

BRAND & VENTURE BUILDING IN AN AI-WORLD

A Playbook for Action

cintrifuse



The world of brand building is undergoing an extraordinary disruption, propelled by the relentless march of technology. Just as it transitioned from radio to TV and witnessed the rise of eCommerce, the landscape is now being reshaped by the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI). This transformative technology, still in its nascent stage, promises to disrupt the dynamics of brand building, revolutionizing consumer understanding, content creation, targeting, and brand safety. It also opens up a world of opportunities for startups to facilitate and accelerate this shift.



About the Author:

Pete Blackshaw is CEO of Cincinnati-based startup catalyst and fund-of-funds Cintrifuse. An early startup founder in Cincinnati's "Digital Rhine" district, he's held top digital and innovation roles at P&G, Nielsen, and Nestle. He's a published author and regularly contributes to Ad Age on topics related to service excellence, consumer trust, digital transformation, and sustainability.

The impact of AI goes beyond brand building alone; it extends to venture building as well. Startups are embracing AI to identify unmet needs, validate concepts, develop marketing plans, and rapidly scale their ventures. Companies large and small that rise to the challenge, including corporate pioneers like Procter & Gamble and Kroger, will find their business strategies enriched by AI's ability to drive customer-centricity and data-driven decisions. We are already witnessing the emergence of AI-fueled chatbots, interfaces, and machine learning, offering unparalleled customer experiences and deep insights into customer behaviors and preferences.

Opportunities in Brand Building: Unleashing the Power of AI

Harnessing the power of AI in brand building offers unparalleled opportunities for personalization, predictive analytics, enhanced customer service, brand identity development, and advanced market research.

- **Personalization:** AI empowers brands to deliver highly personalized experiences, boosting customer loyalty and satisfaction while optimizing marketing efforts.
- **Predictive Analytics:** AI assists in predicting future trends and consumer behavior, enabling informed marketing strategies and agile product development.
- **Enhanced Customer Service:** AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants provide round-the-clock customer service, elevating the overall customer experience.
- **Brand Identity Development:** AI aids in developing a unique brand voice and identity, enhancing brand recognition and resonance.
- **Advanced Market Research:** AI analyzes real-time market data to identify trends and threats, maximizing the effectiveness of market research initiatives.

Empowering Startups to Shape the Future

Generative AI refers to a subset of artificial intelligence that involves the creation of new, original content such as images, texts, or even music. Generative AI models have the ability to generate new and unique outputs based on their training data. This capability has emerged as a game-changer for startups, providing them a competitive edge and enabling faster, smarter, and more cost-effective wins throughout their journey. Generative AI offers distinct advantages at each stage of the startup process. Here are examples:

Insight Gathering & Demand Sensing: Generative AI can be employed to probe brands or categories, identifying vulnerabilities, gaps, and pain points. By leveraging AI technology, startups can collect and analyze data to better understand customer needs and market dynamics.

Idea Generation and Concept Development: Generative AI facilitates fast brainstorming and analysis of patterns and trends in data. It assists entrepreneurs in structuring concept development by incorporating proper insights, enabling them to refine their ideas and identify unique value propositions.

IN ACTION: Enhanced Brainstorming—The efficiency created by Pieces.app allows developers and designers to allocate more time to brainstorming and idea generation. The generative AI within Pieces.app can provide a wealth of pre-designed components for inspiration.

Validation: Startups can utilize Generative AI to simulate customer interactions and analyze their responses, helping validate ideas and refine concepts through market research and testing with potential customers.

Product Development: Generative AI becomes instrumental in coding software, automating repetitive tasks, and providing design suggestions. It streamlines the development process, accelerates prototyping, and enhances efficiency.

IN ACTION: Enhanced Prototyping—Pieces.app's generative AI can offer design variations and solutions, which means multiple prototypes can be created faster, offering a range of choices for the development team.

Launch: Generative AI aids in creating marketing materials, such as collateral, videos, and images. It can also assist in testing selling lines, slogans, and social media messages to refine messaging strategies.

Growth stage: Generative AI provides personalized recommendations to customers, automates certain sales and marketing processes, and predicts future trends to inform growth strategies.

Maturity & Exit: Generative AI continues to play a crucial role by continuously analyzing data, identifying new opportunities, and helping them remain competitive in the market. Generative AI assists in analyzing data and identifying potential partners or acquirers. It aids in generating financial projections to attract investors or acquirers for successful exits.

Beta/MVP Testing Stage: Generative AI enables startups to analyze data and make predictions based on user feedback. A/B testing of unique variations of products or services can be conducted to optimize performance and user experience.

Three Starting Points: Listening, Engaging, and Transforming

Listening

AI search tools, leveraged properly, are infinitely revealing of brand value and startup opportunity. AI-driven listening systems empower brands to gain insights into market trends, consumer feedback, and signals. Moreover, AI tools like ChatGPT facilitate virtual brainstorming and provide real-time feedback, enabling rapid prototyping and concept refinement.

These tools also offer detailed carbon footprint scores, allowing brands to assess their sustainability efforts more effectively. Cincinnati-based startup Native AI employs AI to derive unique qualitative insights for the CPG industry, helping brands optimize their e-commerce channels, monitor and improve brand health, and fuel R&D. NicheFire, meanwhile, provides state-of-the-art consumer and market insights that can provide brands with a clearer understanding of their position in the market and how to navigate through it.

Engaging

AI tools offer tremendous opportunities to engage consumers in conversation through various feedback mechanisms. Whether through focus groups, surveys, social media monitoring, or call center interactions, feedback loops have always played a crucial role in driving innovation. Chatbots, functioning as virtual call center agents with extensive knowledge similar to Wikipedia, can provide automated and engaging responses to nearly any consumer query. This level of automation can be effectively balanced with human interaction, especially when addressing complex issues that require live assistance, such as product defects or adverse impacts.

Most brands fall well short on delivering satisfactory feedback processes. Contact information is often hard to find, call-center interactions are prolonged and frustrating, and brand search engines frequently fail to provide answers to basic questions on topics like product ingredients or sustainability. Furthermore, brands face competition for credibility from AI tools such as ChatGPT and Google Bard, which can provide in-depth brand benefits information beyond what is available on their own websites. Rethinking *engagement* is critical:




Flamel.ai's AI-driven design studio simplifies content creation for brands, enabling them to generate marketing content across different social media platforms. This empowers brands to meet the demand for personalized and dynamic content in an AI-driven world.



With the ability to transform complex scientific, technical, and medical insights into compelling content, Narratize aids brand conversations. By leveraging AI to distill intricate information into accessible and engaging content, brands in these sectors can effectively communicate their value to a broader audience.




Spatial.AI: Through its real-time social media segmentation system powered by AI, Spatial.AI offers brands an unparalleled opportunity to predict and influence consumer behavior. This enables brands like Olay and Kroger Zero Waste Advisor to forge stronger customer relationships by gaining a deeper understanding of their target audience and adjusting their strategies accordingly.


 **NAVISTONE** NaviStone's allows brands to convert consumers throughout their buying journey using powerful digital intent signals, all while respecting consumer privacy. This becomes particularly relevant in the ongoing discourse surrounding data privacy and consent in AI-based marketing initiatives. Brands can communicate effectively and personally with their customers, thereby building trust.


Transforming

Disruption in the brand organization is driving the adoption of AI-based solutions. For instance, Cloverleaf offers AI-powered employee assessment tools to foster high-performance teams. They leverage AI to blend multiple leadership team scorecards, enabling organizations to optimize team dynamics effectively. Another local startup, 80 Acres, utilizes AI to enhance hydroponic farming practices.

Here are additional examples of AI-driven transformation:

 **LOSANT** Losant simplifies the connection, visualization, and automation of devices and data, providing brands with real-time insights and actionable intelligence. This service is especially valuable for brands relying on IoT data, as it enables informed decision-making and reflects the growing integration of AI and IoT in brand-building strategies.

 **VOXEL** Voxel: With a team of dedicated engineers, Voxel employs its software internally to enhance performance in advanced engineering products. Brands in manufacturing or consumer packaged goods (CPG) industries can benefit from Voxel's expertise in optimizing product performance, gaining a competitive edge.

 **TEAM CENTRAL** TeamCentral: By combining a low/no-code integration platform with a data quality management solution, TeamCentral helps brands maintain data consistency and quality across multiple systems. In an AI-dominated world, this becomes increasingly important for effective brand management.



Pieces is redefining the intersection of AI and the creative process for developers and designers. Their AI-powered "generate, curate, save" loop allows for a seamless collaboration between human and machine, where the AI generates ideas and the human team curates and refines them.

To adapt to this changing landscape, companies can invest in AI training for their teams, collaborate with AI-driven agencies, or leverage AI-powered tools. AI can support various aspects such as data analysis, market research, content creation, and personalized advertising. However, it is crucial for companies to prioritize transparency, data privacy, and human oversight in their AI initiatives to foster trust with customers.

Compliance and managing perceptions are crucial as regulatory organizations catch up with the evolving landscape of AI applications in content creation, targeting, and consumer insights. Developing an enterprise brand safety strategy, integrating legal and privacy experts into product development, and forming internal cross-functional task forces can help companies navigate these challenges successfully.

AI Venture Building Space: A Broad Landscape of Possibilities

AI technology is rapidly reshaping industries, and the AI venture-building space is vast and filled with opportunities. Startups worldwide are leveraging AI's capabilities to devise innovative solutions for brand building, customer engagement, and relationship building.

Within this space, there are numerous challenges and opportunities where startups can make an impact:

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Startups can assist brands in ensuring transparency and accountability in AI-driven marketing practices. This involves disclosing the use of AI algorithms, providing explanations for automated decisions, and establishing accountability frameworks for AI mistakes or issues.

- **Data Privacy and Consent:** Startups can help brands prioritize data privacy by developing secure data handling practices, complying with data protection regulations, and enabling clear and informed consent mechanisms for consumers.
- **Bias Mitigation and Fairness:** Startups can aid brands in addressing and mitigating biases in AI algorithms to ensure fair and equitable treatment of diverse consumer groups. They can contribute to diverse training datasets, conduct bias checks, and involve stakeholders in evaluating AI fairness.
- **Human Oversight and Decision-Making:** Startups can support brands in maintaining human oversight in AI systems. They can develop "human-in-the-loop" approaches where critical decisions are reviewed by humans, ensuring that AI-driven outcomes are accurate, unbiased, and aligned with brand values.
- **Impact on Employment and Society:** Startups can assist brands in mitigating the potential impact of AI on employment by developing strategies for reskilling employees and promoting equitable AI practices. They can also help brands consider broader societal implications and work towards inclusive AI adoption.
- **Algorithmic Transparency and Explainability:** Startups can contribute to algorithmic transparency by developing techniques to explain how AI models make decisions in a clear and understandable manner. They can provide simplified explanations, visualizations, or technical documentation for both expert review and consumer understanding.

Leadership in an AI World: Managing Tensions, Navigating Opportunities

In an AI-driven world, effective leadership is defined by the ability to navigate tensions and hype cycles, seize opportunities, and address the broader impact on employment and society. Leaders must strike a balance between automation and maintaining meaningful customer relationships, address privacy concerns while delivering personalized experiences, combine control and autonomy to harness AI effectively, ensure transparency despite increasing complexity, blend human judgment with AI predictions for decision-making, manage the tension between scalability and customization,

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and consider the potential impact of AI on employment and society. By embracing these responsibilities, leaders can drive success while fostering a positive impact on employment and society in the AI era.



Navigating ethical challenges and building trust in the AI-driven landscape not only pose complex considerations but also open up a host of opportunities for startups. Brand managers and startup founders must grapple with questions of trust, transparency, ethics, and brand safety in the context of AI.

AI platforms like ChatGPT enables consumers to scrutinize brand narratives easily, demanding detailed information about sustainability, diversity, and data privacy practices.

However, these challenges also present an opportunity for Greater Cincinnati, known as the

consumer capital of the world, to establish itself as a leader in AI trust and ethics. With industry leaders like Kroger and P&G, who have set high standards in their respective fields, and a robust banking and insurance system in the Midwest that deeply values trust, the region is well-positioned to drive ethical AI practices.

By collaborating with these industry leaders and leveraging their expertise, Greater Cincinnati can foster a culture of responsible AI innovation that attracts startups committed to transparency and accountability. This collective effort can solidify the region's reputation as a trusted hub for AI development and contribute to the establishment of industry-wide ethical standards.

AI INNOVATION IN CINCINNATI

Optimizing Digital Supply Chain Workflows with Pieces.app - Tsavo Knott, CEO Discusses the Role of AI

Cincinnati-based startup Pieces is reshaping the landscape of digital supply chain workflows with its unique productivity platform. Spearheaded by 24-year-old CEO Tsavo Knott, Pieces facilitates the easy storage, sharing, and reuse of various components, from code snippets to design layers.

"Our platform offers a unique environment where atomic components can be saved, searched, shared, referenced, and reused, driving efficiency in the digital creation process," Knott explains. The platform's integration of AI isn't merely a feature but the heart of the system, learning from user input to anticipate project requirements and suggest collaborators. "Our AI copilot doesn't just help you figure out 'how to do something' – it also tells you 'who' could be the best person to help you progress with your task."

This aspect of the platform has been fully realized in its partnership with Microsoft Teams, where it acts as a smart assistant to manage workflows, generate codes, and recommend team members for problem-solving. As Knott emphasizes, "Pieces.app isn't just a tool; it's a new way of working and creating together." The startup has received \$8 million in funding to date.

AI INNOVATION IN CINCINNATI

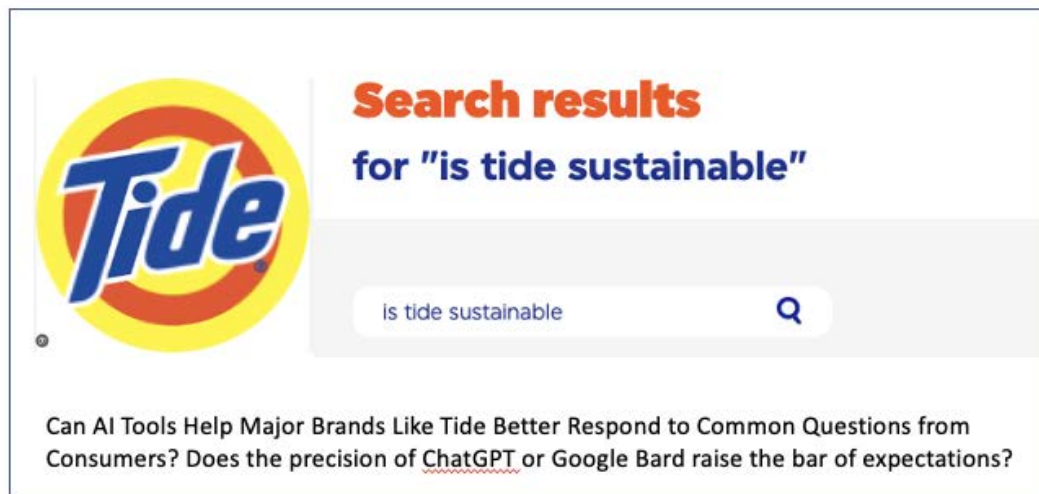
Putting the Theory to Work: Unlocking Tide's Potential with Generative AI

As one of the world's leading brands, Tide presents a compelling real-time case study for leveraging Generative AI to add value and stay ahead in the competitive market. Currently, Generative AI engines are outpacing the Tide website by providing detailed, easily accessible answers to customer queries.

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To catch up and exceed this standard, Tide should consider incorporating supplemental knowledge and brand information through Generative AI.

Generative AI has the potential to enhance Tide's brand by providing a comprehensive and interactive customer support experience. This new service could offer personalized cleaning advice, act as an empathetic concierge around sustainability and purchasing decisions, and provide insights into product benefits.



AI INNOVATION IN CINCINNATI

Brand Building in an AI World: Insights from Maddie Bell, CEO and Co-Founder of Scheduler AI

Maddie Bell, CEO and Co-Founder of Scheduler AI, shares her expertise in brand building, drawing from her experience at Procter & Gamble (P&G). Co-founded with her husband Mike Bell, Scheduler AI aims to revolutionize scheduling processes using AI technology.

Maddie emphasizes the power of deep human insight and understanding consumer needs, which she learned during her time at P&G. This understanding sets the stage for recognizing big ideas worth pursuing. She believes that the fundamentals of brand building transcend industries, enabling startups to transform and build toward success.

Scheduler AI's AI assistant simplifies scheduling for teams, helping them secure high-value meetings and allocate more time to revenue-generating activities. By leveraging AI, Scheduler AI reduces time spent on scheduling, allowing businesses to focus on delivering revenue.

Maddie's insights highlight the importance of consumer benefit and problem-solving in brand building. Startups like Scheduler AI exemplify how AI technology can drive innovation and provide tangible value to customers in an AI-driven world.