

Adidas

ABOUT

Category:

Apparel – sportswear

Owner of the brand:

Adidas AG

Key competitors:

Nike, Under Armour, Puma

BRAND STRATEGY ANALYSIS

Brand essence

Changing lives through sport.

Brand values

Passion, creativity, innovation, heritage.

Brand character

Authentic, passionate, inspirational, urban, creative.

Dominating archetype



The Creator



The Hero

EVIDENCE

Comments

1

Adidas was founded in Germany in 1924 by Adolf Dassler and his brother, Rudolf. Originally named the Dassler Brothers' Shoe Factory (Gebrüder Dassler Schuhfabrik), the company was rebranded as Adidas in the late 1940s after the brothers parted ways. Adolf remained in charge of Adidas, while Rudolf founded his own brand, initially called "Ruda" (derived from his name), which he later rebranded as Puma.

From the beginning, Adidas has focused on meeting the needs of professional athletes, particularly runners. The company specialised in spiked footwear, pioneering the use of lighter materials such as rubber and canvas instead of metal. Adidas frequently highlights its heritage, drawing inspiration from its founder's philosophy. A commitment to athletes' needs, a focus on enhancing performance, and an emphasis on craftsmanship (now reinforced by advanced technology) remain central to the brand's strategy.

2

Adidas believes that "through sport, we have the power to change lives"¹ and therefore, everything the brand does is rooted in sport ("The Badge of Sport"). For years, Adidas seemed to have a different perspective on sport compared to Nike – stricter, more serious and less forgiving. While Nike focused on democratising sport, built on the belief that anyone can be an athlete, Adidas prioritised performance, celebrating those who had achieved success and continually honed their craft ("Impossible is Nothing"). This left little room for amateurism, with the brand primarily championing athletes and, at times, artists and creators. However, this strict approach began to soften when Bjørn Gulden took over as CEO in 2023.

3

The uniqueness of Adidas's brand strategy lay in its focus on creativity, which allowed the brand to differentiate itself clearly from its biggest competitor, Nike. Adidas positioned itself as a constant innovator, operating at the intersection of sport and creativity. It viewed sport as a tool for self-expression and emphasised the role of creativity in sport through its communication (e.g., "Calling all Creators").

Although the main Adidas brand took a new direction in 2024, its focus on creativity and originality remains evident in the positioning and marketing of its lifestyle sub-brand, Adidas Originals. Adidas Originals is associated with authenticity, "contemporary youth culture", and creativity. While it is a sportswear line at the product level, at the brand level it more closely resembles a fashion label.

4

The new direction Adidas took in 2024 was driven by its declining relevance among Gen Z consumers. Research revealed that its traditionally strict, performance-focused approach to sport no longer resonated with younger audiences, who felt overwhelmed by the pressure to excel. Carly Rushford, Senior Manager of Global Brand Communications at Adidas, explained: "We were losing touch with Gen-Z, and we knew they were losing touch with sport. (...) Sport wasn't fun anymore when negative pressure was coming from all angles (...) from parents, coaches, friends, and teammates – to perform in a way that felt heavy and intense."² In response, Adidas launched a new communication platform, "You Got This", shifting its focus from pure performance to encouragement, self-belief, and rediscovering the joy of sport. Interestingly, around the same time, Nike took the opposite stance, doubling down on a competitive, high-performance mindset with its "So Win" platform.

5

For many years, Adidas built its brand equity on the Creator archetype, positioning itself as an innovator and emphasising the role of creativity in sport. Like most sportswear brands, it also drew on the Hero narrative, celebrating performance, achievement, and pushing boundaries. While creativity and performance remain important, the brand, through its "You Got This" platform, is now also positioning itself as an ally or a friend that encourages participation in sport, aligning more closely with the Regular Guy archetype.

Tagline

"You got this"

Official brand statement

"Inspired by our heritage, we push the boundaries of culture and human performance. Through sport, we have the power to change lives."³

Interesting facts

The three stripes, the ubiquitous symbol of the Adidas brand, was not created by the Adidas team. In 1951, before the company became widely known, it purchased the trademark from Karhu, a Finnish sportswear brand, for what is now the equivalent of €1,600 and two bottles of whiskey.