

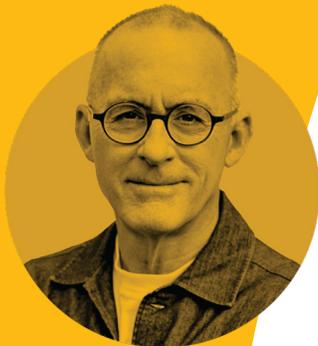
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06

**THE BRAND
BUILDER'S**
PLAYBOOK

THE PARTNERSHIP PAYOFF:

**PICKING THE RIGHT
COLLABORATIONS**

HOSTS



JIM
STENDEL

In October 2008, Jim Stengel shocked the marketing world by leaving his prestigious role as Global Marketing Officer at Procter & Gamble, one of the most admired brand building companies in the world. This bold move was Jim's first step on a new mission to share his passion for growing business through a focus on higher ideals.

To continue on his mission, Jim has embraced a variety of exciting roles: President/CEO of The Jim Stengel Company, LLC, host of The CMO Podcast, Author of *Grow: How Ideals Power Growth & Profit at the World's Greatest Companies* Unleashing the Innovators: How Mature Companies Find New Life with Startups, Adjunct Professor at Kellogg, Northwestern, speaker with the Washington Speakers Bureau® Advisor to several companies.

x **JIM STENDEL**
COMPANY



RYAN
BARKER

Ryan Barker is the founder of BERA.ai, and is known as “Alchemist of Brand Equity” for his ability to turn the emotional power of brands into measurable business performance. After 15 years in brand consultancy at WPP, Ryan grew frustrated by vanity metrics that won awards but failed to drive business outcomes. He saw marketers losing credibility, chasing short-term sales while neglecting long-term brand value.

Out of that conviction, he launched BERA.ai—the world's first real-time brand intelligence platform connecting brand equity to business results. Today, leading brands and private equity firms rely on BERA to predict performance, guide investment, and protect their most valuable intangible asset: their brand. Blending analytical rigor with creative empathy, Ryan's mission is simple: what gets measured, gets valued—and what gets valued, gets protected.

x **BERA.ai**



LINDSEY
WEH KING

Lindsey Wehking is the Chief Investigative Strategy Officer at Nonfiction Research. Nonfiction explores the hidden parts of American life through immersive research. Their researchers have sat beside patients in hospitals, inmates in prison, and have interviewed Atlanta rappers while rollerblading. Nonfiction's findings have been featured by ABC News, Axios, MSNBC, Fox News, and FastCompany. Their work has inspired public service campaigns, a division at Disney, new flavors of Doritos, and a Megan Thee Stallion song.

Lindsey is the author of *The Invisible Weight*, a report and podcast on the hidden emotional experiences of pregnancy and the lack of emotional care in the U.S Healthcare system. She has also authored *America's Secret Playlists*, a report on the secret lives hidden within Spotify playlists, and *Saving America from the News*, a study of what Americans really want from journalism. Her quest for more emotional realism in research has brought her into hip hop therapy groups, sex cults, ayahuasca retreats, illegal gas station casinos, Insane Clown Posse concerts and deep into the inner lives of everyday Americans.

x **NONFICTION**
RESEARCH

TODAY'S GUEST



KRISTEN
D'ARCY

Celebrated for her innovative and disruptive approach to marketing, Kristen has been honored by Ad Age as one of the “Best Marketers Under 40” and a “Top Digital Marketer” and by Brand Innovator as one of the “Top 50 Women in Brand Marketing.”

At True Religion, Kristen has driven double-digit growth and resurgent consumer engagement through dynamic global campaigns that blend fashion, sports, music and culture. She’s forged partnerships with the NFL and NBA and spearheaded activations at the Super Bowl, NBA All-Star Game and Coachella. Some of the music industry’s biggest names have starred in her groundbreaking campaigns. Kristen’s leadership has been recognized by Business of Fashion, Glossy, Vogue Business and WWD.

Kristen started her career at Tribal DDB and R/GA and has held senior brand positions at Ralph Lauren, Oscar de la Renta, Coty and AEO in addition to serving as CMO at Homedics.

06 PICKING THE RIGHT COLLABORATIONS

x **TRUE RELIGION**
BRAND JEANS®

Not all partnerships deliver equal value—some enhance brand equity, while others dilute it. Kristen discusses the framework for evaluating brand collaborations, identifying the right strategic partners, and measuring the true impact of partnership marketing. Kristen discusses how to evaluate, build, and measure successful collaborations.

HOW DOES BERA.AI APPROACH PARTNERSHIP EVALUATION?

01. Pinpoint the challenge.

Are they looking for differentiation? Do they need to be more culturally relevant? Is it an awareness issue?

02. All about positioning.

If you know what is in the core of your essence and the drivers of your brand, you can help to identify the right partners that address perceptual weaknesses while reinforcing strengths. You want to make sure those brands you partner with will bring the differentiation that you need.

These brands that are partnered with should align with the core of your brand essence, and not differentiation for the sake of differentiation.



It's a little bit of math & magic.

KRISTEN
D'ARCY

WHAT IS TRUE RELIGION'S TOP CRITERIA TO MOVE FORWARD WITH A PARTNERSHIP?

The Math

- Number of followers
- Engaged audiences
- Audience alignment with sales targets
- Timing (album drops, tours, major events)

The Magic

Does this partner feel like something our customer would expect or want?

What is the objective of the partnership? Scale or attract a new audience?

HOW DOES TRUE RELIGION APPROACH PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY?

01. Talent Partnerships

Partnerships with talent such as Megan Thee Stallion position her as the face of the campaign, with opportunities to extend into live performances, cultural moments, and long-term brand activations.

02. Influencer Partnerships

The True Religion team created a network of more than 100 athletes, stylists, and musicians—known collectively as #TeamTrue—who act as an always-on community of creators and advocates driving always-on brand energy.

03. Brand-to-Brand Collaborations

True Religion continues to expand its reach through collaborations that range from major partnerships with Ford, to niche drops with Cookies, to culturally relevant fashion collabs with brands like Belladonna—each designed to strengthen its connection to diverse audiences.

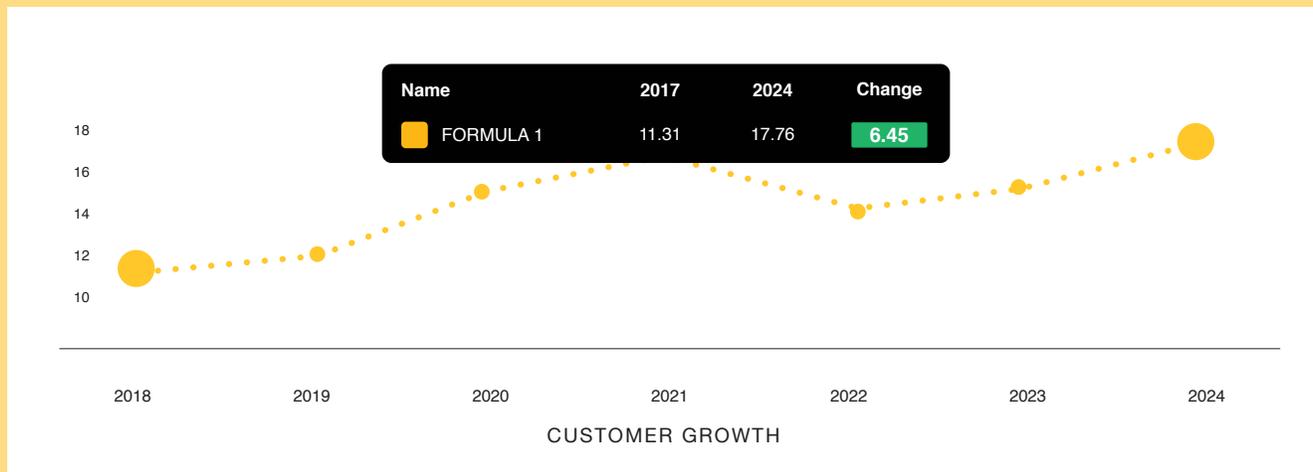
HOW DOES TRUE RELIGION BALANCE SHORT-TERM SALES IMPACT & LONG-TERM BRAND EQUITY?

Go back to the brand's objective—determine the purpose of this specific collaboration. While the overarching goal is to drive sales and strengthen the brand, it's also about understanding customer behaviors and deepening personalization.

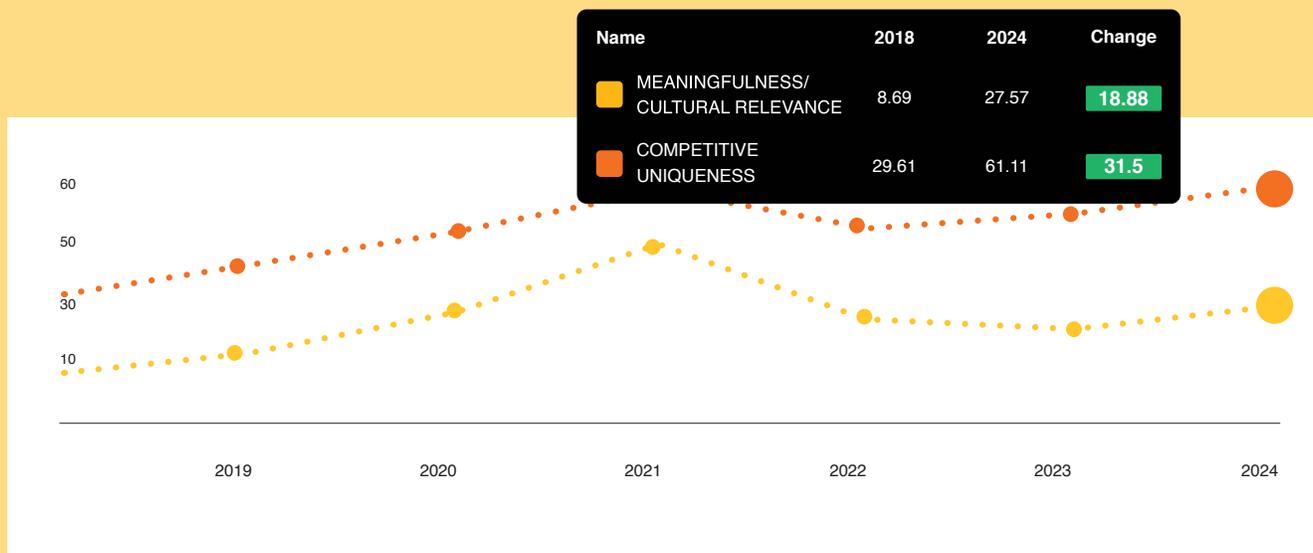
- CAC to LTV ratio
- New customer acquisition
- Customer spend in year 1
- Customer spend beyond collab products
- Loyalty signups

Playbook Proof

This is where theory meets tangible results. In this section, we showcase a key visual directly from the BERA platform—the hard data and actionable insights that prove the value of the strategies discussed in this week's episode.



When Formula One and Netflix got together in 2019, they launched their series—Drive to Survive. From 2019 to today, the brand has nearly doubled its fan base in the US alone.



Historically, this was a brand that was very niche. When we look at the data, meaningfulness/cultural relevance grew from low 8th percentile to the 28th percentile. Simultaneously, Competitive Uniqueness increased over 30 points.



COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Surface-level pairings.



Simply attaching a celebrity or influencer without cultural integration risks being perceived as inauthentic.

Chasing popularity instead of relevance.



A famous partner doesn't guarantee resonance with your audience if it's not authentic and compatible with your brand.

Neglecting measurement frameworks.



Without clear objectives (sales vs. awareness vs. new audiences), it's impossible to evaluate success.

Ignoring cultural nuance.



Missing the subcultural signals can lead to tone-deaf partnerships that alienate rather than engage.

Over-reliance on partners.



Partnerships are amplifiers, not substitutes for a strong core brand identity.

EPISODE TAKEAWAYS

"Know Your Customer."

Go inside the culture. Audience and culture are very segmented. Don't be scared to go inside the culture.

Do a brand audit to understand strengths and weaknesses. And see what can complement your brand amongst your target.

Have a tea time with your team--where fresh ideas brew. Build the culture. It'll make better marketers.



We start every weekly marketing meeting with tea... Good ideas can't just come from one place or one person.

**KRISTEN
D'ARCY**



CONTACT

**BERA.ai to activate
your playbook!**

SHARE

**Your thoughts &
questions on our
social posts!**

LISTEN

**To the full episode
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