



DIFFERENTIATION

BLOG POST BY
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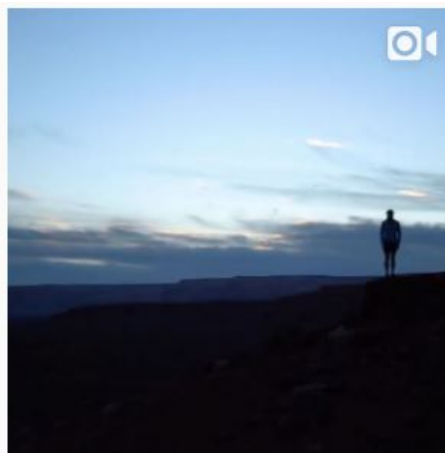


You Can Get With This ...or You Can Get With That

For someone outside of the surfing (and action sports) community it may seem like an easy formula...take a cool picture of a surfer on a wave in an exotic locale, add some clever copy based on nature or living outside the constraints of society, multiply, and you have a social media presence for a surf brand. This generalized way of thinking is what can make differentiating one surf brand's social media account from another a difficult task for marketers and consumers alike. The truth is, surfers, and surf brands, cater to a wide variety of buyer personas. You have the "groms" (youngsters) who thrive on the punk-style branding of some labels, all the way to those looking for sustainability and responsible environmental practices in the brands they support.

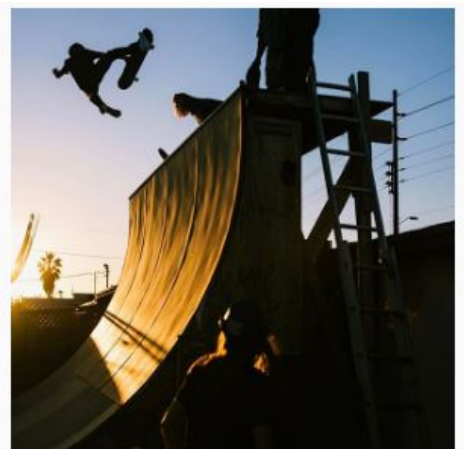
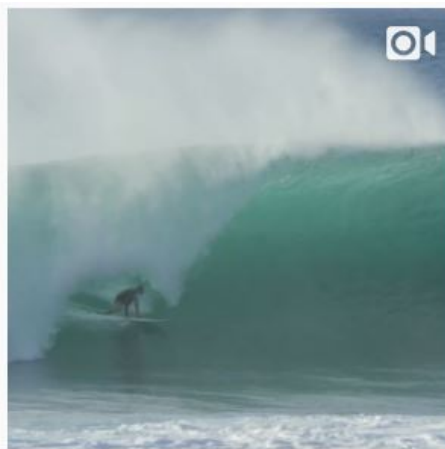
Surfers speak their own language and can muse for hours on surf conditions, weather, surfboard dimensions, and yes, even the brands associated with their beloved sport. So, I will use some pictures to try and visually represent the differentiation between the Patagonia and Volcom brands. For example...

Patagonia's Instagram looks like this:



Patagonia Instagram

Whereas Volcom's Instagram looks like this:



Volcom Instagram

On the surface, they might not seem that different. But with a little knowledge of the difference in culture and history behind these brands, you will see that they may occupy the same industry but target their customers through social media in a very different way.

Patagonia's Soulful Approach

Patagonia's roots are in the 1970's mountain climbing culture of California. The era and atmosphere in which the company was formed are an obvious influence on the brand's tendency to be environmentally focused in its business practices and social presence. Embracing the environment is, in itself, no longer something that can differentiate one surf brand from another. However, Patagonia is an example of a brand that truly excels in using social media, and other public relations initiatives, to express the struggle to be environmentally responsible in a consumer driven business. Patagonia's Instagram and Facebook pages focus primarily on nature-driven content and do not highlight their own products much unless it is to promote the fact that they are responsibly sourced and produced (see their Facebook post below).



Post from [Patagonia's Facebook Page](#)

Patagonia's dedication to the environment was also the spotlight behind a 2004 essay written by Yvon Chouinard (founder of Patagonia) and Nora Gallagher titled "[Don't Buy This Shirt Unless You Need It](#)". This essay was the inspiration for Patagonia's "[Don't Buy This Jacket](#)" ad which was run on Black Friday and Cyber Monday of 2011. The ad was an important, and powerful, differentiation tactic to further establish Patagonia's dedication to being an environmentally conscious brand.

Volcom Evolves, But Doesn't Change...much

Volcom's "Youth Against Establishment" mentality, and its original tagline expressed the humble beginnings of the action sports brand from slinging t-shirts in a bedroom office (on a loan of \$5,000) to being bought by a large luxury/sporting conglomerate for 608 million dollars. Zach Weis, of *Inertia*, wrote a [great blog post about the Volcom evolution](#) from youthful rebellion to their more "mature" True To This slogan.



When Volcom first hit the scene in the mid 90's they definitely embraced a more rock star approach to marketing their brand. They also ventured into the music and art world and embraced the counterculture that the surfing community represented in the 1990's.

Although Volcom is now part of the Kering group (owner of brands like Gucci and Puma) and has toned down their youth-first branding to include more responsible [core values](#) into their mission statement, they still target a younger consumer base with their social media presence. For example, as opposed to the prevalence of environmentally friendly posts on Patagonia's social media channels, Volcom focuses more on the sports and athletes they support (as well as their music and art initiatives). Though they have streamlined their brand identity to be more consistent with their parent company, Volcom still finds a way to differentiate their social media presence by embracing the youthful spirit of the brand.



Another great way to see the difference between these two surf brands is to look at their sponsored athletes or, as Patagonia calls them, “Ambassadors”. Patagonia's [Ambassadors](#) are more along the lines of pioneers of the sport than they are sponsored competitors whereas Volcom promotes many up and coming (some veteran) [team riders](#). They may approach their social media presence from different angles but both brands exude their love for the sports and culture they support.

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