

KANTAR

YOUR INDISPENSABLE PARTNER FOR 2026 PLANNING

OUTSTANDING INNOVATION 2025



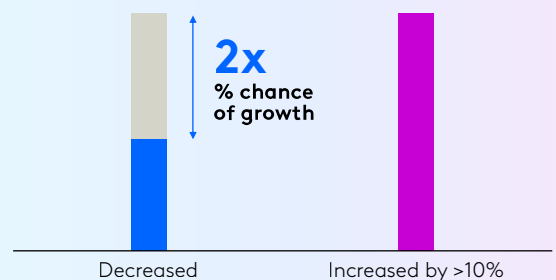
DISCOVER THE SECRETS TO SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION

Innovative brands don't just grow, they lead. They carve out new space by anticipating and shaping emerging signals, while translating subtle shifts in consumer behaviour and global dynamics into bold, future-facing strategies. It sounds simple – but what does it mean in practice?

Drawing on the latest data from Kantar BrandZ and qualitative research, we've identified the brands that are innovating in an outstanding way. In this guide, we take a look at who they are, unpack the crucial factors behind their success, and most importantly, explore what you can learn from them.

Great innovations come in many forms, but when it's bold, intentional, and brilliantly executed, you can't miss them. It's not about timid tweaks and tentative guesses. The best innovators make bold decisions, guided by a clear vision and executed with agility. Discover how you can join them in shaping the future of innovation in 2026.

Change in spread of consumption occasions



**A brand's
CHANCE OF
GROWTH DOUBLES
if it can find new
uses for its range**

Source: Kantar

WHAT MAKES INNOVATION WORK?

The brands shaping the future don't just respond to change—they ignite it. They foster a culture where curiosity, collaboration, and experimentation are not just encouraged, but expected. This mindset enables them to spot opportunities early and adapt at speed.

Their real strength? Building on solid foundations, empowering teams at every level, and making confident, insight-led decisions. Our research shows that the most successful innovators consistently demonstrate the attitudes, behaviours, and mindsets needed to turn ambition into reality.

“Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.”

Steve Jobs



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Think differently

Outstanding innovators don't just adapt to change; they shape it. These brands build from strong foundations to break free from conventional thinking.

By knowing exactly what their brand stands for, they challenge assumptions, reframe problems and rethink norms to deliver transformative growth. Understanding the unique ways they can make a difference creates a powerful platform for innovation — from long-term strategic initiatives to incremental products and services.

In 2026, success will go to those who can do this with intent, scale with purpose — drawing on robust analysis to put the consumer at the centre of their work.

Clorox convincingly demonstrates the necessary boldness. Rather than one-off products, it focuses on longer-term, cross-category platforms such as its varied Scentiva line. This generates momentum and drives ongoing demand.



“It always starts with the consumer and really understanding the consumer, the tensions they're struggling with and what they're dealing with.”

Tad Kittredge

VP Marketing and Innovation, Clorox



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Well-designed products and services



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Shaking things up

Source: Kantar BrandZ



2

Embrace curiosity

Great ideas come from unexpected places. Innovative brands show curiosity to uncover hidden tensions, emerging trends, and new opportunities – fuelled by data, technology, and a deep understanding of human behaviour.

Next year, we expect leading innovators to surface fresh insights through social listening and AI. They'll work closely with communities to shape relevant products and cultural offerings.

KFC's immersive Play Braam store in South Africa – featuring digital ordering, VR gaming and design collaborations – exemplifies how brands can reimagine their offering for new audiences in this way.

"Innovation is about being brave enough to push the boundaries, test new concepts and getting real-time feedback. It's also about having the agility to cater to new ordering behaviours and constantly questioning how and why we do the things we do."

Grant Macpherson

CMO, KFC South Africa

Source: [Restaurants.co.za](https://restaurants.co.za): KFC Play Braam concept store



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Makes people's lives better



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Leading the way

Source: Kantar BrandZ

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Connect purposefully

Successful innovation starts with unity and empathy. The most effective innovators bring teams together early, aligning on shared goals to create a strong sense of purpose throughout the process.

But alignment alone isn't enough. Breakthroughs happen when brands go beyond technology to understand what truly matters to people. By gathering deep consumer insight, using AI to spark imagination, and co-creating with communities, they build meaningful experiences. Strong connections and clear priorities empower confident steps into new territory.

Brands that win in 2026 will display seamless collaboration from the outset. This mindset allows them to make decisions fast and iterate intelligently.

Before embarking on new projects, Trip.com holds internal conversations to make sure teams begin from common ground – aligning on strategy, priorities and user needs. This common ground fosters clarity and a unified direction, enabling teams to move forward with confidence and empathy.



"If everyone agrees on the main user challenges, we have a very good starting point. We have common ground that we can start to tackle... so we begin from something real."

Amy Wei

Senior Product Director, Trip.com



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Makes people's lives better



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Well-designed products and services

Source: Kantar BrandZ



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Learn, test and learn

Innovation thrives on a “learn, test and learn” mindset. The most innovative brands don’t avoid failure, they embrace experimentation, driven by curiosity and powered by AI.

They treat every outcome as fuel for growth, moving fast and flexibly by building a culture where every test is a chance to improve. Continuous feedback and relentless learning are at the heart of their approach, enabling them to iterate, adapt, and unlock new possibilities at pace.

For the brands that thrive next year, this agility will be second nature. When using AI in the right way, they’ll not only accelerate testing and learning, but they’ll also uncover meaningfully different opportunity spaces that are deeply aligned with what their brand stands for, all while embracing failure, pivoting fast, and staying ahead of change.

Netflix drives growth using this kind of approach, with a constantly evolving offer. The business experiments with both tech (AI-powered search and interactive storytelling) and content (gaming and live sports).

“Companies rarely die from moving too fast, and they frequently die from moving too slowly.”

Reed Hastings

Former CEO, Netflix

Source: *The Times: Netflix boss changed the way we watch TV*



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Leading the way



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Offers a good range

Source: Kantar BrandZ

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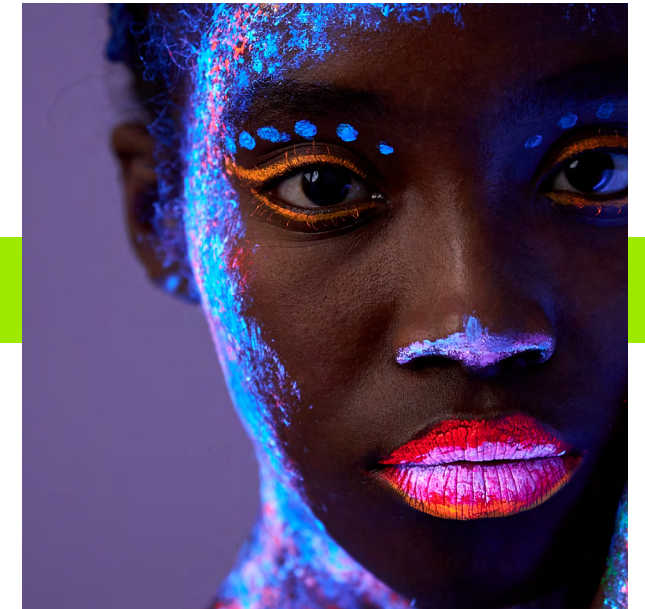
Own it

Innovation rewards those who truly own their ambition. The brands that succeed are the ones that bet boldly on big ideas, empower their teams, and create environments where risk is embraced, not feared.

By backing their innovations wholeheartedly—persevering, investing, and believing in their ideas—they inspire the confidence that allows creativity to flourish. The most impactful innovations come from commitment, not caution; success belongs to those who step up, stand out, and set the pace by walking the talk and championing bold ideas.

The top innovators of 2026 will make space for visionary thinking and back it with real resources.

ChatGPT’s ongoing ventures into new territory demonstrate the required commitment. Recent developments include multi-modal functionality, voice interaction, and real-time browsing.



“Fast iteration can make up for a lot; it’s usually OK to be wrong if you iterate quickly.”

Sam Altman

CEO, OpenAI

Source: *Sam Altman: What I Wish Someone Had Told Me*



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Shaking things up



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Fits well into everyday life

Source: Kantar BrandZ

INNOVATION IN 2026: WHAT WILL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE?

The brands that will lead in 2026 won't just adapt to change; they'll set it in motion. Now is the time to act boldly: make insight-led decisions, embrace risk, and embed a culture where learning and experimentation are the norm.

Ground your ambition in a clear sense of direction.

Align every move with your brand's identity and expand your impact beyond products — innovate in culture, co-create with communities, and build platforms for lasting growth.

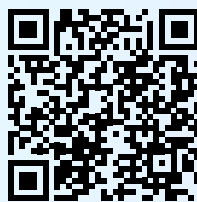
Empower your teams to move fast and think big.

Invest in the systems, technology, and support that enable rapid iteration. Make AI your accelerator, but don't stop there: combine the power of AI with human understanding and innovation expertise to unlock new possibilities. Use AI to fuel curiosity, speed up experimentation, and turn data into breakthrough ideas—while relying on human insight to ask the right questions, interpret results, and guide strategic choices.

Above all, don't wait for the future—shape it.

The difference will be made by those who act with vision and conviction, blending cutting-edge technology with the wisdom and creativity of people. The opportunity is here. Will you step up and lead the way?

At Kantar, we are committed to innovation. We bring together human understanding, AI-powered tools, and world-class expertise to help you innovate with confidence, going from idea to impact, to help you accelerate your journey and unlock meaningful growth—every step of the way. Ready to accelerate your innovation journey?



Visit our website or contact your local Kantar representative to get started and see how we can help you unlock the next wave of growth.

Kantar is the world's leading marketing data and analytics business and an indispensable brand partner to the world's top companies. We combine the most meaningful attitudinal and behavioural data with deep expertise and advanced analytics to uncover how people think and act. We help clients understand what has happened and why and how to shape the marketing strategies that shape their future.