Marketing Doctor

Marketing Check-up

Gap

As of September 29, 2026

Condition: Recovering

The blue box comeback built on denim

Gap spent the 2010s losing its place in North American closets. It changed its logo without asking customers, leaned on mall stores that shoppers stopped visiting and ran ads few people remember. Since 2023 it has rebuilt around denim and music-led campaigns that people chose to watch. This check-up looks at the marketing decisions behind the slide, what changed and what the comeback teaches growing companies.

Key takeaways

- In 2010 Gap replaced its blue box logo, then restored it a week later after a customer backlash. Customers, not the company, decided what the logo was worth.
- Store closures announced in 2019 and 2020 exposed a brand still built for mall traffic that had moved elsewhere.
- The 2025 “Better in Denim” campaign with KATSEYE drew 20 million views in three days, more than Gap’s previous four campaigns combined, according to CEO Richard Dickson.
- The campaigns worked because each one put a specific product, Gap jeans, at the centre. Gap brand comparable sales rose for eight straight quarters through late 2025.

Marketing health check

Area	Finding
Positioning	Clearer. Gap is the denim brand again, with a point of view customers recognize.
Distinctive assets	Strong. The blue box survived a near-miss in 2010 and now anchors every campaign.
Creative	Healthy. Music-led ads that people choose to watch and share, with product in every frame.
Distribution	Recovering. Fewer, better stores after a decade of closing high-rent mall locations.
Portfolio	Mixed. Old Navy and Athleta have not shared the Gap brand's recovery.

Timeline

When	What happened
Oct 2010	Gap launches a new logo online, then restores the blue box a week later after customer protests.
Feb 2019	Gap Inc. announces it will close 230 Gap stores over two years and plans to separate Old Navy.
Oct 2020	A new plan closes 220 more Gap stores, about a third of the fleet, to move away from malls.
Jul 2023	Richard Dickson, who helped reinvigorate Barbie at Mattel, becomes CEO.
Fall 2024	Loose-fit denim campaign with Troye Sivan.
Spring 2025	Campaign with Parker Posey brings back 1990s Gap style.
Aug 2025	"Better in Denim" with KATSEYE, set to Kelis's "Milkshake", draws 20 million views in three days.
Aug 2026	"Denim on your own" keeps the formula with musician Malcolm Todd and actor Inde Navarrette.

What happened: a decade of drift

The first public sign came in October 2010. Gap put a new logo on its website, then restored the blue box a week later after what it called "an outpouring of comments" from customers. Its statement admitted: "We recognize that we missed the opportunity to engage with the online community." A company that changes its most distinctive asset without its customers on side is a company unsure of what it stands for.

The store plans told the same story. In February 2019, Gap Inc. said it would close 230 Gap stores over two years. In October 2020 it set out a plan to close 220 more, about a third of the Gap fleet. "We've been overly reliant on low-productivity, high-rent stores," said Mark Breitbard, head of the Gap brand. The stores had been the marketing for decades. When mall traffic moved online, Gap had little else telling shoppers why to choose it.

The diagnosis: three marketing problems

- **No settled point of view.** The 2010 logo episode showed a company changing its identity before it knew what customers valued in it.
- **A brand built for mall traffic.** Hundreds of high-rent stores did the work of reminding people Gap existed. As visits fell, so did that reminder.
- **Ads that stopped earning attention.** When Gap finally had a hit in 2025, its CEO said it drew more views in three days than "the full length of our last four releases combined."

The treatment: product first, then the story

Gap Inc. named Richard Dickson CEO in July 2023. He came from Mattel, where he helped reinvigorate Barbie, Hot Wheels and Fisher-Price. He described the approach as building brands through "trend-right products that are amplified with more compelling storytelling." The order matters: product first, then the story.

The marketing turned to denim and music. Fall 2024 paired loose-fit denim with Troye Sivan. Spring 2025 brought Parker Posey and 1990s Gap style. On August 19, 2025, Gap launched "Better in Denim": the girl group KATSEYE dancing to Kelis's "Milkshake" in Gap jeans. The ad put specific jeans at the centre, not a mood. That is brand building and sales activation working in the same 90 seconds: memorable enough to share, specific enough to buy from.

The fall 2026 campaign, "Denim on your own", keeps the formula with new talent: musician Malcolm Todd and actor Inde Navarrette. Gap is building consistency, so each campaign adds to the last instead of starting over.

The result: people watched, then they bought

“Better in Denim” drew 20 million views in its first three days, according to Dickson. Views alone prove little, but the sales followed. Gap brand comparable sales rose 7% in the third quarter of fiscal 2025, the eighth straight quarter of growth, and were up 10% in the quarter to August 1, 2026.

The recovery has limits. In the same quarter, Old Navy and Athleta comparable sales fell. A hit campaign fixed one brand, not the whole house. That is a brand architecture lesson as much as a Gap one.

Lessons for your marketing

1. Find out which assets your customers value before you change them. Test with customers, not in the boardroom.
2. Put a real product at the centre of the story. Gap’s ads sold specific jeans, not a feeling.
3. Earn attention instead of only renting it. A campaign people share does work that paid media can’t buy.
4. Judge the work by sales, not views. Views told Gap people were watching. Comparable sales told it the ads worked.
5. Stay consistent. Each Gap campaign since 2024 has built on the same formula instead of reinventing it.

The doctor will see you now.

Book a free marketing check-up at marketingdoctor.ca/contact. We’ll examine your marketing, show you what’s holding growth back and prescribe what to fix first.

Sources

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This check-up uses public information available on September 29, 2026. It is marketing analysis, not investment advice.
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