The Crocs Comeback

Crocs #FindYourFun Campaign 2015
Crocs was a brand that used to be great.

For years they dominated the casual-shoe corner of the market. But eventually the fad wore out…and Crocs became irrelevant.

The planning team faced a difficult task: We needed to breathe life back into a brand that few cared about anymore.

As we dove into research, we uncovered a simple but important truth: Crocs are fun. They’re bright and colorful, but more than that, they’re the shoes you wear when you want to be comfortable and be yourself.

This concept of self-expression came up over and over again. People all around the world are hungry for it. Why? Because “being you” is fun.

It was clear that we needed to turn Crocs into the brand that stands for fun. But how? We took another look at the polarizing clog. Where others saw weakness, we saw opportunity. The clog was more than just a shoe, it was a globally recognized symbol of the brand. Rather than ignore it, we needed to do the exact opposite. We needed to turn it into a global icon of fun.

The campaign came to life through the #FindYourFun creative platform — it was simple, straightforward and universal. The message encouraged everyone around the world to celebrate fun in the everyday.
The Crocs Comeback

Back in 2002, when Ja Rule was topping the charts and cellphones still flipped, the first Crocs shoe was introduced at the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show. It was a new kind of shoe: a water/boat hybrid that was waterproof, odor-free and ridiculously comfortable.

People went nuts over them. All 1,000 pairs were purchased on the spot. And just like that, Crocs became a major hit.

The company expanded rapidly. By 2006, Crocs was earning more than $200 million in 40 countries. When they went public that same year, Crocs had the largest footwear IPO in history.

Yes, we’re still talking about the company that’s responsible for the blocky, squishy shoe with the holes.

Crocs were a fixture in pop culture around the globe. People loved them, people hated them, but no one could ignore them — they were everywhere.

But, after a decade of climbing, Crocs began to lose momentum. Almost as quickly as the brand rose to fame, it became entirely irrelevant. Crocs was still selling shoes, but the brand had become so obsolete that many people assumed it had gone under. If Crocs didn’t take action, this perception could become a reality.

In an effort to seize the opportunity for a turnaround, the company restructured. With the help of some capital investment, Crocs implemented operational changes, streamlined their retail presence and nixed a number of unpopular shoe styles. These changes were a good start, but there was something missing.

In order to be truly great again, Crocs needed to be relevant.

That’s where we stepped in. Our job was to revive the dying brand within its six key markets: U.S., U.K., Germany, China, Japan and South Korea. We needed to attract the trade’s attention, reignite excitement among consumers and boost sales.
There’s a simple but important truth about Crocs — they’re fun

Our first step was to learn more about Crocs and its place within the broader casual footwear category. We traveled around the globe and started asking questions. We held focus groups, conducted interviews and intercepted shoppers at Crocs stores. In doing so, we uncovered a fundamental truth: casual shoes, particularly Crocs, are fun.

Crocs aren’t like other types of shoes. You slip on dress shoes for work, you tie up running shoes to exercise, you pull on heavy boots to trudge through snow. There are rules and restrictions associated with those types of shoes. But Crocs are different — they’re the shoes you wear when you simply want to relax, be comfortable and be yourself. And when you do this, you can have loads of fun.
Everyone around the world is discovering the fun in self-expression

As we delved deeper into this idea, we uncovered a larger global trend: around the world, people are embracing self-expression. Nonconformity — “being you” — is something that has become prevalent and valued. In the U.S. and Europe, this concept is manifested in the way people break from the norm, always striving to be individualistic and different. In Asian markets, self-expression is less about being unconventional and more about taking pride in yourself and your sense of style.

But regardless of location, it’s clear that people have a desire to express themselves. Fashion — clothing, footwear, accessories — is the vehicle through which you can truly show off who you are. When you choose Crocs, you’re choosing shoes that make you feel good about yourself. And when you feel comfortable in your own skin, you can finally have fun.

*We needed to transform Crocs into the brand that stands for fun.*
The clog is more than just a shoe, it’s an icon

Ah yes, the clog. We weren’t entirely sure what to do about that rather unique piece of footwear. Crocs wanted to focus their advertising on other shoe styles, but we couldn’t ignore the fact that many people’s negative perceptions of the clog could impact their opinions of those other styles. Plus, the clog, in spite of its polarity, was generating a huge number of sales. We had to address it somehow.

So we turned to a series of shoe designers. There was some trepidation going into these interviews; we all expected these fashion experts to deride the clog and tear it apart. But something unexpected occurred: They expressed envy — genuine envy! They told us how identifiable the clog was; they wished their products could be as recognizable as the clog.

Yeah. We were pumped.

We had unearthed a major competitive advantage for Crocs. The clog was more than just a shoe; it was a globally recognized symbol of the Crocs brand.

We looked at other international fashion brands to see how they handled their symbolic products. Levi’s uses their 501 jeans to depict an effortless, cool persona. Converse uses the Chuck Taylor All Stars to personify their anti-establishment sentiment. Burberry uses its classic trench coat to represent its authentic British heritage.

“Today it’s taken for granted inside the company that the trench coat must remain our most exciting, most iconic product. It guides all our decisions. This product is who we are.”

ANGELA AHRENTS
FORMER BURBERRY CEO

We wanted to apply this learning to the clog. It was obvious that we should position the clog center stage, but we also needed to redefine what it represented. By infusing meaning into the clog, we could effectively transform it from a widely recognized product to a global icon of Fun.
A worldwide invitation to #FindYourFun

Crocs had already been using some language around fun, so we borrowed it and developed the actionable #FindYourFun campaign platform:

At Crocs, we believe our clog is an iconic symbol for having fun.

We see the fun in almost anything and believe you can turn anything you do into something fun.

So let’s celebrate the fun we see in everything and encourage you to go #FindYourFun.

Our message was powerful in its simplicity and directness. It was something that everyone could understand and participate in, regardless of where they lived.
Bringing #FindYourFun to life

In order to demonstrate the iconic nature of our clog, we needed to behave like an icon. We needed to be proud, declarative and confident, and we needed to do so in locations that are inherently iconic. So we designed our imagery in such a way as to resemble the unmistakable silhouette of the clog. And we selected media placements that were large and sat within emblematic, highly trafficked areas around the world.

- We landed on Times Square in NYC, Piccadilly Circus in London, and Guamao Station in Beijing (not pictured).
The rest of the campaign followed suit. Across OOH, TV, digital and social, we used the clog to celebrate the brand’s promise of fun.

We canvassed a fleet of Spirit Airlines’ planes with our clog silhouettes to remind everyone to find their fun in travel and adventure.

We partnered with Time Out in the U.K. to create a digital hub that highlighted different fun activities to do over the summer, personalized for each user.

We worked with Spotify in the U.K. and Germany to develop a digital experience that delivered individualized, fun-themed playlists.

We created customized backgrounds on weather.com, where we introduced different shoe styles for different weather conditions so users could discover new styles and find their fun in rain or sun.

And finally, we flipped the traditional concept of a fashion show on its head and turned it into something fun: the Crocs Funway Runway. Fans online had the opportunity to create and share videos of a fashion model flying down an epic waterslide dressed in whatever costume and Crocs shoe they wanted, set to their choice of music. The result was pure fun in an easy and accessible way.
Crocs are the talk of the town

In just a short time, Crocs has successfully rejoined the mainstream conversation — with gusto.

Wall Street has taken notice. Stock prices have increased 28% since our advertising commenced and many analysts have begun issuing buy ratings of the company.

“We are warming to shares of CROX as we think about the set-up on the stock over the next 12-18 months [...] While in the UK, we noticed signs of Crocs’ new global marketing campaign, which was well supported by digital components. [...] Bottom line, we see the potential for this campaign to be significantly more successful than the 2013 marketing push.”
(PIPER JAFFRAY, 4/28/15)

The trade world is responding:
“I can appreciate what [Crocs] stand for, or at least what the campaign wants them to stand for. I definitely no longer hate them.”
(RACKED, 5/14/15)

We’ve also seen a stir in mainstream culture. Both Helen Mirren and Alan Cumming have advocated their love of the brand on Twitter and “The Tonight Show” with Jimmy Fallon.

Popular fashion blogs have raved about Crocs and numerous big-name publications like BuzzFeed, The New York Times and Daily Mail are beginning to chime in. And social media is buzzing about Crocs; we’ve already seen double and triple percentage growths in share rates across all of our platforms.

And finally, we’ve seen a boost in sales. Though it’s still too early to provide a full analysis, we’ve seen double-digit uplifts across a number of retailers in our target markets.

But we’re just getting started. As we move into planning for 2016, the excitement will only continue. Just ask Prince George:

That’s right folks, it’s time to find your fun. Crocs are back.