

The evolution of brands is almost inevitable when trying to remain relevant in this day and age. However, some brands lose themselves in doing so and can potentially crash and burn. It takes a great product and an even better brand identity to stand the test of time while remaining fresh and meaningful. Converse is a great example of a brand that has grown and changed its brand identity through the years, but has continually cornered the market in a way that made it relevant and successful for 109 years and counting. The sneaker that began as a basketball shoe, branded solely for that one purpose, has now taken shape as the voice for youth culture, driving a generation of creative collaborators forward.

Converse began back in 1908 as a rubber shoe company that only made galoshes on a seasonal basis. However, after realizing they wanted to be a company that worked year round, they turned their attention to making athletic shoes. With the popularity of basketball, Converse saw the need to develop a shoe that people could wear while playing basketball. In 1917, the first basketball shoe was produced. It was called the All Star shoe and it came in natural brown colors with black trim. Soon there after, the color palette would come to include an all black and an all white sneaker. Famous basketball player, Charles 'Chuck' Taylor became a hugely successful promoter of the Converse All Stars, prompting his name to be added to the ankle patch that previously just dawned the words "Converse All Star" with a star in the center. Thus, the "Chuck Taylor" All Star basketball shoe was born.

When Converse began advertising, their ads were targeted directly at basketball players and coaches. All of the visuals were simple—a black, white, and red color palette with an image of the shoe or of a basketball player with the shoes

on. The verbal was straightforward: a call to action for coaches to buy their team these shoes or simply a list of why these sneakers will make you a better basketball player. The logo on all of these ads also included the writing, "Basketball Shoes," further positioning it as a sneaker meant solely for athletes. As time went on, Converse created a slightly different looking sneaker with an all new "chevron and star" logo, however, it was still marketed for the athlete, using influencers such as Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. One ad displays the words, "Choose your weapon," representing these shoes as the premier basketball sneaker crucial to defeating your opponent. Although Converse was so heavily branded in the sporting goods space—some ads actually specified that they were only sold in sporting goods stores—a giant turn of events started to emerge when younger generations, artists, and rockers started to identify with its "anti-sneaker" look and began wearing them for leisure and fashion.

As this transition began to take course, Converse responded by manufacturing chucks in hundreds of different variations that included prints, patterns, unusual colors and special models for different age groups. Although the actual style of the shoe remained the same, a rebranding of the company commenced. Converse began to drift away from the sporting category all together and began to capitalize on the fashion aspects of the shoe. After the switch, one of their first ads illustrated their shoe sitting outside of a hotel where a car would be, captioning it, "Limousines for your feet...for people who want to go places in style." Although this seemed to position their shoe as one of luxury, Converse still remained affordable to the masses, priced around \$55. They were very obtainable

for all demographics and appealing to both genders, as they came in an array of colors. However, as time went on, it appeared the younger generations were really the driving force behind the popularity of these sneakers, thus Converse focused its brand identity towards the youth culture.

As the shoe started to become identifiable with rockers, punks, and artists, it gained an identity of being anti-conformist. People, especially the younger generation, connected to the dirty, lived-in look and they even began to put pen and ink to the canvas and rubber cap of the shoe adding to the brand identity as one of individuality, youthful rebellion, and being carefree. Converse started to represent this change through out all of its outlets, including implementing new advertisements, reconstructing their website to co exist successfully with their new look, creating reoccurring promotional videos, and even expanding their reach by selling chucks at numerous stores such as Target, Macys, Foot Locker, DSW, JC Penny, Journeys, Kohls, and Finish Line just to name a few. On top of its affordable price, a lot of these stores generally attract a younger crowd and are accessible to them, thus reemphasizing their new target audience. Most notably, however, is their change in advertising style and content. There's a real rebellious and exciting feel to their ads. They're all about chasing desires and dreams, living an exciting life, doing your thing, defining your life, being anyone you want, and always celebrating your individuality and self-expression. Converse put out a series of advertisements all with the text, "Shoes are boring, wear sneakers." All of the images behind the text are vague and up for interpretation, but they all imply some sort of fun, creative, and rebellious activity. In addition, they put out another series of ads reading, "The right

to..." and filling in the various ads with, "Get lost," "Be real," "Test the water," and "Get out." All of these examples reinforce their brands new image. Their identity stays consistent on their website as well, where they have created a young and hip feel with visually appealing images, on trend colors, and promotional videos they release regularly featuring younger celebrities that are hot right now such as Maisie Williams, Miley Cyrus, and Millie Bobby Brown. These videos are described as the present voice and vision of today's youth. They use these influential icons to help promote their identity and get the viewer to think about the world and themselves, as the youth, differently. The brand delivers these messages through their videos of not being afraid to feel uncomfortable, wanting them to question more, and subsequently, changing the world. Not many brands have targeted youth culture with such power and influence before. When we are young we are taught to follow, not lead. Converse has figured out a successful way to give the younger generation some power, or at least the feeling of power, thus creating this incredible personal experience with their product. It's no longer just a sneaker, they're the beginning of a journey, a blank canvas for self-discovery, and a reassurance that there's a role for all of us.

The converse brand has evolved immensely since it first debuted its notorious sneaker. However, unlike almost every other sneaker company, Converse managed to create its signature look on their first try and they have yet to waiver from this style through the years. This created a sense of loyalty, one which followed them through their rebranding. As Converse transitioned from a basketball shoe with a specific sports minded audience to a sneaker for the rebellious and carefree

younger generation, it truly found its identity and subsequently created a brand image that became immensely powerful. As the Converse Company stated, "The name stuck. What didn't stick was their intention. We made them to sink jump shots on the court. You, however, saw them as something more...and started wearing our sneakers to do whatever you wanted." The ability of Converse to see this, adapt their brand, and capitalize on it, is why they've been around for 109 years. In a world cluttered with sneakers, Converse continues to find a spot on the feet of millions of people. They may not be the coolest looking or the most on trend shoe, but when you put on Converse, you are not simply putting on a shoe; you are putting on their brand. A brand that lets consumers feel as though there is unlimited potential in these shoes. A brand that doesn't define you, yet encourages you to define yourself and determine your journey. Converse become a part of you.