

Challenger Brands:



Relish A Chance To Be The Underdog

Why It's Better To Be An Underdog



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“ There’s something intrinsically human about the tale of an underdog, and it taps into our capacity to hope for the future and dream big. It also teaches us about disrupting common beliefs and overcoming and confronting society’s stigmas.

7 Strange Competitive Advantages Of An Underdog Mindset



David Sturt and Todd Nordstrom Former Contributor @
Careers

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“ It’s not that they always win. Instead, it’s because they are not afraid of losing.



Harvard
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Leading Teams | The Upside of Being an Underdog

Leading Teams

The Upside of Being an Underdog

by Samir Nurmohamed

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Why Being An Underdog Is Great

“ [Underdogs] have two important things that many corporations do not have: A Loyal Following And Tenacity.

“ Experiencing underdog expectations was a significant predictor of performance.

David didn't fell Goliath by vying to match his size and strength. Quite the contrary, he knew his smaller size, quick thinking and creative agility could win the day.

"Life is never more fun than when you're the underdog competing against the giants."

– Ross Perot



We see a modern David vs. Goliath matchup playing out today among challenger brands that are boldly facing down much larger corporate giants—and often winning—precisely because they too are willing to take risks and take advantage of being smaller, faster, creative and agile. And unlike David, these mighty mites are typically backed by fearless, loyal communities!

If you're a marketer who relishes the role of underdog this guide is for you. It's a quick, smart and "act now" handbook for challenger brands seeking some fresh rocks for their 2022 slingshots.



Rock #1

Play Like You Get One Shot

– Optimize Media Effectiveness –

“Our dollars are disproportionately smaller; we have to be really thoughtful about where we spend and the creative we use,” says Andy Judd, CMO of Yasso Greek Frozen Yogurt.

More and more challenger brand leaders talk about **triangulation** as the key to ensuring every channel and creative investment hits its target. The three sides of their slingshots include:

- 1. Internal Expertise** – Get the right people on your team with the expertise and confidence to make bold, performance-driven decisions.
- 2. Agency Counsel** – Your media-buying experts also will offer a perspective on where and when your brand should be active.
- 3. Analytics** – And when every dollar has to count, more and more brands are turning to predictive analytics to help model the best allocation of resources across channels, weeks and investment levels...before committing dollars.

“We had our media agency do match market media tests and then triangulated their findings with Keen’s model to reach our conclusions. The process creates solid dialogue and helps us set the right expectations with leadership too,” says Senior Brand Manager, Heather Fitzpatrick, of Vital Farms. “What we’re trying to do is balance efficiency (spend wisely) and effectiveness (reach the right people) to tell our story.

“Because every dollar is so important, there tends to be an even deeper belief that every dollar has to be working, when in reality, a little higher non-working spend, especially when it comes to analytics or creative mix, will net better results,” Judd adds.

“When you're an underdog, you're forced to try things you would never otherwise have attempted.”

– Malcolm Gladwell



Rock #2

Remember You've Got A Whole Community Behind You!

Vital Farms is deeply committed to their community, folks they lovingly refer to as their “Raving Fans.”

Real community requires patience and intentionality our brand experts say. Many times, it's not the “efficient stuff” that builds community. It is a process of patience and sustained effort.

One example is the “Vital Thanks” campaign that Vital Farms launched last year. They invited some of their fans to pen handwritten thank you notes to their frontline crew members and farmers and promoted the campaign on-carton.

In a world where only bills and flyers fill most mailboxes, Vital Farms' raving fans stamped up and sent more than 3,000 handwritten notes of gratitude!

“Every interaction is a way to build trust,” according to Lauren Rader, writing for [Dead Cats Society](#). “Since challenger brands are building new customer bases, they know that they cannot just shove a message down their consumers' throats and expect that they will immediately convert. They also know that these engagements need to be extremely positive.”

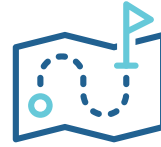
“When an underdog wins, they win for everybody, because somebody gotta come through that door and break it open and make it possible.”

– St. Jhn



Building community and cultivating influencers is still a healthy mix of art and science. Fitzpatrick, senior brand manager with Vital Farms, explains it like this:

“Our strategy is much more holistic than focusing purely on ROI or profits. We have an elaborate consumer journey with many touchpoints that includes educating consumers about our brand and engaging them through stories about our stakeholders. We strive to exercise empathy; it’s one of our company’s core values.”



Another valuable way to lean on real folks to help win the day comes from Yasso Greek Frozen Yogurt, who encountered a sticky problem during COVID:

NO Sampling!

Undaunted, Yasso quickly and boldly turned to its robust network of influencers – they have dedicated strategies to support Micro influencers, ambassadors, top-tier influencers and celebrities.

The influencers served as proxies sending the message to Yasso’s fans that:

“Someone like you tried our product and loved it!”

To ensure their decision to scale this initiative during Covid-19 didn’t result in a deep freeze by management, Yasso turned to Keen’s platform and validated the sales impact, which was significant and powerful, Judd explains.





Rock #3

Accuracy Takes Know-How, Knowledge and Maybe a Little Luck

As large corporate brands pour over expensive, voluminous marketing-mix analyses, challenger brands are charging forward.

“Data is great, but the focus for challenger brands is always on the human datapoint. Challenger brands (and Plato) know that ‘a good decision is based on knowledge, not on numbers,’ ” Rader writes.

“With but few exceptions, it is always the underdog who wins through sheer willpower.”

– Johnny Weissmuller

For challenger brands the dilemma is either to spend more on nonworking dollars to get the right analytical tool or commit to ongoing conversations internally to make the case for why you’re doing what you’re doing, according to Judd.

Vital Farms starts with the data, but mixes it with a healthy dose of humanity. One example is the company has very robust demographic and psychographic profiles of their ideal customers. But to bring them to life, they created (and actively animate) “Abby and Abe” as their customer personas.

“We talk about them,” Fitzpatrick says. “Is this something they’d be doing?’ ‘This is what they do on the weekend. What kind of car do they drive and where do they go?’ It really helps bring a level of personification.”

“Everyone on the marketing team knows Abby and Abe,” VP of Marketing Kathryn McKeon adds. “It’s a good shortcut to making good marketing decisions every day. We’ve gotten to know these people through data, yet we also talk about them as real people. In this way we don’t have to analyze every decision, and we’re able to move quickly.”

Balancing working dollars with investment in insights can help avoid unforced errors, especially when you’re moving at high speed. Success requires a quantitative, outcomes-driven mindset, grounded in the immutable truth that challenger brands live or die by consumer love and loyalty, so personalizing the bond between brand and buyer is a must.

About Keen Decision Systems

Keen Decision Systems is a high-performance challenger in the marketing performance management space. Keen has climbed the Inc. 5000 each of the past three years, alongside its friends at Yasso Greek Frozen Yogurt.

Keen seeks to disrupt how consumer brands make marketing planning decisions by allowing marketers to build future-focused, Bayesian models, even with sparse or poor-quality data, that accurately predict the best marketing mix to deliver the strongest financial return for the business.

More than \$2B in marketing dollars are optimized on Keen's platform, including brands of Post, 3M, Church & Dwight, Tate's, Bridgestone, Capital One among others.

*"Hate it or love it,
the underdogs
come out on top."*

– Curtis Jackson

*"There's no need
to fear; Underdog
is here."*

– Wally Cox

