

Generating brand partner revenue and impactful content

Meaningful, ongoing engagement with Millennial and Gen Z women transforms Bustle Digital Group's relationship with their audiences and advertisers

Millennial and Gen Z women have a wealth of media options at their fingertips. Bustle Digital Group (BDG) needed a way to engage and understand their preferences to inform brand partner pitches, develop a differentiated ad sales program and continue developing editorial content that keeps readers across their sites engaged. BDG is home to Bustle, Elite Daily, Romper, The Zoe Report, Mic, The Outline, Flavorpill, and Gawker (relaunching later this year), and they use the Hive for the female-dominant publications (Bustle, Elite Daily, Romper, and The Zoe Report). The BDG Hive gives them fast, agile access to Millennial and Gen Z women who are richly profiled, highly engaged and have consented to give ongoing feedback. Insight from the Hive contributed to 6% of revenue in 2018.



Members of the Hive provide more than feedback, they share their lives with us. Yes, that insight helps generate revenue, but more importantly it makes our sites more meaningful and relevant to our readers. Plus, it's an 'aha' moment in a partner meeting to say we can engage our audience anytime we need feedback. Our partners are surprised and excited about the opportunity. Ultimately, these two things will secure the future of our business.



Jessica Tarlov
Sr. Director, Research + Insights
Bustle Digital Group

RFPs with Trends Group integrations contributed to 6% of total revenue in 2018

Drove \$5MM in revenue in 2018 through the presale process

Trends Group insight offerings on 70% of pitches over \$1MM in 2018

Close rate for \$500K+ RFPs with BDG Hive integrations is higher than average

Challenge

Millennials and Generation Z have reshaped the rules of engagement, social connections, and digital experience in the modern economy. They have access to an almost unlimited number of media and entertainment options. Their preferences and decisions are shaped by a complex mix of emotions, logic and technology.

And they have big expectations for a personalized and meaningful experience.

BDG's insights team, The Trends Group, recognized that traditional research methods and conventional viewer metrics were not nuanced and detailed enough to provide the hyper-targeted and agile insight they needed to inform compelling, differentiated ad-sales programs for their partners or shape their content strategy. They needed an agile, adaptable and repeatable customer engagement model for insight to better understand expectations, preferences and behavior of their audience.

Solution

The BDG Hive is the voice-of-reader megaphone across 4 properties

Reporting to the CRO, The Trends Group at BDG works directly with the ad sales team. They launched the BDG Hive with two specific objectives: learn more about readers to support pitches and generate additional revenue by providing brand partners customized insight and programs. The BDG Hive is comprised of 5000 women ages 18-49 (primarily 18-34) across the US who read BDG brands and have consented to give ongoing feedback. BDG invites women to participate through social media, primarily Instagram. Averaging about 5 activities a month means BDG can keep a constant pulse on the issues of young women and dig deeper into social impact topics.

A single platform, multiple touchpoints

Hive members are invited to participate in a wide range of activities from surveys and forums to UX studies, product sampling, shop-a-longs, and in-person get togethers.

The BDG Hive also creates an ongoing forum for readers to connect with one another on subjects like beauty, books and movies. These activities boost engagement while providing greater context for editorial and monetization opportunities.

Through the Sparq platform, BDG recognizes the importance of feedback and offers their members personalized rewards and VIP invitations to BDG events.

Because of the rich profiling of Hive members, BDG can target small groups that fit a specific profile to participate in deep-dive activities. The team uses the community to augment Unanimous AI technology which amplifies the intelligence of small human groups using AI algorithms modeled after swarms in nature. In one initiative using this technology, BDG was able to augment the data they collected from AI Swarms with consent data from Hive members to predict the best selling tops for a retail partner with over 80% accuracy during the 2018 holiday season.

Scaling up insight gathering

BDG ran over 40 activities in 2018 with a response rate of 25% or better. Readers participate because they have a strong brand affinity and they know their feedback makes a difference. The reciprocal nature of the community makes possible to easily shareback results of the activities along with other relevant content that makes members feel like a special advisor who is truly valued by the business.



Providing reliable, ongoing access to our readers has transformed our relationship with our brand partners. When we work together, their thinking shifts from executing projects with a singular focus to building long-term programs with us.



Dani Thibodeau
Sr. Manager,
Research + Insights
Bustle Digital Group

The ability to progressively profile members makes it easier to create more targeted and relevant activities based on topics that resonate with their audience, everything from beauty and fashion, to sex and politics. The ability to launch short relevant studies to well-profiled audiences members not only boosts engagement, it streamlines the entire insight gathering process and accelerates the time to insight.

Outcome

Leading with insight

The Trends Group has rewritten the rules for creating branded content based on a simple principle of "Let insights lead the way." They use these rules in every thought leader presentation after mentioning the Hive, reinforcing the importance of using data to tell great stories. Today, insights lead the way for sales to tell more refined category or user stories in their pitches and proposals. Insights validate creative campaign concepts and messaging with reader feedback, provide editorial support for content development and educate client and agency partners on the best approaches for connecting with Millennial and Gen Z women. The Hive is also used to rapidly analyze branded content for partners and deliver timely insights to extend conversations about editorial direction and new content.

Beyond editorial, the Hive has helped transform the businesses relationship with data overall. For example, the Hive makes it easier to share more relevant and actionable insight with stakeholders who have not had access to readers' voices and opinions in the past. The team has seen an uptick in collaboration and storytelling with data, leading to help win more business. For example, BDG's business development team has utilized Hive insights to break into the QSR and hospitality categories.

A compelling value-add for differentiated ad sales

As part of their partner programs, BDG introduces access to the Hive as a compelling value-add for advertisers who reach a specific spending threshold on branded content or media. As a result of this offer, engagement with Hive members is a crucial part of larger deals, including BDG's largest single campaign deal ever -- \$1.5MM. To date, they continue to use their flagship BDG Hive integration as a case study for other partners. The business attributes over \$5M in revenue to this program. In addition to substantial revenue, BDG has positioned themselves as a trusted partner and innovator. The result? Brands come to the table asking for access to the Hive when crafting their creative and agency briefs.

Takeaways

Repeatable ROI evolves ad-sales teams from service providers to long-term partners

Direct feedback from the Hive makes actionable insight accessible and relevant across the business

Consent-based data used to complement and enhance emerging technologies like AI

About Bustle Digital Group

Bustle Digital Group is the largest premium publisher in a competitive media landscape. Every month, nearly 80 million readers turn to Bustle Digital Group publications — Bustle, Romper, Elite Daily, The Zoe Report, Mic, and The Outline — for impactful conversation around the interests and issues engaging young adults today. Focusing on everything from pop culture to parenthood, Bustle Digital Group's content leverages the power of a diverse set of voices from coast to coast. Bustle Digital Group does business with over 300 global brands, and ranks among the most popular media companies with our demographic on social media. Bustle Digital Group was founded in 2013 and is headquartered in New York City, with offices in Los Angeles and London.

About Vision Critical

[Vision Critical](#) builds customer trust and creates new business value through the collection and application of consent data. With its unique, relationship-based approach, Vision Critical's Sparq platform lets brands directly interact with insight communities of opted-in customers. Unlike traditional voice of customer methods, Vision Critical unlocks the real-time feedback that companies need to build better products, deliver better services, and achieve better business outcomes hand in hand with their own highly engaged, well-profiled customers.

Hundreds of high-performing organizations across multiple industries benefit from Vision Critical's technology and guidance. To learn more about Vision Critical, follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#), or visit us at www.visioncritical.com.