
FOOD & BEVERAGE

Singin' in the Rain: Brands Must Work Harder to Spread Joy

By Paul Earle, Contributing Columnist and Principal of A Day in the Sun | May 10, 2023

The skies are stormy these days: economic uncertainty, political division, culture wars, actual wars, natural disasters. And that's just the first three minutes of the nightly news.

Ever the optimist, my mind turns to the 1955 timeless classic *Singin' In the Rain*. The protagonist played by Gene Kelly finds joy and hope even in a downpour.

Anyone focused on innovation or intrapreneurship must follow suit.

We have a big opportunity — perhaps a mandate — to expand our remit beyond stuff in a box. We must help people feel something. Add a dollop of happiness,

or challenge them to think, if only for a fleeting moment. It's the right thing to do, and the rewards can be huge.

I am fortunate to be a founding partner of several new brands that are making waves in the consumer world today: **GOODLES** mac and cheese, **Big Nose Kate** whiskey, and **Small Wonder** haircare. What follows are a few snippets from the playbook to win in any weather.



Paul Earle, co-founder of GOODLES, Big Nose Kate, and Small Wonder

Oh-No-You-Didn't-ism

GOODLES, launched in 2021, aims to spark a reaction of *"Oh no you didn't!"* on all matters big and small. Every detail is an opportunity to surprise and delight. For example, our prep instructions on the back of the package are written in disarmingly human language; there are rabbit holes galore on our call hotline; and GOODLES.com offers incongruous ancillary items like branded roller skates and hoodies for dogs (we call these "Goods.") We took extra care to create entertaining variety names, eschewing the industry standard of dull descriptors. So, our parmesan asiago product is not "Parmesan Asiago"; it is "Twist My Parm" (and came *this close* to being "Kiss My Asiago." We even celebrated our rejected names by swapping them in to our website on April 1st).



The stark absence of *Oh-No-You-Didn't-ism* is why so many new product concepts originating in big company circles end up failing. Sophisticated testing algorithms that the big guys have deployed for decades are metaphorical bleach wipes for anything unusual. Which is the good stuff.

Embrace the wonder of weird. And never be boring, anywhere, ever.

Raise the Bar to “Yes, And”

As we tackle crisis after crisis as a society, people are demanding more from brands. The logic: if we are asked to survive Covid and Putin, then [insert brand here] should figure out how to just... be better. This principle is especially important with “Genzennials” (Generation Z and young Millennials). We’re in the “Yes, And” economy.

Small Wonder, a new haircare brand launching to the general market soon, aims to be the first shampoo powder concentrate that — wait for it — *actually works*. Simply being eco-friendly — no watery goop, no plastic — is great, but doesn’t cut it on its own. Similarly, at GOODLES, our mac not only brings protein, fiber, and nutrients from plants; it is also delicious.

Yes, and.

New offerings need to be turned up to 11, just like the amp in the movie *Spinal Tap*. “Good enough” is no longer good enough.

Have Fun

These days, more than ever, *joie de vivre* matters. People having fun tend to emanate a magnetic attraction, and brands work similarly.

Big Nose Kate is a whiskey brand that launched in 2021. The story of Kate — a real western outlaw whose life was often difficult, confronting danger at every turn — is inherently serious. As is our contemporary mission to position this brave female protagonist to win in a world of Jack, Jim, Johnnie, Evan, George, Elmer, Pappy, et al. And then there is the riotously funny and wonderful duo



of Melissa McCarthy and Ben Falcone, who recently joined Big Nose Kate as investors and partners. Melissa and Ben are aligned with our broad-based mission, but also — as you might imagine — make sure we don't take ourselves *too* seriously.

For example, when asked by a prominent reporter to comment on how she likes her Big Nose Kate, instead of providing cocktail recipes the reporter was seeking, Melissa quipped: “Sitting in my backyard, blasting Yacht Rock.” She also published, to Instagram, an **outlandish video** about how Kate helps her cope with an imaginary nemesis named Diane. Such actions not only make people laugh; they bring originality and authenticity to the brand. Note the absence of any ostensible traditional brand strategy (which, paradoxically, can be a great brand strategy).

Perhaps set aside that 150-page brand guideline deck, for a minute. Instead, simply ask yourself: “What would be really fun?”

Design for Scale from the Outset

Incumbent companies are usually allergic to big retail and distribution partnerships for fear of alienating customers on other businesses. So, ironically, their go-to-market plans for new products often end up being too small. Conversely, the best startups go big, early. At GOODLES, for example, our first foray into brick-and-mortar retail wasn't a local co-op; it was a national deal with Target. At Big Nose Kate, we eschewed the mom-and-pop approach and forged a partnership with Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, one of the biggest and best distributors nationally. Seeking big deals early may provide the answer to a key question all innovators must ask: *will it scale?*

The rain is falling, but we all must keep singing. Perhaps even louder, and with gusto.

So grab that umbrella and have at it. History will be kind.

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