

LOOKING AHEAD



The world of brand experiences doesn't sit still, and neither do we. Each month we track what's shaping culture, creativity, and connection IRL and online, pulling together the ideas, innovations, and oddities worth paying attention to. From AI-fuelled builds to beauty brands on the streets, this report spotlights where audiences are heading (and what brands need to do to keep up). Consider it your cheat sheet for what's hot, what's next, and what's no longer cutting it.

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## BRANDS BECOMING BESTIES...

The collaboration game has evolved from logo swaps to full-blown partnerships. 2025 went one step further with brands getting hyper-creative. We're seeing cross-industry pollination like never before, and honestly? It's about time.

It's not always finding a "complementary" ally. Sometimes it's finding one that challenges you. Like Harley-Davidson teaming up with Doom: The Dark Ages... that's a mash up nobody saw coming.

Here's what's hot in the brand world...



### WHEN IS TOO MANY, TOO MANY?

Here's the catch: with collabs everywhere, not all are going to be a hit. Life's a b\*tch!

Over-saturation risks devaluing both the brand and the partner. And if every drop screams "limited-edition," consumers stop listening.

The smart move for brands moving forward isn't more collabs, it's better ones; finding authentic partnerships, not forced overlaps.



### UNHOLYALLIANCES THAT ACTUALLY WORK







### WILD × PADDINGTON BEAR

Refillable deodorant brand Wild released an Orange Marmalade scented deodorant in collab with Paddington to lean into nostalgia + sustainability.

### **FENTY BEAUTY × NEW YORK LIBERTY**

Fenty brought courtside glam as the official partner for WNBA New York Liberty. Signalling sport and beauty are finally speaking the same language.

### HARLEY-DAVIDSON × DOOM: THE DARK AGES

Leather and heavy metal collide. Gaming x motorbike crossover was so absurd it worked, pulling two cult fan bases into one campaign.



Forget movie stars - the most powerful collabs right now are between brands and music's it-crowd.

Musicians bring both reach and vibes: they sell a lifestyle, not just a product.

Music-led partnerships outperform traditional celeb endorsements by 25% in driving brand favorability.

### THE SABRINA EFFECT

In the past year alone, Sabrina Carpenter fronted Prada, Skims, Versace, Redken, and Blank Street Coffee (the list continues)...

Girl, where do you get the time? Stop making us feel bad for duvet days.

### DUNKIN' × SABRINA CARPENTER

Yes, Sabrina's "Espresso" was a hit song. But it was a Dunkin' campaign in the making. Obvs. The limited collab proved music-driven drinks are the new merch.

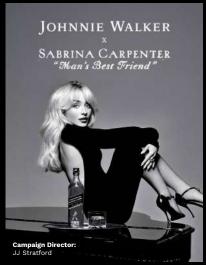
### JOHNNIE WALKER WHISKEY × SABRINA CARPENTER

Another unholy alliance... But with Sabrina at the helm, this legacy brand tapped into an audience they'd never previously reached.

### GAP × KATSEYE

GAP tapped K-pop's rookie powerhouse to inject global cool into its denim, instantly translating into TikTok traction. I mean, this ad is being studied in universities...







### WHEN BRANDS MEET POP ROYALTY



## BILLBOARDS ARE DEAD AS WE KNOW THEM ...

Obviously billboards aren't dead, they've just grown up... and gone a bit feral.

The new era of OOH is about surprises, participation, and moments too good to ignore. Static 2D ads barely get a glance.

Whereas, immersive, interactive, guerrilla-first campaigns are grabbing attention, getting social shares, and earning news coverage.



### GUERRILLA GOES MAINSTREAM

### BEAVERTOWN NEVER NORMAL HOUR,

Happy Hour like never before. Roaming bands, DJs, caricaturists, pass the parcel... 3 days. 10 pubs. *Strictly* 1 hour.

### TINDER EX-PRESS DISPOSAL TRUCK,

A dump truck let people publicly dump ex-related items. Emotional catharsis + viral content.

### ALDI × LEWIS CAPALDI ROOFTOP GIG

Pop star appeared mid-shop. Ordinary supermarket turned spectacle. 100% talkability.

### CANVA WATERLOO BILLBOARDS,

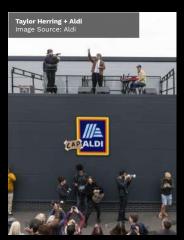
Oversized design fails turned into shareable street content. Agency humour at its finest.

### DREAMIES 'AD ATTACK' BILLBOARDS,

Cats will do anything... Maybe our favourite OOH of the year; Ad Attack sees cats scaling billboards across London to reach the treats!













**UGC-BASED ADS GENERATE** 

400%

HIGHER CTR THAN BRANDED CONTENT III



SOURCES: [1] Meta [2] HubSpot [3] EventTrack



72%

OF MARKETERS SAY NON-TRADITIONAL MARKETING DRIVERS HIGHER ENGAGEMENT THAN DIGITAL ADS [2]

EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS
IMPROVE BRAND AWARENESS BY

**85%** 

AND INCREASE CONVERSION RATES BY 60%





## DOOH INTERACTIVE BILLBOARD



### 'BURNABLE' BILLBOARD, BRITISH SKIN FOUNDATION (BSF)\*

This digital billboard burns in real time based on live UV levels, with QR codes leading viewers to BSF\* website for advice. Spectacle × education.



### STAY. CAMPAIGN, CALM: CAMPAIGN AGAINST LIVING MISERABLY

Series of QR-coded DOOH with a powerful message, encouraging potentially suicidal people that "someone wants you to STAY."

76%

OF PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN ACTION AFTER SEEING A DOOH AD [1]

DOOH GLOBAL MARKET VALUE IS PROJECTED TO SURPASS

\$58
BILLION

**BY 2030!** [3]

**50%** 

OF THE UK'S AD SPEND GOES TO DOOH [2]

SOURCES: [1] One Day Agency [2] Outdoo Platform [3] InBeat Agency

### PROGAMMATIC DOOH



### **DATA TAKES THE WHEEL**

Programmatic DOOH is about to dominate. Automated, data-driven buying will become the norm, enabling brands to target based on weather, location, time of day, demographics, in real time.

### WHAT'S COMING:

**Al personalisation** – Hyper-targeted campaigns that adapt to who's walking past, what the weather's doing, and what time it is.

**3D & holographic** – More depth, more layers, making displays feel alive and responsive.

Omnichannel integration – OOH seamlessly connected with other marketing efforts, spanning physical and digital touchpoints. Retail media networks are the new playground.

**Smart city data** – OOH integrated with urban data sources for hyper-targeted campaigns as cities get smarter.



Beauty brands are no longer confined to counters and glossy ads.

In 2025, they were taking over streets, pop-ups, and most definitely, your TikTok feed. From immersive experiences to unexpected collaborations, beauty will continue to become a lifestyle moment, not just a product.

# **BEAUTY GOES**

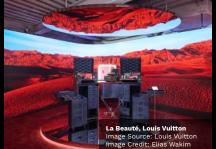




Beauty launches have stopped being about swatches on arms (RIP old school beauty YouTube). Now, we're talking IRL experiences.

Pop-ups and immersive retail are now table stakes, with 75% of marketers calling live events their most effective strategy!







### THE PROOF'S IN THE PUDDING

Kiehl's partnered with New York-based creative agency, Gradient, and proved with one immersive activation that experiential drives sales!

### So what did they measure?\*

- Shoppers entering the immersive side were 2.6x more likely to purchase
- Average dwell time was 13.4 minutes (55% higher than retail norms)
- Transactions at the activation beat Kiehl's national avg. by 8+ points
- Customers stayed longer (yay!), but also bought more...

\*tracked using technology from LiveGauge



## WHEN WE SAID IT'S GOING BIG... LANCÔME TURNS 90!









Lancôme Creative Agency: (we'd love to know!?) Image: 小红书 / Xiaohongshu



China is killing the game when it comes to experiential and creative builds.

This 90th 'birthday' celebration for Lancôme in Shanghai is case in point.

Lancôme celebrated nine decades of creativity and innovation with an immersive experience, the 'Lancôme Happiness Express', inspired by trains and travel.

Five immersive zones showcased a collection from the brands heritage archive and leaned into the spirit of French beauty, with interactive installations, multisensory displays, and a exclusive peek into the future of Lancôme.



Beauty's leaving the mall and showing up where you least expect.

Street-level formats mix immediacy with wow-factor, tapping into hijacking the everyday life and foot traffic.

### **BASE CAMP TOUR, SCULPTED BY AIMEE**

Shade-matching over 1,500 guests on tour buses across the UK, recycling old makeup along the way.

### **LOVE GAME POP-UP, YSL BEAUTY**

YSL Beauty took over Madrid for an immersive experience like no other, with 10,000 guests engaged in the brand.

### **HYDRATING BILLBOARD, THE INKEY LIST**

Press a button, get a free serum. Billboard as vending machine = chef's kiss.













## POP-UP VENUES WITH A TWIST!

Pop-up venues are shedding their "blank canvas" minimalist era, evolving from basic retail spaces to immersive experiences.

The next wave? Spaces with built-in character and leaning into nostalgia; converted diners, retro newsstands, old-skool corner shops.

Why it works: audiences want comfort and novelty. When a brand flips a retro format, it's an almost guaranteed win.



Nostalgia is a cheat code. Seletti turned Selfridges London into a surreal 1960s Italian supermarket; whimsical, maximalist, and absolute creator catnip.



## AMERICAN DINERS

## THE UNLIKELY CULTURAL HOTSPOT

The American diner is an event designer's playground.

Neon signs, vinyl booths, jukeboxes on demand, the American diner is a ready-made set that brands are about to fully exploit.

Menus become merch.
Milkshakes become moments...

The retro aesthetic is doing the heavy lifting.



### **SKIMS DRIVE-IN**

Five-day Mel's Diner takeover (iconic), serving Kim-approved shakes and SKIMS-branded pancakes.



### **GLOSSIER SUPPER CLUB**

Candlelit, glossy, Pinterest-core. A diner that felt like stepping inside the brand's mood board.



### WRANGLER, LONDON DINER

Americana exported to London with country tunes, denim-drenching and branded touchpoints.



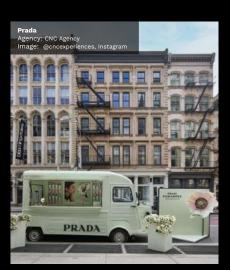
### DIANIC TDAINC \* <u>r lanlo, inamo, </u> & AUTOMOBILES

\*TRUCKS, TRAMS

maebe



LE FLORIST TRUCK



Forget tacos. Brands are hitting the road, turning trucks, trams, and vans into immersive pop-ups. This has been hot for a minute, but it's a trend that's consistently on the rise. And, the more unique the transformation, the

longer the queue.

Mobile activations are exploding because they're low-stakes, high-reach, and stupidly photogenic.



FLOWER MARKET

SUMMER SCOOPS

Agency: Stellar

KITTEN #

## EXTRA! EXTRA! NEWSSTANDS REBORN

The humble newsstand is having a reawakening. Not for headlines (only when it goes viral), but got product drops and brand hype. Small footprint, massive impact.

They scream scarcity, shareability, and lean into that nostalgic era we're all clinging to.

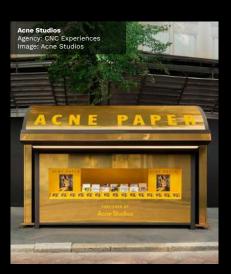
Newsstands work because they're short, sharp, and snackable, and we all know the best things come in small packages. Oh, and... they're also nostalgic. Obvs.



**JET LAG NEWSSTAND** 



THE PAPER



**ACNE PAPER** 



**THE JOURNEY POP-UP** 

## THE CONTINUED RISE OF IMMERSIVE VENUES

2024

2025

2026

**PROJECTION-MAPPED POP-UPS** 

**SEAMLESS TECH INTEGRATION** 

**PURPOSE-BUILT IMMERSIVE VENUES** 

The Sphere. Outernet London. These aren't pop-ups. They're becoming cultural landmarks in their cities... Even tourists have them on their hit list!

The Sphere, Las Vegas, was the pioneer. Proving that audiences will travel and pay for premium, multi-sensory experiences.

At home, in London, Outernet is a prime example of how high-impact digital environments can turn a city centre venue into an entertainment hotspot and a brand showcase.

Purpose-built immersive venues where infrastructure doesn't eat the budget and immersion is at the heart.

Brands don't need to retrofit. They can plug-and-play into venues already offering immersive visuals, sound and scent.

This will only continue to climb as brands chase agile, hyper-shareable formats.











If it's not on the grid, did it even happen?

In 2025 and beyond, designing for social isn't an afterthought. The best activations create moments guests NEED to share, turning every attendee into a broadcaster and every Insta story into earned media.

Win-win.

\*use the word 'need' loosely.



TikTok has rewired attention spans into three-second auditions (IRL + online). Nail the hook or get skipped. Brutal, but true.

Design specifically for the mechanics of social, not just the space: vertical framing, insta-worthy sets, transition-ready moments. Success KPIs are changing. It's no longer just footfall. It's also engagement, impressions, and memes. I mean... reach.

The new rule of thumb: if it's not camera-ready, it's actually not ready.

30% 61% 75%

**EVENTS ON TIKTOK** 

OF GEN Z DISCOVER OF MILLENNIALS USE SOCIALS TO FIND THINGS TO DO

USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PURCHASING

SOURCES: [1] Eventbrite [2] Eventbrite [3] IBM

### SOCIAL FIRST EXPERIENCE DESIGN



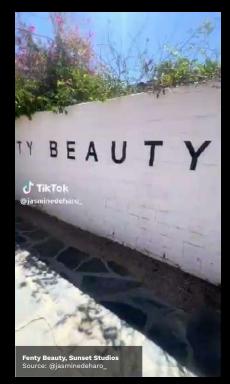






### **FENTY BEAUTY FESTIVAL HOUSE**

A 13-room villa dedicated to Fenty's pillars: hair, skin, beauty. The influencer pilgrimage, dominating feeds all week.





### WEDNESDAY, NETFLIX OUTCASTAWAY CRUISE

A boat packed with props, performers, and easter eggs for super fans. The Tower Bridge finale was viral bait, boosting the day's virality. CLICK TO WATCH!

### **KERASTASE, HOUSE OF GLOSS**

Day one open to influencers. Queues down the road for the rest. UGC did the heavy lifting.









## SHOW UP WHERE THEY ALREADY ARE...

Using influencers is all about authenticity. And there's real strength in showing up in unexpected places where your audience already is.

The takeaway: Tinder said stop playing hard to get! Don't force your audience to come to you. Meet them where they're already gathering, and make it feel like it was always meant to happen there.



### **EXAMPLE:**

Tinder hosted a pop-up rave in a bagel shop where their biggest demographics hangs out, Brick Lane.

Tinder in a bagel shop sounds random, right? But think about it. Young, social, dating-age crowd. Already there. Already vibing. It's genius.



### CALLING ALL CREATORS

Long Live the Influencer! (sort of)... Love them or not, influencers aren't going anywhere. In fact, they're growing faster than your impatience waiting to hear whether you've won a pitch,

BUT, their narrative is changing. They're not just storytellers. They're now co-writers. Give them equity or involve them in design, and they'll bring authenticity, reach, and cultural relevance.

The shift: No more insta-perfect, one-size-fits-all. Brands are leaning on micro influencers & creators with passion and credibility,

Culture above clout: Today's creators are co-creating brand identity. Authenticity is currency, and audiences can sniff a sell-out a mile away.

### THE CROSSOVER

Influencers stepping into roles traditionally held by performers. Performers becoming influencers. TikTok stars on the Oscars red carpet. Creators cast in Netflix shows.

Audiences now expect talent to carry a social footprint.







Immersive tech has finally grown out of its awkward teen phase \*round of applause\*.

For 2026, less is more. Tech should enhance experiences, not over complicate them. Integration with intention, where people forget where the physical ends and the digital begins.

Al-powered "Fruit Genie" creating music with audience input.



AITHAT ENHANCES NOTREPLACES Al isn't the star of the show. It's the director behind the camera, quietly making everything better.

### WHERE IT'S HEADING:

**Creative workflows** - Al image-gen to support briefs, smart scheduling, and auto-moodboards. The boring bits? Automated. The creative bits? Still human.

**Data that matters** - Real-time tracking for dwell time, demographics, sentiment. Insights, not surveillance.

**Predictive power** - Anticipate desires before the event starts. Eliminate friction, create seamless journeys.



THE IMPACTULATOR!

Yeah, we've built something... I know. Where DO we find the time?!

If you haven't already, meet the Impactulator, our in-house tool measuring event success in real-time. Dwell time, demographics, opportunity-to-see. Clients get actionable insights, not just data dumps.

Developments don't stop here. We can't say too much, but we're leaning heavily into AI.

Psst... we're developing an AI camera that reads gender, age, and happiness. Watch this space.



The Impactulator tracked 1.4 million Gen Z noses for a Lynx sampling campaign. <u>READ MORE.</u>



Here's a recent live example created as part of Intuit Mailchimp's FWD: London 2025 experience.



### CLICK TO WATCH!



One of our big predictions for 2026? Al for guest journeys is coming.

...we're already on it. We're using it to predict flow in our design phase of planning.

Our Senior 3D Designer, Franck Tawema, is consistently innovating ways to present designs. His latest brainchild? Flowplans™ ( j for the name).

Born from a trip up the Arc de Triomphe, where he watched the ebb and flow of people below and thought: "What if I could map that?"

Franck says it best: "Floor plans are the most underrated visual format in experiential design. Most people can't read them, and they're boring to look at. Until they reveal the invisible layer that shapes the experience: flow.

Flow is almost always discussed but hardly ever shown. When it's visualised interactively, it grabs attention, drives intrigue, and influences decisions."

### ...MAPPED





## CGI:

## THE INTERNETS NEW OBSESSION

If last year was CGI OOH going mainstream, next year it's going to eat the internet alive. The wilder, the better.

If it makes people ask, "Wait, was that real?" you've nailed it.

**The tension:** Al tools have democratised design. Most with a laptop can create professional-looking content now.

**The challenge?** Execution is cheap. Strategy isn't. Non-designers need brand guidelines, design systems, oversight.

Has a designer's value shifted from making things to helping systems?

### LE CRUISE-ET

Giant Dutch oven towed through streets, opening into a cake serving hatch. Surreal and shareable.

### **NETFLIX**

Billboard of a giant joint blazing in London. Zero explanation needed.

### **MAYBELLINE**

The one that ignited the trend? Maybelline's TFL mascara campaign was true **viral** marketing.







XR (the umbrella for AR + VR) is about to explode beyond niche applications.

AR overlays digital onto reality. VR creates immersive environments. Together, they're meshing the physical and digital.

### **WHAT'S COMING**

01 Live concerts from your couch?

Real-time 3D tech; more visually immersive real-time content

Graphics capabilities; exceptional graphics for XR experiences

Virtual experiences are evolving: globally accessible, personalised, interactive.

Geographical barriers? Don't know her.



## HOLOGRAMS AND TAILENT

Holograms teeter between wow-factor and uncanny valley. Sometimes creepy, sometimes the ultimate flex.

The jury's still out on whether it's the future of live entertainment or entirely dystopian. BUT, it can resurrect legends or create new personalities without scheduling conflicts.

Kevin Winter/Billboard Awards 2014 Image: Getty images for DCP

A holographic image of Michael Jackson performs onstage during Billboard Music Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena

### SOMETHING SEEMS DIFFERENT

### ABBA VOYAGE

This isn't new, but it's still the gold standard, proving holograms can feel alive. Nightly sell-outs, tickets moving like sequin hotcakes.



### INTUIT MAILCHIMP FROM: HERE, TO: THERE, LDN

An AI robot took the stage at Mailchimp's conference. Amplifying the human moment, not replacing it.



### PROTO HOLOGRAM X AARP

Real-time, multilingual AI avatars for guest interactions. Like this one, helping to reduce senior loneliness.



Since we're on the topic of tech and ABBA...

ABBA's Björn Ulvaeus admitted at SXSW London that AI is "very bad at lyrics," but unlocks new routes when he hits writer's block.

Transparency + humour = credibility.

Mainstream tech that's not going anywhere:

Image-gen booths = 2025's must-have is here to stay Real-time personalisation going mainstream.

Al dominates everything. No tech is escaping its impact.



Transparency matters. Consumers care if your work is Al, CGI, or human-made. If you're using AI, own it.

Al is a tool, not a talent. Al cuts admin bloat and find efficiencies, but human-made still wins. Use is an as assistant, NOT an artist.

Appetite for in-person activations is surging. That's not something AI can replicate. You can use AI to plan and predict, but humans still have to build, execute, and run the thing.

Live experiences are untouchable.

<sup>\*</sup>Spoiler: both, if we're clever about it.

## STARS OF THE SHOW



Live experiences still hinge on human talent. From headline acts to nano-creators, the right people electrify a room in ways no tech or build can.

The shift? The line between "performer," "influencer," and "brand face" isn't so clear-cut anymore. Everyone's crossing over.

Talent is the pulse of the room.



Live entertainment drives emotion, engagement, loyalty.

Brands are leaning into festival-level, curated experiences as their secret weapon; that's what's winning hearts (and social shares).

### WHAT'S COMING:

The rise of influential, unexpected speakers who challenge conventional thinking. No corporate-heavy lineups... book people who make the audience genuinely excited.

### **MICRO-TALENT**

Micro-Talent, Macro-Impact. Local artists and niche creators often make the biggest impression. You don't need a headline to create a moment.



### **INTUIT MAILCHIMP**

Comedians as hosts, Louis Theroux and Fearne Cotton sharing insights, Jamie Laing & Joe Wicks adding levity. Even conferences surprise when talent is top-notch.



### THE VIBE KEEPERS

Not every event needs A-listers, but a DJ keeping energy alive? Non-negotiable. Small talent choices = big atmosphere shifts.

## PUTTING ON A SHOW

### AMBASSADOR EVOLUTION





Brand Ambassadors are your ringmasters. First face, narrator, pace-setter. A bad BA kills the vibe. A great one becomes the brand. Brands should continue to invest in their BAs and make the pairing a complementary one.

**Authenticity over celebrity** - Nano-influencers who feel like genuine peers are replacing traditional endorsements. They drive authentic word-of-mouth, not polished ads.

**Long-term partnerships** - One-off collabs are out. Brands are building owned communities (Discord, Slack) and fostering loyalty through consistent, values-aligned voices.

**Purpose-driven content** - Ambassadors will be expected to align with brand values. Sustainability and transparency are the baseline.

Our secret weapon? Our lovingly curated roster of Brand Advocats: trained actors who read the room, stay in character, and become the living, breathing spirit of the brand. Guests notice. Everyone else wishes they had them (sorry ②).







Food is a universal language, and in 2025 and beyond, it's a shortcut to culture.

It's sociable, a creative medium, and visual feast all at once, which is why brands far outside F&B are sticking their fork in.

From fashion-led cafés to beauty-branded cocktails, dining experiences are storytelling. It's a culture hack and the most shareable format on the planet; IRL and online

## ...FOR MORE THAN SALES

## THE F&B IDENTITY CRISIS \*INTHEBEST WAY













Food experiences are multi-sensory, shareable, and deeply emotional. Brands are turning snacks, pop-ups, and cafés into storytelling mediums. And, when fashion houses open restaurants, you know food has escaped the kitchen.

Food as a brand tool taps into memory, community, and culture in ways few other media can.



## CE CREAM

r.e.m Beauty

Image: Kaitlin Cubria, Elite Daily

Why does every brand suddenly have an ice cream truck?

1: Because why the hell not?

2: Ice cream is a sensory jackpot: visual, nostalgic, seasonal. social.

A cone in hand = a campaign in feed.

...and this is just the tip of the iceberg \*cream



🖾 grey day

Kith x New Balance, Pop-Up + Digital Campaign Image: @kithtreats, Instagram

## THE UNOFFICIAL QUEEN OF BRAND COLLABS





THANK YOU!

INFO@BEARDEDKITTEN.COM