



Two items from the footwear world, perhaps from opposite sides of that sector: Vans and Birkenstock. But they are two similar stories of brand loyalty driven by the core vision and mission of each brand.

ADWEEK'S Leslie Blount [reports](#) on Birkenstock's new global paid content campaign, "Ugly for a Reason." The campaign consists of a three-part documentary. The first installment is "How Feet Made Us Human." Featuring experts from various scholarly fields, the episode features the evolutionary role of our feet in human history – for example, the very fact of walking upright which distinguishes mankind from other species. "Foot health is at the heart of everything we do," said CEO Oliver Reichert.

It's that dedication to function that drives loyalty among the devoted customers who buy 25 million pairs of Birkenstocks each year. The tongue-in-cheek attitude of the "Ugly" campaign reminds me of the famous "Think Small" [campaign](#) for Volkswagen in the 1960s. The ads, created by Doyle Dane Bernbach, made virtues of the features that made VWs seem eccentric – if not downright funny-looking – to mid-20th Century Americans driving three-ton Buicks. Not only did that campaign upend the global auto industry; it changed advertising, as part of the "Creative Revolution" of the 1960s. And the ads helped create fierce loyalty among fans of the quirky but highly practical and economical VWs.

Meanwhile Vans, one of the original brands to target the skateboarding world, became a key style-maker for that market and millions of wannabees. The brand is fashion fun, "off the wall." Their two-year-old [Vans Family program](#) boasts 12 million members and is credited with half the brand's DTC sales. It's a very brand-appropriate program, available online and in the Vans app, driving and rewarding not only sales, but engagement with the brand through content and interactive features built around members' favorite sports, activities, games, and characters.

A key feature of the program is that Vans associates are encouraged to participate in

the program. I think that is a best practice, and one I recommend especially for retail programs. Store associates are the face of any brand, and when they're enthusiastic members of a loyalty program, their advocacy can super-charge program adoption and participation.

So, we have two very different brands employing very similar loyalty strategies, one deploying a structured program and one leveraging inherent brand affinity. **Your thoughts** on these or similar programs?

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