

# YOUTHNATION

BUILDING REMARKABLE BRANDS  
IN A YOUTH-DRIVEN CULTURE



**MATT BRITTON**

**WILEY**



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This book is dedicated to my family. Without each and every one of you pieces of me would not exist and my thoughts and words would have less meaning.

I love you all dearly.

To my parents, Robert and Marsha  
and my brothers, Evan and Joey

To my wife Elyse, son Cameron,  
and daughter Ella



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## Foreword

*The most important leadership characteristic to thrive in this ever-changing world is resilience. Resilience is the ability to fall, pick ourselves up from the floor quickly, learn, and continue with our journey. Behind resilience there is an inherent positive outlook on life based on unwavering faith in our purpose, our abilities, and the capability of the teams around us.*

—Antonio Lucio

**A**s global chief marketing and communications officer at Visa, I have been at the center of YouthNation’s massive disruption to business and culture. Despite the fact that Visa, a brand of enormous scale, processes over 96 billion transactions in 200 countries during the past year, in many ways we are now forced to think and act like a nimble startup to ensure our long-term vitality.

I was deeply honored when Matt asked me to write the foreword for his first book. Matt has been an important thought partner and a key driver of change in our global organization. His electric passion for driving

cultural change through social media and his deep knowledge of youth were key elements in Visa's marketing evolution.

The drivers of change below are not specific to the payments industry but have implications for businesses of all types in every corner around the world.

1. The over 2 billion smartphone users<sup>1</sup> around the world have forever changed the way our world communicates and consumers transact.
2. The over 3 billion Internet users around the world now have real-time access to data, tools, and content on a 24-hour news cycle, forever impacting the ways we reach and influence them.
3. The pace of innovation in the marketplace has spawned a wave of millennial-inspired startups, which have reimaged our industry.

For Visa, as for all businesses today, the way in which we manage change will determine whether we will be future leaders in our industry, or another case study of a company that has been left in the dust.

I believe that digital natives will rule the world. Whether you are a global organization with thousands of employees like Visa or a local, family-owned business, your ability to understand the principals of YouthNation is now mission critical. There is simply no way you can replace the experience of being hardwired in the new reality we live in, as today's youth are.

It is imperative, therefore, for business leaders today to empower YouthNation to directly drive change

within our organizations. Only by tearing down walls and challenging legacy systems can we truly disrupt ourselves before we become disrupted into obsolescence. At Visa, we are working hard to deploy the principles of YouthNation in our brand, our products, and all of our marketing efforts—principles which you will learn about in this timely book:

1. **Put consumers at the center.** No longer can we rely on talking at consumers, but rather, we need to engage them in a conversation. We need to fully understand the needs of our various consumer segments and interact with them in ways that add value to their lives.
2. **Embrace social-at-the core.** We must design our communications with shareability in mind at every touch point. We want the consumer to feel a sense of ownership in our brand so advocacy must be earned and authentic.
3. **Everything is marketing.** Whether its the way consumers interact with our products, the way we activate global events like the World Cup or the Olympics, or the way we interact with our great merchant and banking partners, they are all reflections of Visa and must be consistent and continually deliver excellence.

I am excited to be part of this book because even as the CMO of a Fortune 500 organization, my challenges are not unique. Anyone who is looking to navigate their way

to success through today's white water of change must meet the demands of disruption with the principles of YouthNation.

These are indeed challenging times, but these are also times of enormous opportunity. I am hopeful and optimistic that the impact of YouthNation on our economic and cultural landscape will bring about great innovation, impact, and ultimately advancement for America, and for the rest of the world.

*Antonio Lucio is Global Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at Visa Inc. In this role, he oversees Visa's global branding, corporate relations, and marketing activities. Prior to joining Visa as CMO in December 2007, Lucio was the chief innovation and health and wellness officer for PepsiCo Inc. and, prior to that, was the senior vice president and chief marketing officer at Pepsi Cola International Beverages. Lucio has more than 25 years of global marketing and brand management experience earned at some of the world's most successful consumer packaged goods companies including Kraft General Foods, RJR Foods International, and Procter & Gamble.*

*Consistently recognized as one of the most active CMOs on social media, you can connect with him on Twitter @ajlucio5 and LinkedIn.*

## Acknowledgments

**W**hen I was growing up, I never imagined I would write a book. I mean I was the type of person that would have trouble completing an essay and many times a simple paragraph. There was one teacher I encountered growing up who taught me that writing could be a place to channel emotion and passion; Norman Walker you were that person. I will always be thankful you crossed paths with me as an impressionable youth. May you rest in peace.

It's fairly obvious that without the formation of Mr Youth (which would one day become MRY, and then spin-off CrowdTap), I would not have realized the experiences that lead to the writing of this book. I'd like to humbly acknowledge the core crew that has largely stuck by me from what feels like forever ago: Dan Lafontaine, Evan Kraut, David Weinstock, Matt Rednor, Vishal Sapra, Eric Schoenberg, and Helene Devries. I'd also like to thank the great new influences at MRY: Clare Hart, David Berkowitz, Cedric Devitt, Ian Chee, and the incredible Laura Desmond. Lastly thanks to the cronies who were with me when this journey all began; I still

remember our four-person team trying to make enough noise to matter: Paul Tedeschi, Vinny Saulle, and Doug Akin. Lastly to Brandon Evans and Kareem Kouddous, your feats on CrowdTap have blown me away.

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I believe whenever you achieve certain heights in your life it becomes increasingly important to surround yourself with others that push you to achieve more, whether they realize it or not. Throughout the writing of this book several people have inspired me, helped me, or otherwise pushed me to get this done. A big thanks goes out to friends, contemporaries, luminaries, and catalysts: Andrew Fox, Michael Lazerow, Jason Strauss, Adam Braun, Dave Kerpen, Sean Christie, Eric Hadley, Avi Savar, Elliot Bisnow, Jeff Rosenthal, Brett Leve, Jeremiah Owyang, and Ryan Schinman.

#TS: you've helped transform my body and cleanse my mind. Brooklyn for life.

This book would simply not have been possible without a dream team, which amassed seemingly overnight to help an inexperienced ADHD-saddled author actually get this thing across the finish line.

Beverly West: You have been a true partner in helping me frame and create this work. Your experience from a completely different angle of culture has given me great perspective as well as great respect for the trade of authorship. It's been a real honor, you are tremendous.

David Yarus: You are the youthful catalyst to my world. Your energy, positivity, and steady grasp on where this industry is going has kept me honest, dynamic, and inspired. I am so thankful for our relationship; the mentorship goes both ways my brother.

Chris Ayres: You will always be the best designer I've ever known. Thank you for designing the cover of this book, and the logos of MRY, Mr Youth, and CrowdTap and for being an overall incredible person.

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To my assistant Brooks Credeur: you are the thread that holds it all together—*it* meaning my life. Thanks for all that you do.

To the MRY internship class of 2014—thanks for helping this book get off the ground and best of luck

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Finally to the team at Wiley Publishing namely Elizabeth Gildea and Shannon Vargo , thanks for making my first book such a great experience.

# Disclosures

**T**hroughout the writing of this book, I did my best to avoid writing about competitors of clients or otherwise biasing the content of this book with my personal interests. Although let's be honest, today everyone competes and everything is connected.

At the time of writing this book I was a shareholder in the following:

1. Publicis Groupe (owner of MRY and Mr Youth)
2. Facebook
3. Google

At the time of writing this book I was also involved in the following:

I was a major shareholder and chairman of the board at CrowdTap.

I was a member of the board of advisors at Pencils Of Promise.

I was a major shareholder and chairman of the board at Smooch Labs (owner of JSwipe).

Several current and former *MRY* clients at the time of writing were mentioned in this book; they are disclosed throughout where appropriate, but for an updated and full list of clients please visit [www.MattBritton.com/clients](http://www.MattBritton.com/clients).

## How to Connect with Me and Learn more about YouthNation

I encourage you to reach out and connect with me to dive further into the topics discussed in this book. Below are the best ways to do so:

**Twitter:** This is the best way to reach me directly for one on one dialogue; response times may vary. My handle is @MattyB, or visit <https://twitter.com/mattyb>

**Facebook:** Follow this page as new topics related to the book will be updated often. Feel free to join the discussion and get involved. <https://www.facebook.com/youthnation>

**Instagram:** Follow this page for daily inspiration and new findings: <http://instagram.com/youthnation>

I hope you enjoy this book as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Matt Britton - @MattyB



# Introduction: Forever Young

## **YouthNation (Yooth-nay-shun)**

1. (noun): A highly influential group of over 80 million American citizens born between 1982 and 1998. They are currently aged between 18 and 34 and nearly all of them cannot remember a time when the Internet did not exist.
2. (verb): A movement of influential individuals who possess disruptive power over cultural, business, and political issues in the United States.

Youth is not just a state of mind; it's the state of the art.

**Y**outhNation is a new phenomenon. When America itself was young, there was no youth culture to speak of. There was no place set aside for young people to discuss and share things that were of particular interest to them. In most cases, young people were never really together as a group, and as a result, had no opportunity to form a culture that was unique to them. Historically, children were at home, sequestered away from other kids their own age, and by the time they were 10 years old

were expected to take their place in the adult world of work. At the beginning of America, people weren't young for very long.

In those days, the information about the world that young people received came only from adults. When they had problems or concerns, they shared it with their elders. It wasn't until very recently from a historical perspective that young people were able to spend enough time with each other, separated and apart from the worldview of adults, to find the opportunity to be youthful. Even adolescence itself is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon.

As the middle class expanded, kids began spending longer and longer periods of time in classrooms, grouped by age, outside of the influence of adults. With growing middle-class family budgets, and a burgeoning industrial economy, kids suddenly had consumer power and an identity unto themselves. As a consequence, a youth culture began to emerge, and with it a specific language and a shared appreciation for the music, literature, movies, fashion, places, ideals, and activities that spoke directly to youth, because it came directly from youth.

Suddenly, youth culture had a voice and sought out channels of communication to express that voice. Through college radio stations, self-published magazines and newsletters, grassroots movements, or homebrew computer clubs, America's youth found a way to communicate with one another, and began to establish their footprint on the culture of the adult world. But even as recently as the sixties and seventies, our nation's youth remained a fringe culture with crude tools and few

resources. It was, at most, a reaction against mainstream culture that lived on the outside looking in.

Today, far from a fringe or counterculture, our nation's youth have become the driving force behind American innovation, growth, and competitive advantage globally. As a result of our technological revolution, we are now living in a YouthNation, and all the old bets are off. The power and influence of YouthNation stands to dramatically shift every business, consumer, politician, nation, city, town, and village around the world.

This epic shift is disrupting just about everything that we took for granted about the old economy:

- The importance of a college education
- The vision of the American dream
- What success actually means
- What and how we buy
- What and how we sell
- What brands must do to embrace this new national and global ethos and compete

YouthNation has broken free from the hold that big media and big advertising have had on culture, and completely transformed the approach that brands must take in order to appeal to today's target market. The ripple effect from this monumental sea of change has and will continue to completely transform the way we work, play, and live, and is demanding and encouraging us all to be, in many ways, forever young if we want to compete.

So let's be clear. For brands today, the old marketing models are over. The status quo is dead. Today's rapidly shifting marketplace requires businesses to be agile, connected, authentic, artful, meaningful, immersive, and socially responsible. In other words, today, businesses have to embody the ideals of YouthNation, regardless of age or size, in order to succeed.

In YouthNation's hyper-socialized, Instagram fanatical, experience-obsessed marketplace, youth is no longer an age, or even a demographic, but the primary catalyst of business and culture. Fortunately, thanks to technology and the progressive ideals that social media has engendered, youth has become a commodity that is available to everyone; all we have to do is figure out how to tap these new and rapidly evolving resources in our businesses, as well as in our lives.

So how do you harness the enormous power of today's youth-driven economy, where everything is changing at the pace of a teenager's attention span, and future-fit your business for long-term success?

This is the book that will give you all the tools and understanding that you will need to understand the nuances of YouthNation and harness the enormous power of the perpetual youth economy.

As the founder and CEO of MRY (formerly known as Mr Youth), an NYC-based creative and technology agency which has specialized for well over a decade in marketing to youth for such brand titans as Visa, Johnson & Johnson, and Microsoft, I've learned a lot about how YouthNation thinks, works, plays, and spends. Since I was a freshman at Boston University

two decades ago handing out nightclub flyers on the corner of Kenmore Square, I've made a career out of effectively engaging YouthNation on behalf of brands, and leveraging technology in order to keep pace with the counterculture that has now become the mainstream culture itself.

From Big Data 101, which explains how to use New-Gen psychographics to market effectively in a post demographic world, to how to tell a brand story worth sharing that builds engagement and evangelism to tips for cocreating immersive and engaging experiences that build viral followings and loyal brand communities, YouthNation will offer businesses large and small an indispensable map to navigate the radically changed landscape of the present and the future marketplace.

So let's get started, and right away, because in YouthNation, everything happens in real time, and in the blink of a Snapchat.



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CHAPTER

1

# From Status Symbol to Status Update

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