





# Making the Most of Brand Birthdays

By Tim Sweeney

A company anniversary is the perfect reason to thank your customers and connect with new ones.

Early this year, Hasbro announced a new look and new game features to celebrate the 90th anniversary of Monopoly. Hasbro says the expansion packs—which are designed to breathe new life into the game—are a result of deep insights that recognized how consumers were playing the game. “In our 90th year, we’re celebrating the elements our players have loved for nearly a century to keep the exciting gameplay of Monopoly alive for decades to come,” says Brian Baker, Senior Vice President of Board Games at Hasbro.

After all, you don’t survive for 90 years without rolling the dice occasionally. *Ahem.* Bad puns

aside, anniversaries are a great opportunity to refresh a brand or to launch a clever campaign, and Monopoly is hardly the only brand to “pass Go” and collect a little consumer love in the process.

“Brand anniversary and milestone campaigns can be incredibly effective, but only when there’s a clear, authentic reason to celebrate that resonates with your audience,” says Rosie McGuire, Chief Creative Officer for CourtAvenue, an Austin, Texas, company that helps businesses accelerate their digital transformation. “It’s not just about hitting a number—whether it’s 1, 5, 10, or 50 years—it’s about connecting the milestone to something meaningful that your customers care about. You need to answer the unspoken question: *Why should they care?*”

Sometimes, a birthday celebration offers an opportunity to ramp up to a special occasion. In 2024, the National Hockey League’s Boston Bruins franchise celebrated its centennial season with a campaign called “Blood, Sweat & 100 Years” with ad agency partner GYK Antier. The campaign launched in 2023 and included a new brand identity and assets, a historical podcast with team alumni as guests, a fashion show with advertising partner JetBlue at Boston’s Logan Airport to launch centennial merchandise, and an alumni gathering on the season’s opening night—complete with a gold-carpet entrance.

The final piece centered around a mid-season game against the club’s longtime rivals, the ▶

Montreal Canadiens. The buildup around the game incorporated a weekend of festivities that included a statue unveiling, a fan fest on the streets, and a youth hockey showcase at the local arena where the Bruins had played their first game a century earlier. There was also a charitable element: the club's foundation donated \$100,000 in grants to local youth hockey programs.

Despite all those components, it was the content that the club produced around its 100 years of history that had hockey fans buzzing. In an elegant brand video called "Stitches," created by GYK Antier and production company Big Brick, highlights from the team's storied history roll past while an older gentleman hand stitches a jersey for his granddaughter. Another content piece was a three-minute video shot entirely with a drone. As a voice-over plays highlights from the team's biggest historical moments, the drone navigates its way from the streets of Boston into TD Garden arena and buzzes from point to point, where team icons are stationed. Even opposing fans applauded the effort on social media.

Monopoly and the Boston Bruins may have nearly two combined centuries of history and highlights to draw from, but that doesn't mean your own smaller company anniversaries aren't worth publicizing. After all, a brand birthday is a fantastic news-making opportunity. Here are some thoughts to keep in mind as you start baking the cake.

### For starters, start early.

The prep work for any brand campaign—creative shoots, rounds of feedback, media buying, incorporating ambassadors, building PR storylines—takes time. For an anniversary campaign, it's that and then some. It can mean combing through archives, deciding which achievements to highlight, or tracking down retired or former employees and ambassadors to play a part in the campaign.

### Create a simple, memorable creative hook.

"A clear, compelling campaign name or visual theme—ideally with a bit of alliteration or punch—can go a long way in sticking with people," says Rosie McGuire. "It sounds basic, but a lot of brands overcomplicate it. Without a unifying concept, the campaign risks being a patchwork of content rather than a cohesive story." The nature of the business should inform the campaign mechanics, according to McGuire. She recommends that consumer packaged goods brands consider tactical offers—limited-edition packaging, discounts, or loyalty activations tied to the milestone—while tech or service-based brands might lean into thought leadership, expertise, and future-looking content. "Audiences in [the latter] sectors care more about competence and relevance than nostalgia," McGuire says.

### Reward loyalty and incorporate current products.

A brand anniversary is the perfect time to acknowledge to your best customers that they are responsible for your success. Let those people know they are appreciated with special offers that coincide with your celebration. If you are a young company—or even a B2B company—maybe it's the right time to thank your most loyal customers with a discount or a simple message of appreciation. How about creating an anniversary edition of your products and giving the public a chance to win them on social media? "It can become a moment to link your growth to your audience's support," McGuire says. "If it's your third anniversary, offer something tangible: 3 percent off for three days, three new products, three stories from behind the scenes. It turns the milestone into something people can *experience*, rather than just hear about."

**Contribute to society.** Using a brand anniversary to announce a charitable donation is a unique way to remind consumers

of what you have done and will do moving forward. In March of this year, another toy maker, Mattel, announced that it would celebrate its 80th anniversary with a full year of philanthropic investments into more than 80 nonprofits globally. "Since Mattel's founding in 1945, giving back has been at the heart of our mission, embedded in its culture and amplified through the purpose of its brands," says Nancy Molenda, Mattel's Vice President of Global Corporate Events and Philanthropy. "As we celebrate our 80th anniversary, we're continuing to pay it forward by partnering with over 80 of our longstanding nonprofit partners." McGuire calls this a perfect example of "philanthropy with precision" and says if you go this route, the cause should tie directly to the brand's mission or legacy in a way that makes sense. "Audiences can sniff out a forced corporate social responsibility angle from a mile away," McGuire warns.

### Reinvigorate your teams.

Chances are, your employees came to work for you because they appreciated what your brand stands for. An anniversary is the perfect time to remind them of your company's accomplishments, what makes the company unique, and why they work there (beyond a paycheck). Create employee gift packs or merchandise that they will wear with pride, invite guest speakers into the building, give employees an extra day off work, or involve them in philanthropic efforts, such as spending a workday volunteering for a cause the company supports. "These moments are powerful internally," McGuire says. "Use them to reignite your team's sense of purpose. Internal activations—custom swag, spotlight videos, team retrospectives—can go a long way in driving alignment and pride."

### Use digital as an amplifier, not just a container.

Just as the Boston Bruins succeeded with their content, thinking beyond social media can give your story more depth and reach. McGuire encourages brands to "build interactive experiences—timelines,

nostalgia-based content series, user-generated memory vaults, or even digital collectibles (if it fits your audience)."

**Relaunch your brand.** Is it time to update your logo or refresh your brand values? A company anniversary is a good excuse to do so and offers the perfect reason to reminisce while also looking ahead. You might also consider celebrating the anniversary of a brand relaunch or unexpected event. "Not every milestone has to be tied to longevity," McGuire explains. "You can flip the idea on its head by celebrating the 'anniversary of change' or 'one year of reinvention.' Owning your newness or transformation can be just as powerful, especially if you're trying to reposition the brand or connect with a new audience."

### Remember, survival is worth celebrating.

Companies don't need 100 or even 50 years of history to celebrate a noteworthy milestone. After all, creating and building a business is hard work. Whether you are celebrating a 1st, 5th, or 10th anniversary, you are telling your customers that you've made it, that business is good, and that you expect to be with them for the long haul. McGuire says it's worth it for small or newer brands to mark milestones because the lack of legacy can become the story. "The tradition is that there *isn't* one yet—and that's powerful," she explains. "You're building something from the ground up, and that's worth celebrating. Position it less as a 'look back' and more as a bold stake in the ground: *We're here, we're growing, and we're just getting started.* Unlike older brands that sometimes get trapped by their history, younger brands have more freedom to shape the narrative. Internally, use it as a morale boost, especially in the early stages. Every year survived and every challenge that was overcome is a win. Celebrating these moments—publicly and with your team—keeps the momentum alive." ■