

## **Natural diamond marketing: Nasty or nice?**

Everyone knows that you don't win friends with salad.

SAMUEL ORD weighs in on the debate about natural diamond marketing.

It can feel tribal and confrontational, because it is; however, marketing isn't about morality. It's a commercial discipline aimed at achieving clarity, resonance, and conversion. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. With that said, are these natural diamond campaigns perfect? No, of course not! In my humble opinion, the AWDC's 'gumball' stunt was a clever demonstration of the value difference between natural and lab-created diamonds. It was centred around the most common talking point, price, and it found a way to spin a positive into a negative. The NDC campaign was a swing and a miss. The language used on the poster was 'unbecoming' for a product that is intended to represent elegance. I suspect that many readers may not even know what the poster meant by 'rizz'. Relying on stale slang does little to bolster the natural diamond camp's bid to appear culturally relevant. If the goal is to position natural diamonds as timeless, leaning on fleeting trends is outright self-sabotage. The most critical mistake was the visual comparison of natural and lab-created diamonds. If the purpose of the campaign was to underscore their distinctions, the identical images send a conflicting message. Rather than demonstrating the difference, as the AWDC campaign did, this only risks deepening consumer confusion. More alarmingly, it draws attention to the fact that one can achieve the same jewellery aesthetic at a fraction of the cost! With that said, I cannot fault the NDC for its efforts. While the execution may have been imperfect, the change in strategic direction was justified. For natural diamonds to remain relevant, defining the category in opposition to an alternative is not only useful, it's essential. Although the products are chemically identical, contrasting natural and lab-created diamonds shows that they are not the same. Ask any parent of identical twins, and they'll tell you: They appear identical, but the truth is, each is unmistakably different. And isn't that the very essence of the entire controversy? The international jewellery industry has found itself engulfed in a fiery debate over the past month, ignited by provocative natural diamond marketing campaigns. For many years, the natural diamond 'camp', united by a shared resistance to lab-created diamonds, has urged the industry to fight fire with fire and demanded bold marketing strategies. For many, the fear was that lab-created diamonds had captured the hearts and minds of younger consumers with more than just an accessible price point. It seems that these consumers are increasingly unmoved by marketing campaigns centred around tradition. Over the past month, it appears that the natural diamond camp has finally heeded these cries for a more aggressive stance. The Antwerp World Diamond Centre launched a cheeky two-day campaign, with a gumball vending machine packed with lab-created diamonds. It was placed at a busy shopping centre and passersby could 'win' a lab-created diamond for just five euros. The organisation insisted that the campaign wasn't designed to disparage lab-created diamonds. Instead, it intended to illustrate a crucial distinction between the two categories. Explained simply, the notion is that no one in their right mind would fill a gumball machine with natural diamonds. The World Federation of Diamond Bourses followed suit, launching a social media campaign that dismissed lab-created diamonds as a mere 'shortcut'. Finally, the Natural Diamond Council placed a provocative poster in New York where natural and lab-created diamonds were placed side-by-side with a series of contrasting statements, such as "for better vs for worse" and "rizz vs fizz." These campaigns have sparked debate across the industry, exposing divisions and raising broader philosophical questions about the nature of marketing strategy. It has been said these campaigns reflect a profound sense of desperation within the natural diamond industry. Critics suggested that 'mudslinging' paints an image of an industry that is out of touch and lacks ideas. The consensus was that lab-created diamonds are here to stay. Natural diamonds must urgently market their unique worth without alienating younger, idealistic, and price-sensitive consumers. Doesn't every great story need a villain? It's understandable that many would advocate for harmony and 'fair play'. These calls for unity are both predictable and, in some cases,

well-founded. With that said, there are deeper complexities at play, including the foundational principles of effective marketing strategy. There are some fundamental truths about human nature that are worth remembering. Firstly, you can't make everyone happy, and there are some people who, regardless of the circumstances, are never happy. If the so-called natural diamond 'camp' stayed the course and continued to largely ignore lab-created diamonds, they would be dismissed as stagnant. Now that there has been a change of direction, critics are emerging from the woodwork to disparage the industry as out of touch. Surprise! It's impossible to please everyone. That aside, when discussing marketing strategy, it's essential to remember that humans are wired to define ourselves and the world around us through contrast. By determining and comparing opposites, we establish clear boundaries. We often come to understand who we are by recognising who we are not, just as our preferences are shaped in equal part by that which we embrace and reject. Storytelling is critical and every compelling narrative thrives on the tension created by conflict. Remember that consumers don't just purchase products, they embrace the identity associated with those products. People don't drive cars, they wear them. Brands that draw lines in the sand flourish because people want to belong to something distinct. Something and not everything. In a crowded market, a peaceful message often gets lost in the background. It's the villain or adversary that sharpens the story. Portraying the competitor as a villain or adversary isn't always morally tidy. We often come to understand who we are by recognising who we are not, just as our preferences are shaped in equal part by that which we embrace and reject.