

**The Athlete in Everybody:**

**A Comprehensive Brand and Audience Profile of DICK'S Sporting Goods**

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**Brand Story**

DICK'S Sporting Goods was not built in a boardroom. In 1948, eighteen-year-old Dick Stack quit his job at a Binghamton, New York Army surplus store after his employer dismissed his ideas for a fishing tackle business. He went to his grandmother, who reached into a cookie jar with all her life savings and handed him \$300. "Do it yourself," she said (DICK'S Sporting Goods, 2026). The founding moment is the ideological DNA of everything the company has since become: a brand built on self-determination, defiance, and the conviction that sport belongs to everyone willing to show up for it.

Under the leadership of Dick's son, Edward W. Stack, who assumed control in 1984, the company grew from two Upstate New York locations into a national retail force (Portersfiveforce, 2025). By 2001, sales exceeded one billion dollars. Strategic acquisitions such as Galyan's in 2004 and Golf Galaxy in 2006 broadened the company's reach and product authority, while the launch of an e-commerce platform in 2012 marked the beginning of an omni-channel strategy that now sees approximately 80% of online orders fulfilled in-store (Portersfiveforce, 2025). Annual sales have since nearly doubled to more than \$13 billion, with profits more than tripling since 2015 (Boudway, 2025).

Today, DICK'S operates a portfolio that spans DICK'S Sporting Goods, Golf Galaxy, Public Lands, Going Going Gone!, DICK'S House of Sport, and Golf Galaxy Performance Center. As owner and operator of the Foot Locker business, including Foot Locker, Kids Foot Locker, Champs Sports, WSS,

and atmos, DICK'S now serves the global sneaker community across North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia (DICK'S Sporting Goods, 2026). The \$2.4 billion acquisition of Foot Locker in 2025 signals a deliberate cultural repositioning: DICK'S is no longer solely the leading supplier of athletic equipment. It is staking a claim on sneaker and street culture, the terrain where Gen Z consumer spending is growing fastest (Boudway, 2025). Bob Phibbs, writing for The Retail Doctor, captures the brand's philosophy plainly: "Dick's Sporting Goods built a \$13.7 billion business by treating every customer as a human being first and a transaction second" (Phibbs, 2026). This would enable success as a brand.

This community-first conviction is expressed most visibly through experiential retail and social investment. The House of Sport concept, a 150,000-square-foot destination with hockey rinks, soccer fields, batting cages, and climbing walls, was designed, in Ed Stack's words, to "kill us if a competitor built it first" (Phibbs, 2026). The Sports Matter Foundation has funded youth sports programs for three million children in under-resourced communities. GameChanger, DICK'S youth sports mobile platform, has grown to nearly ten million users and generates over \$100 million in annual revenue, deepening the brand's integration into athletes' daily lives (Boudway, 2025). These initiatives are institutional commitments that reinforce the brand's core belief: that there is an athlete inside everyone, and that athlete deserves a place to play.

### **Target Audience Profile**

DICK'S Sporting Goods serves a broad consumer base united by one defining characteristic: an active lifestyle orientation. According to Portersfiveforce (2025), the company's customer base is approximately 55% male and 45% female. Approximately 45% of customers fall between the ages of 25 and 40, reflecting a core demographic of young-to-mid adults with established purchasing power and a sustained engagement with sport and fitness culture. Footwear has emerged as the brand's fastest-growing category, now accounting for 28% of overall business. This figure reflects both the expanding Foot Locker acquisition and the increasing cultural weight of sneakers as a lifestyle product rather than purely an

athletic one (Portersfiveforce, 2025). With over 850 retail locations, 59% positioned in urban environments and 41% in suburban settings, DICK'S serves a geographically diverse audience while maintaining a strategic lean toward metro markets where younger, fashion-forward consumers are most concentrated.

### **Psychographic Profile**

At the psychographic level, DICK'S customers are defined by a desire for authenticity, community, and experiences that reflect their values. Drenik (2023) identifies Gen Z, which is the brand's most aggressively courted emerging segment, as consumers who are more inclined to support brands that prioritize authenticity, transparency, and social responsibility, and considerably less likely to engage with brands that do not align with their personal values. This value alignment is not peripheral; it is increasingly the primary basis on which brand loyalty is formed. Statista (2023) supports this, finding that 73% of Gen Z consumers cite a brand's reputation as a leading factor in their purchasing decisions, with 66% naming sustainability practices as a meaningful consideration. For a brand whose founding mythology is rooted in a grandmother's cookie jar and whose current strategy centers on funding youth sports for underserved communities, this psychographic alignment is structural.

The DICK'S customer also exhibits a strong orientation toward identity-based consumption. As the Oliver Wyman Forum research cited in Uribe and Simpson (2026) demonstrates, Gen Z's engagement with sport is increasingly organized around individual athletes rather than teams or institutions, with 63% of Gen Z stating that content from their favorite athletes drives their sports engagement. This personality-driven fandom extends naturally into sneaker culture, where specific silhouettes and limited releases carry the cultural weight of the athletes and artists associated with them. The NBA pregame tunnel walk, where players like Jordan Clarkson have turned entrances into viral fashion moments, is emblematic of a broader shift in which sport, style, and identity have become inseparable (Ironmonger, 2025). DICK'S, through its Foot Locker portfolio and its investment in experiential retail, is uniquely

positioned to serve consumers for whom buying a sneaker is as much a statement of cultural fluency as it is a purchase.

### **Behavioral Profile**

Behaviorally, the DICK'S customer base skews heavily toward loyalty program participation and digital engagement. The ScoreCard loyalty program drives over 70% of the company's sales, and members who also use the GameChanger app spend approximately twice as much as those who do not (Portersfiveforce, 2025). This behavioral data reveals a customer who does not simply transact with the brand and is rather embedded in its ecosystem — using DICK'S platforms to schedule games, stream youth sports, and manage athletic participation at a household level. GameChanger's 6.5 million unique active users in Q1 2025 represent not just individual consumers but family units organized around youth sports, a demographic with demonstrated willingness to spend. According to Boudway (2025), U.S. families spent more than \$40 billion on youth sports in the past year, which is a 46% increase from 2019, with those having at least one child playing sports regularly spending an average of over \$1,500 annually.

Among the Gen Z segment specifically, behavioral patterns are defined by a strong preference for live events and in-person experiences. A survey cited by Tormohlen (2025) found that 73% of 18-to-35-year-olds plan to attend live events in the next six months. A Cash App and YouGov survey found that Gen Z spent over \$2,100 on concert tickets in the past two years on average, with 75% willing to pay premium resale prices for shows they want to attend (Business Wire, 2025). PwC (2024) further found that younger sports fans are 1.4 times more likely than older fans to attend a live sporting event at least once a month, and report spending an average of \$70 more on tickets than their older counterparts. These behavioral tendencies — a willingness to spend, prioritization of presence, and event-driven social identity — are directly relevant to activations like the Footlocker Sneaker Truck, which positions limited product access within exactly the live environments this audience already inhabits.

### **Attitudinal Profile**

Attitudinally, the DICK'S consumer, and particularly the Gen Z segment within that base, is characterized by a demand for brands that take positions and demonstrate genuine social investment. Zeno Group (2024) found that 69% of global consumers believe companies and brands have a role to play in addressing social issues, and 54% say that brands face more risk by ignoring social issues than by engaging with them. Among Gen Z specifically, this attitudinal pressure is acute. As Drenik (2023) notes, Gen Z is the influencer generation: they want to see people and brands they respect using products before they are persuaded to purchase, and 58% say familiar labels are important to them when buying clothing. Trust is earned through consistency and community, not advertising spend. Attitudes toward loyalty programs also reflect a nuanced consumer who expects reciprocal value. Deloitte research found that 72% of consumers say loyalty programs make them more likely to spend with a preferred brand, and 80% report that loyalty programs increase their perception of value received (Deloitte, 2026). Notably, the average consumer enrolls in eight loyalty programs but actively participates in just five, suggesting that passive enrollment is insufficient, and that brands must continuously deliver meaningful engagement to retain active participation. DICK'S ScoreCard program, which integrates purchasing history with GameChanger behavioral data to anticipate future consumer needs, represents a more sophisticated model of loyalty than most competitors have deployed.

### **Social Media Practices**

DICK'S target audience, particularly its Gen Z consumers, is among the most digitally active of any demographic, but their social media behavior is defined more by participation, creation, and community building than by passive consumption. According to an ICSC study, 76% of global Gen Z shoppers believe that brick-and-mortar stores provide a more well-rounded and enjoyable experience than online shopping, and they are drawn to spaces that offer novelty, authenticity, and shareable moments (ICSC, 2025). This finding is significant: Gen Z's social media behavior is not a substitute for physical

experience but an extension of it. They document, share, and build identity around the in-person moments they choose to attend.

On platform-specific behavior, TikTok functions as Gen Z's primary social media environment, with publications and brands increasingly investing in short-form video as a direct result (D1A, 2022). However, WSC Sports (2025) found that YouTube is the only platform with consistent usage across all age groups, supporting both live, long-form, and short-form content in a single environment — making it the most scalable channel for reaching fragmented sports and culture audiences. Oliver Wyman Forum research found that only 40% of Gen Zers watch live sports on cable television, compared with 61% of Gen X, and that short-form social video from athletes is the single largest driver of Gen Z sports engagement (Uribe & Simpson, 2026). For DICK'S, this behavioral landscape reinforces an organic content strategy that is built around athletes, events, and community moments rather than traditional broadcast advertising.

### **Three Central Storytelling Themes**

DICK'S Sporting Goods communicates its brand identity through three interlocking storytelling themes, each reinforced by strategic initiatives, consumer-facing activations, and the lived experiences of its target audience. These themes do not operate in isolation and are mutually reinforcing pillars of a brand narrative that positions DICK'S not merely as a retailer, but as a cultural institution organized around sport, community, and purpose.

#### **Theme 1: The Third Space — Community Comes First**

The first and most structurally significant storytelling theme in the DICK'S brand narrative is the concept of the third space: a physical, community-oriented environment distinct from home and work where individuals gather around shared passions. DICK'S has built its retail evolution around this idea. The House of Sport concept, a 150,000-square-foot destination featuring hockey rinks, batting cages, rock climbing walls, and soccer fields, is engineered to be a destination, a place where athletes of all ages and

backgrounds can gather, compete, and belong (Johnston, 2025). In this sense, DICK'S communicates a brand story that extends well beyond product: the brand is not where one shops, it is where one plays.

This theme carries particular force among Gen Z consumers, who are actively reclaiming in-person, community-driven spaces in response to sustained digital fatigue. ICSC (2025) research found that 76% of global Gen Z shoppers believe brick-and-mortar environments provide a more well-rounded and enjoyable experience than online shopping, drawn specifically to spaces that offer novelty, authenticity, and shareable moments. Tormohlen (2025) reinforces this, reporting that 84% of attendees at interest-based events have developed close friendships through those gatherings, which is evidence that for this generation, physical spaces are not simply venues for commerce but engines of genuine community formation. Zeng (2025) further identifies that Gen Z's relationship with sports fandom is shaped by shared cultural experiences and the communities that form around them. The Footlocker Sneaker Truck activation is the most concentrated expression of this theme: a brand that does not wait for its audience to find a store, but shows up inside the live events: festivals, sporting championships, cultural moments, that Gen Z already treats as defining experiences.

## **Theme 2: Experience Over Transaction**

The second storytelling theme is one that pervades every major strategic decision DICK'S has made over the past decade: the primacy of experience over transaction. This theme is expressed through infrastructure. GameChanger, which had approximately 9 million active unique users in 2024 and an average of 1.8 million daily active users. This platform embeds the brand into the daily rhythms of youth athletes and their families, generating ongoing engagement long before and long after any purchase is made (Johnston, 2025). The ScoreCard loyalty program, which drives over 70% of company sales and integrates behavioral data from GameChanger to anticipate future consumer needs, deepens this ecosystem at an individual level (Portersfiveforce, 2025). Together, these platforms construct a brand

relationship that feels less like a loyalty transaction and more like sustained membership in a community organized around sport.

This narrative maps directly onto how Gen Z engages with brands and culture more broadly. Vogue (2025) identifies a fundamental structural shift in the Gen Z marketing funnel: this audience moves through an infinite loop of inspiration, exploration, community, and loyalty, using social media as a search engine to research, validate, and contextualize products before committing to a purchase, compared to moving linearly from awareness to purchase. This behavioral pattern demands that brands sustain engagement across the entire loop, not just at the point of conversion. PwC (2024) further indicates that this higher attendance rate among younger fans is driven by a strong preference for unique, immersive in-person experiences. For DICK'S, the experiential retail model is not a competitive differentiator and is the core narrative through which the brand justifies its place in Gen Z's life. The Footlocker Sneaker Truck, which transforms a product drop into a culturally charged live event, is the latest and most agile iteration of this storytelling approach: a reminder that the most powerful thing DICK'S can offer is not a product, but a moment worth being part of.

### **Theme 3: The Athlete in Everyone — Purpose as Brand Identity**

The third and most emotionally resonant storytelling theme in the DICK'S brand narrative is its foundational conviction that there is an athlete inside every person and that every athlete, regardless of background or means, deserves access to sport. This theme traces directly to the brand's origin story and is institutionalized through sustained community investment. The Sports Matter Foundation has funded youth sports programs for three million children in under-resourced communities. The company gave more than \$44 million in grants, sponsorships, and donations in a single year. Ed Stack's decision to remove assault-style rifles from DICK'S stores following the Parkland shooting in 2018, a decision that cost the company an estimated \$250 million in sales, is perhaps the most unambiguous demonstration that this brand's purpose commitment is structural, not performative (Phibbs, 2026).

This theme resonates with acute force among Gen Z, a generation that holds brands to a higher standard of social accountability than any cohort before it. Zeno Group (2024) found that 69% of global consumers believe companies have a role to play in addressing social issues, and 54% say brands face a greater risk by ignoring social issues than by engaging with them. Among Gen Z specifically, Zeng (2025) found that 74% believe sports teams should actively speak up on social and environmental initiatives, and a similar proportion expect athletes to advocate for causes that matter. This gap between expectation and perceived delivery represents a significant opportunity for a brand like DICK'S, whose purpose commitments are grounded in a decades-long institutional record rather than reactive campaign positioning. Drenik (2023) notes that Gen Z is more inclined to support brands that prioritize authenticity, transparency, and social responsibility. For DICK'S, the athlete-in-everyone narrative offers a natural and credible entry point into this value alignment. It does not require the brand to adopt a cause external to its identity. Sport, access, and community are already the brand's native language. Statista (2023) found that 66% of Gen Z consumers cite sustainability practices as a factor in their purchasing decisions, a figure that, read alongside the Zeng (2025) data on social expectation, suggests that purpose is not simply a reputational asset for DICK'S but an active driver of consumer preference among its most strategically important demographic. DICK'S ability to point to thirty million dollars in community investment, three million kids in sports programs, and a founding story rooted in a grandmother's cookie jar is a competitive advantage that no advertising campaign can manufacture.

### **Resonance Analysis**

The three storytelling themes identified in DICK'S Sporting Goods' brand narrative, being community as destination, experience over transaction, and purpose as identity, resonate with Gen Z because they are structurally aligned with the values, behaviors, and expectations that define this generation as consumers and as people. Understanding why requires both an analysis of the themes

themselves and a consideration of the secondary research methods DICK'S has likely deployed to develop and refine them.

### **How the Themes Resonate**

The third space theme resonates with Gen Z because it addresses a well-documented tension in their lives: the desire for authentic human connection in a world that increasingly mediates social life through screens. As Tormohlen (2025) found, 73% of 18-to-35-year-olds plan to attend live events in the coming months, and 84% of attendees at interest-based gatherings report forming close friendships through those experiences. DICK'S storytelling does not need to manufacture relevance here; it simply needs to show up in the physical spaces Gen Z already treats as meaningful. House of Sport and the Footlocker Sneaker Truck are both expressions of a brand that understands this instinctively. When DICK'S positions itself as a third space rather than a store, it is speaking a language Gen Z already uses to describe what they want from the world.

The experience-over-transaction theme resonates because it mirrors the non-linear way Gen Z actually moves through the consumer journey. Vogue described this generation's marketing funnel as an ongoing loop, where creativity, connection, and discovery continually shape one another rather than leading to a single final purchase. A brand that invests in GameChanger, loyalty ecosystems, and live activations is not simply selling products; it is sustaining engagement across every stage of that loop. PwC (2024) likewise frames distinctive live experiences as the central factor underpinning Gen Z's greater engagement with sporting events. For a generation that, per Business Wire (2025), spent an average of \$2,100 on concert tickets over the past two years and is willing to pay premium resale prices to be present, the experiential model is the baseline expectation. Experiences are treated as a fundamental requirement for engaging Gen Z.

This growing disconnect between consumer expectations and corporate performance underscores why the purpose theme holds such strong resonance, as it directly responds to demands for greater

authenticity and accountability in brand behavior. The purpose theme resonates most deeply because it addresses what Zeno Group (2024) identifies as a crisis of brand accountability: 69% of global consumers believe companies have a responsibility to address social issues, yet 62% believe brands are still struggling to do so effectively. Gen Z conducts due diligence because they want brands to align with their values. As Drenik (2023) notes, this is the influencer generation: they research, consult peers, and verify claims before committing loyalty. DICK'S decades-long record of community investment, three million children in funded sports programs, \$44 million in annual grants, and the Parkland decision that cost the company an estimated \$250 million in sales, provides the kind of verifiable, non-performative evidence of purpose that this audience demands and that competitors cannot easily replicate.

### **Research Methods DICK'S Likely Used**

The precision with which DICK'S storytelling aligns with Gen Z behavioral and attitudinal data suggests a rigorous secondary research foundation. The brand's use of the GameChanger platform and ScoreCard loyalty program gives it access to first-party behavioral data at a scale few retailers can match by tracking how consumers purchase and participate in sport across their daily lives (Johnston, 2025). This proprietary data, layered against syndicated consumer research from sources such as PwC, Deloitte, and the Aspen Institute, likely informs the brand's understanding of where its audience spends time, what they value, and what experiences they are willing to pay for. Social listening tools monitoring Gen Z conversation across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube would further illuminate the cultural narratives, such as athlete personalities, sneaker drops, live event culture, that the Footlocker Sneaker Truck is designed to intersect. Trend reports from firms such as Zeno Group and Oliver Wyman Forum, both of which track generational value shifts and sports consumption behavior, offer the kind of attitudinal data that explains not just what Gen Z does, but why. Together, these methods would have allowed DICK'S to develop a storytelling strategy that feels culturally intuitive because it is, in fact, empirically grounded.

### Research Questions

Three research questions emerge from this analysis as particularly consequential for deepening understanding of DICK'S Sporting Goods' storytelling approach and its resonance with its target audience. To what extent does DICK'S community-first brand narrative foster authentic emotional loyalty among Gen Z consumers, beyond transactional engagement driven by loyalty program incentives? This question is significant because the brand's storytelling positions it as a cultural institution rather than a retailer, yet the majority of its sales are driven by a points-based loyalty program, which is a mechanism more transactional than relational in nature. Understanding whether Gen Z consumers perceive DICK'S as a brand they identify with, versus one they simply return to for value, would clarify how deeply the third space and purpose narratives have penetrated the audience's brand consciousness and whether experiential investments like House of Sport are shifting that perception over time. To what extent does DICK'S storytelling approach effectively adapt to the heterogeneity within its Gen Z audience, particularly as differences in participation patterns, cultural touchpoints, and value systems diverge across gender, geography, and sport preference? Gen Z is not a monolithic demographic, and the brand's current narrative, while broadly inclusive in aspiration, may resonate with different intensity across its constituent communities. A female Gen Z consumer drawn to sneaker culture at a music festival may engage with the brand story differently than a male Gen Z athlete embedded in the GameChanger ecosystem; Understanding those divergences would allow DICK'S to deepen its storytelling precision without abandoning the universalist framing that gives the athlete-in-everyone narrative its emotional breadth.

The third and perhaps most forward-looking research question asks: as DICK'S continues to expand its ownership of the global sneaker community through the Foot Locker portfolio, how will the brand reconcile the accessibility and community-oriented storytelling of its core identity with the exclusivity and scarcity mechanics that drive demand in sneaker culture? This tension is not hypothetical. Activations, including the hypothetical The Footlocker Sneaker Truck activation is built explicitly on

limited releases and the thrill of being in the right place at the right time — a model that privileges access for the few over inclusivity for the many. For a brand whose most resonant storytelling theme is the conviction that sport and its culture belong to everyone, the strategic reliance on scarcity as a demand driver represents a potential narrative contradiction. Exploring how Gen Z consumers perceive and reconcile this tension — whether they experience it as a contradiction or as an exciting expression of cultural fluency — would yield meaningful insight into the limits and opportunities of DICK'S brand storytelling as it scales into new cultural territories. Collectively, these three questions point toward a brand at a genuine inflection point: one with the institutional credibility, community investment, and consumer data infrastructure to deepen its Gen Z relationships significantly, provided its storytelling continues to earn the trust it asks for.

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