KANTAR

INNOVATING WITH INTENT

WHY SUCCESSFUL BRANDS DON'T WAIT FOR BREAKTHROUGHS —THEY ENGINEER THEM



© Kantar 2025



Dr. Nicki Morley

Global Innovation Lead, Kantar

Nicki.morley@kantar.com

"True innovation isn't about chasing what's next, it's about uncovering the most meaningfully different innovation opportunity space for the brand".

Contents

01

The innovator's challenge: where next?

With trends shifting rapidly and AI accelerating change, it's tempting to chase what's new, but lasting innovation demands intent. Learn where your brand should focus next to unlock meaningful growth.

02

Innovation in action

Uncover what effective innovation looks like by learning from award-winning brands, Dove and Google Cloud, who combine bold thinking with deep consumer insight and purposeful execution.

03

Developing a strategic approach

Discover how purposeful innovation, grounded in strategic clarity, human insight, and bold execution, enables brands to navigate uncertainty and create futures that are both Meaningfully Different and commercially impactful.

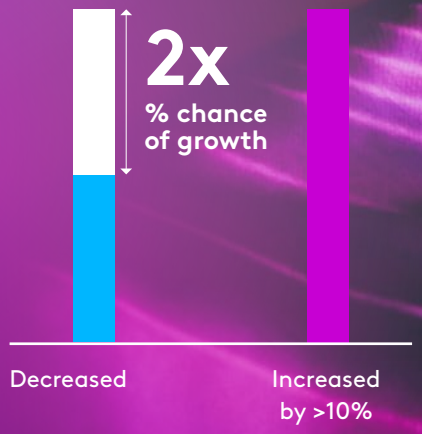
The innovator's challenge: **where next?**

Innovation is essential for growth—but it's rarely easy. In a world of constant change, brands face a tough question: where should they focus next? With trends shifting rapidly and AI accelerating the pace, it's tempting to chase what's new. However, lasting innovation doesn't come from guesswork—it requires intent.

To truly excel, brands need to uncover the foundational needs, attitudes and behaviours that spark new ideas. Insight transforms innovation from a vague concept into a structured, repeatable process. The key is to root your approach in a clear understanding of your brand's unique strengths—what makes it Meaningfully Different. With this foundation, innovation becomes not only achievable, but aligned with what your brand stands for—ultimately leading to incremental growth in the short term and long-term brand equity.

According to the Blueprint for Brand Growth, a brand's chance of growth doubles if it focuses on intentional growth and finds new uses for its range.

Change in spread of consumption occasions



01

Innovation is essential for brand growth

60%

of significant innovations came from winning brands, surpassing what competitors delivered post-recession.[1]

7x

faster growth than competitors achieved by brands perceived as highly innovative.[2]

But failure is common—and poor innovations can **shrink** a brand

1/3

of new products are dead or dying after two years. [3]

40%

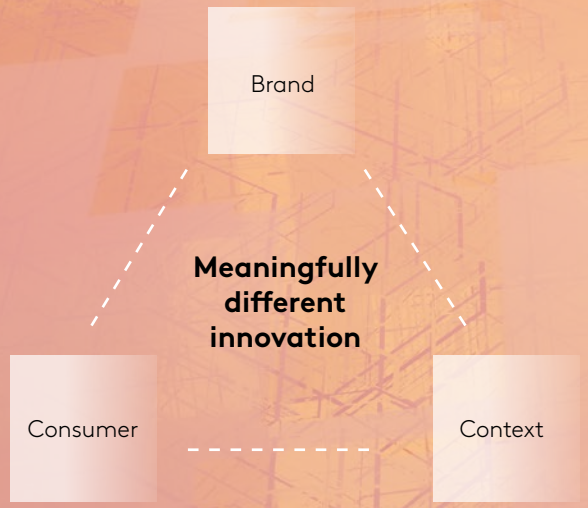
of new products lead to brand decline.[3]



Source: [1] Kantar BG20 analysis in the UK, Sweden and Denmark, [2] Kantar BrandZ, [3] Kantar, Worldpanel Division, 2022 long-term survival rates

Start with foundations

The strongest brands don't just chase trends—they build from strong foundations rooted in a deep understanding of consumers. They connect what the brand stands for with real consumer needs and the evolving context around them.





Great innovators begin with seeking clarity. They ask: *What are the innovation opportunity spaces? How do they align with our long-term ambition?*

But they don't stop there. They look outward to explore the competitive landscape, cultural shifts, and emerging tensions. They look inward to examine their brand's strengths and identity. And they look deeply into the lives of consumers—uncovering motivations, frictions, and unmet needs. This three-way lens—brand, consumer, context—helps turn complexity into clarity and sets the stage for intentional innovation.

Ask the right questions

Once foundations are in place, the next step is curiosity. Brands that grow ask bold, strategic questions:

Is this idea meaningfully different?

Does it solve a real problem in a better way?

Will it drive growth across the category, brand and market?

Can it remove friction and deliver a superior experience?

Do we have the right to play here —and will it build long-term equity?

Build with intention

Innovation is a journey of alignment. The most impactful brands connect their brand identity with execution. They think beyond the product, considering how it lives in culture, resonates emotionally, and evolves over time.

They learn, test, and learn again. They listen to feedback, iterate quickly, and own their innovations—committing to them with the same energy they used to create them.

Connecting brand, consumer and context isn't just a challenge—it's the foundation of meaningful innovation. It's how brands move from insight to impact, from ideas to growth. And it's how they build futures that are not only new, but truly meaningful and different.

Innovation **in action**

The answer to uncertainty isn't guesswork—it's about purposefully mapping new landscapes and discovering their paths through them. So, what does effective innovation into new space actually look like?

We spoke to the latest winners of our Brand Blueprint awards for Meaningfully Different Innovation to discover what drives their success.



02

Dove: it's all about chemistry

The personal care brand Dove continues "real beauty" while expanding into new emotional and functional territory. By incorporating active skincare ingredients into products such as body wash and antiperspirants, the brand is meeting evolving consumer needs in ways that feel highly meaningful.

The Serum Shower Collection uses patented technology to target nine common skin concerns, for instance, while the Advanced Care Antiperspirant with Pro-Ceramide Technology helps underarm skin recover from shaving. Dove also leverages the power of advanced technologies and robotics to deliver these innovations and others–such as its VitaminCare+ deodorant, enhanced with vitamin B3.

The effectiveness of Dove's consumer-first approach is reflected in strong ratings for behaviours such as offering a good range and improving people's lives. This is further reinforced by its high Demand Power—a clear signal of how consumers positively perceive and value the brand's relevance.



"Innovation has been at the heart of Dove's journey to become a €7 billion brand… always committed to delivering measurable superior care, which is both clinically superior and perceivably superior… redefining self-care from a routine into a moment of joy."

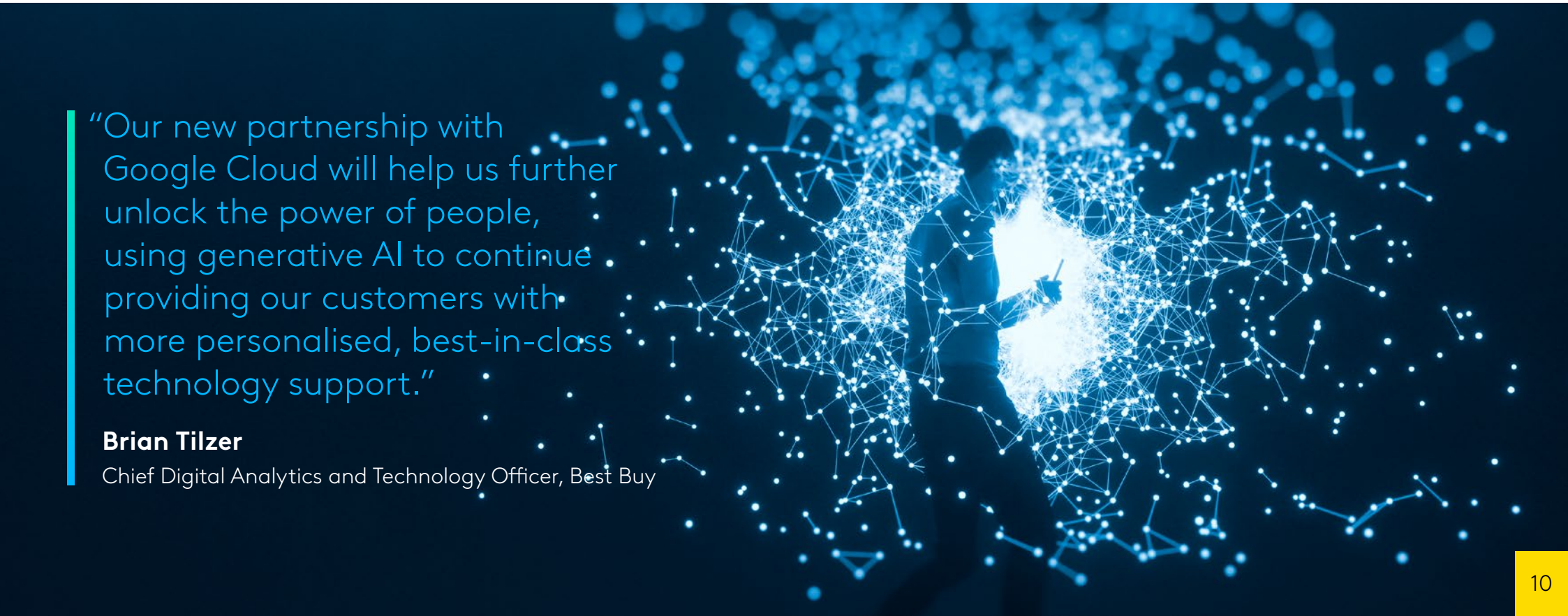
Marcela Melero
Chief Growth Officer at Dove Personal Care & Dove Masterbrand

Google Cloud: accelerating towards the future

Google Cloud continues to push the boundaries of AI, developing technologies that deliver meaningful, real-world impact The brand is consistently recognised for its progressive approach, with innovations that are actively reshaping industries and enhancing everyday experiences.

The company's Gemini model and AI platform enables businesses to create autonomous agents—such as Best Buy's virtual assistant, which provides a better customer experience by helping to troubleshoot product issues and manage subscriptions.

Google Cloud's AI-optimised TPU chips have also been key components to advancing overall research and product development. With this full stack of AI-optimised solutions, from TPUs to best-in-class models, platforms, and applications, Google Cloud is helping organisations around the world transform their businesses for the AI era. The brand's high difference rating underlines how it stands out to consumers, who feel it offers well-designed products and services.



"Our new partnership with Google Cloud will help us further unlock the power of people, using generative AI to continue providing our customers with more personalised, best-in-class technology support."

Brian Tilzer
Chief Digital Analytics and Technology Officer, Best Buy

What lessons can we learn from leading innovators?

Successful innovation is never accidental. The most impactful ideas are co-created through intentional connection and cross-functional collaboration. Award-winning brands like Dove and Google Cloud excel at innovation by aligning their goals with broader business objectives and embedding Meaningful Difference across every touchpoint—from ideation to launch. By following these five principles, brands can design for better innovation outcomes.



01 Think differently
02 Embrace curiosity
03 Connect purposefully
04 Learn, test and learn
05 Own it

Think differently

Real innovation demands more than safe thinking—it calls for boldness, bravery, and a mindset that challenges the status quo. It's not just about reacting to change, but about shaping it. To do this effectively, brands need strong foundations: a clear understanding of their unique strengths and how they create value. That clarity becomes the launchpad for exploring new directions—whether it's stretching into adjacent spaces or redefining category norms.

It begins with reframing the problem. Rather than asking "How can we sell more widgets?", brands might ask, "What unmet need is our widget failing to address?" This shift encourages customer-centric thinking and opens the door to more meaningful innovation. Brands can also challenge category conventions and internal assumptions, pushing themselves by asking questions like, "What rules are we following that no longer serve us?" Disruptive ideas, when anchored in a clear sense of brand identity, can become powerful springboard for driving relevance, differentiation, and long-term value.

10x

Alison Wagonfeld, Vice President for Marketing at Google Cloud, highlights the brand's "10x thinking" philosophy—aiming for tenfold improvements on existing approaches. This ambition is reflected in products such as the Gemini command-line interface (CLI), which supports conversational coding. In Wagonfeld's view, good innovation requires "an audacious vision—believing that we truly can create technology that helps our customers do things they couldn't do before".



Image: Pexels – Sephina Cornwall

The key to successful innovation: Building from strong brand foundations

Ultimately, the biggest driver of successful innovation is a brand's ability to stay anchored in what makes it Meaningfully Different. Melero explains that Dove's new launches build on the legacy of its first product—1957's Beauty Bar, infused with ¼ moisturising cream, which was a game changer for its time. Since then, the brand has stood for "transforming beauty and self-care from a routine into a moment of joy"—a goal it achieves by "always pushing the boundary, redefining, elevating what to expect".

01

Embrace curiosity

The best innovators dig beneath the surface of trends to uncover the motivations, barriers, behaviours and frictions that are driving people's choices. Curious brands actively listen to consumers, not just to what people say, but to what they feel and do, to identify and solve the problems that truly matter. Reimagining norms only works when it delivers real value, and that starts with understanding the tension points consumers face.

One way that marketers can show curiosity is through research. Ethnography, customer journey mapping, and in-depth interviews are powerful tools for unlocking behavioural patterns and emotional drivers. But inviting your customer directly into the innovation process can also open unexpected opportunities, whether that's through live feedback loops or ideation.

For example, when social listening revealed the popularity of Crumbl cookies among GenZ, Dove saw an opportunity to collaborate. Known for being deeply embedded in culture, listening to what consumers wanted, and reacting fast, the brand partnered with the gourmet cookie company on a new body care line, working with a fragrance expert and influencers to "dial up the joy". The result was a successful expansion of Dove's reach and incremental brand growth. Melero says the move demonstrates how "innovation is no longer made in an ivory tower... it's much more [about] co-creating with communities."

Alison Wagonfeld echoes this, advising marketers to "start with the opportunity and the problem that you're solving and then use technology to help solve that". She emphasises that the application of technology should always be used "in service of your strategy and your outcomes". Curious brands combine deep human insight with strategic foresight, using technology not as an end in itself, but as a means to address critical tension points and unmet needs. While new tech will always continue to emerge, the fundamentals of good innovation remain the same: finding new ways to solve unmet needs. By combining insight and foresight, brands can not only understand today's needs but anticipate how they will evolve—ensuring every innovation has a clear and lasting purpose.



02

Connect purposefully

Innovation doesn't happen in a silo. Achieving genuine impact requires intentional connection and cross-functional collaboration throughout the process. The most successful innovations are co-created, not dictated.

To align the organisation around a shared innovation vision, brands can start by connecting innovation goals with broader business objectives, aligning incentives and KPIs across departments. Creating cross-functional innovation 'squads' helps to break down silos and enables collaborative problem-solving. Brands should also treat meaningful difference as a cross-departmental north star. One that is clearly reflected not only in the innovation itself, but throughout the entire journey, right through to the launch activation.

Dove's Whole Body Deodorant is a great example of purposeful connection between innovation and launch.

The innovation team spotted a shift in consumer behaviour: women were using deodorants on areas of their body beyond their underarms, despite products not being designed for that use. Dove responded with a bold solution that added care and boosted confidence.

To launch it, they partnered with hip hop artist Chika to rework Khia's 1990s track "My Neck, My Back" with fearless lyrics. The creative matched the product's boldness and, as Marcela Melero, Chief Growth Officer at Dove Personal Care & Dove Masterbrand, said, "we had an amazing innovation that launched in a way that was inserted in culture immediately." By embracing creativity and cultural relevance with a clear understanding of the product's intent, Dove shattered stigmas and ensured its meaningful difference was reflected in the launch—a clear example of connecting purposefully.



03



Learn, test and learn

Nothing beats real-world feedback in showing the way forward for an emerging innovation. The most successful brands adopt a 'scientist mindset'—they move fast, test critical assumptions early, and use what they learn to iteratively shape new products. This iterative approach helps teams avoid costly missteps and uncover what truly resonates.

Bold innovators don't wait for perfect answers. They build momentum by exposing ideas to consumers early and adjusting at pace. They develop minimum viable products, test them against real tensions, and use feedback to pivot, persevere, or abandon as needed. This mindset is about learning through experimentation. It's a way to build confidence through evidence, not opinion.

Acknowledging that difficult problems "might not get solved perfectly the first time", Google Cloud adopts a "test and learn" mindset, where setbacks are viewed as learning opportunities, says Wagonfeld. Pointing to initiatives such as weekly 10-minute podcasts to share practical learning from AI experimentation across the business, she says "we'll keep learning and iterating and we'll keep making it better—and then that helps inspire our customers".

Ultimately, learning isn't a phase—it's a continuous behaviour. Successful innovators invest in building knowledge over time, raising standards and creating excellence across their organisations.

04



Own it

A great idea is only the beginning. What separates bold innovators from the rest is their unwavering commitment to execution. They don't just launch products—they own them, stewarding every stage from development to launch to post-launch optimisation. Ownership means having a long-term vision and the discipline to realise it. Successful innovators take responsibility for their ideas by setting clear goals, aligning cross-functional teams early, and pushing through the setbacks that naturally come along with bringing something new to the market. This mindset ensures that decisions are made with intent and that promising ideas aren't lost to internal inertia.

Ownership gives innovation its staying power. It's what transforms a good idea into something that makes a meaningful difference in people's lives. Bérengère Loubatier, Senior Global Brand Vice President at Dove Hair and Skin Care, says that for its new range of products that address hair damage, the brand developed three patented technologies that mimic the protein structure of hair, but it wasn't an easy path to success. "It took ten years of research, literally, to get there", she said.

Ultimately, owning innovation is an act of courage. It's about stepping forward with confidence, knowing that the team is aligned, the strategy is clear and the execution is deliberate. When brands truly own their innovation journey, they don't just launch products, they drive growth, equity and lasting impact.

05



Developing a strategic approach to innovation

Innovating in a way that truly works for your brand is hard. It demands strategic clarity, sharp judgement and the confidence to step into the unknown. The best innovators don't just generate ideas—they know how to turn signals into strategy and strategy into action.

The early stages of innovation are where the most critical decisions are made. Uncertainty is high, and setting the right direction can determine whether an idea becomes a growth driver or a costly misstep. To avoid going off course, it's essential for marketers to take a structured approach to identifying new opportunities.

Innovation isn't just about launching something new—it's about launching the right thing, in the right way. It starts with strong foundations, a clear sense of where to play and building the momentum to move forward with confidence. That's why we encourage brands not just to innovate, but to innovate with purpose—ensuring every step is informed, intentional, and aligned with both short and long-term growth goals.

At this critical point, Kantar's insights act as both challenge and inspiration. From qualitative to quantitative and beyond, we support brands to think clearly and act boldly as they build new futures. While our approaches harness the full power of data and AI, we never lose sight of the human factor—fostering the empathy and imagination needed to navigate a changing world. We look forward to working with you as new paths forward emerge and evolve.

03

Innovations that fuel brand growth

Uncover the most meaningfully different innovation opportunity areas and shape ideas that drive commercial impact and brand equity.

Start your innovation journey with Kantar.

LEARN MORE

