

The 50-year evolution of the Game brand

Popular South African retailer Game celebrates 50 years of trade this year.



Game was founded in 1970 by founders Alan Hellman and Jack Schaeffer in Smith Street, Durban. The founders believed that shopping was being taken too seriously and had become tedious and boring for consumers, and they wanted to create an identity and a retail environment synonymous with fun - essentially, they wanted to turn retail into a 'game'.

The well-known Game pink was settled upon for the logo, not necessarily because of a particular love of the colour, but because it would stand out. That pink logo and branding remain in place today, easily identifiable across Game's 150 stores throughout Africa. The marketing message centred on fun, value-for-money shopping, and a wide variety of merchandise at competitive prices.



Characterised by its shocking-pink livery, in-your-face advertising and low pricing, the brand found instant success with local consumers, and by the end of the century Game had expanded to 52 stores nationwide. But what is it about the brand's marketing strategy that has contributed to its continued success?

"Flexibility," says Katherine Madley, vice president of marketing for Game. "As consumer behaviour has changed and evolved, the Game brand has undergone constant reforms and innovations to ensure it remains relevant in the minds of consumers and in line with their needs. However, Game has remained firmly rooted in our founding values, and this has been one of the main drivers of our success."

According to Madley, these are the retail trends that have shaped Game's strategy over the past five decades:

1970s – Stand out era



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In the 1970s marketing was all about standing out. Television arrived in South Africa in 1976 and became a sought-after medium for advertising. With so many retailers taking advantage of this, it was up to brands to stand out from the crowd.

"Game was positioned as rebels in retail. Not only was the iconic pink a differentiating factor, as was the marketing message of fun, but Game was also the first retailer in South Africa to introduce the mega-store concept. The founders of Game were merchants and traders by profession, and discounts offered by Game were usually around the 30% mark when compared to competitors," explains Madley.

"Besides using television as a marketing tool, Game stood out as one of the first retailers to sell television sets. Today, one in every three TVs in Africa is purchased at Game."

1980s – Marketing gets personal

Marketing became more personal in the 80s, as retailers began to use sales as a way to bolster relationships and loyalty with consumers, rather than

focusing solely on the transaction. CRM (customer relationship management) was seen as an important tool within the marketing strategy, as businesses began to track the customer journey.

“Game carried the marketing message or catchphrase 'You Always Win at Game' – which was born in the 1980s – and ensured this was delivered into consumer households through promotions in print, television and radio media, as well as continued in-store. The production and publication of high-impact product catalogues proved to be an indispensable tool for communication with existing and potential Game customers – something we still use today,” explains Madley.

“Further, market research was prioritised within this time to ensure Game stores featured an optimised layout to support the customer journey in store. Entering a Game store was seen as an experience from beginning to end – the interior of the store looked markedly different from the competition and the product offering was diverse, consumers entering the store could spot both a stand full of biscuits and a shelf full of bikes.”



Massmart leadership funds donation of 230 tonnes of food

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1990s – The arrival of the internet

When the internet was introduced for commercial use in the 90s, digital marketing was born. This may have begun as what today's consumer would call 'spam', but it also led to important tools like search engine optimisation (SEO) that allowed businesses and retailers to ensure they were occupying prime space on the internet in order to build and maintain customer loyalty.

“The internet opened up new possibilities when it came to consumer and market research. Ongoing consumer research continues to provide a source of valuable information on market trends, consumer acceptance levels and media penetration – data that was crucial to the formulation of Game's strategy into the future, and remains crucial as we move beyond 2020,” says Madley.

2000s, 2010s and 20s – social media and the consumer experience

As use of the internet amongst consumers grew, social media platforms were born, giving customers more access to information than ever before.

“Importantly, social media gave the customer a platform from which to voice their opinion when it came to their personal experiences with businesses and brands – and brands have a responsibility to ensure they are listening. This fundamentally changed the customer experience and the way marketing campaigns were designed and received,” explains Madley.

Additionally, the customer experience became more personalised, as the consumer drives their own experience – and retailers have to use social media marketing strategies to approach savvy consumers and keep them loyal.



Game launched its e-commerce platform in 2017, and during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 this platform has grown by 300% as consumers have been pushed to shop online.

In 2019 Game [worked with advertising agency The Odd Number](#) to develop and action a brand refresh, which resulted in the birth of a new catchphrase - 'You've Got Game'.

“The refresh is the result of research and the application of many years of learning and experience that has seen Game through the last 50 years. It is aimed at really highlighting the fact that Game works to give its customers access to a better life and pay homage to the rebellious nature of the brand,” explains Madley.



Game partners with The Odd Number on new brand positioning

9 Oct 2019



Game has upped the use of direct and colloquial language in all marketing material, has enhanced the focus on obstacles that consumers have to overcome, and positions its deals and bundles as the perfect solution to their problems.

In 2020, besides growing and improving it's online and e-commerce offering, Game will be opening its first future-ready store for customers at the Mall of Africa, with features like click-and-collect, self-check-out till points and product vending machines.

“The success of Game over the last 50 years has certainly not been without its challenges – we have even seen our customers through seven recessions! However, as a brand we have worked to keep the customer at the centre of what we do and ensured that our marketing activities remained in line with evolving consumer trends in order to remain relevant. We look forward to introducing our loyal customers to Game reimaged in 2020, which will guide the way forward for the brand for the next 50 years,” concludes Madley.

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