clear brand purpose



Evaluate

Check audience relevance, brand permission and timing before jumping in



Decide

Make the call, explain the rationale and feel good about jumping in when it makes sense or sitting out when the fit isn't there

HOW DO YOU DECIDE IF A TREND IS RIGHT FOR YOUR BRAND?

THE QUESTION ISN'T:

"HOW CAN WE DO THIS TREND?"

THE QUESTION IS:

"SHOULD WE BE DOING THIS TREND IN THE FIRST PLACE?"



STEP 1: REFRAME

*Reframe the role of trends from fleeting moments to a **strategic lever** that supports your broader social goals — when used with intention.*



TRENDS ARE A LEVER, NOT A STRATEGY

A trend can be used to:

- Signal cultural relevance
- Extend the reach of a message
- Increase engagement around a topic
- Accelerate an existing strategy

A trend should not:

- Replace audience insight
- Determine what your brand stands for
- Drive every content decision
- Become the strategy itself



**When building a social strategy,
define the role trends will play for
your brand**



Step 1: Reframe

WHEN A TREND SERVED THE STRATEGY

The Moment: Taylor Swift is photographed at a Chiefs game with chicken tenders, “ketchup and seemingly ranch.” The phrase instantly takes off online.

The Move: Heinz moves quickly, turning the viral phrase into limited-edition “Ketchup and Seemingly Ranch” bottles.

The Strategic Fit: Heinz didn’t only participate because Taylor was trending. It participated because condiments were.

The Payoff: A fleeting cultural moment became another way for Heinz to reinforce its authority in condiment culture.

Key Takeaway

The trend created the opportunity.
The strategy gave Heinz a reason to take it.



WHEN A TREND TURNED CULTURAL RELEVANCE INTO BRAND RELEVANCE

The Moment: Two denim campaigns dominated social conversation, but with dramatically different outcomes.

The Move: Gap paired Gen Z favorite Katseye with Millennial nostalgia, creating a culturally relevant campaign with broad appeal.

The Strategic Fit: Rather than chasing buzz, Gap translated a cultural signal into a brand expression that felt authentic, inclusive and distinctly Gap.

The Payoff: The campaign became Gap's most viral and highly engaged of all time, earning overwhelmingly positive sentiment along the way.

Key Takeaway

Winning with trends isn't about joining every conversation. It's about identifying the cultural cues that naturally align with your brand and audience.



zalfazar 48w
@gap got the formula right!



jeremydante 48w
GENIUS. GENIUS. GENIUS. Taking it back to the @gap we knew and loved, that tied music to style, interconnecting culture. American clean, so smart, so new yet something familiar. Repackaged with modern sensibility. cc @zacposen



**THINK ABOUT THE LAST TREND YOUR
TEAM PARTICIPATED IN. DON'T SAY IT
OUT LOUD, JUST THINK ABOUT IT.**



STEP 2: EVALUATE

*Learn a fast, repeatable way to evaluate trend fit so you can ensure **audience relevance** and **brand alignment** before investing time or resources.*



THE FAST FIT CHECK:

HOW TO KNOW IF A TREND IS RIGHT FOR A BRAND

1

Start with the target...

Would your target audience care?
Does the trend align with an insight about this group?
Is it a passion area they have?

2

Then look at brand positioning...

What values does your brand stand for — and does this trend support or conflict with those values?
Would it feel authentic coming from your brand? Whether through voice, values, category or point of view.
Is there truly any relevance to your brand? A product application? A brand standards overlap?

3

Then the moment...

Can we add something distinctive, meaningful or unique that makes our brand's participation feel intentional?

Miss the intersection of trend, target and brand, and your involvement will read as inauthentic or tone deaf.



THE **SPIN** TEST: HOW TO ADD A DISTINCTIVE BRAND SPIN

Specific to the Brand

Connect the trend to a product, service, expertise or experience unique to your brand.

Provides Value or Perspective

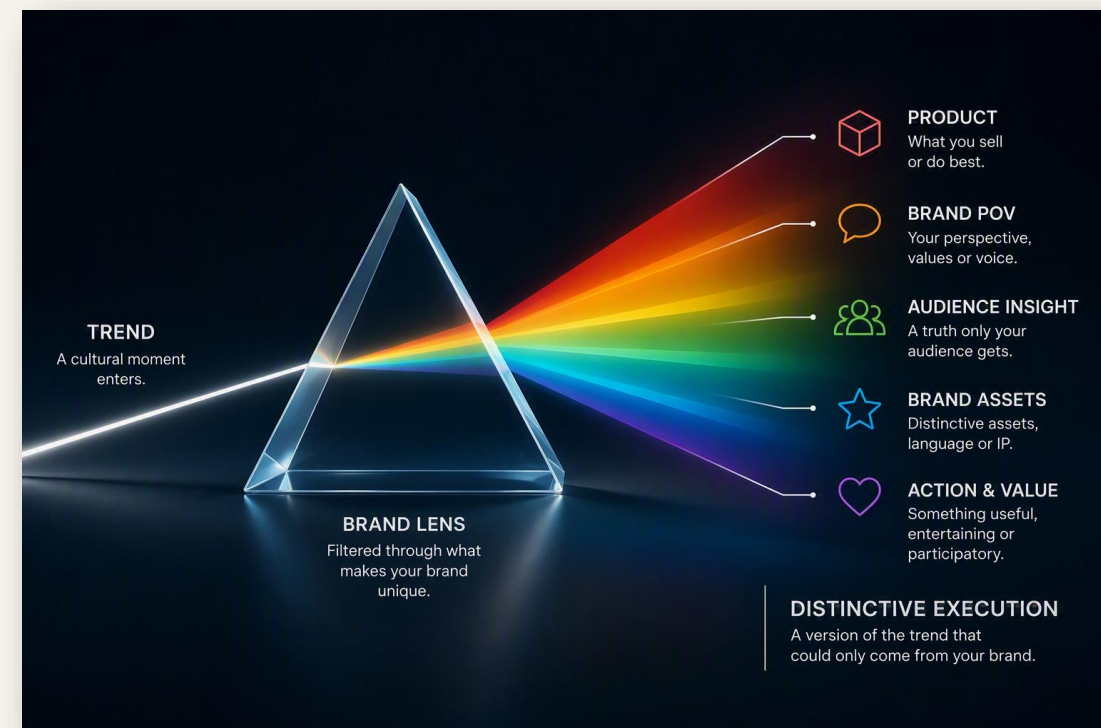
Go beyond repeating the trend. Teach, entertain, help or share a point of view.

Insight-Led

Root the execution in a truth your audience will recognize and relate to.

Not Interchangeable

If another brand could swap logos and post the same thing, the idea needs a stronger spin.



TO JUMP IN OR TO **NOT** JUMP IN?

JUMP IN WHEN:

Audience Relevance

It's relevant to your target audience.

Brand Fit

It fits with your brand positioning.

Still Alive

The trend hasn't died and the community hasn't moved on.

Your Own Spin

You can put a relevant spin on it that makes the trend subtly unique.



WHEN THE FIT-CHECK EARNED ITS KEEP

The Moment: Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce get engaged and announce it via Taylor's Instagram. Brands immediately take to socials to post engagement-related posts and puns.

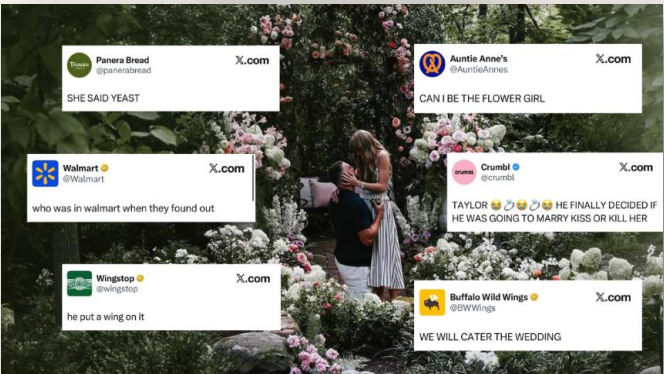
The Move: Miller Welding, a Hiebing client, asked about jumping in. We ran the fit-check first.

The Strategic Fit: The audience would get the reference, but the trend had no tie to why welders follow Miller. No relevance, no permission, no spin.

The Payoff: We passed, and put the effort into content Miller's audience actually wanted. The check protected credibility instead of borrowing impressions.

Key Takeaway

The fit-check works. Knowing quickly that a moment isn't yours is a win.

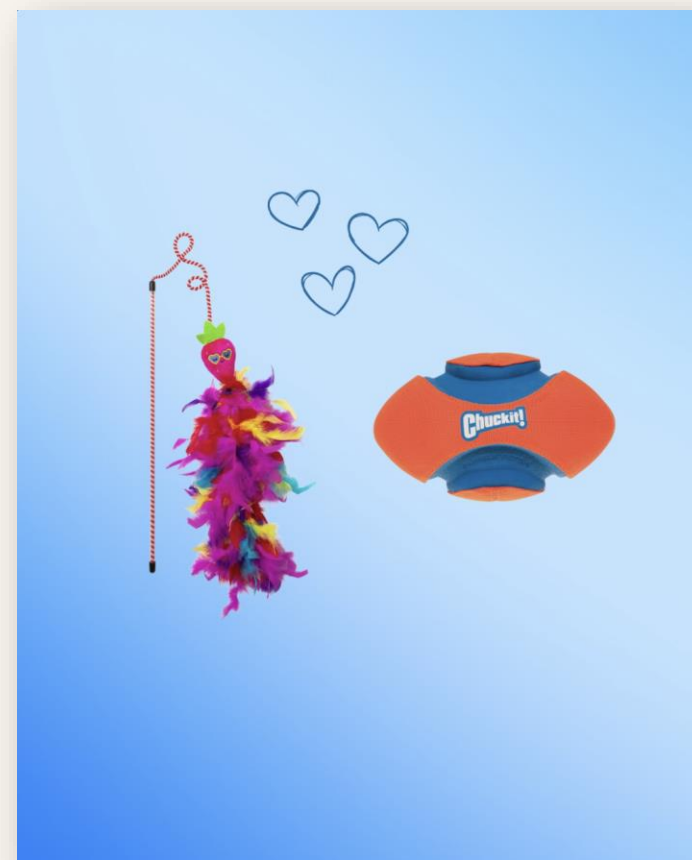


WHEN THE TREND ACTUALLY MADE SENSE

- **The Moment:** Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce get engaged and announce it via Taylor's Instagram. Brands immediately take to socials to post engagement-related posts and puns.
- **The Move:** Petmate, a Hiebing client, responded the same day with a playful post that reimagined the couple through pet toys, translating the moment into pet-parent humor.
- **The Strategic Fit:** Petmate's brand is rooted in playful pet humor, so making its own brand-specific take on a cultural moment feel like a natural extension of the feed rather than a forced trend response.
- **The Payoff:** The post felt entertaining, not salesy, allowing Petmate to join the conversation while staying true to the brand.

Key Takeaway

The trend created the opportunity. Petmate's brand voice made it relevant.



 petmatepetproducts When your English teacher and your gym teacher are getting married 💍
50w

YOU ARE THE SOCIAL TEAM JUMP IN OR SIT OUT?

EXAMPLE 1: *A HEALTHCARE SYSTEM WANTS TO JUMP ON A TRENDING MEME FORMAT*



YOU ARE THE SOCIAL TEAM JUMP IN OR SIT OUT?

EXAMPLE 2: *A CREATOR AUDIO TREND IS TAKING OFF, BUT THE SOUND INCLUDES PROFANITY IN THE ORIGINAL VERSION. CULVER'S HAS AN IDEA THAT FITS THE TREND PERFECTLY*



YOU ARE THE SOCIAL TEAM JUMP IN OR SIT OUT?

EXAMPLE 3: A BANK WANTS TO RECREATE A VIRAL "SPEND A DAY WITH ME" TREND SHOWING EMPLOYEES' DAILY ROUTINES.



STEP 3: DECIDE

Build **confidence** in your decision making, so you can commit to the trends that fit — and clearly articulate **when** and **why** to pass on the ones that don't.



MAKE THE CALL — AND STAND BEHIND IT

Make the call, explain the rationale, and feel good either way — committing when the fit is there, and sitting it out when it isn't.

REMEMBER:

Timing

Timing can be everything.

Competitors

Consider what competitors are doing, if available.

Public Reaction

Watch for public reaction before and after you publish, so you avoid being dragged into a space you don't want to be in.



WHEN THE TREND MADE SENSE

- **The Moment:** The "unhinged brand" trend on TikTok/Reels.
- **The Move:** [Scrub Daddy](#) created bizarre, chaotic content featuring their mascot sponge in absurd scenarios.
- **The Strategic Fit:** Authentic alignment. A goofy, smiling sponge naturally fits a playful, weird persona, unlike traditional corporate brands forcing a joke.
- **The Payoff:** Massive, dedicated following; audiences actively seek out and engage with their ads for the entertainment value.

Key Takeaway

Trend participation works best when it amplifies who the brand already is.



WHEN THE TREND SHOULD'VE STAYED IN THE DRAFTS

The Moment: A daredevil couple climbed the Empire State Building and hung a large black banner out over the city that read: *"When the power of love beats the love of power, the world knows peace."*

The Move: Loverboy, an alcoholic seltzer and tea brand, had the speed to join the trend, editing their logo onto the flag, but the fast fit-check would have slowed the decision in the right way.

The Strategic Fit: The meme offered no specific value or entertainment for their consumers. It was a reach, not a reward.

The Payoff: The forced, inauthentic attempt offered no real value and just added to the content clutter.

Key Takeaway

Fast doesn't beat fit. The strongest trend participation happens when timing and brand relevance work together.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1

Reframe the role of trends

From fleeting moments to a strategic lever that supports your broader social goals when used with intention.

2

Learn a fast, repeatable way to evaluate trend fit

So you can ensure audience relevance and brand alignment before investing time or resources.

3

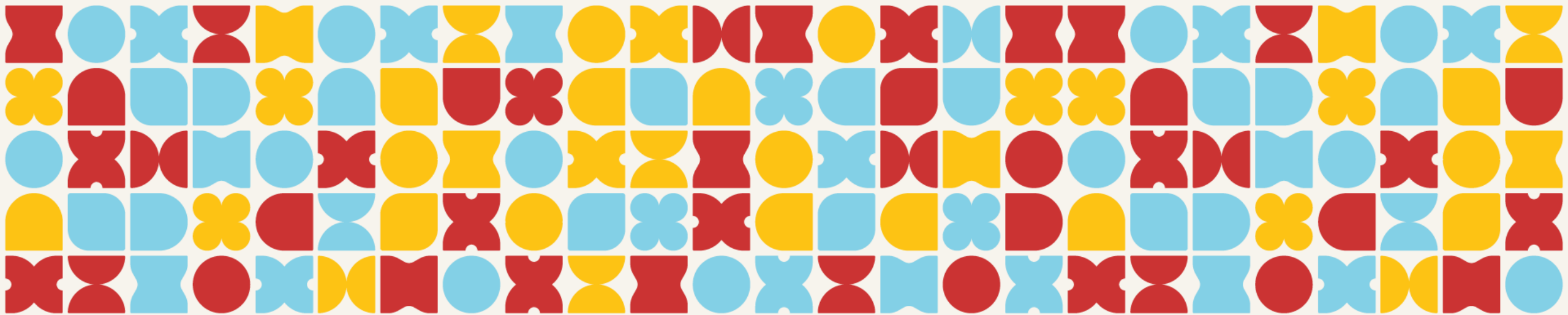
Build confidence in your decision making

Allowing you to thoughtfully merchandise trends and clearly articulate when and why to dive in or pass.



**SAYING NO TO A TREND CAN
BE JUST AS STRATEGIC AS
JUMPING IN.**





THANK YOU



QUESTIONS?

