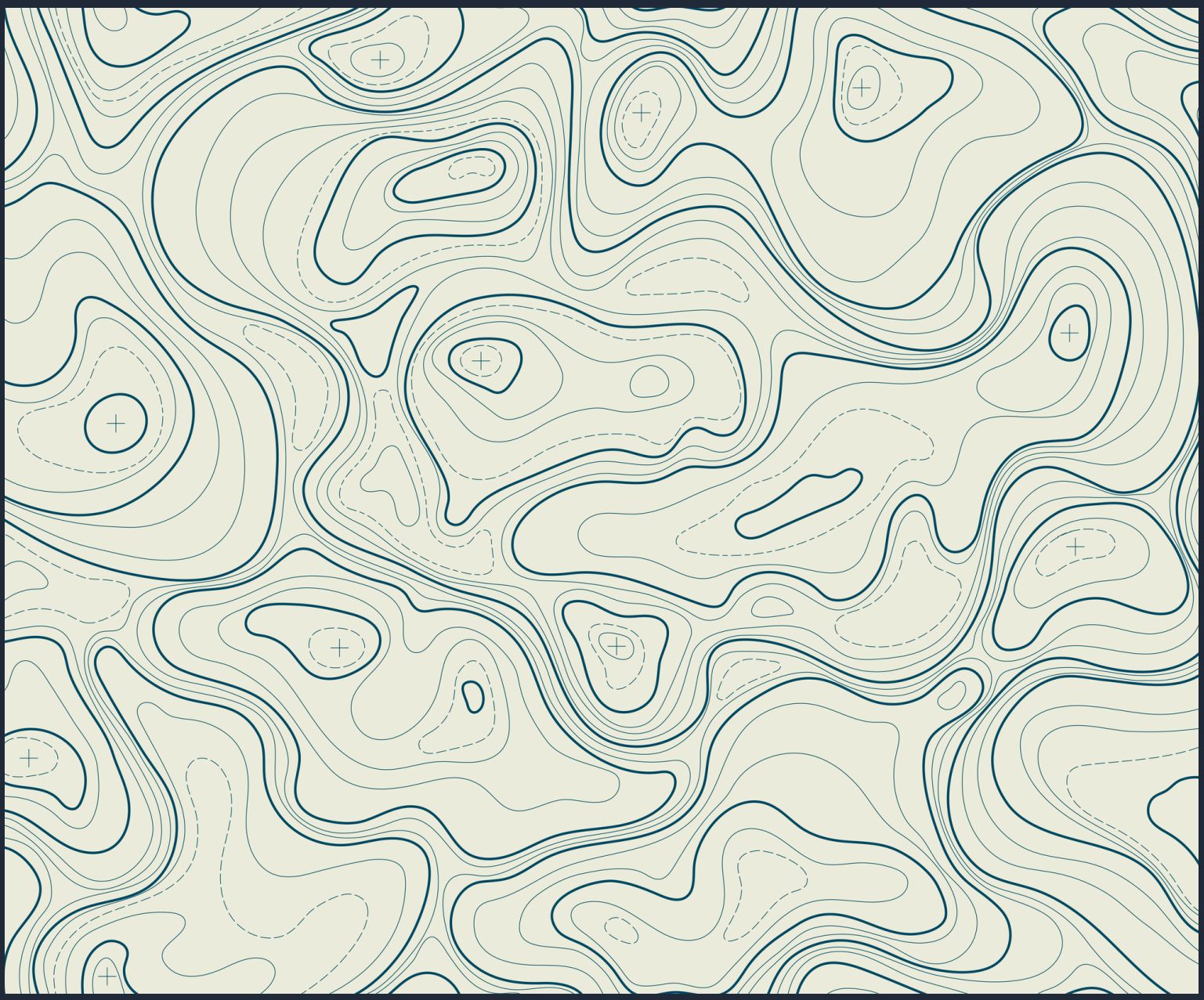
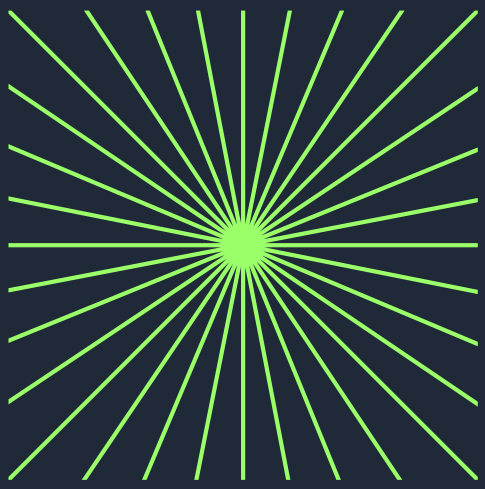
FUTUREBRIEF

Volume I 2026 Futureproof



The credibility gap

Why young Australians are fact-checking your brand and your employer promise in real time, and how to survive that test



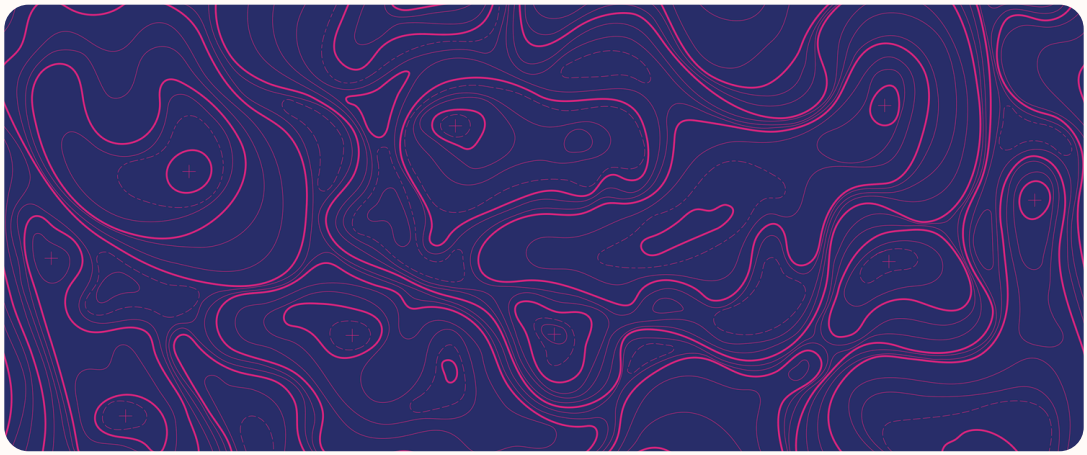
Hello, and welcome to the first edition of Future Brief.

Every year, Australian organisations spend more trying to reach young people. Every year, the gap between what they say and what lands gets wider. This edition is about the why - why organisations keep getting young Australians wrong despite the investment, and what the data says about what actually closes that gap.

In our experience working with Australia's top brands, organisations and governing bodies, we repeatedly encounter three key assumptions that drive that spend: that young Australians are disengaged; that the right brand campaign on the right platform will automatically cut through; and that the key problem to solve is attention.

This edition is about what young Australians, just like us, are actually seeing when they look at your brand - and what it means for the organisations that fall short. It's backed by the real-time views of thousands of young people. Let's get into it.

Future Brief is a monthly intelligence brief from *Futureproof by The Daily Aus*.



Every edition is built on first-party data from TDA's newsletter subscribers, who are young Australians engaging with our journalism every day, not a paid research panel.

There is evidence that survey and panel incentives and formats can shape responses, especially for young people - trust-based responses produce different data from incentivised panels. That should be an important layer of complexity and nuance to complement other data you're receiving.

If you've been forwarded this edition, you can find out more by clicking here.

Learn more about **Futureproof**

01 The *signals*

What TDA's audience is telling us - the data, and how it challenges our assumptions about what closes the gap with young Australians.

Over the past 30 days, we asked our audience three questions about how brands communicate with them. The answers pointed in one direction.

In a cohort of 1,766 respondents, only one in five said they felt positive when a brand described itself as "purpose-driven" or "values-led". When users engage in our research, they have the option to leave further comments - and the responses here were consistent in their scepticism. Respondents described the language as marketing spin, as performative, as something that needed to be earned through action rather than declared in a tagline.

We were curious. So we dug deeper.

When we asked 968 respondents whether brands actually listen to feedback from young Australians or just pretend to, 65.9% said they pretend to, with only 10.7% saying yes.

And of 1,076 respondents asked whether they can tell when a brand has paid someone to reach them, 64.6% said almost always, with a further 27% saying sometimes. Above 90% can detect paid reach almost always or sometimes - which means a campaign is being read and categorised before it has finished playing.

1 in 5

feel positively about a brand when they hear them describe themselves as “purpose-driven” or “values-led”

“Purpose has become a catchphrase”

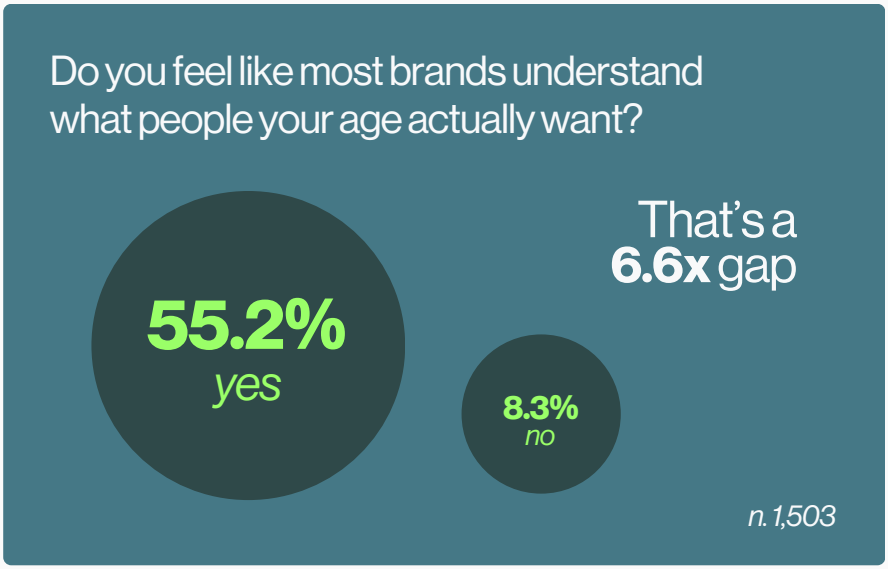
“It feels like fluff words to cover up something else”

We're looking at a generation that has spent its entire adult life inside branded content, paid partnerships, and algorithmic feeds, and has developed strong advertising literacy.

They're quick to recognise when content is paid or strategic - even if they're still influenced by it.

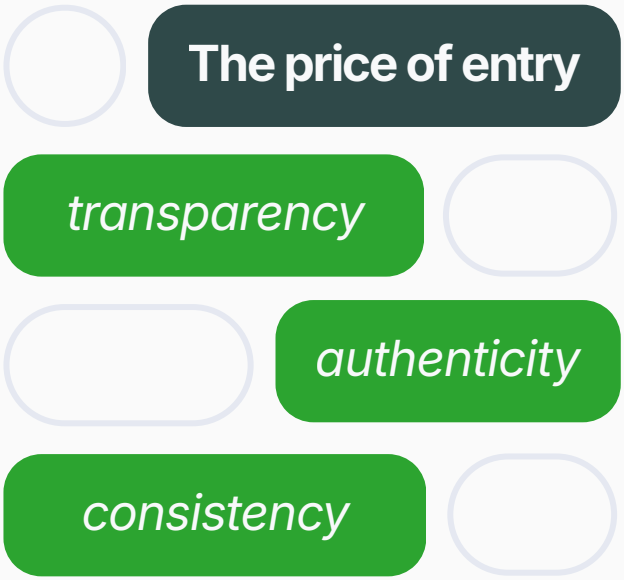
The industry has known about this gap for a while, but the data shows no signs of closing. When we asked 1,475 respondents whether brands understand what people their age actually want, 55.2% said no, with only 8.3% saying yes.

External research corroborates the scale of the problem: only one in three Gen Z consumers feels accurately represented in advertising, and just one in five believes brands effectively connect with people their age.



But young Australians are not turning away from brands altogether; rather, they frame trust as a **“price of entry”** rather than a **nice-to-have.**

Research conducted by Live Nation’s brand agency found the three make-or-break criteria for young consumers to invest (in both time and money) in a brand are transparency (58%), authenticity (50%) and consistency (49%), and Edelman’s 2025 Brand Trust report similarly found that trust now ranks equal to price and quality in purchase decisions globally.



“What a brand says about itself is meaningless. It’s their actions that matter. If they are values-led, we should be able to see it”

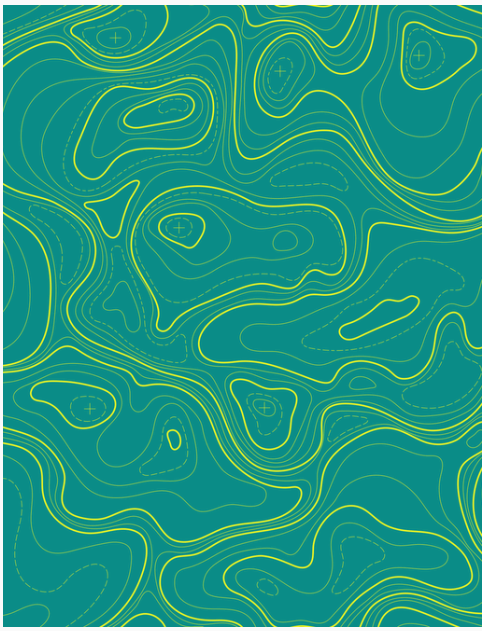
What this means for your marketing and comms team

The market appetite is there, but in the eyes of young people, the executions are not meeting it. The campaigns are geared towards attention as the primary barrier for optimising reach, and creatives are built around that idea. For many young consumers, brand executions come across like they were designed for someone else. **For this cohort, attention is not the barrier - credibility is.**

02 The *story*

What sits underneath the numbers - the pattern, the tension, and what it means for your organisation.

The communications problem has a root cause. It is not a creative one.



The communications problem described in Section 01 has a root cause, and it is not a creative one. It lives inside the organisation.

Young Australians are not applying one standard to brands and another to employers. They are applying the same test everywhere: does what this organisation says match what it does?

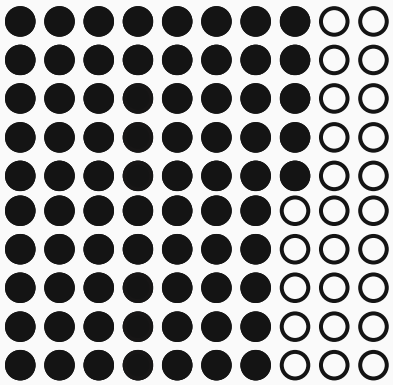
When we asked our audience whether their employer's stated position on social or political issues affects how they feel about working there, 73.6% said yes - 43.4% said a lot, 30.2% said somewhat. Only 11% wanted their employer to stay out of it entirely.

But this is where things get really interesting. The open responses drew a distinction the headline number doesn't capture. Respondents are taking it upon themselves to assess whether those positions are credible - by cross-referencing what the organisation says publicly against what they can observe from inside it every day. They're simultaneously dealing with a cost of living crisis, and not in a position to change jobs, even if they feel as though their values are compromised.

"If I have to feel like I can't talk about what is going on in the world and in politics at work, I feel as though I have cut off a part of myself. So, yes, it matters."

"In my heart of hearts, it's a hard yes. But I answered 'somewhat' because I don't think I would be prepared to risk being unemployed if it was only that. I don't really like admitting that - especially as a queer woman - but it's the truth."

75% of young Australians look to your *external position* to judge your *internal reality*.



Just as a brand communicates externally to potential customers, a gap emerges: the difference between what organisations say and what young Australians working there can verify.

Globally, Deloitte's 2025 survey of 23,482 Gen Z and millennial workers across 44 countries finds these generations are basing career decisions on a trifecta of money, meaning and well-being - not just higher pay. This shapes how future employees judge your organisation as a potential workplace, long before your employer brand campaigns reach them.

The finding that almost 75% look to your external position on social or political issues as a deciding factor in judging workplace satisfaction is a clear warning that public claims on values that cannot be verified internally are not building trust with this cohort, but accelerating its loss.

“If the inconsistency bothers me, I would say something - I’m always up for a debate.”

What this means for leadership & people/culture teams

The organisations getting this right are treating their internal culture not as a separate HR conversation, but as the foundation on which their external communications either stand or collapse. Communications can reflect credibility, but cannot manufacture it.

03 Where to *start*

Where the data points for organisations that are ready to act

The core premise that 4 in 5 young Australians react either negatively or neutrally to a brand using their purpose-driven credentials in the way it shows up is not a brief to find better language to describe the same ideas. We're confident that the problem here is not the words used, but the gap between words and independent verification. That's an exciting challenge to solve.

Most organisations would route this finding to marketing, brand or corporate communications. But those teams didn't actually create the credibility gap - rather, they've inherited it. The gap was created upstream, at the decision-making level. Giving this problem to communicators is probably the most reliable way to ensure it doesn't get fixed.

The question this edition is actually asking - and the one that we think would lead to the most meaningful conversations at the leadership level - is whether your organisation's public positioning is an accurate description of how it operates, or an aspiration it has not yet built the internal conditions to substantiate.

The honest answer to that question is what makes everything else in this edition fall into place. Young Australians are asking for the answer to that question to change.

Three questions to surface at your next leadership meeting

Who in this organisation has the authority and the safety to tell leadership when our external positioning has outrun our internal reality?

Test whether your team has built the internal conditions for honesty to travel upward. In most organisations, the honest answer is nobody - and we're going to be looking at the effectiveness of internal feedback tools in coming editions.

What would we have to stop doing - not start doing, stop doing - for young Australians to trust us?

This one is gold. In our experience, every strategic response to a trust deficit yields a list of initiatives, like new programs, commitments, or language. This question forces teams to run the other way and examine whether trust deficits with this cohort can be closed by subtraction.

If our organisation ceased to exist tomorrow, what would the young Australians who worked here for six months say we stood for - and would it match what we've been saying publicly?

Most organisations think about legacy across decades. Young Australians are forming their verdict in months - during the onboarding period, during the first performance cycle, during the first time they watched a decision get made that contradicted something the organisation claimed to value.

04 One thing we're **watching**

A signal in the data that has not been resolved yet, and will shape a future Brief edition.

The assumption most organisations are carrying into the next planning cycle is that the credibility gap is recoverable - that visible behavioural change, sustained over time, earns back trust with young Australians. We're going to test that assumption directly by asking our audience whether a brand that has demonstrably changed its behaviour, not its messaging, but its actual conduct, earns back credibility, and how long it takes.

The answer that most organisations are hoping for is yes (with a timeline), but our hypothesis is that the answer the data may return could be more complex. Remember, this is a generation that grew up watching institutions make and break commitments in public (on climate, on inclusion, on economic fairness), and it will be a challenge to update that view based on a single organisation's behaviour change, however genuine.

If that is what the data shows, it will only reaffirm the strategic advantage for organisations who stop trying to manage the perception and start doing the work (or double-down on the early shoots of that work) that makes the perception accurate, early enough that young Australians have years of evidence to draw on, not months. The organisations still in the communications-first frame will not get there. We'll have the data in the next edition.

Every edition of the Future Brief is built on one thing no research firm can replicate: the honest views of 400,000 young Australians who trust us enough to tell us what they actually think. **We've already started our investigations into closing the credibility gap, but the next edition is only available to subscribers.**

Our founding rate for the Future Brief is $99/month. After the first 100 subscribers, it increases to $149/month permanently. You're reading this before that threshold.

This is the way to get the genuine views of the cohort you need to understand, translated into actionable intelligence for your next meeting. Join us today.

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What's your strategy for what's next?

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