

Don't believe in trends, believe in brands

I've spent most of my life moving between two realities. Different ways of seeing the world. Different definitions of what "success" even looks like. Growing up that way, you learn early that there is rarely one truth, one audience, or one way forward.

 By [Giulia Benincá Hanger-Hill](#) 16 Feb 2026



Retroviral head of strategy, Giulia Benincá Hanger-Hill says she doesn't believe in trends, but in brands (Image supplied)

Success was shaped by showing up consistently, not sporadically. The environment will always change, but if you're anchored in your truth, you'll connect with the right people at the right time.

That's probably why I've never really been obsessed with trendy (especially this time of year).

When everyone is looking the same way

We're living in an era of unprecedented access to information. Every brand sees the same reports, the same cultural moments, the same "next big thing." Ironically, that access is creating sameness.

Brands aren't making braver choices; they're making safer ones. Not because they lack creativity, but because they're afraid of being left behind. So they follow.

They adopt the language of the moment. They attach themselves to whatever feels culturally approved. Purpose, identity, inclusivity, sustainability—important conversations, yes.

But when every brand is saying the same thing, the difference between belief and performance becomes painfully obvious. Purpose, when it's forced, doesn't feel purposeful. It feels performative.



ADVERTISING

#BizTrends2026 | Brave Group's Bibi Bonnecwe: Why human truths matter more than marketing trends

Bibi Bonnecwe 5 Feb 2026

Culture isn't something you jump in and out of

I believe that brands should live in culture. But living in culture is not the same as chasing it.

Culture isn't a checklist. It's not a campaign theme or using vernac just for the sake of it.

The work I care about most sits in the in-between space:

- Between what a brand wants to say and what people are ready to hear.
- Between what people say they want and what they actually respond to.

That space requires listening, not forecasting.



MARKETING

#BizTrends2026 | Tom Kaneshige on how CMOs seized strategy in an age of chaos

Tom Kaneshige 22 Jan 2026

The problem with predicting people

Here's the thing we don't admit often enough in strategy: You can't truly predict culture.

Trends are signals, not guarantees. They're fragments of momentum, often identified after the fact and packaged as foresight.

By the time they reach a brand deck, they're already diluted.

Strategy can then become about keeping up instead of standing for something. That's not a place you want to play.



MARKETING

#BizTrends2026 | App Your Game's Yusuf Abrahams: Neuroinclusive design, the real competitive edge for 2026

Yusuf Abrahams 13 Feb 2026

I play my cards intentionally

I believe in knowing the deck you're holding. A brand with clarity doesn't panic when culture shifts. It plays

cards right, understanding its role, its voice, and its boundaries, when to play a King or Joker at the right moment.

That means:

- Engaging cultural moments that align, not everything that trends.
- Speaking to Gen Z without trying to desperately be their bestie.
- Evolving without erasing what made the brand meaningful in the first place.

Brands that know who they are don't need to audition for relevance. They earn it over time and show up in culture with authenticity. As Gen Z would say, that slaps.



TRENDS

#BizTrends2026 | Brave Group's Musa Kalenga: Why 2026 demands a new code of leadership

Musa Kalenga 13 Feb 2026

Final Thought

Trends will always move faster than meaning. Forecasts will always change. I play my strategy hand based on understanding. Understanding the cultural tensions people and brands exist within.

Brands that are anchored, that listen before they respond, don't lose their way every time culture shifts.

Play the cards well, and you won't need to predict the future. You'll already be equipped to meet it.

Take trends lightly, not as a trajectory.

ABOUT GIULIA BENINCÁ HANGER-HILL

Head of Strategy at Retroviral
View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>