



Brands Taking a Stand: 4 Industry Leaders on the New Rules of Brand Culture

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It doesn't take a political science degree to know that civic discourse in the U.S. is strained. As tensions wear on, brands are entering conversations they might've shunned in the past. But how do they ensure their statements and actions ring true?

think with **Google**

Ben Jones, creative director at Google, recently spoke with agency and content leaders in a panel conversation at a SXSW conference to unpack how socially conscious brands can take a stand—and remain standing—through a fraught period.

Tasked with the central question, "*How can brands enter into culture in such charged times?*", these industry leaders offered the following perspectives:



[THE AGENCY STRATEGY DIRECTOR](#)

Jess Greenwood
VP, Content & Partnerships, R/GA

"The stakes for a brand playing it safe are higher than not saying anything at all. You don't need to address the political climate to make a statement. But, if as a brand, you want to be out in culture sending a message, you have to be sure your company reflects that internally too."



[THE CREATIVE COLLABORATOR](#)

Ben Jones
Global Creative Director, Google

"It's a time of brand bravery where brands are really taking a stand, but safe space is disappearing. It's an easy time for brands to jump onto passions, but what you have to remember is that those passions will define your brand from that point forward. So you have to be able to own it."



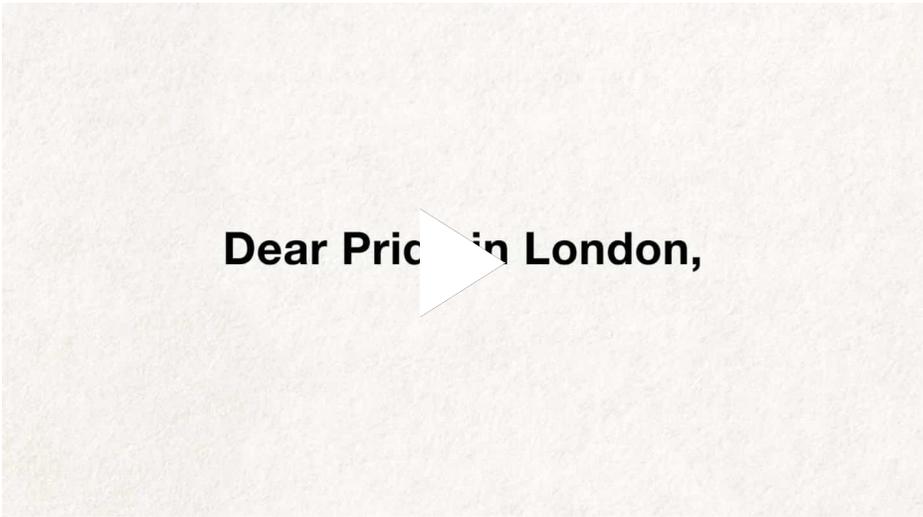
THE AGENCY CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Myra Nussbaum

SVP & Group Creative Director, DDB Worldwide

"One honest, unexpected act from a brand taking part in culture was [Skittles' work in the U.K.](#) in 2016. Skittles could have had a rainbow presence at the Pride Parade. But instead they gave their rainbow away to the people that day and gave away colorless Skittles in solidarity."

Give the Rainbow.
Taste the Rainbow.



Dear Pride in London,



THE BRANDED CONTENT PARTNER

Sebastian Tomich

SVP, Advertising & Innovation,
The New York Times Company

"There's a way to make an impact, even without being tied to politics. Brands can take on the optimistic lenses of this divided era. For instance, there's a need for a more globally minded U.S. culture. So there's an

opportunity to educate young mindsets about core American beliefs that brands can play a role in."

Whether it's promoting equal pay, [embracing diversity](#), challenging stereotypes, or [fueling female empowerment](#), brands are putting stakes in the ground on any number of issues. But as these four speakers note, the key to authentic messaging is not just figuring out how you can take a stand—it's also ensuring you can own it.