25 disruptive brands that changed the world you live in

Category: Branding
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In a marketplace that's more crowded than ever, today's brands need to shout louder and accomplish more if they're going to capture the attention of their target market. A resurgence of "disruptive marketing" has begun to lead the way as companies search for new innovations and new ways of speaking to their audience.

Disruption is something that has existed in every industry, all around the world for centuries. Every time someone experiments with a new idea, and that concept earns the attention and respect of an audience, a "disruptive brand" is born.

Whether it's Nike, and their attempt to transform gender stereotypes, Tesla's powerful new forms of energy, or even Netflix and the rise of television streaming apps, there will always be an appetite for disruption in the consumer world.

Sometimes, building a brand with true potential isn't just about figuring out where you fit into your current industry, it's about finding a new way to break the mould.

To help you begin your journey towards disruption, we've put together a list of 25 of the most disruptive brands to hit the marketplace through the ages. These are the companies that, one way or another, have transformed the way we live. Even though we might view some of them as established, household names today.

1. Tesla

What makes Tesla a disruptive brand? Well – basically everything that Elon Musk does. This is a company that takes the quest for next-level technology and sustainability to another level. Not only is Tesla perhaps the most impeccable electric car manufacturer in the world, but they're also pushing the boundaries of what vehicles can do, by literally sending them into space.



Credit: Ivan Radic (left image)

While some people suggest that Tesla isn't one of the most traditional disruptive brand examples because of its "high-end" backing, it's hard to argue with the changes this company has made to the automotive industry.

What's more, Tesla also has their own open-source patents, which means that they're open for everyone to work with – this makes a pleasant change from the often-secretive companies that prefer to keep their engineering achievements under close guard.

2. Smarter

Smarter is one of the first companies to bring the industry innovation of “IoT” or the Internet of Things to the consumer marketplace. In 2013, co-founders Isabella and Christian Lane designed their own Wi-Fi-connected kettle – so you could have everything you need for a cup of tea ready before you even got home.



Since then, the brand has branched out into newer devices, including a fridge camera, so you can order food directly to your home based on what you currently have in your fridge, and more. The business has grown from a simple idea into a worldwide phenomenon without any sources of outside funding.

3. Purple

The mattress industry might be more likely to put you to sleep than fill you with excitement. Usually, companies in this space prefer to play it safe and keep their innovations low-key. Of course, everything changes when disruptive brands like

Purple come into the mix.



Credit: Purple

Terry and Tony Pearce – the brothers behind the mattress brand, took on the industry and turned it upside down with a high-tech mattress designed to offer best-in-class spinal support at a price that anyone can afford. While the mattress itself is disruptive enough, it's the business model for this company that could really blow you away.

Instead of licensing to retail stores, Purple uses a direct-to-consumer model that means clients can avoid distributor, wholesaler, and retailer mark-ups. What's more, you can try your mattress for up to 100 nights before asking for a refund.

4. Airbnb

Let's face it, you just can't have an article covering disruptive brand examples without a mention of Airbnb. This innovative service gives homeowners an opportunity to rent their homes and apartments out to travellers at a low price. It's a platform that's put a huge dent in the way the hotel

industry works, and it’s meant that more people than ever before are exploring the world.



They might be an established brand today, but since they stepped into the scene in 2008, this disruptive brand has acted as a marketplace for universal adventure. There are more than three million listings on the platform today for over 65,000 cities.

5. Uber

If we mention Airbnb, then we have to talk about Uber too. In towns and cities around the world, taxi cabs have long been a staple of public transport. When you want to get somewhere fast, but you can’t rely on a bus, train, or even your own car – then you needed to shell out the extra cash for a cab.



Uber decided to make their name as one of the world's most disruptive brands by making travel more affordable. With the push of a button, you can now have a car sent to you and generally, pay a lot less for your trip than you would with a normal cab.

Uber has appealed to the rise of the gig economy, allowing people to choose whether to become a driver or a passenger based on their individual needs. If you're just looking for a ride, then you can get something cheaper, easier, and more modern. If you need some extra cash, then you can use your own car to make an additional income. It's transport re-defined.

6. BrewDog

BrewDog may be one of the most disruptive brands in the alcoholic beverage industry. Ever since they brewed their first craft beers in 2007, BrewDog has been bringing more variety, and personality into the marketplace. This is a company that's disruptive for different reasons to some of the other organisations on this list. The product it introduced

might not have been entirely new, but the strategy it uses to market that product is something else entirely.



BrewDog was bored of the industrially brewed larger in the UK and decided to make a change by shaking up the way companies communicate with their customers. These are drinks that capture the imagination and make people take notice.

7. Netflix

Netflix is yet another textbook example of one of the most disruptive brands in the world. They started off as a pretty boring business idea, mailing out DVDs to customers who wanted a blockbuster-like experience without going to Blockbuster.



To begin with, the company targeted people looking for easy entertainment, who might not want to watch the latest chart-topping films. However, after they saw some initial success in the marketplace, the founders behind Netflix made the decision to turn their very own business model upside down. They moved away from the tried-and-tested formula of mailing and decided to "stream" their media instead.

The decision to give customers access to stream-able movies and television on their own computers (and later television screens), meant that Netflix could officially push Blockbuster out of business. Now, many people consider their Netflix account to be an everyday essential.

8. Apple

When Apple first arrived in the technology space, it wasn't an industry innovator or a disruptive brand – it was just another overpriced computer company. But in 2001, Apple released the very first iPod – something that made it easier for people around the world to carry their music with them wherever they

went.



The success of the iPod led to new innovations for Apple in the form of one of the world's first mobile touch-screen devices, and mass-production of the all-important smartphone. If it wasn't for Apple, there's little chance that you'd be scrolling through this article on your phone in the same way.

Although plenty of other companies have sprung up offering similar products in Apple's wake – this company will always be the one that changed the way we use technology and ensured we always have our own personal computer within our pockets.

9. Aldi

When you think of disruptive brands, there's a good chance you don't pay much attention to the grocery stores in your local area. However, it's worth noting that companies like Aldi are disruptive in their own way. Just like many of the other companies on this list, Aldi tore up the rule book of what could be done with grocery shopping and decided to pledge its own path.



While they may not be the most popular option around yet, companies like Aldi and Lidl are gradually winning over the British customer with the promise of relatively high-quality items at low price-points. What's more, Aldi was also the very first company in Britain to champion the absence of plastic bags. They're not just making the world a cheaper place – they're making it greener too.

10. Amazon

When Jeff Bezos started his very own online retail company, he originally wanted to call it "Cadabra" – as in "Abracadabra". However, when someone confused the name with the word "Cadaver" he thankfully changed his mind to "Amazon" instead.



The name of this company is more significant than you might think. When Bezos picked it, he was hoping it would come first in a search list – as the algorithms were based on the alphabet back then. What's more, he also liked the fact that it contained both an "A" and a "Z", since he wanted the store to sell products from every niche, all over the world.

As the very first company to disrupt the way we buy products online, Amazon is one of the ultimate disruptive brands. Today, it has officially become the one-stop shop for everything you need – from aspirin to groceries and lawnmowers.

11. Facebook

Facebook is the company that changed the way we communicate with people around the world. As disruptive brands go, this one is one of the most significant in the online world, as it spawned the creation of dozens of new forums called "social media platforms".



Mark Zuckerberg – the man behind Facebook, was a student of psychology, who wanted a simpler way for friends to connect online. Originally, Facebook was designed to help undergrads meet each other in college. The idea quickly outgrew the Harvard Campus, and today it's the most popular social media channel in the world.

In fact, there are about 1 billion people active on Facebook, and 48% of adults check their accounts as soon as they wake up in the morning.

12. HBO

Way back in 1972, a new television channel called the "Home Box Office" came to life on a cable system in Manhattan. The company showed first-run films to a very small local crowd until a company called Time-Life took a chance on the company and streamed the "Thrilla in Manila" boxing match in October 1975. From that point on, everyone wanted to watch HBO.



As a disruptive brand, HBO wanted to bring never-before-seen entertainment to the family home. By 1982, around 9.8 million people had the channel. While growth hasn't always been easy for HBO, that doesn't make it any less of a disruptive company. Ever since it first launched, the organisation has been devoted to supporting new shows, and new forms of entertainment to the whole planet.

13. McDonald's

You might not think of McDonald's as a disruptive concept today, but without the golden arches, you might not have fast food today the way you know it. The McDonald brand started small, with two brothers making fast, but delicious burgers in San Bernardino California. The brothers were bought out by a man called Ray Krok for $2.7 million.



Today, McDonald’s is the most well-known brand in the world. There are golden arches in 119 different countries, and countless other burger and fast-food restaurants have popped up in their shadow, attempting to cash in on the concept of fast-food. Your chicken nuggets might not seem like an industry innovator, but they changed the world we live in.

14. Visa

In the year 1958, the way we spend money changed for good. Visa became one of the first disruptive brands in the financial sector when the Bank of America issued their first credit card. The card had a pretty small spending limit of $300, and it only worked in California – but it introduced an opportunity that we had never had before – the chance to spend credit instead of cash.



By 1974, the concept of the credit card had gone global, and two years later, the marketing department decided to change the name of the card to something more universal – as a result, “Visa” was born.

As disruptive brand examples go, Visa has almost single-handedly transformed the way we buy things. With a quick flash of a card, you can buy almost anything you need in an instant – without having to worry about carrying a pile of cash with you wherever you go.

15. Viagra

Giggle all you like, but at the end of the day, Viagra is one of the most innovative brands in the healthcare industry. More than 18 million men over the age of 20 suffer from erectile dysfunction. That’s about one in ten. Before 1998 rolled around, there wasn’t really a solution for this problem, until Viagra came along and decided to launch a new way of treating problems in the bedroom.



Credit: Tim Reckmann