

BrandCulture



The Power-Up Playbook:

5 Learnings from a Grand Prix Award-Winning Culture Campaign

Ben Hubbard, Strategy Director for Pringles @ Brand Culture



Hello Player! It's-a-me, Ben. Read on for some game-changing insight for your next cultural promotion.

If I cast my mind back to November 2023, I remember Storm Ciaran was whipping around Western Europe, Tottenham had somehow found their way to the top of the Premier League, and Christmas songs were beginning to take hold on the airwaves.

Meanwhile, our Creative Strategy team at Brand Culture were cooking up a 2025 plan of attack that would elevate Pringles to be the #1 snack in gaming.

Fast forward to today and we're celebrating a campaign that sent culturequake waves through consumer minds and industry channels, went on to dominate this year's Institute of Promotional Marketing (IPM) Awards, taking the Grand Prix prize as well as gold in brand partnerships, shopper and food categories.

As the client said themselves, this has become a benchmark for future activations.

But how in Mario's moustache *did we do it?*

Well, if you're looking to drive brand relevance and sales, read on to discover five actionable learnings that can be taken from this award-winning campaign that tapped into culture and the power of brand partnerships.



The 5 Lessons from Pringles x Super Mario

Read on for more insight around the 5 learnings, and a Mystery bonus at the end.

01 Collectability > Prizing

Reducing copy on pack and giving more space to the marriage of iconic IP and brand DBAs can become a real conversion driver, over the need for a promotional 'WIN' message and offer.

02 Cultural activations can grow both Brand and Performance

With the right cultural partner, brand metrics and commercial gain can both be outcomes, and even fuel each other.

03 Good Partnerships Come from Great Strategy

It's easy to think reductively about partnerships when they just 'fit', but the best collab examples begin with data, have sharp cultural insight and deep brand mapping at their core.

04 NPD Can Deliver Cultural Relevance

Innovation tied to IP and tapping into fandom can drive trial, digital and physical talkability, and incremental sales.

05 Activate Partners Distinctively or Risk Missing the Mark

Pringles x Super Mario delivered two moustachioed icons, shared core colours, matched DBAs and more to look and feel like a partnership only Pringles could do.

01 Collectability > Prizing

Simpler on pack execution without prizing can 'Win'

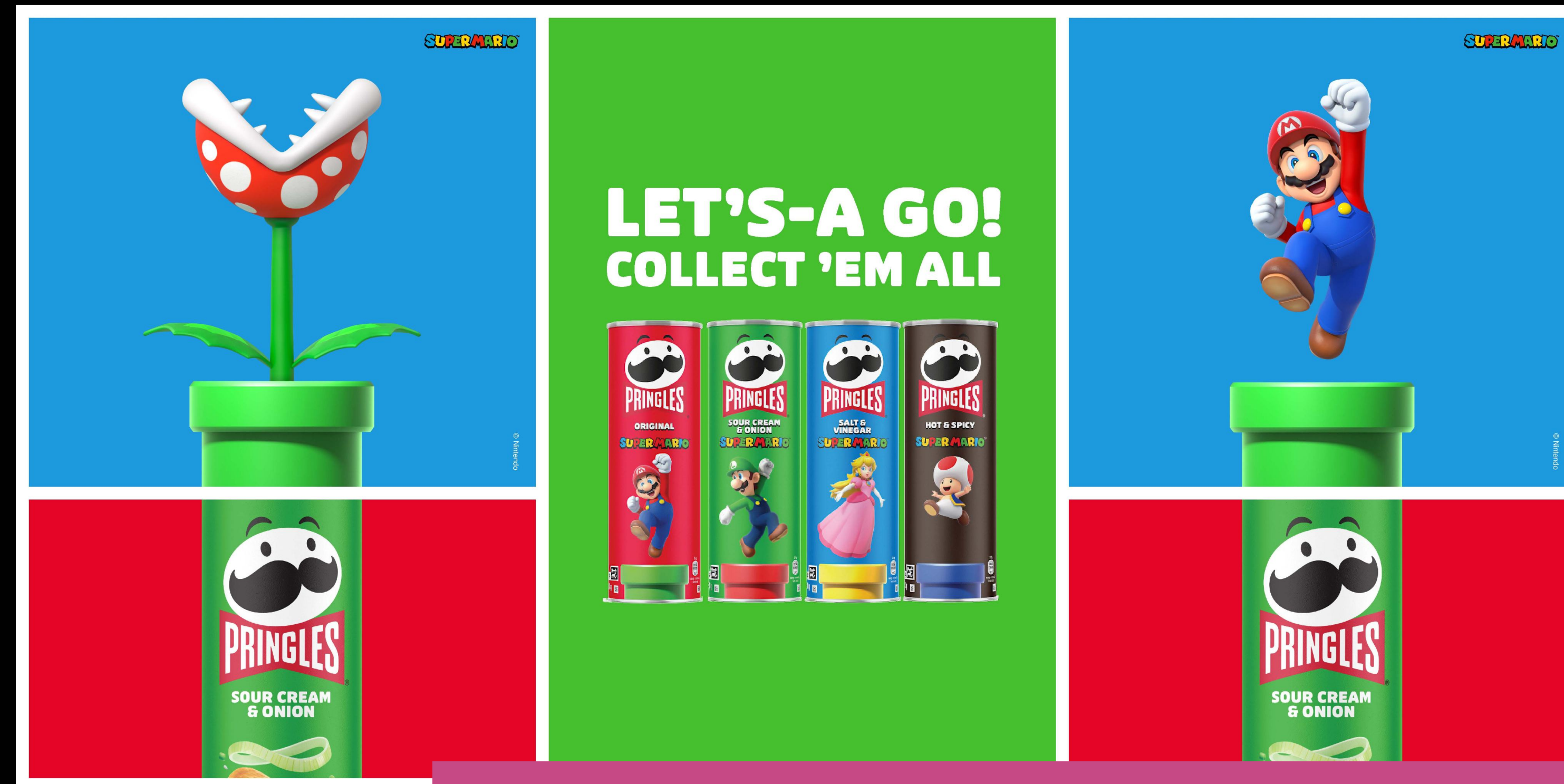
Unlike other channels that will be seen by a percentage of the final purchaser, your pack is a billboard seen by EVERY shopper of the product. However, the nature of the pack limits space to communicate significant messaging and decisions must be made about how much to include on a pack itself to encourage conversion.

For our Pringles partnership, a very definite decision was made to keep the packs clean of messaging and let the iconicity of the Super Mario logo and characters accentuate the classic Pringles can and housed brand DBAs.

While marketers may feel obligated to include a 'WIN' message and more on pack to convert the shopper at point of purchase, the simplicity of the can design was one of the absolute strengths of the wider campaign.

The Pringles cans became timeless collectables as a result, building the sense of nostalgia that was the bedrock of the strategy behind the collaboration. This resulted in meeting one of our client objectives from the campaign: achieving 'must-have' status among the franchise's fanbase. This was demonstrable through limited edition Super Mario Pringles product reselling on eBay for vastly inflated prices due to its perceived collectability value beyond the shopfloor.

Allowing the Super Mario characters space to breathe on - pack, we utilised POS to communicate the high value Prize Pool, which helped secure incremental on and off-shelf space.



POWER UP

Lean into simplicity; by stripping back the noise, you give your product the chance to become a cultural icon, not just another pack to be walked past.

02 Cultural activations can grow both Brand and Performance

Much has been written in recent industry press about the oscillating fashions of prioritising Long- & Short-term marketing. In certain cases, campaigns can both build the brand and create short term gain. The power of the Super Mario IP energised the full Pringles team and their agency network to throw the kitchen sink at a campaign. This resulted in an increased investment in an integrated activation that went way beyond a rate of sale driving on pack promotion.

Since a central part of our strategic planning process for the original promotional strategy was using the creative agency's brand creative platform work, the partnership with Super Mario was inherently linked to the Pringles above the line delivery. This allowed the brand team and lead agency to adopt the strategy behind the partnership, and incorporate the IP into their wider plans that then helped drive more sales in a power up move more usually seen in a Mario game.

The result was a multi-channel campaign that built the brand platform in a culturally relevant way and achieved commercial success with a significant YoY sales uplift. With the right cultural layer you don't need to choose between long-term brand building and short-term commercial gain.

POWER UP

Build one culture-first idea that ladders up into ATL and down to shopper so brand metrics and sales accelerate alongside each other.

03 Good partnerships come from great strategy

This point may get an eye roll of obviousness and the self-importance of a strategist. However, the partnership strategy required to deliver across markets, unite cross-brand teams and win awards is deeper and more robust than some would give credit for. Some partnerships just 'feel right' or 'are a great fit', but behind the scenes there will have been a strong strategy that brought the two partners together.

For Pringles x Super Mario, we used the brand's creative platform as a starting point. As per the point above, this allowed us to create a promotional campaign that felt deeply rooted in the above the line strategy.



Drawing on the groundwork done by the creative agency, we looked to a consumer insight and gaming truism for Pringles to own and set us apart from our cultural competitors like Doritos, Oreo and Lay's. This insight became the North Star for our rigorous Partnership Selection Modelling that considers all the brand non-negotiables for a partner to deliver across 34 (very different) European markets.

Our strategic process generated a shortlist of potential options and ultimately landed on the best partner option available, the most iconic gaming IP of all: Super Mario. The result was a cultural power-up that delivered commercial and brand uplift in equal measure.

POWER UP

Start with data, a sharp, ownable cultural or fan insight and build out a rigorous partner fit. Execution then scales effortlessly.

04 NPD can deliver cultural relevance and convert through taste.

New flavour NPD as a route to trial and talkability has become so common among consumer brands that regular new flavour launches can feel like a hygiene factor across the category - so much so that they can become wallpaper for shoppers and consumers.

What's another white chocolate biscuit, another cherry flavour soft drink, or spicy crisp? In recent years we have seen innovation be used as a lever for brands to pull with a variety of partners, usually in the guise of borrowing flavours such as Frank's Hot Sauce.

Innovation with culturally relevant properties is a subsection of this type of NPD that has increasingly become an important device for brands to secure ultimate relevance. If done well, cultural innovations can become transmedia storytelling, with fans of known and loved franchises seeking out NPD that brings them closer to their favourite IPs.

New flavour NPD as a route to trial and talkability has become so common among consumer brands that regular new flavour launches can feel like a hygiene factor across the category - so much so that they can become wallpaper for shoppers and consumers. What's another white chocolate biscuit, another cherry flavour soft drink, or spicy crisp? In recent years we have seen innovation be used as a lever for brands to pull with a variety of partners, usually in the guise of borrowing flavours such as Frank's Hot Sauce.

Innovation with culturally relevant properties is a subsection of this type of NPD that has increasingly become an important device for brands to secure ultimate relevance. If done well, cultural innovations can become transmedia storytelling, with fans of known and loved franchises seeking out NPD that brings them closer to their favourite IPs.



4. NPD can deliver cultural relevance and convert through taste.

Whilst fans have already experienced Super Mario through sight, sound and touch by playing the games and watching the film, the Mystery Flavour Pringles introduced a new sensory experience to the franchise: taste.

The Mystery element to the NPD created fan intrigue whipped up by relevant influencers in an authentic way.

For more information on Culturally powered NPD, have a watch of Brand Culture's recent industry event here:

[Watch the Industry Event](#) ➤



POWER UP

Supercharge NPD with cultural moment or beloved franchise and an IP raison d'être for fans to turn taste into talkability and repeat purchase.

05 Activate Partners Distinctively or Risk Missing the Mark

Does this one sound obvious? You'd be surprised.

Think back to the most recent partnership you saw and ask if a competitor brand could have done the same thing.

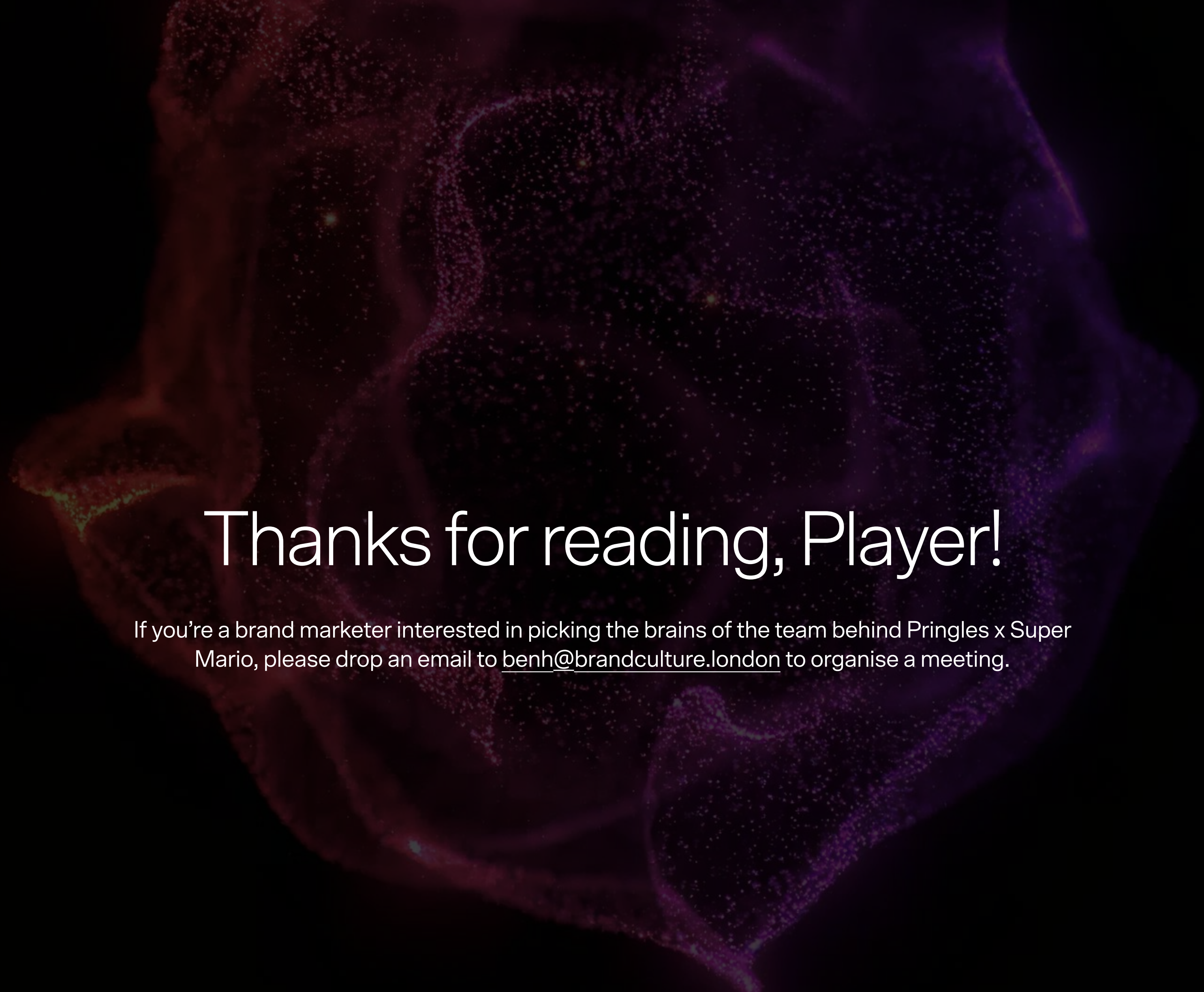
Brands may be concerned that in partnerships, equity can become diluted. Distinctiveness is the engine of relevance and memory. Anchor partnerships in your brand's own codes and assets, so they could only come from you.



Part of our strategic process included our proprietary BC Brand Mapping model, testing Pringles with the shortlisted IPs for potential cohesion with the brand. The synergy with Super Mario was undeniable: moustaches; an inbuilt brand playfulness; the red and green of Mario & Luigi matching Pringles' core flavours Original and Sour Cream & Onion; the shape of the can matching the green pipe; and chips replicating coins. This all added up to a truly distinctive campaign that only Pringles could have created.

POWER UP

Distinctiveness is a superpower. If a rival brand could run the same activation, sharpen the brand x IP fusion until only you could (or choose a better partner).



Thanks for reading, Player!

If you're a brand marketer interested in picking the brains of the team behind Pringles x Super Mario, please drop an email to benh@brandculture.london to organise a meeting.

BrandCulture