

Creative Challengers


How brands are tapping
into creativity to
cultivate community





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MEGA-TRENDS

 STATUS SEEKERS

 PLAYSUMERS

 FUZZYNOMICS

BASIC NEEDS

STATUS

COLLABORATION

Designer handbags, luxury cars... Traditional (and material) status symbols don't carry the cachet they used to. In the era of the 'personal brand', it's creativity that grants true status. The influencers and TikTokers who've achieved internet fame – using little more than their smartphone camera and imagination – are inspiring other consumers to try their hand at content creation.

Meanwhile, pandemic-induced anxiety has prompted people to up their skills, and to pursue and share creative endeavors – after all, engaging in creative activities has been scientifically proven to reduce stress. Next? **Brands challenge consumers to get creative – not only for engagement, but also to build stronger communities and work towards shared goals, with the consumer role shifting from passive to active.**



The evolution of **Creative Challengers**

2012

STATUS SKILLS »

Consumers embrace brands that help them accrue – and share – new skills.

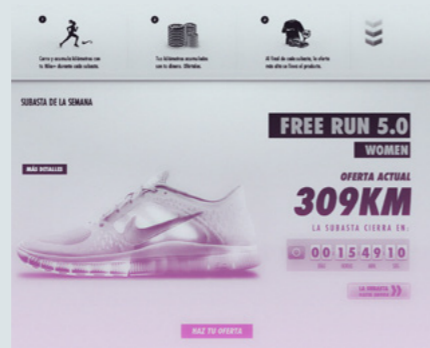


UK-based luxury automaker **Aston Martin** offers one-on-one performance driving courses.

2016

SWEAT EQUITY »

Consumers seek chances for real, sweat-inducing, participation.



Nike Mexico lets fans bid for products using kilometers they have run as currency.

2017

S.I.P. ECONOMY »

Social shifts and new technologies erase the line that divided creative peers from fully-fledged celebrities.



US platform **Digital Brand Products** helps bloggers launch fashion and lifestyle brands.

2021

CREATIVE CHALLENGERS »

As pandemic-related boredom accelerates the growth of social content creation, brands are using creative challenges to drive engagement *and* build stronger communities.



Reality show sees **Sims** players compete to tell the best stories.



Why now?

CREATIVE ELITE

The rapid growth of TikTok combined with the ever-lowering barriers to starting a side hustle or business means that every spark of creative genius can be documented, shared, pursued further... and rewarded. Consumers have access to a mind-boggling amount of original content and products, and can support creators on Patreon and Kickstarter. And the most creative among these consumers – the ones who garner attention and support from their peers – can receive a host of unexpected opportunities. YouTubers like Liza Koshy have gone from filming in their bedrooms to being filmed in Netflix shows. Others are extending their 15 seconds of (viral) fame: Nathan Apodaca's TikTok video turned into a collaboration with Ocean Spray.

THE SKILL SPRINT

Consumers are reasoning: 'If I'm stuck at home, I might as well gain some knowledge or engage in creative pursuits.' As they see their peers do the same, the pressure to 'use this time' to gain and display STATUS SKILLS increases. Online education

platform Coursera saw a 1,500% uptick in month-over-month demand for courses. A few more indicators? Globally, 58% of consumers are trying new cooking methods and 47% are trying new hobbies or returning to old ones (Accenture, August 2020). US-based e-commerce platform Etsy saw a 100% increase in vendors selling their wares in Q2.

CREATIVE THERAPY

Another factor driving consumers to immerse themselves in imaginative pursuits? Stress, which 83% globally report experiencing (Cigna, September 2020). Consumers are turning to creative activities, which have been scientifically proven to reduce stress: just 45 minutes of flexing one's creative muscles alleviates anxiety; the mental health benefits of specific activities – such as knitting and clay work – have warranted a closer look from researchers.





DEZEEN & SAMSUNG

Contestants challenged to repurpose cardboard boxes into home items »

Samsung and UK-based design magazine Dezeen launched **Out of the Box**: a contest challenging entrants to design items for the home that can be created out of cardboard boxes. The global contest is driven by Samsung's Eco-Packaging, that's designed to be repurposed. Each box is marked with a dot matrix and QR code that direct customers on how to transform the box into other objects, including a TV console and a cat house. Contest participants were asked to design items that anyone can easily make out of cardboard boxes using household tools. The winner, who created cardboard versions of endangered animals, was announced in September 2020.



THE SIMS

Reality show sees Sims players compete to tell the best stories »

The Sims Spark'd is a four-episode reality TV show which challenged 12 Sims players to show off their skill and creativity. Developed by EA Games and aired in the US in July 2020, The Sims Spark'd followed a conventional reality TV format, with a panel of three celebrity judges and USD 100,000 in prize money. Contestants were required to build characters, worlds and stories in timed challenges, with themes including 'supernatural' and 'unconventional build'. The Sims also launched Spark'd Challenges – community challenges open to all players.





CITY OF CHICAGO

City launches outdoor dining challenge to help restaurants survive winter »

The **city of Chicago** launched the Winter Design Challenge to solicit ideas that would allow outdoor dining to continue at restaurants and bars into the winter. During the scheme, which ran from August through September 2020, more than 600 plans from 13 countries were submitted through IDEO's open innovation platform. A panel of local restaurants and community members selected one winner in each of the three challenge categories. Each winner received a USD 5,000 cash prize and the opportunity for restaurants throughout the city to pilot their idea.



HEINZ BRASIL

Ketchup brand rewards creative consumers with burgers cooked by esteemed chefs »

Q2 2020 saw ketchup brand **Heinz** launch its #MakingArtWithHeinz campaign in Brazil to encourage people to stay home and practice social distancing, as well as get creative. On Instagram, Heinz posted a blank silhouette of a hamburger; the company encouraged followers to draw or create their dream burger onto the template. Heinz then teamed up with esteemed burger chefs in Brazil, who selected the most creative designs. The chefs turned them into real-life burgers, which were delivered to the winners.





CD PROJEKT RED
Game studio
hosts global
cosplay contest »

Poland-based video game studio **CD PROJEKT RED** revealed the winners of its cosplay contest, designed to promote its upcoming game Cyberpunk 2077, in October 2020. The global competition required entrants to create their own costumes and transform themselves into characters from the game. Finalists' getups featured prosthetics, machinery, handmade apparel and more, with the first place winner shaving her head to lend authenticity to her cosplay. Winners received funds from a USD 40,000 prize pool and a handcrafted trophy resembling a weapon from the game.



NASA
Crowdsourcing
designs for a
new toilet for
astronauts »

NASA opened its **Lunar Loo** challenge, to design a new toilet for astronauts, to the public in June 2020. The contest was part of NASA's preparation for Artemis, the space agency's program to send the first woman and the next man to the moon by 2024, and create a base on the moon that will facilitate missions to Mars. NASA requested designs for toilets that are compact, function just as well as toilets on Earth, and work in both lunar gravity and microgravity (current models only work in microgravity). The Lunar Loo challenge was open both to professionals and to students under 18, and offered a total prize package of USD 35,000. A **new challenge** focuses on unloading payloads from lunar landers.



What next?

EASY, MEDIUM, HARD, EXPERT

One way to turn this trend into a targeted and effective engagement strategy? Pick a level! If you're looking to go 'expert,' get inspired by CD PROJEKT RED. The developer's cosplay contest maintained hype for a game and calmed fans' rage around **release delays**. Could you prompt customers who *don't* participate to share and engage, too?

DIP YOUR TOE

Is there something your brand has always wanted to explore, but hasn't had the chance to yet? Use a CREATIVE CHALLENGE to dip your toe into new waters! Samsung's contest helped the brand reimagine its packaging and sustainability while tapping into Dezeen's creative readership. Fashion brands are experimenting with virtual worlds and gaming: **Gucci** urged Sims players to recreate its sustainable Off The Grid collection within The Sims 4; **Amaro** asked Animal Crossing players to show off their style, and turned their favorites into IRL outfits.

IDEAS FROM ANYWHERE

As the famous Steve Stoute quote goes: 'Great ideas can come from anywhere.' That includes your customers! Participants from *13 countries* offered solutions to the outdoor-dining conundrum restaurants are facing in Chicago, while NASA called on people to design a lunar gravity-friendly toilet. Can your brand treat customers as collaborators and see the value of an outside perspective? If it's good enough for *rocket scientists*...

COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY

What would it look like if you treated your consumers as *collaborators*, working together towards a shared goal? **Eat Just** opened a culinary innovation hub in Shanghai to teach people how to use its products and advocate the benefits of a plant-based lifestyle, while **Peloton** is a masterclass in how building a community that doubles down on motivation and a 'together we go far' mantra can scale to heady heights. In 2021, is it time to switch your thinking from consumers to collaborators?

