



MOST CONTAGIOUS REPORT 2021



**MOST
CONTAGIOUS**

Welcome to the 2021

MOST CONTAGIOUS REPORT



Welcome to this year's Most Contagious Report. From NFTs to KFC, we've crammed in some of the world's best campaigns from the last 12 months, alongside the most influential trends set to rock the marketing world over the next 12.

In these pages you'll find the Contagious team's analysis of everything from how brands are tackling sustainability issues and reacting to shifts in the surveillance advertising landscape, to the importance of online communities and why the world is ready for more brutally honest comms, alongside our pick of what exceptional creativity looked like in 2021.

Of course, 2020 was such a physically, emotionally and mentally draining year that many of us entered 2021 like contestants entering a *Squid Game* warehouse, nervously waiting to see where the next blow would come from.

Would it come from Donald Trump's exit from the White House? (Yes, it would). Would it come from a pharma company trying to profit from the Covid vaccine? (Yes, it would). Or would it come from reliable favourite, the climate crisis? (Yes, it would).

Then, of course, there were the less predictable events to keep us on our toes. It was no great surprise to see the billionaire set ploughing on with their exit strategies from reality, as Bezos and Musk set a course for outer space. But Mark Zuckerberg beginning his retreat into the avatar-infested fantasy land of the metaverse was certainly an omission from our 2021 bingo card.

A less predictable but more instantly impactful event was the disruption of supply chains. The sight of the Ever Given container ship stuck in the Suez Canal for six days during March may have been

a great visual representation of the situation, but the complexities of global supply chains aren't as simple as a massive boat jammed sideways in a waterway. According to JP Morgan Economic Research, global manufacturing delivery times this year reached a 25-year high, while, according to Bloomberg, demand for imports to the West from Asia saw the cost of shipping from China to the US increase more than six-fold.

And the knock-on effect started to wreak havoc on entire industries. A shortage of semiconductor chips became a huge headache for automotive manufacturers. In September, VW Group's head of procurement, Murat Aksel, stated: 'Because of a 50 cent chip we are unable to build a car that sells for \$50,000.'

To be honest, 2021 was not a great year for the European auto industry overall. In July, VW and BMW were hit with \$1bn fines for creating what the EU called an 'emissions cartel' colluding to slow the deployment of cleaner emissions technology. Meanwhile, the German non-profit and consumer protection organisation Deutsche Umwelthilfe (DUH) is suing both BMW and Mercedes-Benz because, in the words of its federal managing director, Jürgen Resch, 'With their particularly climate-damaging vehicle fleets, BMW and Mercedes-Benz are violating the fundamental right to climate protection.'

And right now, it seems like the climate needs all the protection it can get. Jeff Bezos did his part at the Cop26 climate change conference in November, pledging a whopping 1% of his personal wealth to restoring natural habitats and transforming food systems. But even the benevolence of Bezos may not be enough – especially when an IMF report in October revealed that the fossil fuel industry is benefiting from subsidies equivalent to \$11m per

minute (\$5.9tn a year) for the production and burning of oil, coal and gas.

In September, the UN reported that Earth's climate is changing faster and more intensely than previously expected. As *The New York Times* summed up, 'Because the world's nations delayed so long in curbing emissions... A hotter future is now essentially locked in.' A future that's hotter than the present is worrying.

This year, it was so hot in Sicily that snails cooked in their shells. Jacobabad in Pakistan and Ras al Khaimah in the UAE both reached temperatures of 52°C (126°F), officially passing the threshold of 'hotter than the human body can handle'. Lytton in British Columbia, Canada, was less than half a degree away from reaching the same threshold. Even Siberia – the coldest region in Russia – this year reached temperatures hotter than any on record for over 130 years. The dry conditions sparked wildfires that lasted for months and created smoke clouds so large that they reached America and the North Pole.

I'm not a climatologist but I'm beginning to suspect that the wildfires burning for months at a time, the animals being cooked alive, and the cities in America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia that are hotter than the human body can handle are all telling us the same thing: we've run out of road in delaying a response to the climate crisis.

If you're reading the Most Contagious report to help you plan for the year ahead, my suggestion is that the first thing to go on your plan for 2022 is this: stop delaying; start responding.

Alex Jenkins, Editorial Director

More than the Metaverse

We're on the precipice of a new era of the internet and this presents unparalleled creative opportunities for brands, says Contagious editor Chloe Markowicz



In 2018 Peter Diamandis, founder of the XPrize Foundation, proclaimed there was a magical future ahead that would 'transform every aspect of our lives, from retail and advertising, to work and education, to entertainment and social interaction'.

This past year, developments in technology to help us bridge the physical and digital divide have inched us even closer to the cusp of a big digital shift. If you consider how seismic the evolution from the earliest version of the internet to the mobile and social web was for advertisers, then you can anticipate how important this subsequent development will be.

One way of describing this next era of the web is the 'metaverse'. First introduced in the 1992 Neal Stephenson novel *Snow Crash* as a parallel virtual universe where avatars interact with each other, 'defining the metaverse' is as NYU Professor Scott Galloway has said 'the kind of thing nerds fight to the death over'.

However, VC investor Matthew Ball, the preeminent thinker on this topic, has outlined some key attributes. He argues the metaverse should be persistent (ie, continue indefinitely), be synchronous and live (meaning it exists consistently for everyone in real-time), offer inter-operability (so digital assets can be transported across virtual worlds) and have a fully functioning economy.

Ready player one

While gaming, virtual reality and augmented reality might play a role when it comes to the metaverse, they are not the metaverse because the metaverse does not yet exist. But that hasn't stopped the world's most important tech companies from making some bold announcements this year. Most notably, Mark Zuckerberg revealed that Facebook was transitioning from a social media company to a metaverse company, renaming it Meta to reflect the pivot.

Since spending \$2bn on Oculus VR in 2014, Zuckerberg has made huge investments in this space and is developing new tech to impact how people could exercise, play and work virtually in the future. Though he warned that Meta's operating profits would be reduced by \$10bn this year because of the company's investments in the metaverse, Zuckerberg hopes that 'within the next decade, the metaverse will reach a billion people, host hundreds of billions of dollars of digital commerce, and support jobs for millions'.

Microsoft is another company that's made a big play for the metaverse. It has invested heavily in mixed reality (a combination of augmented and virtual reality), releasing its first HoloLens headset in 2015. In May, it introduced Mesh, a mixed-reality platform that can be accessed through the HoloLens, but also

VR headsets, computers and phones.

While Microsoft and Facebook have experimented with virtual and mixed reality for years, the technology hasn't gained mass adoption. Gaming, however, is a mainstream pastime and one platform that is often described as close to the metaverse is Fortnite. In April, Epic Games, Fortnite's publisher, completed a \$1bn funding round to 'support its long-term vision for the metaverse'.

Another platform seen as one of the precursors of the metaverse is Roblox, which hosts all kinds of user-generated games and experiences. Roblox's CEO,

David Baszucki, believes his platform will become an 'essential tool for business communication' and commerce. Already, in the first quarter of 2021, players spent the equivalent of \$652m buying digital goods on Roblox.

NFT knowledge

If virtual goods are a key part of the metaverse, NFTs (non-fungible tokens) will be critical because they will allow people to prove their ownership of goods across different virtual worlds.

NFTs are unique digital certificates (non-fungible means non-interchangeable)

stored on the blockchain that signify the ownership of a digital asset. They will provide the basis for a functioning metaverse economy.

The NFT market has exploded this past year with sales volumes of NFTs reaching \$10.7bn in Q3 of 2021, according to DappRadar.

It's early days for NFTs, but there are a few key use cases for brands. First, they can help monetise content. When Kings of Leon released their latest record as an NFT in March, they earned \$2m. Second, NFTs enable brands to transform their existing assets or

content into collectibles, making them more valuable in the process. The NBA, for instance, has developed digital trading cards of sports moments that people can buy, trade or sell as NFTs. Third, NFTs can be used to create engaging customer experiences, as seen with Burger King's NFT game to complement its Keep It Real meal combos, which were fronted by famous musicians.

Well versed

The metaverse could be five years away or decades away. And some of the things that tech leaders have predicted may never happen at all.

That said, there are some concrete opportunities for brands today that we shouldn't discount. There's a real PR advantage to brands launching campaigns with tech like NFTs that feels novel and exciting. There are serious economic opportunities around selling NFTs and virtual goods. And, finally, this tech is providing new ways for brands to engage with people.

Going forward, metaverse-type tech is also going to be great at providing answers to brands' problems related to space, distance and budget. Virtual solutions could be the way for brands to deal with their real-world constraints. If, instead of applying existing ways of doing things with new platforms or tech, brands take a more imaginative approach, the creative possibilities are endless. 🌈



‘Much has been said about brand love, but if people aren’t actually consuming your product, it doesn’t matter if they say they love you or not’

YouGov's Best Brand Improvers of 2021

YouGov's VP of data products, Charlie Taylor, reveals which brands saw the biggest improvement in consumer brand health in 2021, and why

Every year YouGov looks at the brands that have shown the biggest improvement in positive consumer brand perception in the UK.

YouGov monitors hundreds of sectors and more than 20,000 brands around the globe with its BrandIndex tool. The Best Brand Rankings are decided by a score based on six brand health metrics tracked in BrandIndex: Quality, Value, Impression, Reputation, Recommend and Satisfaction.

At Most Contagious, Charlie Taylor, VP of data products at YouGov, revealed the UK's top 10 brands that have improved their score most compared to the previous year.

In 10th place was All 4, Channel 4's video-on-demand service. 'This last year All 4 has had a lot of hype for a strong lineup of shows including the hit *It's a Sin*, which attracted an average audience of 2.3 million viewers per episode and was Channel 4's biggest drama

launch in three years among young viewers,' said Taylor.

Another high scorer was Shark, a brand of vacuum cleaners, air purifiers and hair-dryers. 'Three home appliance brands have made our top 10 improvers this year, perhaps reflecting the increased time the consumer has been spending at home and a focus on modern conveniences,' he said.

In eighth place was Sky Arts, which increased its audience by 50% after moving away from being part of Sky TV's subscription package and launching as a free service last year. Sky Arts' live paint-along show, *Portrait Artist of the Week*, reached 4.6 million people.

The second appliances brand to make the top 10 was Hotpoint, which saw large uplifts in general brand Impression, Quality and Reputation. 'During the pandemic, many consumers reignited a love for cooking at home, and this played nicely with Hotpoint's Fresh Thinking

campaigns, which focused on reducing household food waste and demonstrated [Hotpoint's] range of cooking and cooling appliances,' said Taylor.

At number six was Amazon Prime Video, which registered its biggest improvements for Satisfaction, Impression and Quality. 'Last year saw Amazon Prime Video benefit from a successful continued expansion into streaming of live sports – such as the final of the women's US Open, the most streamed tennis match on Prime Video ever,' said Taylor.

In at five: Octopus Energy, the British renewable energy group specialising in sustainable energy, which benefited from a large increase in brand awareness and is now recognised by three in five consumers.

Coming in at number four was Northern Rail, which was re-nationalised in March 2020. Since then, its brand health scores have shown notable improvements, sug-

gesting a positive consumer response to the change in ownership, said Taylor. Home appliance brand Whirlpool, number three, saw impressive increases across BrandIndex brand health metrics despite a challenging start to 2020.

The two most improved brands reflect two major trends of 2021, streaming and travel. Disney+, in at second place, launched in March 2020, and has 'gone from strength to strength', said Taylor. 'Clearly this has been a good year for in-home entertainment.' In first place, after relaunching as an online travel agent, is Thomas Cook. 'The travel industry took a huge hit during 2020, but Thomas Cook registered an 11-point increase in brand health in 2021,' said Taylor. 'As many countries have reopened their borders, the brand health of Thomas Cook seems to be heading back to pre-Covid levels.' 🚩

For more and to see where your brand placed, visit yougov.com/bestbrands

YouGov UK Improvers: Top 10 Brands				
Rank	Brand Name	Score	Previous Score	Change in Score
1	Thomas Cook	9.8	-1.5	11.3
2	Disney+	17.3	10.4	6.9
3	Whirlpool	6.8	1	5.8
4	Northern Rail	-2.2	-6.8	4.6
5	Octopus Energy	12.5	8	4.4
6	Amazon Prime Video	25.6	21.8	3.8
7	Hotpoint	16.5	12.8	3.6
8	Sky Arts	11	7.5	3.6
9	Shark	15	11.4	3.5
10	All 4	18.9	15.6	3.3

Scores show average data from 1 Oct 2020 - 30 Sept 2021 compared to 1 Oct 2019 - 30 Sept 2020

How Brands Go Green

Contagious editor-at-large Katrina Stirton Dodd explores how marketers and agencies can create successful brands that don't wreck the planet

It's taken almost a decade to embrace marketing professor Byron Sharp's analysis of how brands grow but now a more pressing challenge looms: How can we balance brand growth and environmental sustainability?

The ad industry takes a lot of flak for driving excessive consumption, and in the run-up to Cop26 it was especially hard to ignore. In the UK, a poster campaign from pressure group Badvertising called out agencies for 'greenwashing' on behalf of high-carbon clients. Meanwhile, the European Citizens Initiative is lobbying local councils to follow Amsterdam's lead in banning the advertising of polluting cars, airlines and fossil fuel brands.

There's also frustration inside the industry. An October survey by the Chartered Institute of Marketers found that 49% of respondents were 'weary' of working on sustainability campaigns. Some are leery

of the greenwashing label, while others cited a lack of training in sustainability marketing as key concerns.

Weary or not, the industry has to act. Research carried out by Magic Numbers and published at Cop26 shows the influence of advertising adds 28% to the annual carbon footprint of every UK citizen. These 'Advertised Emissions' amount to around 186 million tonnes of greenhouse gases – the equivalent of 47 coal-fired power stations running for a year.

Committing to this level of self-examination is step one of how brands green: what gets measured really does get managed. If that sounds basic, the next steps should all seem similarly attainable, because they all conscript familiar concepts into the service of new priorities.

We need more collaboration between legacy brands and the newcomers who are doing things differently. The halo of



aspiration a brand like Adidas lends to an organisation like Parley for the Oceans is what helps to create a category-wide acceleration towards more climate-friendly products and practices.

We need to apply big-brand clout to the challenge of incentivisation across whole supply chains. Organic beer Michelob Ultra Pure Gold created the Contract for Change programme to help its suppliers make the switch to organic farming. This is not just about growing crops, it's also

about growing the market for a more sustainable product, and AB InBev forecasts that the increased supply of these crops will allow the brand to grow 25% by 2023.

We need to learn from the organisation shown by global players like Carrefour. This year, the French mega-retailer's Act for Food initiative won the first ever Grand Prix for Creative Business Transformation at Cannes. This strategic commitment to make the food system better for consumers, farmers and the planet impacts



every facet of its business – and it emerged from an ad campaign (The Black Supermarket). What started as an effort to align the brand with quality and provenance, ultimately resulted in a change in the laws governing growers.

Innovation is crucial, but the bigger challenge is the normalisation of the changes that we're all going to have to make if we're serious about avoiding climate disaster.

Miracle-level science is reinventing what we consume and how it gets made. A perfect example is Aether, which turns CO2 into diamonds. A single one-carat stone removes 20 tonnes of carbon from the air around us. But without a strapline to rival the mythic 'A diamond is forever' how will it become more than a niche alternative?

In July, YouGov found that 52% of UK adults use a brand's eco-credentials to inform their purchase decisions. In the US, Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, says the picture is roughly the same... and yet mostly it doesn't happen, because people are confused.

Knowledge is power, and yet as an industry we're failing to adequately translate information into the motivation to buy better. According to Leiserowitz, galvanising just 3% of people to follow through on their good intentions 'would send shockwaves through the market system'.


Which brings us to communication.

One thing that strikes me as worrying about a lot of green advertising: it's a bit samey. And I'm not the only one who feels this way.

In October, Josh Bullmore, chief strategy officer at Leo Burnett London, wrote that greenwashing – trying to mislead the public – is not the biggest threat to advertisers: the real problem is that 'brands are becoming like green wallpaper that fades into the background'.

The inconvenient truth is that 'uniqueness and creativity' are often missing in action when it comes to the advertising that's supposed to help avert an ecological disaster. We need to do better. And we need to move fast.

Magic Numbers plotted two possible pathways for the industry as we head towards 2030. The first shows business as usual, with Advertised Emissions tracking relentlessly up and exacerbating the climate emergency. The second shows the trajectory we need to be on, and it will take all the above steps – from self-examination to collaboration to incentivisation to education to organisation to normalisation to on-point communication – to create the kind of decarbonisation that will get us there.

That is how brands green. By pushing through the frustration and the weariness, and applying the same skill and determination they deploy in pursuit of growth to create an outcome that works better for everyone. 

‘The process to great work is not luck or a fluke or some sort of jazz created by some genius in your company. We’re really ruthless. We get in a room and we go, “Why is that going to be famous? Why is anyone going to care?”’

Stop Calling Gamers 'Gamers'

Audience Strategies' David Boyle on why segments matter

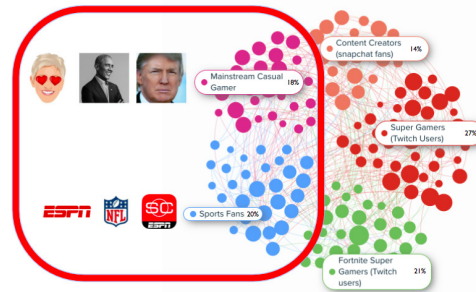
Marketers must stop referring to 'gamers' and learn how to segment audiences properly, according to David Boyle, director at Audience Strategies.

Boyle, who in the past has used his expertise to help musicians like David Guetta and Pink Floyd reach new audiences, was speaking on behalf of Audiense, a consumer segmentation platform, at Most Contagious UK & US.

He said that at the moment marketing is 'in some kind of crazy gold rush' where brands believe that all they need to do to win is to reach out to a generic and homogeneous demographic they refer to as 'gamers'.

But this is a wrong-headed strategy that ignores the differences between gaming audiences, said Boyle, who used the example of the Fortnite battle royale game to make his point.

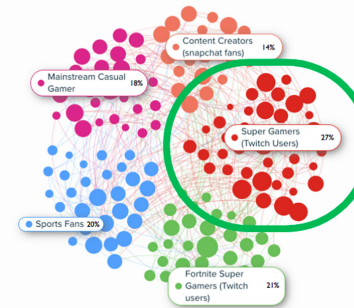
If you look at the top affinities of US Fortnite players you get mainstream sports brands like ESPN, talk-show host Ellen Degeneres and former presidents like Barack Obama and Donald Trump.



Clearly that's not the demographic that marketers want to reach when they target Fortnite players – and that's the point.

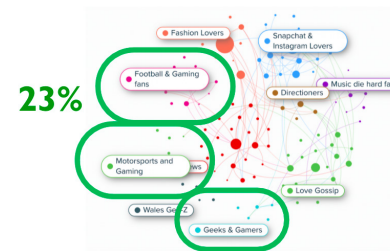
'If you take the whole of an audience,' said Boyle, 'whether it's gamers or Fortnite or anything else, it's gonna be a trainwreck. Mass audiences don't work.'

But when you start splitting out groups from within a mass audience, interesting segments begin to emerge, said Boyle. For instance, within the broad audience of Fortnite players in the US you can find a subset of 'super gamers' with affinities for esports and Twitch, which is much more likely who marketers are trying to reach when they ask to target gamers.

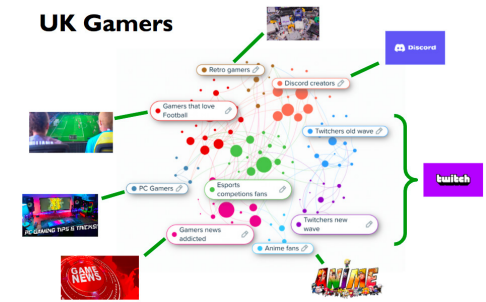


Similarly, Boyle looked at whether targeting 'gamers' was a good proxy for reaching young people in the UK.

Dividing the 13- to 20-year-old demographic into sub-groups shows that, while there are discrete clusters for whom gaming is a key interest (alongside football, motorsports and geek culture) it would unlikely be an effective marketing strategy for connecting with the entire youth audience.



Even among the 23% of the UK youth audience for whom gaming is a key passion there are yet more sub-clusters, who should be marketed to in different ways. Successfully targeting Discord creators, for instance, requires a different approach than targeting PC enthusiasts or retro gamers.



Boyle's point is that there is no homogeneous group of 'gamers' that can be targeted and engaged effectively with one message. So why don't more marketers segment audiences?

One excuse that he hears time and again is that marketers are simply not asked by their stakeholders to segment, so they don't bother.

The tools exist to separate audiences into more relevant clusters and that it's the job of brand and insight professionals to use them to raise expectations of their industry.

'It's my fundamental belief,' concluded Boyle, 'that audience segments are the equivalent of having an x-ray vision into your audience. So please, I'm asking you to stop calling gamers "gamers". Stop saying "nobody asked me to inspire change", and tell your stakeholders that segments really, really matter.'

Interested in learning more about how to roll out effective segmentation within your business? Chat with a member of our team [here](#)

Nothing Personal

In 2021 the bell tolled for some of the methods and tools used to track people around the internet for the purpose of serving them personalised ads. Contagious' online editor James Swift asks what this means for brands

A horseman of the online tracking apocalypse arrived in 2021 in the guise of a simple change of choice architecture.

Previously Apple made people opt out if they did not want the apps they downloaded to track their behaviour online. But the App Tracking Transparency (ATT) framework introduced to Apple's iOS 14.5 operating system in April changed the default, meaning apps would have to ask for permission to track instead.

It made a lot of ad networks nervous because they suspected very few people would opt in, which would deprive them of data that helps them to deliver personalised ads. And those doubters were right. According to Fyber, opt-in rates for ATT around the world were just 17% in September.

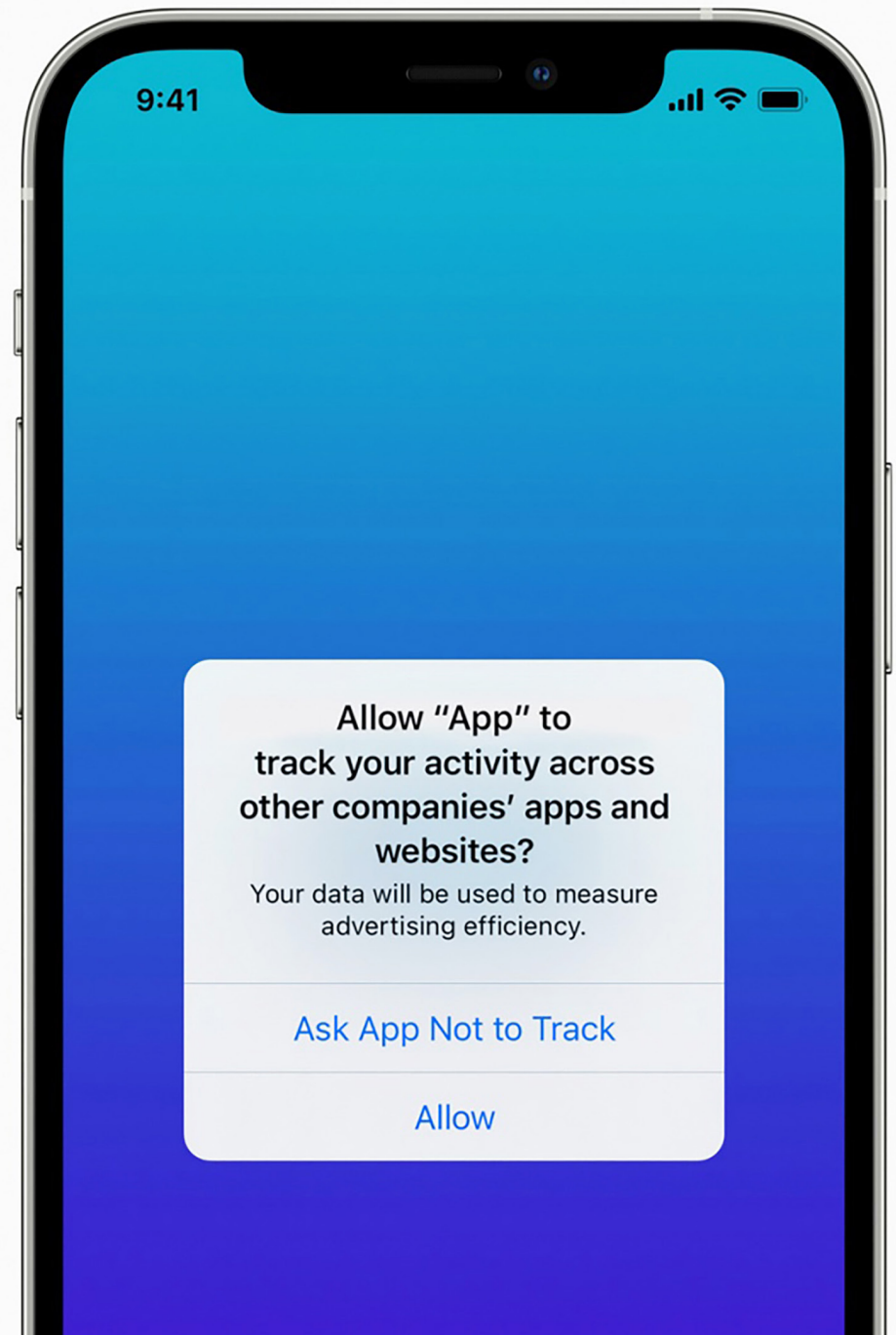
Facebook, which uses app data

to feed its own advertising machine, launched a campaign in February warning that ATT would hurt small businesses because they can't afford mass media advertising. There may have been some truth to the message, but by this point arguing for less privacy was like campaigning for a one-day weekend, and no one was interested.

It took a few months for the effects of ATT to bite, but at the end of October Ad tech company Lotame estimated that the change had cost Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube \$9.85bn in revenue in the third and fourth quarters of the financial year.

Track and trace

A second horseman of the advertising apocalypse is scheduled to appear in 2023, when Google blocks third-party



cookies from its browser.

Apple's Safari and Mozilla's Firefox browsers have already blocked third-party cookies, but Google controls 65.4% of the market, according to October figures from W3 Counter, so when it stops supporting them that'll be all she wrote.

But a world without IDFA tracking and third-party cookies doesn't necessarily mean the end of targeting and personalised advertising.

In the context of online advertising, privacy has acquired very specific – some would argue arbitrary – boundaries. Third-party data (the kind collected by companies you had no idea were tracking you) is out of bounds, but first-party data (the kind companies ask for when doing business with you) is still above board. And as third-party data becomes more scarce, first-party data is going to become more valuable.

The rise of first-party data is expected to benefit the tech giants, who are already set up to collect and hoard people's information, but it is also attracting retailers to the advertising business.

Walmart and Lowes are two of the most prominent examples of this trend. Both of them have built ad platforms that not only let advertisers buy space on their websites, but also let them use their customer data to target people across the open web. It's a handy second income for retailers – and probably at



a much better margin than they're used to – but it's not the only way they can put first-party data to good use.

For instance, Finnish co-op S Group used data gathered from its retail, financial services and hospitality businesses to help customers understand their own shopping habits. S Group added easy-to-read infographics to its app that showed customers things like the nutritional value and carbon footprint of their food shopping, and then compared their stats with the national average. The company credits the initiative with helping to boost its revenue by 13.9%.

Meanwhile Gelo, an environmentally

friendly hand soap, demonstrated how a little creative thinking can make even cookie tracking seem like a fair value exchange. The brand created a tracker that delivers ads about sustainability with the intention that kids would sign up on their parents' devices to help persuade them to ditch single-use plastics.

The cookie crumbles

But brands aren't the only ones trying to figure out a world without third-party cookies. The tech giants have a vested interest in coming up with solutions, too.

Google has proposed replacing cookies with something it calls Federated

Learnings of Cohorts (or FLoC).

Essentially Google will monitor people's behaviour within their own browser and then use that information to lump them into broad interest groups, which advertisers can pay to target. The advertising experience for customers is more or less the same but the difference is that no personal or identifying information about them is ever shared online or with third parties.

And in January 2021, Google wrote that early tests showed FLoC resulted in 95% as many conversions as regular cookie ads.

But for many rights groups and regulators effectiveness is not the point and any form of surveillance – even within people's own device or browser – is unacceptable. In fact it's hard to remember a time when the ad industry faced so much scrutiny. But if there's one comparison, it's probably with the late 1950s when *The Hidden Persuaders*, which provoked public outrage with its sensational portrayal of marketers as master manipulators, cast a shadow over many advertising methods and practices.

And it's worth remembering that shortly after that period of suspicion and consternation came the creative revolution of the 1960s, which produced campaigns still revered today. So who knows? Even if the apocalypse does come for online tracking, it might be the best thing to happen to advertising in 60 years. ❄

‘A Google result is not an insight. Every strategist starts on Google, and I guarantee every single one of them reads the first 10 search results’

Powerful Posters



Clear Channel gathered ad industry leaders to explore the rules and rewards of best-in-class outdoor advertising

Contagious co-founder and chief brand officer Paul Kemp-Robertson sat down with a panel of industry experts to discuss outdoor advertising and the opportunities that it offers. The discussion covered four topics: the cultural role of out of home; the power of simplicity; context and environment; and communication and craft.

The cultural role of out of home

Uncommon co-founder Nils Leonard was unequivocal about the impact of OOH. 'When you think about making things that might outlast yourself, outdoor is one of the key ways to do that.'

This should guide brands' approach to outdoor, he said. 'The point is to try and make something that someone will stop and actually take a photo of, and images, posters are just immortal. I just want for a brief moment someone to stop and hold their phone up – that should almost be our goal for great outdoors.'

The power of simplicity

There are certain rules to outdoor, said Grey London's creative director and head of art, Costanza Rossi, but they are always the same: create simple, striking images. 'There are certain things that you simply cannot do without,' she stated, with Leonard adding: 'If it captures the imagination, people will talk about it, they'll feel it, they'll share it. I do think just keeping that boldness and bravery in is incredibly important.'

Context and environment

Universal McCann's chief strategy officer, Enyi Nwosu, dug into the importance of immediately connecting with culture and what's going on in people's lives, highlighting the physical sites themselves, and how advertising money flows into those sites to help communities. 'That money helps regeneration, that regeneration touches people.' He went on to stress not treating outdoor



as a catch-all. 'We should think about outdoor within its many constituent parts. Where there's less dwell time you have to think about that message because it is going to be consumed in no more than two seconds flat. If it's in a mall, you might want to think about it differently because someone's in a different frame of mind.'

Communication and craft

On the question of how best to use outdoor media to elicit an emotional response from consumers, Nwosu said 'connect to culture, be relevant, and even use the visual cues of "If I can see it, I can be it"'. And for diverse communities in particular, that's really important.'

Rossi meanwhile explained how OOH can stress test an idea: 'When you

have a concept, everyone says, "Yeah, start doing the poster and see if it works." Because if it was on a poster, the chances are that you're going to do a good TV ad, but if you can't summarise everything in one shot, I don't think the concept is very strong.'

As for measuring the impact of an outdoor ad, Lumen Research's Managing Director, Mike Follet, was clear: 'Posters are the last broadcast medium. If clients and agencies try hard enough, you can measure the economic benefit of these things. It's the elegant, simple, funny, brilliant creative that leads to more sales. And it's the busy, ugly, boring creative that gets ignored, that doesn't work.' 🚩

For more visit clearchannel.co.uk/powerfulposters

Finding Your People

Brands are getting communities wrong, says Contagious strategist Becca Peel, who argues that they should be platforms for curation, not collection

Brands have long been fascinated by the idea of community and obsessed with how to inspire the same kind of fanatical devotion as Apple and Harley Davidson. But perhaps marketers have been duped by these outlier examples of community marketing.

In an age where loyalty is in the doghouse, mass targeting is queen, and measurability is favoured above all else, community strategies have been overlooked because their ability to achieve real business objectives beyond intangible 'affinity' is misunderstood.

We've lost sight of what communities can really offer brands. Marketers should look to find their people in interest areas adjacent to their brands to gain greater relevance. As Howard Gossage said, 'People don't read ads. They read what interests them. Sometimes it's an ad.'

Scale > Relevance

For consumers today, finding what we're interested in online is no simple task, and this fragmented landscape makes it hard for brands to deliver contextually relevant communications. According to technology expert, Eugene Wei, we are experiencing a massive 'context collapse'.

On social media, we now follow people from all spheres of our lives – family, colleagues, friends, acquaintances – which according to Wei is having a 'disproportionate effect on the relevance and quality of what we see'. Rather than a news feed full of interesting and relevant content, we're often confronted with a bombardment of scattered information. As a result, social media platforms that organise information based on social graphs have in many cases become the equivalent of a phonebook – a simple directory of people.



Meanwhile, search engines have become overloaded with information. So many sources are called up that it is rare for the most trustworthy or the most relevant to make it to the top.

In a world that has prioritised scale over relevance, the need for communities is clear: not for connection, but for curation.

Embrace your social skills

Communities are inherently social; they are groups of people coming together around a thing. But as a brand, once you've found your people, there is no one

right way to interact. Three campaigns from 2021 shine a light on how communities can be engaged in different ways.

In August, Wendy's – the US fast food chain famous for its fresh beef patties and social media sass – launched a Discord server. Discord is a platform that organises people and information based on interests, and people self-select the groups they join, similar to Reddit.

Wendy's uses this platform much like it does other social media platforms – to talk about its cheeseburgers and brand announcements, but more broadly to engage with its audience

over the things that interest them, especially gaming.

Wendy's has a clear reason for putting this effort into engaging the gaming community: Kristin Tormey, social media manager at Wendy's, told us its target audience is 'anyone who eats food, which is literally every human' and the way that it gets people through the door is by being top of mind. So, engaging with a massive group (there are 226.6 million gamers in the US alone, according to the Entertainment Software Association) over something they like to talk about seems like a pretty good way of doing that.

And it looks like it's paying off. Wendy's recently became the number two burger chain in the US, displacing Burger King. Of course, this isn't all that the QSR brand is doing; but it certainly can't have hurt.

Sporting chance

Taking a different approach, EA Sports Fifa created a campaign speaking to the British-Asian football community. The Midnight Ramadan League TVC tells the story of a teenager who plays for a grass-roots team set up for Muslim footballers to play at night during Ramadan to better fit in with fasting rituals.

The campaign doesn't directly engage the community in conversation, but it recognises, speaks to and empowers communities within communities and builds



bridges across the British-Asian, Muslim, football fan and Fifa gaming communities.

In this instance, the strategy serves to recruit new players and drive penetration by 'inspiring future generations to play' according to David Jackson, vice-president of brand at EA Sports Fifa.

Connection through ownership

Taking community participation to a whole new level, drinks brand Bacardi launched the Music Liberates Music Mixtape. As part of its ongoing programme to champion under-represented communities in the music industry the

brand tasked three female producers to each make a track, which were minted as individual NFTs that people could buy.

Bacardi is facilitating a new model of community investment, one where members and creators can share in the success of the thing they love, as people who bought the NFTs will receive a percentage of streaming royalties in the future.

Thanks to digital developments, community is no longer a purely intangible entity, that interdependence, support and interest can be tangibly expressed and measured. For Bacardi, the Music Liberates Music Mixtape helps drive

long-term measurable connections with the music community, extending the brand's purpose of 'bringing people together for key moments in celebration, conversation and contemplation'.

Commercial interests

We might take for granted our ability to find people – literally anyone – today but finding the right people in the right context is where our efforts are best placed.

Community strategies enable brands to be niche at scale, driving relevance so that comms are noticed and achieve greater commercial impact. ❧

‘I’ve seen too many people put 20 pounds of crap in a 10 pound ad. What happens is confusion and confusion kills great advertising’

New Worlds Order

Dentsu's Creative Trends for 2022

*'The centre cannot hold' – WB Yeats,
The Second Coming*

When we look forward to 2022 and beyond, we see a profound shift away from traditional centres of commerce, community and connection.

Some talk of the Great Resignation, others about the possibility of another great migration away from urban centres.

What we see most profoundly is a great decentralisation, powered by virtual economies, crypto-currency, climate anxiety and distributed workforces.

We see five key themes powering this great decentralisation.

Alternate Realities: The rise of virtual economies creates entirely parallel worlds with virtual identity, currency and assets no less valuable than those in the real world.

We see a dramatic acceleration in Virtual Signalling – a luxury economy shaped for and by the virtual world. We also see the opportunity for Meta-Morphosis; a powerful ability to play with identity in safe spaces.

We see virtual streamers equipped with

motion-capture suits, the rise of virtual YouTubers, all exploring what the real self, versus the augmented self, looks like.

Redistributed ownership: The second major theme we see is a redistribution of wealth, opportunity and control. New models for ownership emerge blurring the boundaries between fans and creators, owners and players. Cryptocurrency engages a new demographic of investors as the only financial vertical which over-indexes on younger audiences versus more mature investors. Meanwhile the inexorable rise of live streaming creates individuals with the ability to single-handedly sell billions of dollars' worth of product in a single day.

Conscious Decoupling: The third theme we see powering the great decentralisation is the ever-increasing urgency of the climate crisis. A generation of marketers are asking how they can decouple economic growth from environmental damage.

Eighty-one percent of CMOs agree that their business will undergo a fundamental pivot in response to climate change – powering a significant acceleration in rental,

re-commerce and recycling models.

We also see a generation of talent rethinking their future and the primacy of work in an unpredictable climate. In August alone, 4.3 million Americans quit their jobs. (Source: US Labor Department)

Generation 'Also Me': The fourth trend we see within the great decentralisation is the rise of Generation 'Also Me'. Identity is fluid for a generation who see no boundaries or binaries in how they define themselves, or how they consume content.

For this generation, financial advice comes from YouTube and TikTok. Discord can become a classroom, a delivery app can become an art gallery, a game can be an important space to resolve social tensions.

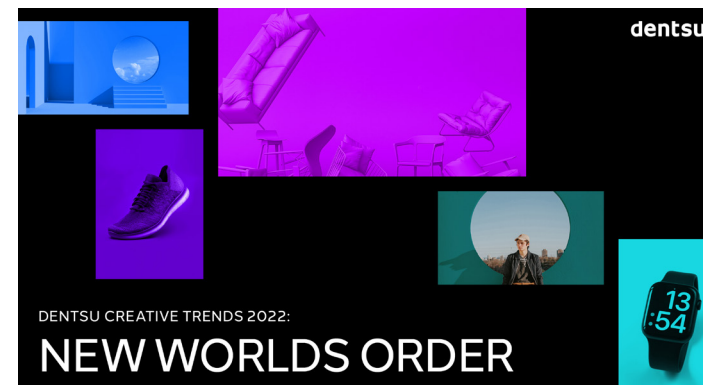
This is a generation who expect brands, formats and channels to cross-pollinate at the pace of a generation raised on memes. It is entirely normal and desirable for Gucci to collaborate

with The North Face, McDonalds with K-pop phenomenon BTS, or Balenciaga with *The Simpsons*.

Personal Bubbles: The last trend driving the great shift from centre is the rise of Personal Bubbles. While some react to a volatile climate by building virtual connections, others retrench into smaller and smaller personal spaces.

The body and the data it generates becomes a source of truth and security in an unstable world. We see increased investment in the home, alongside an anxious desire for self-sufficiency. Staying close to home, we rediscovered the power of the neighbourhood and the joy of local. New platforms are accelerating and reviving old customs, creating a new Digital Neighbourhood.

The great decentralisation and the rise of new connections and communities will affect every business, brand and organisation. 🌀



For more data, case studies, and context, download [Dentsu Creative Trends 2022: New Worlds Order](#) [here](#)

Reality Check

The filters have come off, argues Contagious strategist Amelia Markham, and brands are rapidly turning to honest and unvarnished portrayals of life in their advertising

Last year Instagram reached a milestone when it recorded more than 1 billion monthly users for the first time. In the 10 years since it was founded, the photo-sharing app has become so popular that almost anyone can recognise the so-called 'Instagram aesthetic' of highly curated feeds and easy-to-access filters.

But over the past few years this look has fallen out of favour. Social media's reputation for promoting unattainable lifestyles and setting unrealistic beauty standards has led to a backlash against perfectly posed and heavily edited photos. As a result, the app is starting to appear more casual than curated, with users sharing quick snaps on their Stories and posting often filter-free carousels known as 'photo dumps'.

In wider culture, too, there's been a shift towards the unfiltered, including those in the public eye sharing their stories of miscarriage and speaking openly about mental health, such as US gymnast Simone Biles, who withdrew

from the Olympic Games in 2021 to focus on her wellbeing.

Now brands are beginning to present more open, honest portrayals of people's lives too. Cosmetics company La Roche-Posay, for example, worked with BETC in Paris to launch Skin Is More Than Skin. The ad shows real people with skin issues, from allergies to acne, and ends with the line 'a better life for all skin is possible'.

According to the brand, more than 2 billion people around the world struggle with skin conditions that impact the quality of their lives. And, of course, their discomfort is not helped by the media's focus on flawless complexions. But Skin Is More Than Skin breaks those conventions, standing out from the category while also positioning La Roche-Posay as an expert in skincare.

The shift to more real representations has also been prevalent in the femcare category. Bodyform is a prime example of this trend and its brilliant work in recent years has positioned periods as part of





everyday life rather than something to be ashamed of. But over the past year, the baby care sector has stepped up to trumpet more truths.

In February 2021, Tommee Tippee, working with London agency Manifest, opened up the conversation around breastfeeding. A 60-second spot shines a light on the complex issues of being a new parent, while a website highlights the real-life stories of those featured in the film.

Just a few weeks later, US brand Frida Mom unveiled a similarly taboo-tackling campaign, called Fourth Trimester. The ad, developed alongside Mekanism, New York, shows the realities of breastfeed-

ing. Rather than glossing over issues such as latching to leakage, it gives voice to women's worries about breastfeeding and is empathetic to their experiences. The resulting ads show new mothers that the brand is on their side by helping to fight the stigma that they experience every day.

According to the agency, the video was viewed 2 million times on YouTube and nearly 700,000 times on Instagram. In total, Fourth Trimester generated 2 billion impressions and, importantly, quadrupled traffic to Frida.com.

Laura Wimer, executive creative director at Mekanism, told Contagious that




the campaign, and its success, is reflective of the world we're living in. We're all simply 'too tired', she said, 'not to be truthful with each other'. Wimer calls this approach 'cut-the-shit' advertising. It's about showing what life is really like rather than selling a dream.

And it's an approach that extends into other sectors. In July 2021, Australian insurance brand NRMA launched Help Like No One Else, a campaign created alongside Sydney agency The Monkeys. 'Help' is NRMA's guiding philosophy so with this initiative the brand shares the real-life stories of its claims assessors working to help their customers. By doing so, the work

humanises a faceless corporation – and a friendly face is something that's much needed in a desperate situation.

As Stephen Denny and Paul Leinberger argue in their book *Unfiltered Marketing*, in a world where technology is often the face of the brand, 'finding ways to rehumanise' the relationship in this way is critically important.

Whether it's to break category convention, to fight stigma to show consumers you're on their side, or to rehumanise the relationship, there is something to be gained by bringing honesty into advertising. To quote Wimer once more, 'Truth is all it takes to make great work.' 

‘You just need to put on a show that keeps people in their seats and puts them in a good mood. They’ll like you better, and then they’ll buy more of your stuff’

From Mobile to the Metaverse: Exploring the New Frontiers of Creativity

Meta VP Caitlin Ryan on what the metaverse means for communities, businesses and creativity

The metaverse will bring new economic opportunities for people and businesses, and it's going to make creativity more important than ever, according to Caitlin Ryan, the EMEA VP of Meta's Creative Shop.

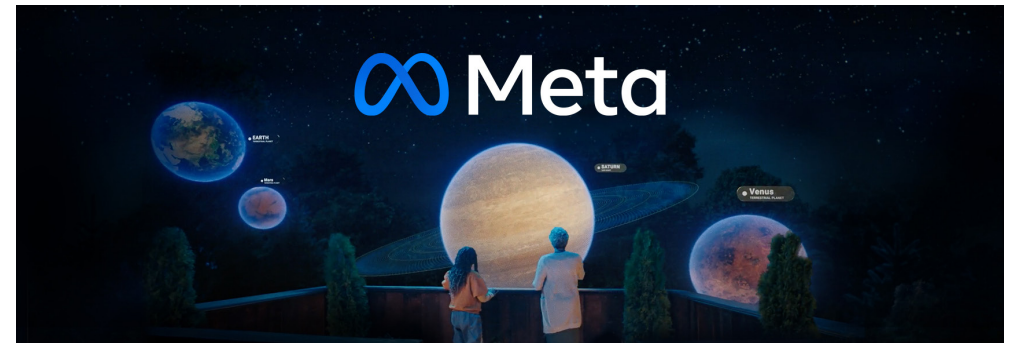
Ryan was speaking at Most Contagious on 1 December when she explained the metaverse as 'a set of virtual spaces where you can create and explore with people who aren't in the same physical space as you.'

Rather than replacing in-person experiences, the metaverse will be about making online experiences more meaningful, said Ryan, who added that it could be like 'teleporting a friend or family member into your living room, even

if they're on the other side of the world.'

But while it lays the groundwork to help develop the future of the internet, Meta will continue to be 'laser focused' on improving the core products that it has built over the past 18 years, said Ryan. And she added that the work being done by agencies and brands today to connect with creators and communities on Facebook, Instagram and Messenger would be 'critical to finding success on our platforms over the coming years.'

As the world moves towards a metaverse, sharing tools with creators and communities will play an even bigger role in building brands, predicted Ryan, who gave as an example Meta's work with Adidas to promote NBA basketball



star James Harden's new sneaker.

During the pandemic, Harden was forced to abandon his usual promotional trip to Europe, so instead Meta arranged to give eight creators access to digital experiences – such as AR instructional tools featuring a digital Harden – and then let them post content on their own Instagram feeds.

'This work shapes a bridge to the metaverse,' said Ryan. 'We gave over to the creators tools from our digital sandbox and they made the Harden launch they wanted to see.'

Technologies like AR and VR can also deepen connections between people, which goes to the core of Meta's stated purpose as a company, said Ryan, who used her company's work with the International Paralympics Committee and tech studio Phoria to illustrate the point. Together they built a WebXR experience that immerses people in the personal stories of Paralympic athletes and how they feel as they compete.

'As you hear the voices of the real athletes sharing their story it becomes so much more intimate and the empathy generated is visceral,' said Ryan.

The creative opportunities for brands to connect with people and culture are multiplying exponentially. As the world moves into the next era of the internet (from mobile to metaverse), Ryan believes creativity will matter more than ever as businesses adapt to more empowering and more immersive technology by adding value in surprising ways.

Ryan concluded by offering three guiding principles for navigating this new world:

- 1.** Build ideas with people at the centre, ideas that empower and enable creative communities.
- 2.** Build for what exists today but experiment with what's emerging.
- 3.** And finally: Embrace perpetual exploration, because it's the only way to keep up with the pace of change. 🌌



Nutcracker?

Whether you're gnawing on marketing to over-50s, consumed by data-driven personalised creativity or stumped by those elusive Gen Zs, **Contagious On Demand** is here to help.

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 **ON
DEMAND**
CONTAGIOUS

‘Provide clarity. People crave certainty [but] leaders cannot guarantee certainty at this time. The next best thing is clarity’

The Power and Purpose of Video

RTL AdConnect's Jean-Baptiste Moggio explores how consumers are connecting with video, and how video can connect better with consumers about sustainability

Thanks to the longeurs of lockdown, video consumption hit a peak in 2020 across Europe and the US, according to Jean-Baptiste Moggio, head of marketing at RTL AdConnect (the international total video sales house of RTL Group).

'But what is interesting is what we see going forward after 2020. The consumption of video that we are having, as individuals, will remain significantly higher than what it was before the lockdown period,' he said.

That's great news for brands looking to advertise on TV but identifying the different video types that people are consuming is equally important. Video on demand is becoming more popular, and while linear television is losing share in terms of total video consumption, that doesn't mean linear TV consumption is declining in volume. Moggio says: 'What we see if we compare 2019, 2020, and 2021 is that even if there was a peak of

linear TV consumption in 2020, the average in 2021 is still [higher] than what it was in 2019. So that consumption is resilient.'

But what are the most popular kinds of programmes? Looking at the top 10 programmes across 120 countries, RTL AdConnect's research shows

that there are 21% more entertainment programmes in the top ten lists. Moggio says: 'The viewers needed these campfire moments sitting on the couch, watching programmes with their family. We saw a great emergence of really good and cosy entertainment programmes such as *The Masked Singer*,



which was a huge success around the world, but also some lighter, friendly ones like *Lego Masters*, *Marble Mania* and cooking competitions.'

Citing the power of video to fulfill some of our most basic needs, Moggio turned to the topic of sustainability, and how video content and television content can improve communication and understanding of this most vital of topics.

RTL AdConnect interviewed 1,000 people in each of four European countries (Italy, UK, France, and Germany) about the climate crisis, and the vast majority (71%) said that they were very concerned about the situation. The research showed that both older and younger respondents believed the media has a role to educate them on the topic, how to deal with it and how to improve their behaviour in terms of sustainability. And while Moggio states that 70-80% of brands incorporate sustainability messaging in their campaigns, a damning takeaway was that the vast majority of respondents do not perceive the claims about sustainability made in brand communications: 40% of them couldn't cite one environmentally responsible brand.

So, how should brands communicate about sustainability? Based on semiotics research, Moggio recommends avoiding extremes (particularly greenwashing) and taking the middle ground: 'Be real, practical, empathetic, and especially have a very local approach.' ❧

The Strategy Behind Ikea's Trash Collection Campaign

How the furniture giant is challenging perceptions of its products by shining a light on throwaway culture

Each year in Norway 3 million pieces of furniture are thrown away. To acknowledge its role in the problem and show that its products are durable and worth repairing, Ikea showcased its products in a counter-intuitive light. Instead of pristine studio shots, the campaign features Ikea items that have been dumped on street corners and in junkyards across the country.

Ikea Trash Collection, created by Oslo-based creative agency Try, features TV and outdoor ads that display the name of each discarded Ikea product, where it was found, what was done to refurbish it,

and its secondhand price compared with the original.

The items are also highlighted on the campaign website, where visitors can find out how to order spare parts for Ikea goods, learn more about the company's buy-back scheme and get price quotes for specific pieces of furniture. They can also read about Ikea's pledge to achieve zero waste and become 100% circular and climate-positive by 2030.

To find out more about the idea and where it fits into the brand's global sustainability push, Contagious spoke to Caroline Riis, senior creative at Try. She

revealed how the campaign was conceived for a Norwegian audience that appreciates honesty over glossy advertising and explained why showing the durability of Ikea furniture was key to shifting perceptions of the brand.

Over the past two years we've covered a number of sustainability initiatives from Ikea in different territories. Where does this campaign fit into this global push?

Ikea want to have this role as a positive change-maker in people's homes. To do that they have to know each market

individually – even though they have this mass-market, international voice and their sustainability goals for 2030 are global, sustainability in Norway is vastly different to, say, in India. Local initiatives show that Ikea really understand each audience and how they live their life.

When we got the brief, Ikea wanted to talk about sustainability, but we had to address the elephant in the room: Ikea is seen as a disposable furniture maker. The fact that they're talking about massive sustainability goals is amazing but in order to get people to listen, they have to believe Ikea.



Can you speak to Ikea's business challenge in Norway versus globally?

It's just that issue of people assuming that Ikea is disposable. Especially for a younger generation, sustainability is massive. The younger generation in Norway is very consumed by climate action, it's a massive issue and one that might be the difference between people choosing Ikea over another brand, thinking that Ikea furniture won't last. We know people can have shelves from Ikea for over 40 years, but you just assume they won't last, so you throw them away. I think taking that issue head-on and showing furniture in the trash shows that Ikea know they are part of the problem and

that people throw their products away. But you can make throwing away furniture the least attractive option. People throw furniture away because it's cheap, but you don't actually think of the environmental impact that will have. And the people who think that won't go to Ikea. So it's about shifting that perception.

Alongside this aim to challenge quality perceptions, were there any other business objectives tied to the brief?

Ikea wanted this behavioural shift for how people use their furniture. Also, they're the world's largest furniture retailer and of course, they want it to stay that way. That comes with a cer-

tain responsibility and they have to take certain steps to secure the position they have and keep people visiting Ikea and using their furniture. So the main thing in the brief for us was, 'Make people think twice about throwing furniture away, and show the other stuff that we are doing in addition to selling furniture.'

How did you approach the brief initially?

We were a bit scared, to be honest – we had this glaring insight staring us in the face. 'Oh, you want us to talk about sustainability, well there is one issue you should talk about.' I remember the first presentation we had, walking in and saying, 'We have this one idea we like.' We had a picture of piles of garbage and put an Ikea product name and a price in the middle of that stinking trash pile. We knew that if we were doing this, we'd have to do it properly. We'd have to do it real and honest. Luckily – and surprisingly – Ikea jumped on it.

The creative is quite beautiful – were the images of discarded products staged?

The production company, Aparent, were hired to do the shoot, and our brief for them was that this has to be real discarded furniture, you can't buy new furniture and add a little stain. And Ikea, more than anyone, was like, 'This has to

be real, we can't do this with a new Billy shelf.' So they drove around – the shoot was meant to be two days but they got so eager they drove around different counties in Norway for nine days – just finding furniture. I can't say for sure that they didn't find a chair 'there' and place it 'here', but that's the most staging they would have done.

How did you ensure you got the tone right and didn't just end up reinforcing negative perceptions of Ikea's furniture as disposable?

It was a long journey. The main thing was transparency – just showing furniture where it had been discarded. The song choice [Joe Tex's 'Hold What You've Got'] was also important. We had more than 800 songs downloaded to put on top of the film. You could so easily guilt trip people and say, 'Look, this is your fault.' Or you could not take it seriously enough. So that tonality of saying, 'We know there's a problem, but look how easy it is to fix, look how easily you can avoid this problem,' without talking down to people – Ikea were very aware of that. We're not educating people, we're saying we know how it is, and we're going to help you change it. We know how we are, and we're going to help ourselves change. So there were lots of talks about the wording – 'might' instead of 'should', and so on. We worked with Ikea to make the tone humble but also real.

Ikea, more than anyone, was like, 'This has to be real, we can't do this with a new Billy shelf'

Caroline Riis, Try



📌 **It is a fine line for a brand to take responsibility for something without also making itself the scapegoat. Did you have to follow a global brand book or were you given freedom at a local level?**

Ikea absolutely have a brand book, but the great thing about this was how each market is allowed to evolve. The global book might come from America or Sweden, and might not know how to speak to an audience in Norway. So while we had certain things in the back of our heads, we did our own thing. A marketing director at Ikea who we worked with had to show it to a global team when we were done, and I think he was a bit nervous and said we might have strayed from a few of the guidelines, but for the greater good. Luckily the team saw that, although it was out of the ordinary, it was getting the point across in the right way.

📌 **How was the campaign rolled out?**

We launched it on TV first, with just one hero film for the first week. We followed up the week after with these other films that say, 'Maybe this didn't need to end up here, maybe all it needed was a spare part – order spare parts at Ikea' or 'send it back to us'. And then we rolled out outdoor weeks after that, so it's been a long push. As the first films went live on TV, we knew there was potential, and

it was different for Ikea, so we got the production team to translate all the films and we sent them out to our contacts globally. Obviously with the permission of Ikea, but very rogue. We don't have this whole PR team, we literally just sent off 50 emails and waited to see how it got picked up. Once it was covered in some places, it spread organically.

📌 **What has the response been?**

It's been really interesting – I think a lot of people were surprised that Ikea dared to show their products in this way. But I'm yet to find a negative comment. Norwegians like it real – they don't like the glossy, polished, American ads. When I worked in New York, the way you talk and showcase things is very different to how we do it in Norway. I think Norwegians really appreciate saying how it is, and showing that they know themselves and are honest about who they are. I think that's why Ikea Norway dared to do this, because they know the audience would appreciate it.

📌 **With that cultural difference in mind, are there plans to roll this out in other territories?**

I think we are taking steps to adapt it for other countries over the next few months. I'm almost scared to see if it could be replicated somewhere else, because I know how hard the production team worked to make it authentic. Would



VEJMON
found at Oppsal 28 April 2021.
Just needed a wash and tightening
of some screws. Original price €99.

€15

another version be as sincere? That's me being really overprotective of the idea, but I don't think Ikea would allow it to not be translated in the way it deserves. Because this insight isn't exclusive to Norway. The UK, for example, would resonate with the insight of throwing Ikea furniture away. It will be interesting to see.

📌 **What was your biggest takeaway from this campaign?**

Don't be scared to scare the client. Don't be scared to do that idea that you're afraid might offend them. Don't be afraid to push the client. In our case, we didn't have to push, we just didn't know we didn't have to push. When we went in with the Ikea Trash Collection, they could have said, 'What are you talking about?' But they've been amazing through all of this. Don't underestimate the client. Go for the idea that you're scared to present. 📌

THE MOST CONTAGIOUS CAMPAIGNS OF THE YEAR

We've made a list and we've checked it more than twice. These are the 25 campaigns that the Contagious team has judged to be the year's most creative, most effective or just the most impossible to ignore



Guinness / Welcome Back (Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO, London)

The brief for Welcome Back was to persuade Brits to choose Guinness as their first post-lockdown pint when pubs reopened in May, and AMV BBDO nailed it.

The agency's concept of a world where everything resembled a pint of the black stuff captured our longing to return to normality without resorting to sentimentality. But Welcome Back wasn't just a great campaign, it was a flex. It was Guinness luxuriating in the spoils of a world-class brand. Few marketers are in possession of an asset so distinctive that people will see it in snow-topped dustbins or half-painted garage doors. And even fewer have a backlog of ads so famous that they can create a sense of occasion just by bringing an old slogan out of retirement.

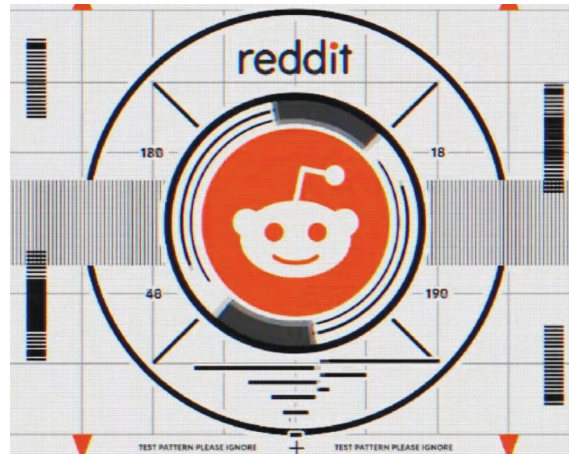
Welcome Back demonstrates what is possible when you invest in a brand over a long time. Good things come to those who wait indeed.



Kiyan Prince Foundation / Long Live the Prince (Engine Creative, London)

Few campaigns break through the ad industry bubble like Long Live the Prince, a pro bono initiative by London agency Engine Creative for the Kiyan Prince Foundation. Prince played for Queens Park Rangers youth football team and was fatally stabbed in 2006 when he was 15 years old. His father started the foundation to instil a positive mindset in kids, steer them away from knife crime and help them achieve their potential.

And that's what this campaign does. On the 15th anniversary of his death in May, EA Sports Fifa brought a 30-year-old Prince (the age he would be today) to life as a player in the football video game using ageing-projection software. The accompanying out-of-home and social media campaign, fronted by the virtual Kiyan and supported by top footballers and influencers, boosted donations and imparted Prince's story to a new generation.



Reddit / Superb Owl (R/GA, New York)

In late January with the Super Bowl just a fortnight away, Reddit had no plans to advertise during the big game. But after members of its Wall Street Bets forum propelled the social media platform into the international news cycle by acting in concert to inflate the price of GameStop shares – and in the process costing hedge fund managers who had shorted the stock billions of dollars – Reddit seized on its moment in the spotlight.

Working with R/GA, New York, the brand quickly pulled together an eye-catching stunt on a shoestring budget: a long-form copy ad styled as a technical glitch that was broadcast during the game in five-second spots across nine key regional markets. Nowhere near enough time for viewers to actually read the ad, but that was the point: it induced people to pause their TVs or search online to try to make sense of what they just saw, resulting in the spot becoming the second-most searched on the night. Touchdown, Reddit.



Canesten / Vagina Academy (AnalogFolk, London)

Vaginas. More than half of us have them, yet there's a great deal of mystery and shame attached to the female anatomy. In Brazil, a key market for women's intimate health brand Canesten, it's taboo to openly discuss vaginal health, with one in four women ashamed to even say the word 'vagina'. Last year, to add insult to injury, the country's far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, introduced abstinence-based sex education to help lower teenage pregnancy rates.

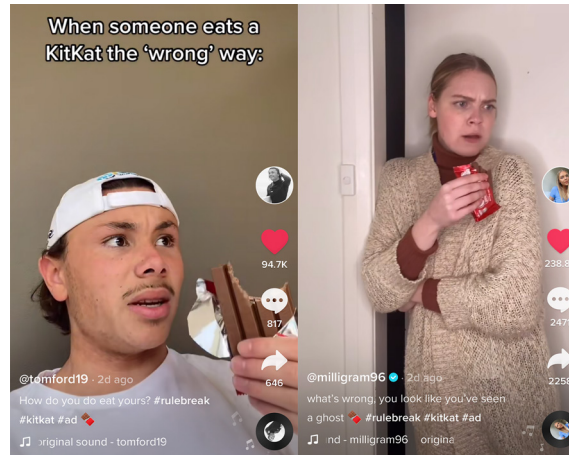
Presented with this barrier to people seeking treatment, Canesten enlisted Analogfolk, London, to create Intensivão Da PPK (Vagina Academy) – a TikTok 'school' where Brazilian influencers and experts on vaginas, psychology and body positivity delivered engaging, stigma-shattering lessons about intimate health, which was viewed 44 million times. Hats off to Canesten for tackling a sensitive topic in the face of government censorship and prioritising women's safety over playing it safe.



Danish Road Safety Council / Helmet is Always a Good Idea (& Co, Copenhagen)

To show Danes that there's nothing prissy about wearing a helmet, the Danish Road Safety Council turned to the country's gloriously violent heritage. In a spot that looks more like a clip from an HBO series than your average PSA, burly Viking Svend is admonished by his wife that he can 'go looting and pillaging' all he wants as long as he wears protective headgear. The absurdity of a tough-as-nails warrior complaining that his helmet makes his scalp itch drums home the silliness of people's excuses for not taking safety precautions.

Outdoor ads and displays in bike stores drove the message home when cyclists were either on their bikes or thinking about biking. Meanwhile, a partnership with the National Museum helped prove that if helmets were good enough for their ancestors 1,000 years ago, they're probably good enough for modern Danes. After seeing the film, 4% of non-helmet-wearers bought a helmet.



KitKat / Have A Bite (Wunderman Thompson Australia, Sydney)

We've seen many attempts at engaging TikTok's youthful and numerous user base over the past year, and most have fallen flat. But KitKat in Australia racked up 4.3 million views across TikTok and Instagram in 48 hours just by stirring up a heated debate.

The best way to eat a KitKat is much discussed, with BuzzFeed polls and Reddit discussions devoted to the matter – one article even suggested a woman end a relationship based on her partner's method of munching. The brand fuelled this fire by working with influencers on TikTok, who challenged people to weigh in on the argument. It was simple enough, but what made the campaign effective is that KitKat didn't manufacture something and shoehorn it into TikTok. Instead, the brand tuned into culture and responded to a conversation that was already happening. Let's not forget that figure we started with: 4.3 million. Who wouldn't want a bite of that?



House of Lapland / Save Salla (Africa, São Paulo)

Earlier this year, the most mentioned city on Twitter for three weeks running was Salla, Finland. The -20C winter wonderland earned the attention as a result of its controversial bid to host the 2032 Summer Olympic Games. What people didn't realise at the time was that the bid was a hoax to raise awareness about the severe effects that climate change is already having close to the Arctic Circle. The bid seemed pure folly but people were especially bamboozled because tourism board House of Lapland had complied with all of the International Olympic Committee's rules for a legitimate entry (creating a mascot, uniforms, a logo and even a 220-page bid book). It wasn't until after a press conference with the town's mayor that the board came clean, transforming Salla 2032 into Save Salla and increasing social conversations on climate change by 879%. If there was a medal awarded for climate change awareness, Save Salla would take home the gold.



Vienna Tourist Board / Vienna Laid Bare

The Vienna Tourist Board's decision to create an OnlyFans account to display the city's risqué artworks was a marketing masterstroke disguised as a fit of pique.

The tourist board began posting images of nude paintings on the subscription media platform to protest the overzealous censorship that left Viennese museums and galleries unable to share some of their greatest works on mainstream social media such as Facebook and TikTok.

It was the perfect marriage of message and medium, and OnlyFans had just been all over the news for threatening to ban explicit content from its platform, which all but guaranteed the stunt would pay for itself in earned media coverage. Not that there was any reason it had to cost the tourist board a bean. Who knows, it may have even earned a nice little bit of tip money from posting some of the city's more Rubenesque masterpieces.



Balenciaga / The Simpsons

Paris Fashion Week is awash with glitz and glamour, yet Balenciaga grabbed all the attention at the event with a surprise 10-minute episode of *The Simpsons*, which culminates in various Springfield misfits hitting the catwalk.

The short could so easily have been a bit naff – it's a long time since peak *Simpsons* – but it works because it's a lovingly made mix of luxury and laughs. Its unveiling also speaks to the brand's universal appeal: a year in the making, the film was released without fanfare on Balenciaga's social media channels the same day it premiered in Paris. And it worked, racking up over 10 million views on Twitter, 8 million on YouTube and 2 million on Instagram.

Funny, self-deprecating and surprising enough that it was all anyone could talk about, the tie-up typifies Balenciaga's playful and inclusive approach to luxury – and, when it came to choosing this list, pipped its all-encompassing Fortnite collaboration to the post.



Chevrolet / Lost Roads (Commonwealth/McCann Colombia, Bogotá)

Most car ads sell freedom but all seem to be imprisoned by the same glossy idea of the open road. Usually in a desert. General Motors-owned Chevrolet bust an SUV-sized hole through the cliché and told a meaningful story along the way.

The terrain the automotive brand dared negotiate was decidedly rocky: Colombia's civil conflict with The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known as the Farc) and its history of violence in the Caquetá region that had left it a no-go area. The *Lost Roads* documentary unlocked the little-seen lush natural habits of the area and also tapped into human interest stories of former guerrillas, who were retrained as local guides as part of the project. Partnering with Discovery Channel ensured the branded film's high-end credentials, airing in April across 14 Latin American countries and ultimately reaching 23 million people.



KFC / Backdoors (PS21, Madrid)

Inviting the employees of your competitors to try your product for free doesn't sound like a winning tactic, but creativity is rarely logical and KFC needed something stand out to launch its Double Down burger (two pieces of fried chicken fillet, as opposed to bread, with a bacon and cheese filling – yum) in Spain. KFC has a fraction of the budget of bigger rivals, and while the Double Down had proved popular elsewhere, product testing had suggested Spaniards were unconvinced of its guilty pleasures. The plan: if other fast food workers found the sandwich too good to resist, then so would everyone else. Using guerilla tactics such as hangers placed on delivery scooters, notes left on online orders and an AI-powered hotline, KFC lured opposing QSR staff to the backdoors of its restaurants to try the burger, dubbed La Infame ('infamous'). The left-field thinking earned the brand attention beyond its modest budget and a 24% uplift in sales, proving the shamefully irresistible appeal of La Infame.



Elena's / Bye Love Bye (VMLY&R Commerce, Cleveland, Chicago and Mexico City)

Lockdown was a disaster for family-owned ice cream brand Elena's, which conducts most of its sales instore. The brand lost almost all of its revenue overnight and knew that if it was going to survive it had to ramp up online. Working off the insight that people turn to ice cream in times of emotional distress, Elena's created a 1 litre tub divided into the five stages of grief. The stages were represented by flavours according to how the ingredients can affect people's mood. Codes were also printed on the interior of the tub to correspond with each layer, which could be redeemed on the brand's website to unlock suitable experiences – such as a free Tinder gold subscription to help a return to dating. The campaign increased mentions of the brand on social media by 420%, led to a 230% increase in visits to its ecommerce site and was followed by a 160% sales lift for Elena's other flavours of ice cream.



Oatly / Help Dad (Oatly Department of Mind Control)

People complained to the UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) that Oatly's first ever TV ad was ageist, sexist and offensive to dairy farmers.

None of that is a good reason to celebrate a campaign (although the farmers thing is kind of funny) but in this instance we don't feel it is cause to dismiss one, either.

Sometimes it is smart for a brand to draw battle lines. After all, conflict can be an effective way for a brand to win attention and communicate what it stands for. And as long as the position is defensible, brands shouldn't fear causing small amounts of offence.

Oatly's January 2021 campaign, in which teens despair at their dads' addiction to cow's milk, was punchy but bang on-brand for a product that is marketed as a challenger to the dairy industry. And the ASA eventually declined to investigate the ad too.



Vans World / Vans (Gang Stockholm)

You might be tempted to dismiss Roblox – which hosts all kinds of user-generated games – because of its infantile blocky graphics and young-skewing fanbase, but the platform still has more than 46 million daily users. It's also now working hard to court a more mature audience and has this year partnered with some decidedly grown-up brands from Hyundai to Gucci. Vans' virtual skatepark might not necessarily be sophisticated, but it is one of the best branded experiences we've seen on the platform. Nick Street, vice president of global integrated marketing at the apparel brand, described Vans World as 'bridging the gap between virtual and real-world fashion and sports in an accessible, inclusive way'. Players can compete in challenges and practice skating tricks, but, from a marketing perspective, the smartest part of the experience is how it familiarises them with Vans products by letting them customise their Roblox avatars with branded virtual accessories.



Channel 4 / Super. Human. (4 Creative)

In the run-up to this year's Paralympic Games, Channel 4 launched another evocative film showing athletes with disabilities preparing for and competing in the competition. Channel 4 has broadcast the Paralympic Games since 2012 and its Superhumans platform promoting the event has been widely praised for changing people's attitudes. But previous ads also evoked a 'Terminator-like' image of paralympic athletes that had ushered in a new stereotype of their own, according to Eoin McLaughlin, executive creative director at 4 Creative.

To rectify this, Channel 4 focused on the human component of the platform for its 2021 film, reflecting the rigours and everyday struggles of training, but delivered in a humorous and accessible way for mainstream audiences. As well as being a great ad, it reflects Channel 4's founding objective of taking bold risks and creating content that other organisations wouldn't.



Frida Mom / Fourth Trimester (Mekanism, New York)

The truth will set you free... and in the case of Frida Mom, it'll also help launch a range of breast-care products. The brand's ad takes a leaf out of the Bodyform playbook of Telling It Like It Is, but breaks new ground in its particular category by focusing on mothers and the realities of the postnatal experience – unabashedly showing breasts and breastfeeding in the process. Raw, real and funny, the film stands out in a saturated category while reminding mothers that their care is of the utmost importance. A previous Frida ad had been rejected from airing during 2020's Oscars for being too explicit, so Fourth Trimester's premiere during the Golden Globes also ensured it made a big splash. Speaking to Contagious, Mekanism's ECD, Laura Wimer, said: 'If someone were to name this era of work, it would probably be called the cut-the-shit era of advertising. I don't want to see someone happy, frolicking through a field, all we want is connection.'



Ikea / The Trash Collection (Try, Oslo)

When Try received a brief for a sustainability campaign for Ikea, it had to address the elephant in the room. 'Ikea is seen as a disposable furniture maker,' Caroline Riis, senior creative at the agency, told Contagious, 'The fact that they're talking about massive sustainability goals is amazing but in order to get people to listen, they have to believe Ikea.' Rather than shy away from this perception, the agency tackled it head-on with the Ikea Trash Collection: an ad campaign featuring pieces of Ikea furniture found in rubbish piles strewn across Norway.

Designed to show people that Ikea furniture is durable and worth repairing, the campaign acknowledges Ikea's role in the problem of furniture waste and draws attention to its buy-back and refurbishment schemes. 'A lot of people were surprised that Ikea dared to show their products in this way,' says Riis. 'But Norwegians like it real.'

For more on this campaign, see page 28.



Financial Times / Letters to this New World (The Brooklyn Brothers, London)

The *Financial Times* (FT) is a perfect example of why you shouldn't judge a book (or a newspaper) by its cover. In September, the paper unveiled a global campaign showcasing the breadth and rigour of its journalism. Created with The Brooklyn Brothers, London, the campaign centred on a series of open letters penned by FT journalists such as Martin Wolf and Pilita Clark, which look to the past and the future, and address the biggest issues we face as a society as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The initiative is the latest phase of The New Agenda campaign, which launched two years ago with a call for a reset of capitalism. Finola McDonnell, chief communications and marketing officer at the newspaper, told Contagious: 'We are at an inflection point, and the FT is positioned to encourage and lead debate about what comes next.'



Dutch Mill / Sponsor of Mom-and-Pop Shops (Wunderman Thompson Thailand, Bangkok)

Thai dairy brand Dutch Mill is a challenger that doesn't have the big advertising budget of multinational competitors such as Nestlé. So, to drive sales of its milk drinks it needed to do something unconventional and cost-effective. Dutch Mill's solution was to invite mom-and-pop stores in its existing retail network to create their own ads for the drinks and a local snack to go with them. The brand then used geo-targeting to promote the ads in the vicinity of the shops. The campaign drove footfall to local stores and supported the small businesses as they struggled to stay afloat during the pandemic. According to Wunderman Thompson Thailand, which came up with the idea, the campaign saw average sales for these family-run neighbourhood stores increase by 20%, while sales for Dutch Mill's products soared by 200%.



The Royal Canadian Region / The Immortal Poppy (Wunderman Thompson Toronto)

It's not clear whether NFTs are the future or a fad, nonetheless The Royal Canadian Legion found a useful application for them. To mark the centennial anniversary of the Remembrance Poppy on 11 November, the non-profit organisation unveiled a digital artwork of a poppy and a war memorial encrypted with the names of all 118,000 fallen Canadian soldiers in the First World War.

The artwork was created by 3D-scanning real poppies plucked from the Belgian fields that inspired John McCrae's poem *In Flanders Fields*. The poppies were sold in the form of 100 limited-edition NFTs on online marketplace OpenSea for 0.1111 Ethereum (approximate value: \$500) and all proceeds went towards The Royal Canadian Legion. Should the poppy be resold, 10% of that sale will also go towards the non-profit (as the creator of the NFT). By 5 November the organisation had already raised \$16,000.



Distance / Outlaw Runners (BETC Paris)

There's a certain romance to great guerilla marketing and a kind of purity to great poster advertising. The Outlaw Runners campaign for boutique running store Distance earns its place on our Most Contagious list because it combines the virtues of both.

After Paris introduced a blanket 30km/h speed limit to its streets in August, Distance recruited professional athletes to wear its gear and then run past speed cameras fast enough to trigger the flash. The initiative, which was created by BETC Paris, piggybacked on the controversy surrounding the new speed laws to secure more than 100 pieces of press coverage, but it also produced images that were attention-grabbing adverts in their own right – a real one-two punch. Oh, and unless you can run 100 metres in about 12 seconds, the answer is: 'No, you're not fast enough to set off one of the city's speed cameras.'



Mercado Livre / New Iconic Kisses (Gut, São Paulo)

'Be brave' is one of the Contagious commandments for achieving great commercial creativity. Brazil's online marketplace Mercado Livre expressed this fundamental principle beautifully by reimagining iconic kisses from history and pop culture with LGBTQ+ couples.

Public displays of affection are still risky for members of Brazil's LGBTQ+ community, who are frequently targets of abuse and aggression. As the largest online retailer in the country, Mercado Livre had plenty to lose by championing this cause. Still, the brand stepped beyond its usual Pride sponsorship to deliver a sumptuous ad on prime-time TV and out-of-home media that celebrated progress and freedom. According to the agency behind the campaign, Gut, New Iconic Kisses reached more than 300 million people in just two weeks, with thousands of people replicating the iconic kisses organically on social media. It pays to be brave.



Degree / Degree Inclusive (Wunderman Thompson Argentina, Buenos Aires)

One in four adults in the US has a disability but there was no deodorant on the market designed for people with physical impairments, despite the fact that twisting a cap, operating a spray, or turning a stick can present them with significant challenges. That is until Degree (known as Sure or Rexona in other markets) stepped in to create an inclusive product for people with visual impairments and upper limb motor disabilities.

The brand teamed up with 200 occupational therapists, engineers, consultants and people living with disabilities from across the world to create the roll-on, which features a hooked design for one-handed usage, magnetic closures and an enhanced grip. Not only does the innovation align with the brand's purpose to get everyone moving, it also won an Innovation Grand Prix at Cannes Lions. The deodorant is set to come out in the US in 2022.



Heinz / Draw Ketchup (Rethink, Toronto)

There are only a handful of branded products so universally recognisable that anyone could pick up a pencil and draw it from memory – Heinz's glass ketchup bottle is one of them. But what if the brand asked people across five continents to simply draw 'ketchup'? Would people sketch the unmistakable 57 on the Heinz bottle neck, the green vine stalk on the label and even include the brand name?

The answer, Heinz discovered, was yes, yes and yes. Around 97% of participants who took part in the experiment drew a Heinz bottle, with the brand adapting a selection of these drawings into real labels for a limited run of bottles, billboards and digital out-of-home.

Mike Dubrick, managing partner and ECD at Rethink, told Contagious that these salience boosting stunts are necessary for Heinz Ketchup to remain distinctive: 'There's certainly a danger for any iconic brand to fade into nostalgia and we're trying to find ways to be relevant.'



Mastercard / Roadside Markets (McCann Bucharest)

According to the Global Labour Organisation, 2 billion people work within the informal economy, earning money from jobs that are neither taxed nor regulated. Mastercard wanted to make inroads with these invisible breadwinners in Romania by giving small informal business owners access to cashless payment terminals – a big deal in a country where 70% of payments are made with physical currency (one of the highest rates in the world). Mastercard partnered with popular GPS directions app Waze to give these roadside vendors a permanent digital pin on its map so tourists and locals could easily find their off-the-beaten-track shopfronts. It also shared stories about the sellers via a website with supporting links to locate their stalls.

Not only does this help Mastercard unlock access to new customers, it also builds on its brand purpose of striving towards financial inclusion for everyone. Now, that's priceless.

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