

Building fandom

What kids brands need to know (and most don't)

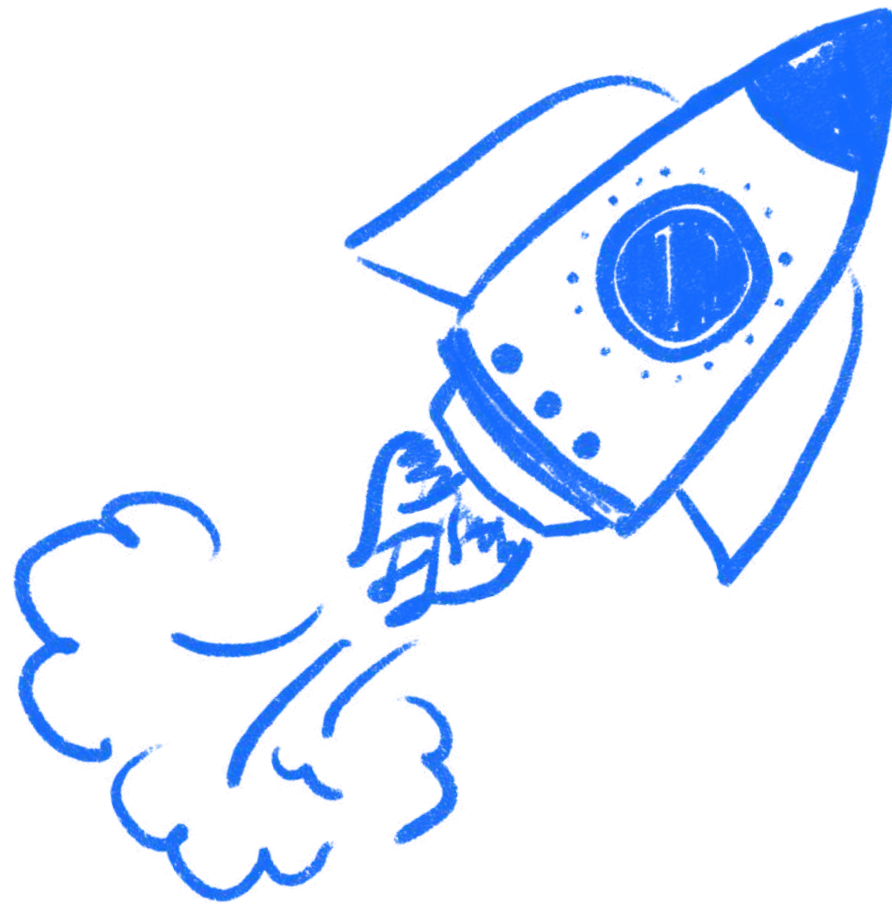
Fandom isn't about attention. It's about emotional relevance. When brands meet kids' emotional and psychological needs, they build something stronger than hype. They build belonging, identity, confidence, and loyalty that lasts.

This guide breaks down why kids become fans, what makes them stay fans, and how to design fan experiences that grow with them.



Why kids become fans

Grabbing attention is important and fun is a must-have, but brands that answer kids' needs give them a profoundly personal reason to join a fandom. So, what are the emotional and psychological drivers linked to fandom?



Six reasons to join a fandom

Full breakdown on the next page →

**Identity
formation**

Friendship

**Self-awareness
and confidence**

**Creative self-
expression**

**Role models
and heroes**

Family ties

Reasons to join

EXPLAINED

Identity formation

Fandom lets kids explore their identity. This is a critical stage in early child development when kids actively seek ways to define and express who they are. Fandom offers a low-risk, high-reward way to experiment with different roles, personalities, and social groups.

Friendship

Fandom gives kids an immediate way to connect and bond over shared interests. Not only can this inspire an immediate sense of belonging, but often shared enthusiasm and the sense of discovering something together can foster deep friendships.

Self-awareness and confidence

Kids gravitate to fandoms that help them recognize and sharpen their strengths. As kids practice and deepen their knowledge or skill, fandom becomes more than fun. It becomes part of their identity and a source of confidence.

Creative self-expression

As kids grow, so does their need for self-expression. Fandoms that make space for creativity and sharing support this developmental pillar. Whether it's designing dream houses, inventing characters, or telling stories through gameplay, kids get to show the world who they are.

Role models and heroes

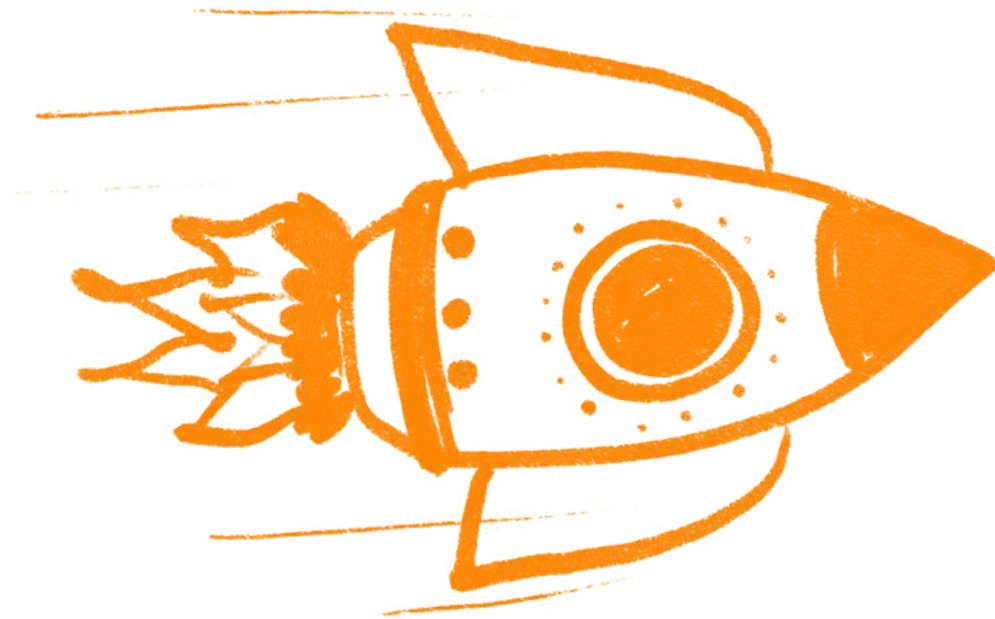
Fandoms centered on role models or heroes feed the personal ambitions and aspirations bubbling up in children as they grow. One way or another, these individuals give kids a way to make dreams feel possible.

Family ties

Kids often become fans because someone they love is already a fan. Fandom within families gives kids an unconditional welcome to that sport or franchise in a way that's uniquely personal.

Why kids **stay** fans

Getting attention is just the start. If you want fandom to last, you need to go deeper. Here are the key drivers behind long-lasting fandom.



Six reasons to stay in a fandom

Full breakdown on the next page →

**Emotional
engagement**

Belonging

**Participation
and ownership**

**Developmental
alignment**

**Purpose and
values**

Reasons to stay *EXPLAINED*

Emotional engagement

As kids grow, they want to go deeper. That might look like deep diving in lore, collecting all the characters, unlocking hidden levels, or competing at higher and higher levels. Fandoms that make space for progression can be rewarded with prolonged emotional investment.

Belonging

What starts as shared enthusiasm becomes shared identity. It's a natural progression for kids who find in fandom the friendship and community they crave as they begin to forge an identity separate from family.

Participation and ownership

Kids want to shape their experiences. They don't want to be passive users or spectators. Fandoms that invite participation quench their thirst for agency and ultimately benefit from longer-lasting engagement.

Developmental alignment

A kid who loves your brand at six won't necessarily love it at eight. And unless your brand adapts, they'll move on by nine. As kids grow, their emotional, cognitive, and social needs shift. To sustain interest, your fandom strategy has to evolve with them.

Purpose and values

Kids join fandoms to express who they are—and who they want to be. For Gen Alpha, that means purpose-driven brands that share their values, including sustainability, fairness, or inclusion. When a fandom shows up with real purpose, the kids who see themselves in it tend to stay.



How to build lasting fandom

Now you know that meeting emotional and psychological needs motivates kids to become fans and stay fans. How's it done? Here are a few high level strategies to design fandoms that grow with kids.

PART 1/2



Match content to developmental needs

Fandoms that evolve with their audience are the ones that last. So tailor characters, storylines, and fan experiences to meet kids where they're at developmentally. And adapt as they grow.

Empower meaningful participation

Kids want agency. Give it to them. Invite them to contribute, collaborate, and express their voice. Avoid empty gestures, though. If they bother to show up, they need to feel seen and heard.

Design for a positive culture—and protect it

Use prompts, visual cues, shared language, rituals, or lore to encourage positivity, mutual respect, and emotional connections from the first interaction between members of your community. Also: moderate early and often to establish clear expectations and intervene before toxicity takes hold. Invest in up-to-date moderation approaches, both online and offline. You protect your brand when you protect your fans.

How to build lasting fandom

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PART 2/2

Balance superfans and casual fans

Superfans bring depth, energy, and dedication. Celebrate them. Let their passion inspire others. But don't design just for them. Casual fans matter too (and they're often the ones who grow with you). A welcoming culture makes space for both.

Create breathing room

Build rhythms that let kids dip in and out without losing their place or feeling left behind. That means designing products, events, forums, and experiences with breathing room. It also means moderating your fan community's culture. Superfans can unintentionally raise the stakes. Make sure there's space for everyone to engage on their own terms.

Embrace online and offline fandom

Fandom doesn't live in one space. Kids carry it from platforms to playgrounds, from servers to sleepovers. That means your fan experience needs to work wherever they are. Online, that means clear rules, active moderation, and safe design. Offline, it means thoughtful event planning, inclusive merch and messaging, and activations that reflect your brand's values. Don't just think digital. Think everywhere.



Want to go further?

When you build a fan experience rooted in connection, creativity, and belonging, your fandom becomes part of the story kids tell about who they are—to themselves and to the world. That doesn't just earn their interest. It earns their loyalty.

Visit our website to read the full article and to learn more about kid fandom. Connect with us if you'd like support reaching and engaging kids as they grow.



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