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## A SOUND APPROACH

WILL BRANDS GET  
LOST IN THE AGE  
OF VOICE?



**BRANDS OF  
THE YEAR**

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SAQ  
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Wealthsimple, one of our Brands of the Year, launched the in-house "Mad World" spot earlier this year (p.20).

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**ON THE COVER:** Brands are developing voices. Some may find that creepy but, at least for now, there's an element of whimsy in the enterprise. A voice assistant that gets pizza delivered to your door? An AI tool that automatically moves money into your savings account? A chatbot that helps you buy makeup for your best friend? For the cover, illustrator Alexei Vella shows the fun side of the coming voice revolution, capturing the enthusiasm with which brands are experimenting.

## OK brands, are you ready to find your voice?

**I**ll admit I don't have a relationship with Siri (yet). She's too artificial, not enough intelligence. Plus, I'm not entirely comfortable speaking into my phone when there isn't a human on the other end (my harebrained voicemails prove this). I know I'm not alone. Others are equally aloof, and perhaps even more dubious, when it comes to conversing with voice AI.

But there are also fans, like my brother-in-law, who was recently at odds with his wife for spending too much time with his new flame, Alexa. My sister is convinced the bot overheard her demanding that her husband's new "girlfriend" live in the garage, and "now [Alexa] ignores me when I ask her to do stuff," she jokes. According to a study by J. Walter Thompson's Innovation Group and Mindshare, his fixation is not unique: 37% of voice assistant owners wish their bots were a real person.

Whether you're an adopter or a resister, voice assistants could one day perform our every task/search bidding. And that's not something to be taken lightly, especially if you're a marketer. Why? Because it offers a do-over for errors made on other platforms, like mobile.

Let's say home-bots become as prevalent as the pocket PC, which took a relatively slow 17 years to hit 67% adoption in Canada. It's plausible. The two sort of act the same, except that smartphone "apps" are replaced with Echo "skills," Google Home "tasks" and so on. Some even look the same (Amazon's new Echo Show is an assistant speaker with a screen) and they both offer search capabilities: one in voice, the other text.

Most importantly, each exists to provide utility. At some point, that part was forgotten by brands who failed to build useful content on mobile.

Here's how you can tell: scan your home screen on your phone. Most of your apps likely have nothing to do with a consumer-facing brand. Nike's Training Club, TD's MyAdvantage and Starbucks are the few left on my phone. That's because many of us have uninstalled the ones that don't add value (Catalyst reported the average number of total apps dropped from 26 to 19 in 2015). If they don't have an app, brands tend to fall back on social platforms where they generate likes, but again, not much value.

Brands shouldn't get caught creating content that gets lost in the voice ether. Learn from those who've embedded themselves in users' daily lives on mobile (I don't go a week without checking in with Nike about my next run). And aim to provide what Mitch Joel (a pundit consulted for our feature story on p. 12) coined "utilitarian marketing" a few years back on his blog, Six Pixels of Separation.

Campbell's took this approach when it introduced the "Campbell's Kitchen" branded "skills" for Echo. A person can ask for recipe ideas from the CPG, and the assistant will provide instructions. The brand can promote its food (and users can add items to a grocery list), while adding value with suggestions tailored to things like taste profile, trending flavours or even the weather.

Voice is intimate, and possibly more personal than mobile. People aren't just inviting brands into their homes through televisions and phones – they're conceivably adopting a new member of the family. So learn from mobile, turn the model on its head, and create content that's truly useful.

**Jennifer Horn, managing editor**



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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

### Pick a lane

A&W ROOT BEER IS ONE of those legit iconic things, evocative of simpler times. It's good memories in a frosty mug. It's also a guilty pleasure in our calorie-aware, health-focused climate.

Back when burger joints first tried healthier options, salads were the go-to. For QSR franchisees, promoting salad over fries was deemed high lunacy. For consumers, the intrepid few who ordered QSR "greens" often found them pale, wilted or puzzlingly "out of stock."

Fast-salad joints popped up to fill that void, and between the proliferation of choice and the challenge of engaging mass audiences, it now takes a bigger idea and a deeper commitment for brands to stand out.

A&W's long-term strategy to improve the menu – from antibiotic/hormone/steroid-free food to the new sarsaparilla and cane sugar root beer – is a great example of what we look for in a Brand Of the Year.

The fact that A&W found a way to tackle that trickiest of QSR dilemmas – shifting to a better-for-

you fast food consideration set – and committed to it, makes it a BOY. From its crafty Root Brewery, to efforts battling packaging waste, the journey continues on all fronts.

A category facing changing consumer tastes, where iconic products are at odds with trends, is a shared challenge. And while A&W's people-on-the-street spots may not be the sexiest campaign, the strategy made the brand relevant with a new generation.

Nissan, on the other hand, went old-school cinematic with vehicles battling nature. It made the BOY cut because it stuck with its Canadian-originated concept (born of a safety insight) long enough to outmanoeuvre competitors via memorable brand building.

SAQ is here because Inspire shows how a vision for a loyalty program can inspire rabid loyalty – and open the door to DNA-level, customized data-driven direct marketing.

Rethink Breast Cancer impressed us as a made-in-Canada brand whose unique voice propelled it across borders, while creating content that is merch, messaging

and therapy all in one. Wealhsimple is another Canadian launch expanding into new markets, fuelled by a distinct brand persona and model built to meet a void.

Our brands to watch (Saje, Matt & Nat and Collective Arts) followed the same BOY strategy – they found a gap, picked a lane and stuck to it.

We hope the behind-the-strategy stories spark ideas and inspire big-picture Canadian branding investment and perseverance. And for some serious, long-term brand building, read up on CIBC's 150-year case study (p. 52).

For a more intimate discussion of how to build brands for the future, the Marketing Evolution: C-Suite Summit is coming up in February, where we'll dive into issues facing marketing leaders, from data and AI to talent and training.

As for the rest of 2017, we hope to see you at the Agency of the Year gala in November and at the MIAs in December!

Cheers, mm

**Mary Maddever, SVP/Publisher**

OUR BRANDS OF THE YEAR FOUND A GAP, PICKED A LANE AND STUCK TO IT.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

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## KNIXWEAR STRIKES A BALANCE

By Harmeet Singh

Femcare brand Knixwear has set its sights on the pre-teen demo.

**F**eminine care has moved beyond blue liquid on pads – think Always’ viral “Like a Girl” or U by Kotex’s branded content powerhouse *Carmilla*. Some brands are even showing blood in their ads.

The evolution is also happening on the innovation side, with organic tampons, menstrual cups and subscription delivery options offering more choice than ever.

This is the crux of Knixwear, a Canadian intimates brand known for its “period underwear.” Established in 2013, the leak-proof undies brand is one of a handful of companies in a period-friendly intimates category. Knixwear aimed to offer more realistic, body-positive alternatives, says Toronto-based founder and CEO Joanna Griffiths.

The brand is now targeting gen Z, with two styles of underwear designed with teens in mind (including a lower price point), marketed as Knixteen.

The average age to begin menstruation is now 12, and girls as young as nine are getting their periods, Griffiths says. That put Knixwear in the tricky position of

making a product cool enough for its young customers while targeting the primary purchaser: mom.

Design has been key. Agency Leo Burnett created Knixteen’s packaging to be reusable, so it can double up as a pencil case or makeup bag for teens. It also included microwaveable towels that can go inside the bag to turn it into a heating pad – something its customers have responded to with a lot of enthusiasm on social, Griffiths says.

Meanwhile, the balancing act of also reaching mom came to life in its ad campaign this summer and during the back-to-school period. The campaign shows typical settings, like the school cafeteria, with voiceover from the annoying “period” talking about how it’s about to disrupt the situation. The Knixteen wearer is able to tell her period to “shut up.”

The creative is meant to be “honest and timeless,” speaking to Knixteen’s brand positioning of normalizing periods, Griffiths says. “Whether you were born in 1975 or 2005, the moments are kind of the same.”

## THE GIN IS IN

Craft distilling is catching on, and brewers are getting in on the mix.

By Mark Burgess

The Mill Street Brewery was one of the first tenants of Toronto’s revitalized Distillery District when it opened back in 2002. So it’s not such a stretch, 15 years later, for the brewer to add craft spirits to its list of products.

In August, it joined a growing number of Canadian craft spirits producers with the release of its Mill Street Small Batch Gin. The brewery (owned by Labatt since 2015) launched its distilling program in 2013, producing beer schnapps. There’s also whisky in the works (it takes several years of barrel aging, and the first batch is set for release this fall).

Craft distilling has experienced a recent boom in the U.S., with more than 1,300 distilleries



operating across the country and claiming 2.2% market share in 2015, according to the American Craft Spirits Association. There are signs of it catching on in Canada, too, with more than 100 distillers in operation.

Despite a restrictive regulatory environment, the number of on-site distillery retailers in Ontario reached 25 this year, up from seven four years ago. Sales make up a tiny fraction of the overall market – \$6.3 million – but they grew 62% this year, per the LCBO, a trend the distributor sees continuing.

Beamsville, Ont.’s Dillon’s, which is best known

for its gin but also makes rye, vodka and absinthe, is the top-selling craft distiller at the retailer.

Using unique ingredients, the craft distillers can tap into foodie trends around local products and bold combinations that have impacted the coffee, wine and craft brewing spaces. Marketing for the products focuses on community and influencer outreach, and telling a story about the liquor and how it's made.

"People just get excited to try new things," says Mill Street distiller Martha Lowry (pictured below). Most of the gin available at the LCBO is London dry style, so she wanted to make something very different. The key ingredient in her sipping gin is citra hops, used in IPA beers, which not only makes for a distinct flavour but ties the product back to the master brand.

"It kind of bridges the gap between a traditional spirit and what we do on the beer side," says Adam Ralph, the brewery's brand manager.

Mill Street isn't alone in expanding to spirits. Muskoka Brewery, which bought a still in 2015, released the first batch of its Legendary Oddity gin in June. It borrows from a beer of the same name and uses the same ingredients. It's already stocked at the LCBO.

In B.C., where legislative changes in 2013 led to a few dozen craft distillers opening, Phillips Brewing also made the transition to gin and whisky. Founder Matt Phillips opened the Phillips Fermentorium Distilling Co. and has been selling his Stump Coastal Forest Gin since 2014.

All of the ingredients in the spirit are grown or foraged on Vancouver



Island. "That became the premise for our gin. It was an expression of the island," Phillips says.

It's still a niche product for the brewery, with roughly 2,000 cases per year sold in about 170 private liquor stores in B.C. and Alberta. And while it may bring in some new consumers, there's a lot of overlap in the brewery's clientele of "flavour explorers," he says.

The Mill Street distillery isn't set up to make massive quantities for wholesale. The first batch made just over 600 bottles, 500 of which are being sold at the Toronto shop for \$50 apiece. As with the brewery, the plan is to test products at the bar and scale up when it's popular. Lowry says they could look to do vintage releases at the LCBO down the road.

"We wouldn't say it is going big, we wouldn't say it isn't," Ralph says. "But if people like it, we'll find a way to keep doing it and improving on it."



## IF BRANDS WERE PEOPLE...

By Harmeet Singh

Any marketer who's navigated Twitter will know that brand personality is tough to convey. We wanted to see how brands stack up when it comes to charisma. After perusing lists of the most trusted brands, we teamed up with research firm Fresh Intelligence to poll 408 Canadians on how they view brand personality. We asked: "Which brand would you..."

### Want to play hockey with?

**Tim Hortons 52%**

Cirque du Soleil **14%**

Home Hardware **14%**

WestJet **13%**

MEC **7%**

### Trust to take care of your kids?

**Shoppers Drug Mart 30%**

Tim Hortons **27%**

Google **20%**

Canadian Tire **19%**

Dollarama **4%**

### Want to have a beer with?

**Tangerine 26%**

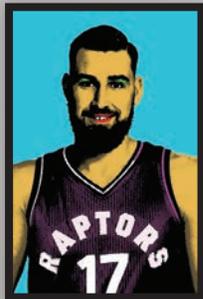
TD **22%**

RBC **15%**

Scotiabank **15%**

Bank of Montreal **12%**

CIBC **10%**



# PROMO! MEETS PO-MO

**IN THE CREATIVITY SPECTRUM**, where does art meet advertising? Could they? Would they? Should they? Can an amalgamation of the two play with “notions of celebrity and influence” or “activate spectatorial memory and desire”? (Try wrapping your head around that one.)

The answers to these questions formed the mission of this year’s PROMO! Awards show gala, where the best brand activation programs were recognized.

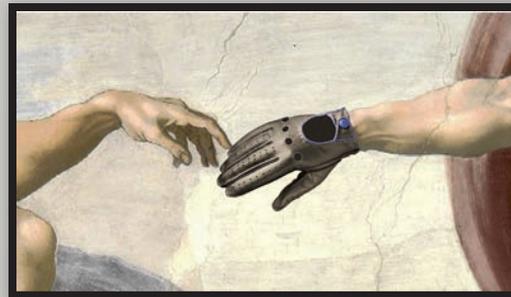
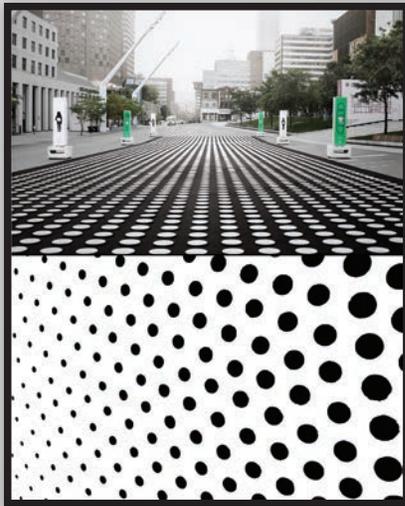
The conceptual language and thoughtful ideas (written by Kerry Manders) were presented at the Toronto event. *Strategy* and CAPMA (Canadian Agencies Practicing Marketing Activation, which owns PROMO!) drew from the styles of various artists – from Banksy to da Vinci – to create 11 pieces of art inspired by shortlisted campaigns. We dubbed them “plunderpromos” and hung the pieces on the wall, gallery-style. Then we handed out some awards.

Thirty unique campaigns were awarded at the event, held at District 28: 15 Gold, 20 Silver and 18 Bronze. Unsurprisingly to those who’ve been watching the 2017 awards circuit, SickKids’ “VS.” campaign took home the most Gold (four), as well as the coveted Best of Show. The anthemic film and integrated campaign, by Cossette, with a superhero-style depiction of kids fighting serious illnesses, won for its ability to activate a new donor demo.

Claiming the second-most Golds (three), were the Canadian Down Syndrome Society and FCB, recognized for their niche targeting and clever use of online video in the “Down Syndrome Answers” campaign. The media-centric work targeted expecting parents looking for answers to questions related to raising a child with Down syndrome, directing them to videos of those with the condition candidly answering their Google search queries.

FCB’s data-driven creative group FCB/Six also left the show with a Gold (plus two Silvers) for “The Call That Comes After” campaign for Drug Free Kids Canada. This campaign was celebrated for its effective use of digital and data, creating a mechanism that allowed text messages to be sent to teens (from their parents) while they watched a PSA about driving under the influence of marijuana. Here’s the kicker: the messages were sent to teens at the exact same time as the characters in the film, right after they got into a car accident.

Zulu Alpha Kilo, DentsuBos and Anomaly each took home a Gold for tactical targeting. Zulu’s “1903” café for Harley-Davidson brought in new riders of a younger generation; Dentsu’s LinkedIn campaign for Lexus went directly to high-level executives to drive them into dealerships; and Anomaly’s post-Super Bowl film got sports fans talking about Shock Top long after the game.



Clockwise from left: "Plunderpromo" work for the PROMO! show's gallery was inspired by winning campaigns and work by artists Roy Lichtenstein (SickKids, Garde-Manger), Andy Warhol (Nike, Ontario Tourism, Harley-Davidson, GoDaddy), Michelangelo (Lexus) and Banksy (Rethink Breast Cancer).

BY JENNIFER HORN

Three more cause campaigns took home Golds that night. Each used installations to drive their message. The first went to Juniper Park\ TBWA for its work with YWCA on the "Blamé" campaign and pop-up boutique, which created a fake brand to address victim blaming in sexual assault cases. Another went to KBS for its Innocence Canada "12 Years Stolen" exhibition that showed a portrait of a man who was found innocent after spending a dozen years in jail for his wife's accidental

death. And one more went to Cossette and Le Garde-Manger Pour Tous for their "Help Us Fill The Emptiness" campaign that saw volunteers stacking plates along a sidewalk to demonstrate the organization's efforts to feed those less fortunate.

*For all of this year's PROMO! winners (and a peek at the "plunderpromos" created for the show), go to [www.strategyonline.ca](http://www.strategyonline.ca).*



Congratulations to our partners at **Zulu Alpha Kilo** on their nominations.





# PREPARING FOR BRANDS THAT TALK

AS VOICE ASSISTANTS START TO MAKE THEIR WAY TO CANADA, BRANDS ARE FIGURING OUT HOW TO INSERT THEMSELVES INTO A NEW KIND OF CONVERSATION AND THE HIGH-STAKES METHOD OF SEARCH.

BY MARK BURGESS

**M**arketers today would be forgiven for hearing voices in their heads. They may not all be identical, but they share certain elocutionary quirks and the same slightly halting delivery. They're mostly female. And regardless of the words they use, their message is more or less the same: don't get left behind.

In the quest to be present wherever consumers are ready to buy, voice assistants are a growing concern. There are the well-established ones from the tech

in "the gimmick phase" of how brands are using them. Customer service is still the most practical use for chatbots and voice assistants, a June report from eMarketer said. When it comes to shopping, the platforms are best suited to reordering or shopping for products that don't require much research. Consumers have concerns around security and privacy, payment, and the ability to search products, the market research company said.

companies: Alexa for Amazon, Apple's Siri, Google's Assistant, Cortana for Windows and Bixby for Samsung. But some brands are looking at building their own personalities, from bots to voice assistants, like Domino's pizza-ordering AI personality, Dom.

The market for smart speakers in Canada is miniscule: Google Home only launched here in June, and Amazon has yet to release the Echo north of the border. But in the U.S., adoption is on the rise. More than 45 million voice-enabled digital assistants are in use (roughly 70% of the smart speakers are Amazon's and 24% are Google's), per eMarketer, and that number will rise to almost 67 million in 2019.

Facebook is working on its own hardware, including a smart speaker to compete with Amazon and Google, and a video chat device named Aloha that could be released next spring, according to various reports. In August, Google and Walmart announced a partnership (U.S. only for now) between the retailer and the Google Assistant. Walmart customers can link their accounts to Google to receive personalized shopping results based on previous purchases.

The devices are still clunky as purchase tools, and industry experts consulted for this article agree we're

But agency creatives and developers say clients in Canada are already asking how to prepare for voice in order to avoid being left behind like some were with mobile. How will voice assistants affect search and purchasing? How does online content need to change for a voice-enabled world? Do brands need to develop their own voice or personality to serve up that content, or do they leave it to the Alexas, Siris and Google Assistants of the world? And if they do want to develop their own voice, what do they need to take into account?

### The multi-million dollar question

In June, not long before announcing its acquisition of Whole Foods, Amazon released a video for its Dash Wand. A woman asks it for recipes and uses the device to scan items in her expensive fridge. The ingredients that automatically appear on her shopping list are soon delivered in green Amazon Fresh cooler bags.

As the dinner party prep proceeds, her husband tells the device they need white wine. “Your favourite white wine will be here between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m.,” Alexa responds. When he tells the Wand to dim the lights, down they go. The guests arrive for the dinner party, which resembles a scene from a Hallmark movie with a conspicuously large budget.

It’s the vagueness of the “buy white wine” command that has some marketers worried. Alexa typically responds with only two suggestions when asked to make a purchase. According to a July report from research firm L2, those suggestions are usually Amazon’s Choice products, meaning brands must earn that label to be found on the devices (Amazon uses a combination of Prime eligibility, sales performance and customer reviews for the distinction, rather than going by the top search rank or the best seller).

As brands tinker with bots and voice assistants, they’re also preparing for, or at least contemplating the consequences of, a world where voice is a dominant form of search. It already accounts for 20% of searches in the Google app, according to the company.

The new holy grail for search is “position zero,” says Neil Mohan, VP of digital and creative technology at Edelman. That’s the featured snippet Google offers, often from a Wikipedia entry, which appears above the number one ranking and includes the first few lines of text from an entry.

To succeed in voice, brands will not only have to produce relevant content to be delivered in that medium, but make sure that content is positioned as the first or second result. Otherwise they risk not being found.

That may involve developing content designed to answer specific queries the voice assistants are likely to get, and filling gaps where no answer exists. Mohan says he’s working with Unilever to reconsider website design

and make sure copy is written and coded to work for voice search. They’re imagining situations like someone cooking, hands occupied or too messy to touch a device, asking a voice assistant about an ingredient – the kind of question its brands would hope to answer.

“I want the brand to be there with the kind of answer a trusted friend would give,” Mohan says.

That means writing audio-friendly text: staying away from certain words that voice assistants struggle with and being mindful of the length.

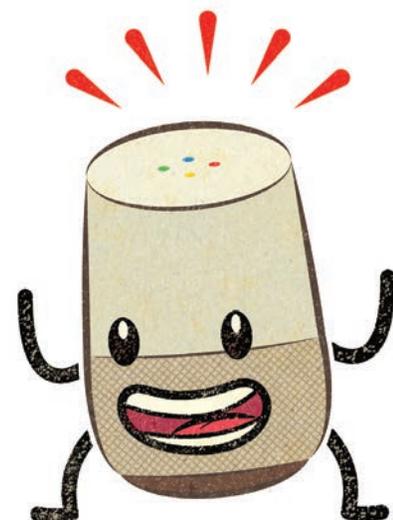
L’Oréal also sees opportunity in the new hands-free search world, and wants to be there to provide expertise to the woman asking for beauty tips mid-application, says Martin Aubut, the brand’s chief digital officer. L’Oréal is learning about the types of questions consumers ask through its chatbots (more on this below), and is tagging all its content to be pushed to the consumer in the right context.

“You will be able to provide the right answer to the right question in the right format, which is voice or text or sending a picture,” he says.

Voice search may also force brands to shell out a lot of money, says Mitch Joel, president at Mirum.

“You can imagine what that cost is going to be once [search engines] understand the value and merits of being the A1 answer in a world where you’re not going to see five, six, seven, 10 results on a page,” he says. “It may start as a function of who can provide the best result but it’s going to quickly evolve to who can pay the most for that coveted spot.”

Joel sees the era of voice search as a return to the days when “advertising was primarily a scarcity model.” Before digital media, where advertisers have endless opportunities to reach a targeted audience, if a brand’s ads weren’t on prime time TV or didn’t make it into the morning newspaper, they simply missed out on that



## SO WHY ARE THEY ALL WOMEN?

In Spike Jonze's 2013 film *Her*, Theodore Twombly (played by Joaquin Phoenix) is asked whether he would like his AI operating system to have a male or female voice. "Female, I guess," he answers, without seeming to give it too much thought. So he gets "Samantha."

The decision isn't a perfunctory one for brands. Many have criticized companies' choice of gender for their voice assistants, inserting females into the secretarial tasks of scheduling, assisting, etc. traditionally held by women.

Some people object to using assistants because they don't want their kids "learning to shout at a female," says Vass Alexiou, group creative director at Huge.

The onomastic histories of voice assistants are complex. First of all, why give them names at all? Researchers at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management tested people's trust of technology using a driving simulator named Iris (Siri backwards), and found that drivers trusted it more than those using an unnamed simulator.

Names that are easily distinguished from other speech (so as not to accidentally activate the assistant) are also important. But there is always a binary choice.

Siri means "beautiful woman who leads you to victory" in Norse. Alexa was inspired by the ancient Egyptian Library of Alexandria (many have asked "Why

not Alex?" then). Cortana was an AI assistant in the game Halo, where she appears as a mostly naked hologram. Google avoided personification, going with "OK Google" to trigger the Google Assistant. But the voice is still a female's. Only Siri allows users to change to a male voice.

Citing various studies, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that people respond better to AI if the robots are given gender cues. Both men and women see females as more welcoming, warm and nurturing, according to an Indiana University study. People prefer to learn about computers from men but to receive counsel on love and relationships from women, a Stanford University study said.

The WSJ pointed out that there are cases of brands choosing male voices – such as Dom, Domino's pizza-ordering voice assistant. (The target for that one is fairly predictable.)

Agency Fjord addressed the dilemma for brands in its online guide to designing voice interfaces. Applying a gender identity has ramifications, "especially because the resulting impulse is to then add a 'her' to every product we can," the guide says. "Instead, we should pay attention to the unexamined decisions we're making to avoid digitizing existing power structures under the guise of a 'default' identity."

brand personality. In May, L'Oréal Canada launched its Beauty Gifter bot with Montreal digital agency Automat to help consumers on Facebook Messenger find the right gift. Through a series of questions, the bot learned about the recipient's beauty profile and made product recommendations.

It's part of an effort to test Messenger as a transactional platform, CMO Stephanie Binette says. The bot was less about developing a personality, since it was a single service speaking for L'Oréal's 39 brands, and more about learning to provide personalized content to consumers at scale.

"In that sense, the brand tone was not as necessary. Obviously that's where we want to go, but this was test and learn," she says.

L'Oréal also debated how focused the bot should be on the sale. "You don't want to be too functional. You want to create a relationship," says Aubut, the chief digital officer.

audience. The same could be true for voice.

It could also mean a challenge to "Google's insane monopoly," Joel says. The shift in search query format could provide competitors with an opportunity to challenge for the lead in next-generation search.

### First chatbots, then chatter boxes

More emphasis on voice will create opportunities for brands to go further upstream to partner with tech companies, like RBC's partnership with Apple allowing customers to pay their bills and send transfers through Siri (PayPal also has a partnership with Apple).

But brands' focus on voice goes beyond the implications for search and how to interact with the proliferating Siris of the world. Some are also looking at developing their own voice personalities to interact with consumers on devices.

As a warm-up to a full voice assistant, chatbots (a smaller investment) allow brands to learn how consumers interact with AI and to experiment with

He compared the interaction to dating, where the two parties build trust with simple questions.

Michael Wandelmaier, associate product design director at Huge, has been working on chatbots and voice services for brands, mainly on the customer service side, and has faced the question of how much personality the assistants should have.

His research suggests it comes down to timing. There are occasions when consumers want the assistants to "get out of the way and deliver the information" rather than demonstrate any personality, he says. "And there are times when it makes sense to manifest a lot of the brand values in order to set expectations, to remind people where this is coming from." Deciding when comes down to context.

Ideally, a bot could adapt to a customer who is in a bad mood and making a complaint versus one who is shopping or seeking information. Language processing may be getting refined, but it's not nearly as tone sensitive as a real human, Wandelmaier says. So for

customer service, some built-in casual quirkiness can feel inappropriate and even irritating.

Many times, “a simple, straightforward assertion of fact is received much better than anything with a layer of personality to it,” he says. “The moments for personality are really bookending conversations: at the beginning introducing themselves, and at the very end.”

Just as L’Oréal is learning from the Beauty Gifter before developing voice services, RBC launched its AI financial assistant in August, which could eventually become the brand’s customer-facing voice.

RBC’s CMO, Alan Depencier, describes Nomi (named from the insight that customers want the bank to know them) as a kind of Siri for RBC, the bank’s own AI brand personality. It will provide insights about spending and account activity when customers log in to the mobile app, and learn which ones are useful to a specific customer through a rating system. It will also use predictive technology to make saving decisions.

While there’s no voice capability in Nomi’s current version (Nomi has no image or gender yet, either), “In the future it will be where we take our voice brand,” says Depencier.

The bank used mostly in-house design, tech and innovation specialists to develop the service, with ethnographic research central to the process. RBC’s partnership with Apple is about helping customers on the channels they’re already using, Depencier says, but the bank also wanted to “build a capability and an overall brand personality and experience that’s unique to RBC.”

### How many voices is too many?

Huge’s Wandelmaier says the big tech companies may want to develop “a centralized brain for their customer experience” that transfers across all devices – the voice assistant in your car, for example, will remember the conversation you had yesterday with your in-home smart speaker.

But there are risks for brands positioning their assistants “as extensions of the self,” he says. “This is at odds with what brands would like to be – essentially the brand ambassador talking to the customer.”

Wandelmaier thinks there will be opportunities for brands to bud in on the territory of the assistants like Siri and Alexa. (Some of the assistants are themselves cooperating. In August, Amazon and Microsoft announced that Alexa and Cortana would soon be on speaking terms. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos predicted that assistants would one day be smart enough to pass requests to whichever assistant is best suited to answer, without requiring the command, “Alexa, open Cortana,” or vice versa.)

Having Google Home find a recipe from a specific publication could leave room for a brand to intervene and answer the query in its own voice, for example, rather than Google Home reading it out. Dominos already has such a partnership with Google: “OK Google, order Domino’s,” a user says, and the brand’s own AI assistant, Dom, takes over the process.

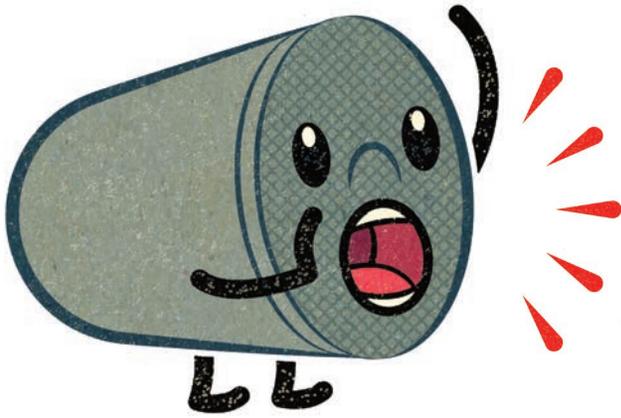
“At least in the near-term, I think that’s what all major brands playing in this space are going to want to do,” Wandelmaier says. “It’s essentially the most visible part of their return on investment: not only can we serve the customer better, but they are experiencing the brand when they interface with these services.”

But he’s not sure that’s the right approach for the user. Interacting with dozens of different brands a day could become overwhelming.

Brands should focus on designing for a “utilitarian experience,” Wandelmaier says, helping customers achieve what they’re looking for through the user interface. “That is still more palatable and practical in the short-term than a jaggy, branded and human-emulating-style experience,” he says.

One way to avoid some of the challenges around creating a brand voice and personality is to allow users





to do it for you. Google-owned navigation app Waze is taking this route. In August, it launched #NextWazeVoice, encouraging users to record themselves delivering Waze's stock navigational lines ("in 800 metres," "speed trap reported

ahead," etc.) to then share with friends.

The app had already partnered with brands on voices as promotional tools (Owen Wilson's character from *Cars 3*, for example, in a partnership with Disney). With #NextWazeVoice, it's inviting YouTube creators to record their own custom voice packs to share on their channels, offering a new platform for influencers to reach fans in a particularly intimate environment.

"This is a totally new format for content creators to entertain and engage their fans and ultimately promote

their brand," says Mike Wilson, Waze's country manager for Canada.

Families and friends recording their own versions is a model of personalization that could be adopted by other brands. Several experts consulted for this article said personalized brand voices are a future possibility.

In the meantime, there will be road bumps for brands developing voice tools. In addition to concerns about privacy, there are social barriers. The "uncanny valley" phenomenon where robots that are nearly – but not quite – identical to humans evoke unease or revulsion is true of voices, too.

"The technology has matured but our understanding of human nature has not progressed that fast," says Vassilios Alexiou, group director for creative at Huge. "A lot of people just don't like talking to machines."

As with the Google Glass and IBM's Watson, voice assistants might be better suited to the workplace than for mass consumption right now. Alexiou says Huge is working with corporations on tools for workers in labs and other spaces whose hands are occupied and need to interact by voice.

"The consumer-facing stuff is further along the journey," he says. "We've got to learn a lot more before we can create very successful applications of that." 



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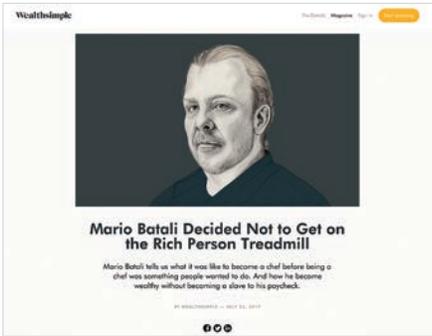
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## 2017 BRANDS OF THE YEAR

**WE CALL IT BRANDS OF THE YEAR, BUT THE TITLE DOESN'T TELL** the whole story. Our BOYs are usually like icebergs: there's enough peeking out for us to admire in 2017, but much of the work goes back several years. Our stories aim to take you below the surface. ¶ Nissan, for example, is being recognized for its consistent, long-running brand platform. "Conquer All Conditions" was built from an insight about safety, and the brand has followed through on it. ¶ Same with A&W, which used the position it staked out years ago around simple ingredients to drive urban growth. ¶ And rather than getting complacent with its dominant position, the SAQ used loyalty to reinvigorate its relationship with customers. ¶ Though it's been producing cheeky campaigns for years, Rethink Breast Cancer had us rethinking the non-profit model by creating a product line that generates revenue while providing a valuable service to its niche target. ¶ Finally, robo-advisor Wealthsimple managed to turn a potential weakness (software managing your money) into its strength by putting its humanity at the core of the brand with some effective marketing and design. ¶ We decided on this year's brands after consulting industry experts and then debating a long list of contenders over many days, narrowing it down to the five featured below (they appear in no particular order). And just like in past years, we've also included a few Brands to Watch whose unique positioning and marketing caught our eye, so be sure to read about Saje, Matt & Nat, and Collective Arts Brewing as well.



# A robo-advisor's human touch

Canadian startup Wealthsimple has grown globally by putting humanity at the core of its brand.

BY MEGAN HAYNES

Above, clockwise from left: Some targeted OOH across from iconic streetwear brand Supreme in New York; a shot of the Webby-winning website; a scene from the 2017 "Mad World" TV spot; images from the new "Investing for Humans" campaign; and a testimonial from the brand's online magazine.

**W**ealthsimple is not a typical financial startup. For one thing, it was founded by a Canadian and two American ad agency guys-turned-Silicon Valley entrepreneurs in California. It also launched in Canada, despite those Valley roots. And the idea stemmed from its founders' ignorance of financial products.

The website and software company, which simplifies and automates the investment process, was conceived after chief product officer Rudy Adler, ECD Mike Giepert and CEO Michael Katchen sold another startup called 1000memories (which allowed people to scan photos with their phones) to Ancestry.com in 2012.

Suddenly they had money and – like many of Wealthsimple's 25-to-45-year-old target – Adler and Giepert found investing intimidating and had no idea what to do with it. They turned to Katchen (the money-savvy one of the three) for advice and he created a spreadsheet with investing opportunities. As word spread, and friends approached the trio for the same advice, they realized there was an opportunity to fill the information void, says Adler.

After relocating to Toronto (where Katchen is from and where he wanted to live longer term) and securing two rounds of funding in 2015, Wealthsimple turned its eye towards marketing and branding.

The company tried to drill down to a core emotional truth, says Adler. "There's a lot of distrust and confusion around investing, especially

for a younger generation," he adds, an insight that came from talking with friends. "They lived through the financial crisis and [managing money can be] overwhelming and frustrating."

The original idea of creating software that could make investing simple and approachable fuelled the company's marketing message. Giepert and Adler used their marketing chops from their tenure at Wieden+Kennedy in Portland, where they worked on brands such as Nike, Levi and Dodge.

During its first year of operations, Wealthsimple grew its client base to 10,000 customers. Last year, it increased that to 15,000, and today, it manages more than \$1 billion in assets for 30,000 customers. (In comparison, Vancouver's Questrade, which opened in 1999, bills itself as Canada's largest online broker that targets boomers and manages more than \$11.9 billion.) In January, Wealthsimple started operating in the U.S. and it's planning to expand its service to the U.K. in the fall.

The company – which uses software to help create personalized portfolios for investors – competes in a crowded space, against the likes of other "robo-advisors," banks (such as BMO's SmartFolio) and even traditional financial advisors.

Wealthsimple takes a percentage of what's invested, as many investment advisors do. There's no fee for contributions less than \$5,000, while those under \$100,000 are charged 5%. When clients exceed \$100,000, the rate drops to 4%.



It offers unique products, such as its recently launched “Halal portfolio” (which forgoes investments in pork, alcohol and other products uncompliant with Islamic law) and a variety of socially responsible investment portfolios (such as clean energy brackets or stocks that exclude companies with poor social responsibility records).

The company is relatively straight-forward in its branding, opting for a message of simplicity and an “invest how you want” identity. It all stems from the human truth that money is incredibly personal, and that the company can offer solutions for everyone.

“I think one thing we noticed – and that seemed like a huge opportunity to us going in – was we didn’t feel like there were other financial institutions [both banks and wealth management firms] that had strong, memorable branding,” says Giepert. “Even other competitors from a pure product perspective might have been building suitable products to do the job, but I don’t think we were feeling a connection to the brand. We wanted there to be humanity at the core of our brand.”

Wealthsimple’s marketing has aimed to demonstrate how investing can be approachable and to highlight the team of people able to help customers if and when they need it. And while it’s still relatively small in the online investment market, it has big plans for its Gen X and Gen Y customer base.

In February 2016, the company launched its first marketing campaign to bring in new customers. It ran during the Canadian broadcast of the Super Bowl, alongside print, OOH and online ads. The “Future You” spot, created in-house, showed straight-forward conversations between 20-somethings and their future selves, discussing their changing financial needs and how robo-advising could help them achieve those fluid life goals.

The campaign stemmed from the idea that consumers can easily invest in their future, and eschewed scary talk about what would happen if they failed to meet those goals, says Giepert. It was also supported by content Wealthsimple’s website, which featured blog posts about how famous people (such as Elijah Wood, Bobbi Brown and Kylie Jenner) invested, how-tos and Q&As with advisors.

This February, during tax season, the brand launched its second marketing push, “Mad World,” also created in-house. In the ad, a man tries to make it through his day while receiving a myriad of contradictory advice on how to handle his investments. At home, he logs into Wealthsimple and breathes a sigh of relief.

“The first campaign was designed to be a little bit more informational,” Adler says. “We were a newer company, but now we’re a little older and we’ve grown a lot, so we’ve moved past the stage of trying to tell people specifically what we do.”

And while the two ad campaigns have driven new visitors to the website (which won Webby awards in 2016 and 2017), the company uses its Wealthsimple magazine – an online source for investing information and advice – as a more central part of its brand identity.

While branding is relatively obvious (it is called Wealthsimple, after all), the magazine’s stories are utilitarian. They include articles on apps you can use to budget and manage your money, how to trick yourself into saving and planning for a more luxurious parental leave. It also runs a regular Money Diaries feature, asking both ordinary and well-known people – from actors to entrepreneurs, spanning millennial and gen X demos – to share their money secrets and habits.

Using connections forged during the founders’ time at W+K and in the Valley, the team is able to tap well-known personalities – like Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and actor Woody Harrelson – to open up about the often-taboo topic of money. And while the celebrity articles do predictably well, it’s actually the content around everyday people that drives traffic.

“We recently had a story about a nun who took a vow of poverty. It was hugely popular,” says Giepert. “Real people are so much more relatable than Woody Harrelson.”

The duo is turning that insight into Wealthsimple’s latest marketing campaign. Also created in-house, with media handled by AI-driven agency Blackwood Seven in Copenhagen, the new TV and digital push directed by legendary documentarian Errol Morris includes more than 50 videos of 20 real people opening up about money. The spots span a variety of topics – from how they save, to their fears for the future, to their apprehension over investing – and launched mid-September.

“If you can make a connection over content, it’s so much easier to [get them] to listen to you talk about your product,” Giepert says.

The marketing itself is designed to appeal globally. While there are nuances in each country, for the most part, the “universal truths” about money translate across countries, Adler says.

Next up, Giepert says the brand is focusing its efforts on bringing some of its online work and branding into offline spaces, such as events. The goal, he says, is to make the brand even more tangible and drive home that there are humans on the other end of the software.

“Mike likes to say ‘Humans when you want them. Technology when you don’t,’” says Adler. “We’re a software company when it comes down to it. And it’s really interesting that so many people don’t want to interact with a person unless they have to – but there are so many others who want that human touch. We want to position our product in a way that’s easy for whichever type of user you are – you get the service you’re looking for and are most comfortable with.”

# Nissan doesn't play it safe

How a commitment to building drivers' confidence has made the auto brand stand out in the highly competitive SUV and crossover market.

BY JOSH KOLM

**C**onsistent, long-running brand platforms have become rare in Canadian automotive marketing.

One exception is Nissan. The world's sixth-largest automaker (and leading electric vehicle manufacturer) has not only consistently targeted Canadians with its crossovers and SUVs, but done so in a way that energizes an already popular category.

Over the last four years, a global desire to build the Nissan brand has resulted in an increased focus on unique work in the Canadian market to get drivers to connect with its "Innovation That Excites" positioning. That's where the Canada-born "Conquer All Conditions" platform comes in.

Launched in 2014 by TBWA Toronto (now Juniper Park\TBWA), the creative takes a cinematic approach to show how its crossovers and SUVs can handle whatever the harsh Canadian climate throws at them, dramatized through giant, evil snowmen with catapults or monsters made of rocks and mud. The ongoing campaign, created for the Nissan Rogue, has expanded to include the automaker's full portfolio of SUVs and has been adapted for other markets.

It's a prominent campaign in a red-hot category, as SUVs and crossovers are the most popular vehicle formats in Canada today. The segment now represents 39% of

new vehicle sales in Canada after overtaking passenger cars this year, which now account for one-third (from more than 50% around the time of the recession).

"When you surveyed car buyers a decade ago on what the most important reasons were for buying a particular car, safety would be somewhere between tenth and fifteenth. Now, it's consistently in the top five," says automotive analyst Dennis Desrosiers. "Consumers in the last decade have embraced safety, and that's why the SUV segment as a whole has grown so much. Nissan has, very wisely, done a good job at telling people about their advantages in that regard."

Following the lead of "Conquer," Nissan's director of marketing Steve Rhind says the company has been focusing on showing how its vehicles can give drivers confidence on the road.

"Canadians are pretty pragmatic when it comes to the reasons for purchasing a vehicle," Rhind says. "'Conquer All Conditions' came from the number one reason for buying a compact SUV – which was all-wheel drive. And that was because it gave them more confidence in difficult driving situations. It speaks to safety, sure, but our belief is also that to get their attention, we have to be exciting."

Right, from top: Nissan's OOH ads helped launch the Qashqai, a vehicle the brand hopes will build off the excitement cultivated through the monster-fighting "Conquer All Conditions" campaign (bottom).





Desrosiers points out that “Conquer All Conditions” is an ad campaign that, for the most part, rarely shows Nissan’s SUVs “fighting” or “defeating” any of the monsters. The vehicles are always dodging, evading or escaping the monstrous weather.

“An awful lot of drivers view safety as being able to escape a difficult situation, rather than prevent it,” Desrosiers says. “They want to be confident that they’ll be able to hit the gas and get out of a bad situation.”

Another recent spot showed a Nissan Rogue driver backing up in a campground, unaware that he was about to collide with an oncoming dump truck. Luckily, the motion sensors and collision monitors prevent a disaster.

“Some of the communications will be more cinematic and bigger, but you can’t do everything at that level,” Rhind says. “Sometimes you have to capture that essence in a different way. Even though a truck on a campground isn’t as cinematic, it’s still a dramatic moment where the vehicle saves the day.”

As of July, sales for the Rogue have so far grown a further 16.2% year-over-year, continuing seven consecutive years of sales growth for what has consistently been among the most popular vehicles in Canada. The brand’s Pathfinder and Murano SUVs also continue to perform well, and sales of the Leaf are up 11.7% in the growing electric vehicle segment.

Far from just reaping the benefits of a booming category, Nissan’s market share has also grown by more than two points since its renewed Canadian focus began.

On the flip side, sales for cars – including the Sentra, Altima and Maxima – are continuing to slip, mirroring an industry-wide decline. And sales for the smaller Juke crossover are also tumbling, but that could be attributed to the launch of the similarly sized Qashqai in June. The brand’s new vehicle was purposefully designed to straddle the line between compact car and crossover SUV. It has many of the features that have attracted drivers to crossovers – all-wheel drive, spacious interior and versatility – at a size

and price point more in line with today’s customer needs.

For Qashqai, Nissan is looking to reach a consumer segment that’s interested in smaller vehicles – especially those in urban environments – by using the equity it has built in crossovers and SUVs.

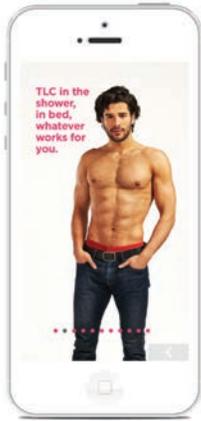
After a small pre-release digital campaign in April, marketing for the Qashqai’s launch debuted in the summer. The lead TV spot showed a Qashqai driver diverting off a regular city street in favour of significantly rougher terrain, traversing dirt, mud and holes in the ground, before coming back into the city again. The “best of both worlds” message is also reflected in a national OOH campaign, the first Nissan has done in Canada since 2013.

“The compact car was number one until compact SUVs took over,” Rhind says. “So there’s still a lot of people who own and like that kind of vehicle, but they might not consider moving up to an SUV because it’s bigger or more expensive. This is an opportunity to bring in a vehicle that drives like a [compact] car, but has [SUV] capabilities.”

Nissan has also begun to apply its marketing approach to new automotive technology. In addition to connected car platforms, Nissan has been a global leader in developing autonomous vehicle technology, most of which is meant to avoid collisions and keep passengers safe without a driver. Pieces of that tech have already made their way into Nissan’s vehicles, and the automaker has been speaking about collision detection, forward emergency braking, blind-spot sensors and all-wheel drive to help make drivers confident (and safe) on any road.

Rhind says Nissan’s “Intelligent Mobility” platform (where the company’s vision and mission is to create technology and cars that integrate into society) will be an even bigger part of the marketing going forward.

“That’s what takes us to the future,” he says. “And it’s proof of how we deliver on ‘Innovation That Excites.’ It’s a new way to show that confidence can be exciting, on top of keeping you connected.”



# Rethink rejigs the non-profit model

Next, the scrappy brand is expanding across the continent and reaching out to tweens.

BY MEGAN HAYNES

**R**ethink Breast Cancer has always punched above its weight. But it hasn't been easy.

The Toronto non-profit is challenged in a category replete with equally worthy causes, each competing for the same donor coin. Not only that, it also has to carve a share of voice within the dominant "pink" cause sphere – charities and brands raising money for breast cancer – to reach women under 40 (a very small percentage of the breast cancer population).

Despite having a staff of only 11, Rethink has seen steady growth in its fundraising activities, last year netting \$2.9 million in donations, up from \$2 million in 2015 and \$1.8 million in 2014. (For comparison, the Canadian Cancer Society pulled in more than \$270

million, though that's been on a steady decline year-over-year since 2011).

In fact, Rethink, founded in 2001, is so small that the organization has never been able to pay for brand tracking, says Alison Lawler-Dean, Rethink's VP marketing and communication. It only started buying media this year. "And we're talking, like, a couple thousand dollars [for ad spend]," she says.

Rethink has grown using edgy humour, like its mega-successful Your Man Reminder app (by John St.) with sexy shirtless men reminding women to perform self-examinations.

But in late 2016, it went a little deeper (without compromising its cheeky tone) to connect in a more thoughtful way with a product line that gave breast cancer patients and survivors a voice.

The Give-A-Care product line – which acts as both a revenue generator and a way of providing support – has picked up numerous awards, including a D&AD Graphite Pencil and a pair of Cannes Lions (not to mention a few AToMiC and Shopper Innovation Awards).

Give-A-Care was originally intended as an update to a guide for medical professionals. Only 4% of women diagnosed with breast cancer are under 40 – Rethink's primary target audience. As a result, these women – who typically have a different set of questions for doctors than the majority of cancer patients – are often overlooked,

Above, clockwise from left: The Your Man Reminder app; Rethink's annual Boobyball; the Cancer Fabulous Diaries offers advice and coping techniques; some brand merch; and a still from the LiveLaughLearn series.



Lawler-Dean says. For example, questions around child bearing and career planning are common, yet they're not usually discussed. That's what the guide was intended to solve.

In focus groups with breast cancer survivors and patients, the brand realized there might be a way of making a bigger splash with marketing efforts, Lawler-Dean says. "The overwhelming feedback was 'Everyone wants to help – they just don't know what to do or say'...and friends and family can get paralyzed by that."

Rethink and Lq2, which donated its time, were inspired to create a product line of gifts (some co-branded with companies including Aveda and H&M) that people could give to help women during treatment. Some products were designed from points in the guide, while others came from feedback women gave about items they wished they had during chemo, such as lemon drops for dry mouth, or moisturizer to keep chemo-battered skin soft.

The products, which range in price from \$4 to \$100, were given cheeky names: "My-mouth-is-dryer-than-prohibition water bottle" and "I'm-tired-dehydrated-and-cranky-so-don't-give-me-any-of-your lip balm." Designed to look like high-end hygiene products, each comes with a consumer-friendly version of the 10-point guide.

The campaign rolled out on social media with a video featuring real cancer patients talking about the items they wished they'd received. Give-A-Care has sold more than 1,500 products that have travelled as far as Italy, and the non-profit is in early talks to roll the product into retail stores.

Thanks to investment in analytics through a non-profit CRM tracking tool, the brand was able to re-target consumers throughout the year at key times, such as Valentine's Day (when lube and other sexy-time products take centre stage) and the holiday season, with users on social media invited to buy Give-A-Care packages to donate to women in need. More than 400 were purchased, leading to the biggest holiday fundraising push in the brand's history.

Part of the campaign's success, Lawler-Dean says, comes down to its increased international presence.

Since the non-profit's audience is typically younger gen X and older gen Y, Rethink has always had a strong digital presence, she says. And the organization has increasingly found global audiences online, prompting a shift to focus its services more internationally.

Lawler-Dean, who joined in 2014 to help further focus its marketing online, says the evolution was natural, going where the audience can be best served. She points to a 2015 content push that stemmed from the desire to improve its in-person support groups.

The groups in various Canadian cities provide a place for women to speak with other young breast cancer patients and receive advice and planning tools. "A good group for us was 20 women," Lawler-Dean says. Logistical issues – such as child minding or transportation, or even the effects of chemo treatment – prevented many from accessing these groups.

"We took a step back and said, 'If we're there to support them, how do we do that on their terms?'"

Based on the success of some of its online videos, Rethink created a YouTube series – "Live. Laugh. Learn." – tackling five topics related to living with cancer across 25 videos. The brand partnered

with Avon (which sponsored the series), as well as publishers like *Chatelaine*, *Flare* and *Refinery29* to spread the word.

One of the series' most popular videos garnered 32,000 hits on Rethink's YouTube channel (and an additional 50,000 views on *Refinery*), an almost 1,600% increase in participation from the in-person groups. The brand has since followed it up with series on beauty and talking to kids about breast cancer (children of women with breast cancer narrate the videos).

Almost 50% of the audience views today come from the U.S., Lawler-Dean says, and Rethink has officially changed its mandate to supporting women with breast cancer across North America. Its fundraising (with the exception of the internationally available Give-A-Care line) will still predominantly take place in Canada, but its marketing will push across the continent, as well as potentially expanding events like *Boobyball*, an annual gala hosted in five Canadian cities.

It is also looking to see how to make Give-A-Care a more permanent part of its fundraising mix, Lawler-Dean says.

In the meantime, Rethink is going after an even younger target audience for the next Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Launching at the end of September, with creative from Sid Lee, the non-profit is embarking on an education effort for teens and tweens.

The campaign addresses some of the misconceptions about breast cancer and flows from a Rethink study that found young girls overestimate their risk of breast cancer.

"Some people worried it was contagious. The Angelina Jolie thing came up [where the actress discovered she carried a gene for aggressive breast cancer], and kids assumed if someone in the family had breast cancer, they would too. There were beliefs that underwire caused breast cancer," Lawler-Dean says. "The opposite effect of the pink movement is that there isn't a lack of awareness of breast cancer, but people still don't know the facts."

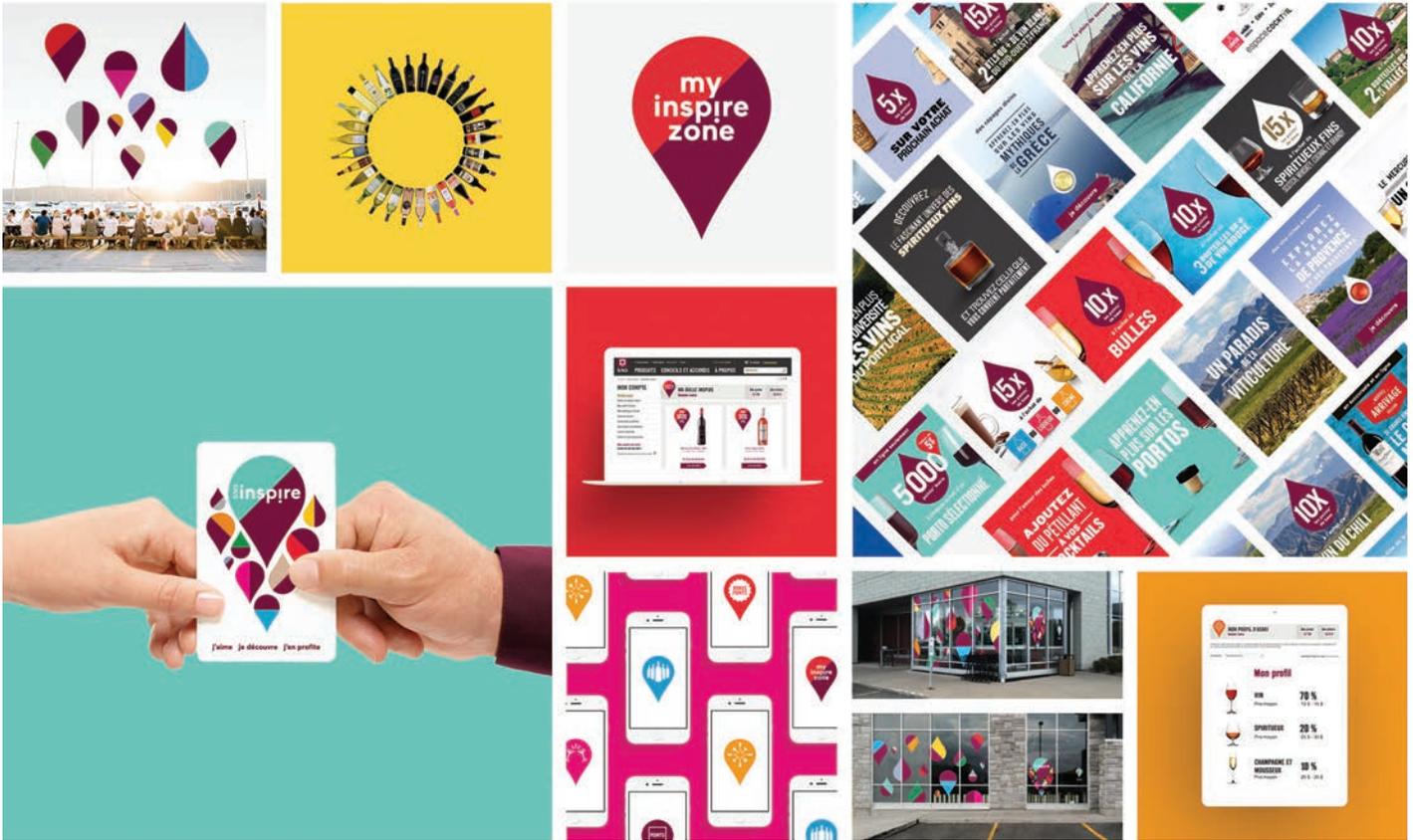
Indeed, the goal of the campaign is to educate youth on healthy, long-term breast habits (such as regular check-ups) in a non-threatening way.

To do this, the brand and Sid Lee are launching a "retro" call line. With a launch video inspired by the famous *Mean Girls* four-split screen scene, youth are encouraged to ask a Facebook chatbot breast cancer questions, with elements pointing them to Rethink's website for more information.

The "#8008132" campaign (that's #BOOBIES, if you type it on a calculator and hold it upside down) will be supported by old-school phone books set up at popular music and cultural festivals, encouraging people to "call in" for more information (and post their selfies). A social media push will also work to drive traffic.

H&M will launch a limited-edition, breast cancer-inspired line of t-shirts, available across marquee stores in North America, with all proceeds going to Rethink.

"Since day one the organization has always stood out as a challenger and making a lot of noise," Lawler-Dean says. "We're this scrappy underdog – we always try and do things a little bit differently. We like to call it the 'Rethink' way."



# Cheers to SAQ's CRM success

Quebec's liquor retailer makes it very personal.

BY JEREMY LLOYD

One of the earliest heralds of the Société des alcools du Québec's (SAQ) CRM breakthrough opened with the lines, "A loyalty card for a monopoly? How does that make any sense?"

Peter Hadekel's article in the *Montreal Gazette* from January 2016 was one of the first to track the startling adoption rates of Inspire, the loyalty program introduced by Quebec's government-owned liquor retailer. But even he couldn't ignore the seeming silliness of the offer. In a province where consumers seeking quality have few options but to buy wine from the SAQ, what need does it have for a loyalty program?

Many Quebecers decided to find out for themselves, however. By the time Hadekel wrote his article, two months after Inspire's launch, 1.2 million people were already signed on – about 100,000 past its

initial objective. Seventy per cent of SAQ customers knew of the program (thanks to an integrated campaign that included contesting, ads on TV, print and online, as well as engagement on social and in-store), and 64% of those who had signed up were active users.

Today, Inspire has more than two million members. What began in 2015 with a beautifully designed "bubble" logo and the lure of points for purchases has become an effective intelligence and communication tool, signalling SAQ's evolution into a data-led company. The brand is now altering its strategy to put personalization at the heart of its operations.

Despite pundits' misgivings about whether a player as dominant as SAQ needed a loyalty program, Sandrine Bourlet, head of marketing and client experience, knew such a program could yield results. But it needed to be more than mere discounting and point collecting. Inspire was designed to be a customer service tool from the outset in response to a study the retailer conducted to gather intelligence on how it should adjust to shifting shopper expectations (especially with the incoming millennial shoppers who, as any retailer has discovered, don't shop the same way their parents do). One of the survey's biggest takeaways was that customers wanted a more personalized experience.

That's in line with what loyalty experts are seeing across Canada. "Making people feel special and recognized for doing business with you is surprisingly meaningful beyond discounts," says Sean Claessen,

**Above:** Inspire's bubble logo is taking over as the program gains prominence in SAQ's marketing.



**(champ)agne**

**congratulations to the SAQ  
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**Right:** The Cossette-designed icon can be a wine drop, or flipped to become a thought bubble.

EVP, strategy and innovation at Bond Brand Loyalty. Bond's latest study on the effectiveness of loyalty and CRM programs in Canada showed Canadians tend to value experiential elements over "earn-and-burn" dividends. Respondents reported higher levels of program satisfaction from things like personalized recommendations, for example, than more common loyalty benefits like rebates and discounts.

"We all have a sense that more data is being collected on us," Claessen says. "Companies that find a way to use that productively to ease the shopping experience and make people feel special because they've done business with you... these are things that will differentiate a brand."

Bourlet says this is the very essence of Inspire's mandate. The company's focus for the next few years will be "to make the best personalized experience for the consumer as possible. We want to be more relevant. Our [goal] is to have the best CRM to understand our consumer."

Inspire launched in late 2015 with the typical trappings of a modern loyalty program: a card for your wallet, an agreement to collect data and a mobile app to track the points you rack up. Initially, the offer was \$1 off a purchase after a member spent \$200.

As with other loyalty plans, SAQ also offered bonus points for selected products like, say, those made in Quebec. It could likewise drive consumers to specific channels, such as online ordering, with the promise of extra points, all of which can be tracked on the app.

This initial, points-focused version of the program drove solid results at the cash register. In its 2016 annual report, the company calls out its "Get 5,000 SAQ bonus points when you buy 5 bottles or more" promotion, which generated more than 370,000 transactions.

But as its pool of customer data grew, Inspire was able to do more with it and become more of the customer service tool Bourlet intended it to be. The customer service side really got rolling when the Inspire app was upgraded in September 2016 to add a number of personalized tools. It revolves around the customer's purchase history, and includes a list of every bottle they've taken home from SAQ to help them remember favourites and, more importantly, to make recommendations based on repeat purchases. Tend to buy Spanish garnacha? Like fruitier whites? The app looks at a customer's purchase profile and steers them to labels beyond their go-to list.

Data also showed that offering bonus Inspire points isn't the best way to engage every single customer. For example, many wine and

liquor buyers are connoisseurs, Bourlet says, looking for rarer bottles that arrive in limited quantities. When new or limited-run bottles that match a member's taste profile become available, they get an early notification and are directed to order online.

Perhaps the most impressive new element is the newsletter the brand customizes to each member. Both its content and product offers are shaped by two data sets SAQ owns: the customer's purchase history and their engagement data that tracks how they have reacted to specific offers (i.e. bonus points, discounts, etc).

This means each subscriber receives offers tailored to their personal taste. Someone could, conceivably, get a deal no one else gets. No two newsletters in a subscription list of two million are quite the same.

"They're moving from being a mass-media team to a personalized one-to-one marketing team," says Louis Deschenes, EVP and general manager of Cossette in Quebec. The shop worked with SAQ on Inspire's customer journey on contract, helping shape the data strategy and what services to offer in return. After helping to build the program (with software company Comarch overseeing its development) and promote its launch, the Société had Cossette take on a broader assignment that includes brand and media strategy, digital and creative.

It's where Bourlet sees marketing opportunities going forward, dialing back on mass promotion in favour of customer experience and the relationship they have with SAQ's sales staff. In her words, there will be "more promotion, but less mass promotion."

"We can't ignore mass marketing, but it's more about branding position than discovering categories," Bourlet says. "Promotional targeting will be done with SAQ Inspire."

With Inspire set to become the keystone of its marketing spend going forward, its "bubble" logo appears to be invading its overall branding. While SAQ's purple square logo is still being used, the wine-drop-shaped Inspire icon can be seen everywhere these days from bags, to ads, to in-store signage.

And Bourlet says the plan will certainly evolve beyond its current form, something it can do because it's a proprietary platform. Because SAQ owns the data, Claessen says they are beholden to no one except their customers in how they develop their program.

"I really applaud what the SAQ has done," he says. "Even in a highly regulated market, they see the value of catering to their customers uniquely, on a one-to-one basis."



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# A&W stays rooted in real

The QSR is growing among millennials thanks to a commitment to more real ingredients and less packaging waste.

BY HARMEET SINGH



more Canadian-made products).

The ingredients promise has also translated into the “Good Food Makes Good Food” restaurant concept. The chain aims to eliminate as much packaging as possible (drinks come in frosted glass mugs, fries sit in metal baskets, while breakfast is served with metal forks and knives, for example). The majority of the paper waste is compostable and the brand is working on eliminating the remaining waste, such as plastic straws.

“Whether it’s the restaurant menu or our facilities, they all need to...speak the same language,” says Rob Fussey, a 36-year A&W veteran who began cooking burgers in Winnipeg. He’s now VP of marketing and concept innovation.

The “better ingredients” shift has been part of A&W’s evolution away from its core baby boomer base and nostalgia-driven marketing to focus on bringing more millennial customers through its doors.

In part, that’s meant expanding beyond its foothold in the suburbs (where it has drive-thrus and mall locations) and into cities, prompted by Canada’s urbanization, Fussey says. “We needed to respond to that because the world was changing and we needed to change with the world.”

The brand now has 900 locations across Canada; 50 are part of its urban location strategy, which began in 2010. More recently, A&W has been doubling down on expansion in Ontario and Quebec. In 2016, 21 of its 31 new locations were in those two provinces, which Newitt says have traditionally been underrepresented for the brand (its stronghold has been in Western Canada since its first location opened in 1956 in Winnipeg).

Millennials are also proving crucial for the brand’s growth. In early 2016, the company introduced a new franchise model aimed at lowering the upfront investment to open a

**W**ith its long tables, wooden taps and walls adorned with glass jugs, a new watering hole in downtown Winnipeg was like a flame that drew millennial moths on a summer’s day.

It wasn’t a hipster craft beer locale. Instead of barley and hops, the pop-up was home to sarsaparilla root, birch bark and cane sugar – some of the natural ingredients brewed into A&W’s revamped root beer.

The “Root Brewery” – complete with spokesperson Allen serving up frosted mugs – was a 2017 marketing initiative tied to the overhaul of the brand’s signature soda.

“It was a big deal because that’s where it all started,” says Tom Newitt, senior director of marketing and brand communications. “It’s always been our most famous product. Typically when you say ‘A&W,’ root beer

pops into their mind.”

The new root beer recipe was the latest in a series of product shifts that have been central to the QSR’s success.

“A&W has a serious commitment to strategy,” Newitt says. Every three to five years, the brand embarks on a “strategic renewal,” where senior leadership meets to analyze the business and set corporate goals.

A former CPG marketer in the U.K., Newitt joined the restaurant in 2013, just as it was coming out of its most recent strategic renewal that led to a greater focus on what it calls “better ingredients.”

That strategy began with the burger brand’s hormone and steroid-free beef. Over the years, it has extended to antibiotic-free chicken and pork, eggs from vegetarian-fed hens and organic fair trade coffee. (In 2016, the chain also switched all ketchup and mustard to French’s, in a bid to offer even

**Above:** A&W’s summer Root Brewery was created to promote its latest product shift – a new version of its signature root beer with natural ingredients.

store so that the younger demographic could build more urban locations.

“It does bring something fresh to the whole business,” Newitt says of the model.

The positive impact has been felt across A&W, with same store sales growth increasing 11% between 2014 and 2016, which marked the 25th straight year of systems sales growth (after a slight dip in early 2017, growth picked up again in the second quarter this year as well).

Still, strategy isn’t enough without the whole organization moving forward together. Both Newitt and Fussey are quick to point to what the brand calls its “climate goals,” which, coupled with the strategic renewal process, are imperative to A&W’s success.

The goals are the principles for how the organization operates, from things like “we put our guests first” to inviting feedback and working with partners. Revised by management and franchisees following each strategic renewal, the behaviours guide how the QSR functions, from upper management

to front-line workers.

The latter has become particularly important on the marketing side in 2017. A&W visited more farms, ranches and factories to highlight in its advertising, but also to give its marketers and agency a better understanding of its ingredients promise.

“It’s not just us booking a ticket and hoping that we get some great content,” says Chelsea Stoelting, partner and managing director of client services at Rethink – A&W’s 17-year agency partner. “We really work to understand what they do and how they do it and then to communicate that to Canadians.”

Indeed, credibility has been at the core of the brand’s long-running, man-on-the-street style advertising, with its spokesperson Allen interviewing real Canadians about the brand’s latest “better ingredients” initiatives.

The philosophy of authenticity means creative that speaks to the audience on each platform specifically, Stoelting notes.

“We don’t take a TV ad and cut it down for YouTube,” she says. One 2016 pre-roll ad, for example, featured Allen simply explaining that the brand’s chicken is raised without antibiotics before inviting viewers to either skip the ad or have a staring contest with him.

It’s also using an influencer strategy, geared toward authenticity-seeking millennials, to complement its actor-free ads. At the Root Brewery, for example, the brand captured content with chefs and bartenders brewing their own root beers, a new strategy for A&W.

The Root Brewery project signalled a shift in its marketing approach, Newitt notes. It was a first in terms of the brand creating an event and drawing people to it.

Going forward, more ideas like that will emerge as A&W evolves how it communicates its ingredients messaging. “The main thing,” Newitt says, “is to keep it real.”

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## Brands to Watch

Keep your eye on these up-and-comers – a vegan accessory maker from Montreal, a Hamilton brewer with crafty cans, and a Vancouver skincare brand – as they gain favour throughout the country.

### MATT & NAT'S VEGAN VENTURE ETHICAL FASHION GOES BIG.

By Harmeet Singh

There was a time when “vegan accessories” might have conjured up images of hemp purses with questionable design.

But just as vegan food has evolved to suit more mainstream palates, so too has the fashion. Leading the trend in the Canadian market is Montreal brand Matt & Nat, which has proven itself popular beyond consumers on the hunt for ethical fashion.

Many Canadians likely know the brand from their trips to Indigo, where the vegan accessory maker's handbags, totes, wallets and backpacks have adorned the bookseller's shelves and website for the past five years.

But since establishing itself in Montreal in 1995, the brand is now standing out on its own, with dedicated retail spaces showing off its minimalist design aesthetic.

Matt & Nat opened its first standalone brick-and-mortar location in March 2016 at the CF Carrefour Laval in Quebec. At press time, it had grown to four locations, with a fifth set to open this fall in Montreal. That will be followed by two new Toronto stores in 2018, bringing it close to its ultimate goal of 10 stores across Canada. “We don't want to open 40, 50 stores in Canada,” says president and CEO Manny Kohli. “We can, but this is not our vision.”

Rather than just driving sales, the strategy is for the stores to drive brand awareness, he says. Through its wholesale business, boutique retailers don't buy its entire collection and it needed a forum to showcase its wares within a design curated by the brand:

clean, minimalist and contemporary. “You pay \$150 but the bag looks like \$500,” Kohli says, summing up the appeal.

Since Kohli bought out his partner's half of the business in 2013, Matt & Nat has focused heavily on its contemporary design aesthetic and growing into a lifestyle brand. Last year, it expanded into footwear, now offering a line of flats, boots and sneakers. Plans are in the works to expand its line of sunglasses and, in fall 2018, it will introduce soy candles, its first home products, Kohli says.

Matt & Nat's sales have grown 400% since 2013, according to Kohli. Currently, 60% of sales come from Canada, with the remainder split evenly between the U.S. and international markets. He attributes that success to focused designs created specifically for its 19- to 40-year-old target.

Another change was to add an in-house photographer, a move he describes as one of his best decisions. “We shoot for social media pretty much every day,” he says, with Facebook and Instagram as the primary marketing channels.

There's also a heavy focus on bloggers, sending products to influencers who fit with its ethical positioning. (Along with its commitment to cruelty-free products, the brand also moved to using recycled materials in the linings of its bags in 2007.)

Kohli says he's also looking overseas for growth potential, including in India, where e-commerce is becoming popular and the brand's vegan message resonates with urbanites.

## THE CHAMELEON CAN COLLECTIVE ARTS BREWING DESIGNS ITS BRAND PURPOSE INTO ITS LABELS.

By Mark Burgess

**Right:** Cans from the brewery's Series 8 designs, showcased at a reveal party.  
**Below:** The mural at the Hamilton brewery; and an artful can.

**Collective Arts Brewing has a lofty manifesto** about fusing craft beer and art, but co-founder and CEO Matt Johnston traces its approach to something more basic. "Stubborn ideas are what we're founded on," he says.

That's what prompted the one-time VP of marketing at Moosehead to venture out on his own with creative partner and designer Bob Russell. And it's what has led to branding that embodies Collective Arts' purpose of promoting artists and musicians while keeping its signature beers frustratingly unfamiliar. Every few months, beer labels change to feature a new piece of art.

"Both of us disdain the status quo," Johnston says of himself and co-founder Russell. "So having a brand that's always evolving naturally fits us."

Four years after launching, the Hamilton, Ont.-based craft beer with the striking-but-fickle cans has featured more than 600 artists and musicians on its products. It has also sold a lot of beer: production has tripled every year, and sales did the same in 2016. Its beer is available in most of Canada and New England, as well as locations in Spain, Italy and Australia.

All the brewery's marketing is done in-house, with a team of four (in addition to the founders) handling strategy, design, content and social. The latter is big, with the brand relying on a community of more than 10,000 artists from 40 countries to help spread the calls for new art submissions and to promote the products. It also runs some social ads in new markets.

At any given time, Collective Arts beer can be found in stores with four different looks – or, to put it another way, a devotee's favourite beer may have 16 different labels in one year. It can be hard to keep track of, but Johnston trusts his audience's intelligence and curiosity when browsing the shelves.

"Even though you don't necessarily see our brand name, you very much know it's us. It does jump out because it's beautiful pieces of art," he says. And there's always enough Collective Arts branding to be identifiable without taking away from the artist's work, he adds.

But rather than just being a design conceit, the label art provides the brand with a built-in target community of artists and musicians. With each call for submissions, Collective Arts gets about 3,000 entries. Johnston attributes



the interest to the artist-friendly terms: the brand doesn't ask for unique work, claims no ownership, and promotes the artists through its channels (artists get a \$200 US stipend and their work is featured on roughly 35,000 cans of beer).

The cans can be scanned with phones for more information about the artist or to listen to the featured band's music. After initially partnering with Blippar, Collective Arts just launched its own app, built by Hamilton-based digital agency Hifyre, to play the music or bring the consumer to the artist's page.

The designs allow for a populist approach in new markets. While sponsoring a tattoo convention in Boston earlier this year, Collective Arts made cans featuring the work of four of the artists. As it plans to launch in Chicago and Nashville this fall, it's building a base by featuring artists from those cities on the labels.

Closer to home, there's a branded content partnership with Toronto's Indie88 to produce the Black Box Sessions recordings of artists including Spoon, Austra and Mac DeMarco (the content lives on both the radio station's and the brewer's websites). Collective Arts just took over the Hamilton brewing space it was sharing with Nickel Brook Brewing and is transforming it to include a music venue and art space, with a commissioned graffiti wall (the opening party in August featured new beers and a performance by the band Weaves).

Next up? There are plans for another brewing space in Toronto, though the team is still looking, Johnston says.

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## HOW SAJE STRUCK OIL THE NATURAL SKINCARE COMPANY IS SPROUTING UP EVERYWHERE.

By Val Maloney



**Above:** Saje echoes the ingredients in its bottles with plants and natural accents in its stores.

**Saje has built a business on the idea that** if you can't make a product that's 100% natural, then don't make it at all.

The company, which sells completely natural essential oil and skincare products, was founded in Vancouver by husband-and-wife team Jean-Pierre LeBlanc and Kate Ross LeBlanc in 1992. The impetus came after Jean-Pierre got into a car accident and was seeking more natural remedies for his health challenges.

While it experienced moderate growth in its first 18 years, business began to skyrocket between 2010 and 2015, a period that saw revenue jump 1,012%. In 2016, the company entered *Profit* magazine's ranking of Canada's fastest-growing companies at #74, and this year, Saje is opening five new stores in Canada and 11 in the U.S., bringing its total to 71 at the end of the year. It is also making a more mass consumer play by opening new mall locations, including a large presence in Toronto's Yorkdale Mall.

A mix of internal and external factors are behind the wellness company's recent growth spurt.

First came the money, with Saje bringing on undisclosed Canadian financial partners to help fuel the expansion about seven years ago. Next, the company did a review of its brand identity, hiring the co-founders' daughter, Kiara LeBlanc, as VP brand and creative director. That addition led to a redesign that Katie Drechsel, VP of marketing, digital and customer experience at Saje, says makes its stores and packaging match the feel of the product. Saje incorporates nature into its store design, with natural elements like plant walls, as well as wood furniture and clean aesthetic.

Externally, Saje was responding to a shift in how people approach their health, moving from treating symptoms at the doctor's office to being more preventative in their everyday lives by using natural oils, for example.

"I like to joke that we are a 25-year startup," says Drechsel. In the past two years she has been at the company, Saje has grown from 12 to 160 employees at its Vancouver headquarters. The 12-person in-house creative team works on everything from product packaging to photography and website design.

Beyond its ubiquitous jute bags that act as a marketing vehicle, the company typically uses social media posts, community partnerships, influencer events and in-store seminars to promote the brand. It also recently started testing paid Instagram advertising this summer.

As part of its sampling strategy, Saje partners with like-minded health and wellness-focused companies, such as fellow Vancouver-founded brands, including Lululemon and Yyoga, as well as SoulCycle and Nike. Partnerships include pop-up events, product seeding, gifting and locker room takeovers. It's also collaborated with TED for the last two Vancouver TED Talk summits, creating a wellness lounge and educational breakfast on natural healing.

"Whenever we [enter a new] partnership, we look at how we can elevate an experience, create a new experience or how we can educate," says Drechsel.

In addition to the larger partnerships, Saje has local community specialists on the ground in key markets like Toronto, Vancouver, New York and L.A., who are tasked with finding opportunities for customer connections in those areas. Jean-Pierre still hosts about 50 educational seminars at Saje locations each year.

Drechsel says Saje is nowhere close to the top of its growth trajectory, and is planning to increase brand awareness in Canada and the U.S., where the company opened its first physical store in 2016. She says efforts will be focused on the areas where Saje can have the biggest impact, which is measured by product trials, conversations about wellness, and how many people they can help feel better.

"There is a lot we can still do to grow the natural wellness sector and our brand in the next three years," she says. "We want to continue to be a thought leader and sharing with them how they can improve their wellness."



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# Alain Desormiers' really big startup

Touché's founder still runs his agency like it's just starting out. That approach fuelled a year of big wins, including *strategy's* Media Agency Leader of the Year title.

BY BREE RODY-MANTHA

**T**ouché! founder and CEO Alain Desormiers says that, like any entrepreneur, he sometimes feels like he's stayed in startup mode since he founded the agency in 1995.

"I like to get involved in so many things," he says.

"Putting things together in terms of marketing initiatives, corporate affairs, talent management and even office space, I'm very focused on the culture and the day-to-day of the agency."

One thing he doesn't like to do, however, is get between his team and the agency's clients. He's a fan of autonomy, and Karine Courtemanche, president of Touché!, says his "hands-off" approach helps build his employees' confidence.

Another sign, says Courtemanche, is that among the management team, there has been very little turnover. She says that's a result of a positive environment that's tied to Desormiers and his business goals. "He really is in love with the idea of efficiently running a company," she says. "He's driven by creating a work environment that makes profit, and yet people don't feel enslaved."

Courtemanche notes that in the last five years, revenue has grown by 30%. The agency has also picked up a slew of big brand accounts including Volkswagen and Audi, H&R Block and Agropur, while retaining Tourisme Montreal, Quebec Tourism Alliance and Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec.

While Desormiers says the VW Group win (which marked Touché's first key automotive account) is "probably the biggest thing to happen to the agency this year," he's most proud of the retentions — not a single review this year resulted in a client loss. "The odds are always against you when you re-pitch," he says. "So it's a very big honour to have won back all the accounts we re-pitched."

The agency has also racked up award wins — its "Bully Ads" campaign for the Canadian Safe Schools Network and the "Fastest Olympic Campaign" for Sport Chek gave Touché! recognition on a global level (both taking home Gold at the Festival of Media in Rome and the Internationalist Awards in NYC, as well as landing on the Cannes Media shortlist). The agency was also awarded Media Agency of the Year at the Festival of Media, a first for a Canadian agency. And according to the Gunn Report, Touché took home 60 awards this year, making it the top-ranked in Canada.

At a time when some agencies are tightening the purse strings on awards, Desormiers says this is still very much a focus for Touché!

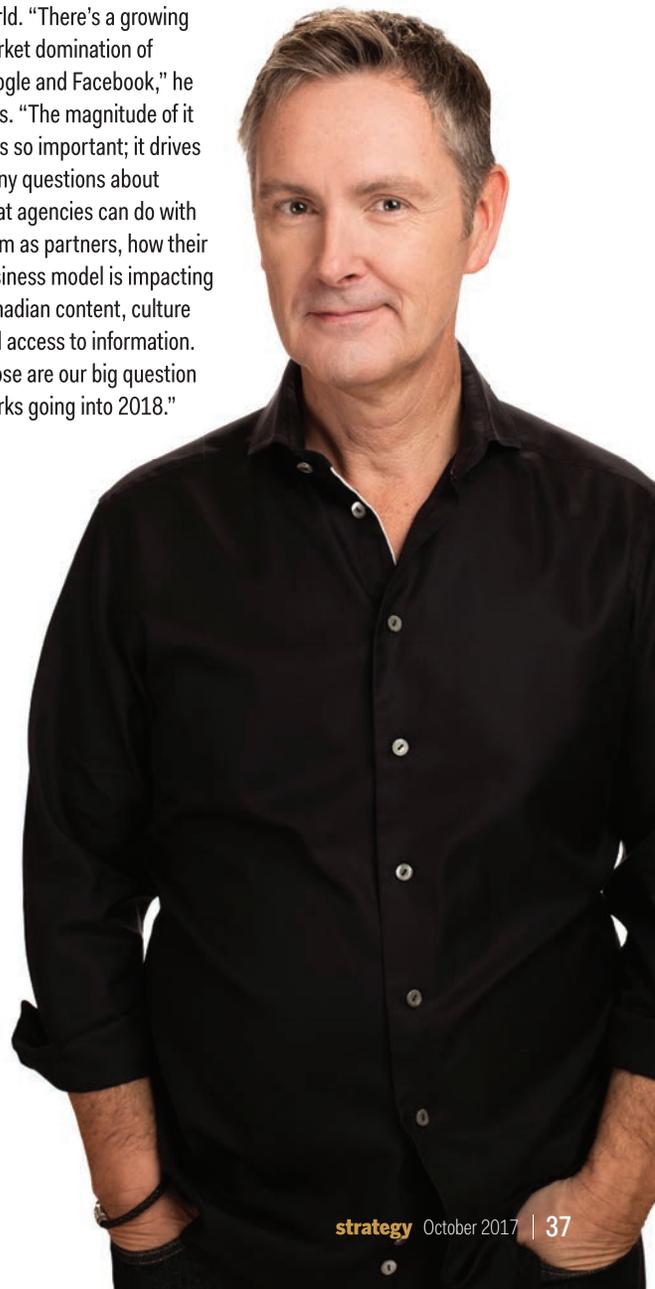
"Awards are our way of saying, 'Hey, this isn't just us saying it's great, this is the industry — judges in Toronto and Montreal, New York, Cannes and Rome — saying it's great.'"

Another area of investment is data insights and research talent, largely driven by the creation of Touché's marketing science department this year. The division now contains 21 employees whose main task is to deliver new insights based on the swaths of data from various media companies.

But despite his success, Desormier says the pace of change still keeps him up at night.

"Never before has the HR function been as critical," he says. "We have only had our [HR] department for a little more than a year, and in the last seven years Touché went from 40 [staff members] to 250. It's now a matter of helping us acquire exactly the right profiles and skillsets, which are not the same as what they used to be."

Heading into 2018, Desormiers sees a big challenges ahead, particularly in the digital world. "There's a growing market domination of Google and Facebook," he says. "The magnitude of it all is so important; it drives many questions about what agencies can do with them as partners, how their business model is impacting Canadian content, culture and access to information. Those are our big question marks going into 2018."





From left: **Christina Litz**  
SVP marketing and content, CFL  
**Devon MacDonald**  
CSO, Mindshare  
**Lori Davison**  
VP brand strategy and  
communications, SickKids  
**Andrew Saunders**  
chief revenue officer,  
*The Globe and Mail*



From left: **Joseph Leon**  
president of media, Vision7  
Communications  
**Cathy Collier**  
CEO, OMD  
**Robert Jenkyn**  
EVP, Media Experts  
**John Rocco**  
VP of marketing, Sonnet



A STRATEGY ROUNDTABLE

# Facing the pace of change

BY VAL MALONEY AND  
BREE RODY-MANTHA

Consumers are more complicated than ever. There never seems to be enough talent, or at least the right kind. And, oh yeah, consultancies are staking a claim to traditional agency territory. There is no shortage of issues when media agency leads and brand execs congregate to talk about change and competition. The latest *strategy*/Media in Canada roundtable was no exception.

**STRATEGY: What tool or process has your agency been flexing hard in 2017?**

**JOSEPH LEON:** One area that's becoming a much greater focus for us is the infrastructure around technology. So, things like cloud computing and machine-learning. All of those more complex, behind-the-scenes pieces that involve a very significant capital investment, a very different set of skills — that's where we're seeing a lot of our focus in 2017 shift.

It's interesting because if you think about all the people at this table, whether you're an agency or you're a business, that's not necessarily something that's a fundamental part of our team skillset. As we're enabling that change and figuring out the opportunity from a media perspective, it's also providing a bit of impetus to look at the skillset to maximize potential. If I was going to say one thing, 2017 is a focus on infrastructure, the backside of technology and the data.

**ROBERT JENKYN:** We're really investing in people and culture as well as that back-end infrastructure. For a couple reasons: One,

everything is digital all the time. I get that, but it's evolving so fast that change is the new normal. What we're finding now is that, to keep sticky with our clients, we really have to solve that problem of "What part of my advertising is working?" That seemed to be the big driver over the last couple of years.

**CATHY COLLIER:** Most of the technology has been about how it's influenced the business and not about how it's impacted consumers lives or our own lives. But I find technology is distracting us from what we should be focusing on, which is clients' objectives. And I think the shift this year is spending less time with which "bits" fit into which ideas.

Everyone probably saw that the Media Grand Prix [in Cannes, Jet.com's "Innovating Saving" campaign] this year was really fueled by an idea. And you didn't see the bits that came together. You just saw the end-product and how that all resonated from the brand.

I think that's the biggest thing for me: that we stopped talking about the bits and started talking about the idea and how it's driving the client's business.

**LORI DAVISON:** And the agency that won that Media Grand Prix was a creative agency...

**COLLIER:** I know, so disappointing.

**DAVISON:** That speaks to the convergence and overlap that's going on now. It's so grey now as to where the ideas come from. Not to get cliché, but the media is the message. The origin of the media is in the idea.

**COLLIER:** And it has to be so intermixed. We have to be able to work out the complexity of executing in 20 different channels in different ways. You can't just have a blocking chart that says you need a TV ad.

**CHRISTINA LITZ:** For the most part, the marketing people we have on the team are digital-first and they came to us from various organizations where they were developing products. We have brought a lot of our products in-house, from videogames to apps to geeky things like stats systems that allow us to power new interactions, and we have seen that pay off in a relatively short period of time. And we have



“OUR ABILITY TO DESIGN NEW PRODUCTS, TEST THEM, SCALE THEM AND DIVERSIFY WHAT WE DO IS WHERE WE SPEND MOST OF OUR TIME.”

**Joseph Leon, Vision7**



to. We don't have the budgets and reach that some of the international leagues and teams do so we have to think differently, be nimble and try and fail, and fail fast [when we do].

Our investment has been in the type of people we are bringing into the organization who are used to working fast and can be agile and try things. We are inspired and we're learning a lot by the way our fans are interacting with each other online.

**What are media agencies' biggest challenges and competitors today?**

**COLLIER:** To be completely honest, the biggest competitors we have now aren't the people at this table – it's the consultants.

I think we are really well-poised to go head-to-head, as we've been evolving in terms of strategy and thinking and data.

**JENKYN:** And they're moving into our space from the C-suite, so they have a different advantage than we do. And some are coaching their clients to bring everything in-house, which in some instances might be a good idea and for

others might not be scalable or feasible for a long time.

**So, then, how are you proving your worth as agencies and showing clients that there are some things that shouldn't be brought in-house?**

**COLLIER:** I think it depends on the clients. Every client has a different point on the scale of how much they want in-house, how much they can handle in-house. What we do changes so fast and the scale of what you have to have in terms of the resources – you really have to staff against it.

And in terms of competing with consultants, yes, a lot of them are coming from the C-suite but when we're comparing model to model, I think we're really well-stacked against them to have the right conversations.

**JENKYN:** I think that piece about scale and staying current is very challenging for a lot of clients, especially larger clients bringing large-scale media shops within their business. They don't necessarily recognize the expense of

the people involved, and I don't think they often recognize the pace of change.

**DEVON MACDONALD:** We have a number of clients who have brought services in-house, and we encourage them to do so. And that trend will continue.

I think there's a twist that goes back to the consulting relationship – in acting as a consultancy, you're really just trying to prove the business objectives. I think the fault of most agencies is trying to prove the agencies' business objectives instead. Whether that's for billings or staff or media rates or whatever it might have been.

How we measure or monitor ourselves hasn't changed fast enough to innovative clients. We talk about serving clients' best needs, but recognize what they are trying to solve. If building a videogame lab is your thing, then great. We'll help you figure out the right or wrong things to do.

**How do you compete against consultancies?**

**COLLIER:** I think that we're in the midst of an evolution from being squeezed on margin to having real client business relationships that are based on fee models that are comparable to consultants. Probably not at the same rate as consultants, but clients are recognizing that having the talent that's required on their business costs money. And when you have the fee agreement, then you have that business discussion about value and what they are looking for. Most of our clients who have that kind of high-level relationship want someone who is skilled – people who are consultant-like in terms of their strategy.

It varies by client. We will always have those global clients that value dollars over everything else and I don't know when or if that will ever go away. And there are others that really see the link between media and business results.

**How much of a competitive threat have the consultancies become this year?**

**LEON:** I was in a room a couple years ago with Accenture and Adobe where I was representing our media group, and if you'd asked me five or 10 years ago if Adobe, Accenture and a media agency would end up in the same room talking

about the same project, I would have said, "You're crazy."

In that moment, it became very clear that there's this interesting white space around core strategy and operational strategy. As we're seeing [consultancies'] businesses evolve, we're also seeing our businesses evolve laterally in both directions.

We have an amazing foundation to build on from a consumer insight perspective and from understanding people, and that will evolve in very different ways over the next four years. That's our core currency, and I think it very heavily differentiates us.

I think you will also continue to see a lot of tension, especially around technology.

**DAVISON:** From a client side, I've been in a situation where I've had a creative agency pitching against an accounting firm. It's interesting because I do think the value exchange and the currency of the relationship is different. With media and creative, you're really looking at creativity and insight as the core proposition. Whereas with consultancies, it's more about time and process, and that seems to be the trade-off where you might lean toward a consultancy where you're looking for efficiency. But you compromise that sort of *je ne sais quoi* that you get with a media agency or a creative agency.

In my mind, they will never replace each other. It's different people, different ambition. There are different experiences, from my perspective.

**COLLIER:** Your point about being focused on efficiency is absolutely right. There's a difference between what's happening now and what's projected to happen. What's happening now is

"CLIENTS ARE RECOGNIZING THAT HAVING THE TALENT THAT'S REQUIRED ON THEIR BUSINESS COSTS MONEY."

**Cathy Collier, OMD**



they are very focused on measurement. Versus on your Cannes lanyard, it says Accenture Interactive. That is where they want to go and they obviously have a lot of money to spend to be a part of the game. But right now the place they are occupying is very much in efficiency.

**MACDONALD:** One area we have to do a better job at or we're going to lose, is [to] step away from the technology, demystify things and increase the value we have, because the consultants are excellent at that. Understanding

the true core problems of launching brands.

**COLLIER:** The other thing that we've been doing more is having very specific business discussions with clients, which we didn't have before. Being able to link to business outcomes makes it very interesting and becomes very consultant-like. There's no one closer than us to the investments.

**JENKYN:** We have to solve business problems, not media problems.



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“IT’S UNDERSTANDING THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE AND BEING ABLE TO SOLVE A BUSINESS PROBLEM.”

**John Rocco, Sonnet**



**JOHN ROCCO:** It’s an art and science thing as well. As a company starting a new brand, there’s a tremendous amount of trust we had to place in our media partner to help guide us with that. It’s not binary. It’s the experience of years of doing different categories.

We had worked with a consultancy partner on a promise of their deep analytics and understanding, and we worked for a number of months to get a proof of concept. At the end of the day it didn’t work. The technology was fantastic, the analytics behind it was fantastic, but it lacked the fundamental business understanding to get us to the insights that we needed, the “so what” of the data.

We stepped away from it and are now looking at a more traditional model of using an analytics arm of a media agency.

It’s simple to say it’s the art and science, but it truly is. It’s understanding all the information you have and being able to solve a business problem for me and giving me something to do with it. It’s that personal understanding and being embedded in the business.

**Coming back to the internal focus: what**

**have you put the most hours into in 2017?**

**LEON:** Up until this role, my entire life has been working in startups. The point of the startup culture is iteration, scale and reiteration and rescale. What we do as a media group [has never] been closer to what I’ve done the rest of my career. I think the two are very alike.

It’s a distillation of everything we have talked about today. I call it service design. There’s massive technology and data opportunity, and if we unlock that potential, it leads to the evolution of our services and products.

Our ability to design new products, test them, scale them and diversify what we do is actually where we spend most of our time. For me, I would say service design.

**MACDONALD:** To paraphrase: the pressure from consultancies, the expansion of digital media companies, planning for the future – we see this change, we see the complexity, we see what’s going on...and what are we going to do? This is what keeps us up at night. What are we going to do in two years, how is the model going to look? How are we going to continue to evolve

and run healthy businesses that serve clients given the change and the investment that’s required?

**JENKYN:** It’s all kind of part and parcel. Clients first and foremost, and you spend a lot of time there. And that informs service design. Talent has been one of the biggest issues for the last 15 years. I think it still is, because of that pace of change. Maybe 10 years ago it was about finding someone with digital smarts, and now digital natives are all around us. It’s more about certain levels of technology, as well as that creative side and strategic side and marrying them all together.

**COLLIER:** We have our north star where we’re going in the next couple years. And the thing that’s going to get us there is people. We’re building a marketing science community that will enable us to get where we need to be. It’s amazing that these people exist, and they come from all walks of life. They bring a richness and validation to what we’re providing our clients.

We need to be evolving our strategic frontline people to go from being middlemen who are trading, to people who can be client partners and interpret the data and distill that business objective.

Talent takes 70% of my time.

**When it’s 2020, and we’re back at this table drinking wine that’s three years older and looking back at 2017 – what would you say this year was all about?**

**JENKYN:** It’s This is the year that everyone’s “The Uber of this!” and “The Uber of that!”

**DAVISON:** One thing we have been getting behind lately is the importance of influencers in marketing strategies. It’s not just earned, it’s paid. As amplification, influencers are huge, and they haven’t been core to brand and marketing strategies, they’ve been a bit peripheral, but I think that’s becoming more central.

**COLLIER:** I hope that when we look back at 2017 it’s the year that we stopped using the word digital and it just kind of faded out; out of job descriptions, out of job titles, out of articles. And we just started thinking of it as one world. 🚀

# THE SESSIONS

Presented by Canada Post

In the past, a common approach to customer acquisition was to extend the reach of messaging as far as possible. The belief was, the more people you reached, the more customers you would acquire.

Today, marketers realize how far from the truth that is. Every day, hundreds of brands now compete for people's attention, with only 12 of them actually making an impression.<sup>1</sup> That means marketers must find more meaningful ways to break through the clutter. In *Smartmail Marketing™: The Sessions*, presented by Canada Post, you'll watch as industry leaders dive into a deeper discussion of the role of data-driven marketing, and how it can be used to optimize targeting and maximize acquisition dollars in today's market.

While a digital approach is still time- and cost-effective, according to Mark Morin, President of Strategies Relationship Marketing, "by layering on physical media like direct mail you're able to talk to people [and] move them forward in their decision-making process" in a much more compelling way, particularly when you use Postal Code Targeting to find areas whose residents share the characteristics of your ideal prospect.

The old adage proves true: it's not just what you know, it's who you know that counts. Rethinking traditional strategies of customer acquisition, and being able to target the right prospects with relevant messages while suppressing existing customers, will provide more bang for the marketing budget.



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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, Sheree. "New Research Sheds Light on Daily Ad Exposures", SJ Insights, September 29, 2014. Online at <https://sjinsights.net/2014/09/29/new-research-sheds-light-on-daily-ad-exposures/>. Accessed in August 2017.



**Andy Bruce**

Co-Founder & CEO  
The Mobile Experience Company

**Sarah Simpson**

Chief Customer Executive  
Sarah Simpson Consulting

**Mark Morin**

President  
Strategies Relationship Marketing

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# OUT OF HOME: STREET SMARTS

**T**ECHNOLOGY IS HELPING TO TRANSFORM the out-of-home industry – but it’s what the mediacos are doing with the tech that is really making an impact.

Beacons, mobile and real-time messaging have upped the game, and creativity and innovation are also flourishing across traditional and street-level executions. Standard transit shelters have undergone eye-popping transformations to become a giant coffeemaker or the Eiffel Tower.

When you add data and tech to OOH executions, the variations are virtually unlimited, ranging from digital messages that change according to weather, time or event, to projection media teamed with SMS, sound and interactivity.

Studies have shown time and again that out-of-home is one of the most efficient and cost-effective advertising mediums – particularly when it comes to driving consumer purchases.

The most recent RealityMine TouchPoints Study looked at 20 product categories and found that nearly two-thirds of purchases were made within 30 minutes of OOH exposure. The categories seemingly most influenced by OOH include beer and alcohol at 84% of purchases made within a half hour of exposure. Cosmetics and beauty/personal care purchases were also notable at 70% and 63% respectively.

OOH also generates more online activations for each dollar spent compared to broadcast and print media, according to the 2017 OOH Online Activation Survey from the Outdoor Advertising Association of America and The Nielsen Company.

With unlimited creative opportunities and proven performance, it’s no surprise that out of home is experiencing a renaissance.

Read on to find out what two of the country’s leading OOH companies have been up to and what is next for the industry.



# STREET AND THE CITY

**AT** THE OUT-OF-HOME DIVISION of Quebecor Media Group, the belief is that just putting beacons into the market doesn't mean a thing if they're simply pushing coupons to mobile phones – the real opportunity is to talk to audiences and to understand their actions.

That's why Quebecor OOH sees interactivity and beacon technology as tools for providing value via info about the city and events – as well as for enhancing advertising messages. The company's work over the past two years with TéoTaxi, a Montreal fleet of electric digitally-connected cars, illustrates this philosophy, and the future of its business.

For Montreal's 375th anniversary this summer, Quebecor mounted an integrated mixed-media campaign that included TV, newspaper and TéoTaxi, with taxi top advertising and interactive tablets for passengers featuring frequently updated schedules of anniversary events. In the context of the celebration, Quebecor Media Group also partnered with photographer Monic Richard on an urban exhibition. The street-side gallery featured portraits of 14 inspiring Montrealers, curated across 200 digital and standard transit shelters across the city.

Claude Foisy, vice-president of Montreal-based Quebecor OOH sees executions like this as an example of how Out-of-home will continue to evolve and “create new opportunities to become even a bigger part of daily life.”

The evolution also means innovation and creativity are thriving as both standard and digital transit shelters become a canvas for more experiential ideas. Past campaign executions have included an orange tree for Oasis juice and sensors that spritz scents to promote cooking show *La Relève*.

There's been a concerted push to help brands fully realize OOH's new potential as a platform says Foisy. “We have been touring around to agencies to talk about digital and the intelligence we're building to help them develop innovative and effective campaigns.”

Quebecor OOH's roster includes transit shelter advertising in the Montreal, Laval and Lévis markets and bus advertising across Lévis and the surrounding area, including parts of Québec City. The network spans 82 digital transit shelters, with expansion plans through 2018.

Foisy describes the platform as the last unfettered, unblockable touchpoint to reach consumers on the path to purchase: “It's part of their daily life.” And that access comes with increasing ability to pinpoint targets.

Quebecor's digital transit shelters comprise three networks, created using a mix of audience targeting and location-based intelligence to help brands talk to specific audiences. The DownTown Network is in the heart of the business, entertainment and cultural areas. The HipTown Network targets the 18 to 34 demo, students and public transit users in trendy locations. The GoTown Network gives advertisers visibility with motorists on major traffic arteries and a presence at peak times.

The bigger picture includes adding beacon technology next year, and to do so in a way that will be welcomed by consumers, along with continued smart city infrastructure development projects.

“Because Quebecor has expertise in management, installation and optimization of street furniture, we have become a pivotal point in the development of Montreal as a smart city,” says Foisy. The company has been working with the Société de transport de Montréal and expects to launch real-time bus schedules for the digital shelter network early next year. For Téo electric taxis, upcoming enhancements include interactive roof-top signage.

“We see our role as an important one for keeping the public informed,” says Foisy. “Real-time info such as weather forecasts, LCN news as well as contextualized advertising campaigns has made our street furniture a place where people can expect an enhanced experience.”

By providing an ecosystem that balances consumer experience value with relevant, entertaining brand messaging, a goal is to avoid audience tune-out – a bane of other media platforms. “We talk a lot about developing the smart city,” says Foisy, adding, “the smarter the brands are, the better and smarter we have to be to accompany them.”



(TOP LEFT) For Lassonde's Oasis juice, shelters sprouted an orange tree and the scent of oranges. (ABOVE) For Montreal's 375th, transit shelters became a city-wide gallery



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# GUERRILLA STREET CRED

**G**RASSROOTS ADVERTISING KNOWS HOW to take brand messages to the people and, thanks to new technologies, the mediaco has been ratcheting up the creativity and innovation of its executions. Its philosophy is that anything is possible, and has embraced a can-do attitude to deliver on that.

Mike Gillissie, the company's VP sales, operations and business development, says, "We make it a point to say yes as much as possible. 'Do we do crop circle advertising? Yes we do'."

Gillissie says Grassroots is seeing more demand for creating memories, and a focus on making sure the experiences are easily shared on social media to amplify the audience. "We're enjoying integrating technology with traditional out-of-home and seeing how much fun the viewer can have with it."

Toronto-based Grassroots Advertising has specialized in guerrilla marketing and street advertising for more than 30 years across Canada, the US and Europe. Its main products include experiential, 3D props and stunts, wildpostings, projections, street frames, mobile billboards, showcase vehicles, food trucks, sampling, stencil and chalk art, murals, human billboards, indoor posters and whatever unique executions can be imagined.

A recent Grassroots campaign for Cars to Go in Vancouver featured a static display integrated with a large format projection and hidden talent. As customers went to pick up their rented cars, they were greeted by a big projection of comedians interacting with them in real time, transforming what is typically neither a fun nor memorable experience into something to tweet about.

Gillissie says gamification executions, such as a campaign executed for Toyota, are also great for word of mouth and social sharing. To generate Corolla buzz, passersby were offered a seat and a steering wheel to take a virtual test drive on a (virtual) 40-foot track that was projected on a wall for all to see. Gillissie says this type of experience gets happily shared by word of mouth and social media.

He expects the experiential aspect of out-of-home to increase even more as media and technologies converge. Integration of big data, beacon tech and digital OOH will result in more hyper-targeting, fuelling dramatic growth of the industry and the use of triggers and ID software to influence behaviour.

"We see trends in what clients want to do," says Gillissie.

"A couple of years ago our walking billboards were very popular, as was 3D chalk art. Currently food trucks and our showcase vehicle are getting a lot of traction, as they garner very positive consumer interaction with brands."

One example is a campaign developed for Nordstrom, which included a truck branded with an elegant floral pattern and brand ambassadors handing out tulips to welcome in spring. Another Nordstrom campaign used food trucks to give away hot chocolate and gingerbread cookies. The cups had a tear-away tab that was a coupon for a free gift in-store, effectively bringing people into

the store and creating a rewarding experience from start to finish.

Holt Renfrew also used a display truck in an interesting way. People were invited into the glass-sided vehicle to play a game, then given the opportunity to choose a key that opened one of three plexi boxes, each one containing gifts for them to take home.

Gillissie says out-of-home, even in its most traditional sense, is still completely relevant: "It augments the digital message. It is the original geo-targeted medium – and great creative with a powerful image cannot be ignored."

Since the average person spends over three hours out of home per day, Gillissie says as people become less tethered to their offices and homes, thanks to mobile devices, this will likely increase. "I think now more than ever the real-world omnipresent nature of out-of home is critical for any plan. After all, you can't skip it or turn it off."



(TOP LEFT) Projection tech gave Toyota the ability to give virtual Corolla test drives on a 40-foot track projected onto city walls.

(ABOVE) Shoppers entered a glass-sided truck to play a game and receive a gift from Holt Renfrew.



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# THE MARKET FOR PET PARENTS

MILLENNIALS TAKE PET OWNERSHIP SERIOUSLY, CREATING ALL KINDS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRANDS THAT KNOW HOW TO REACH THEM.

BY MARK BURGESS



Above, clockwise from left: A Frenchy seems happy enough with the ethically sourced, grain-free food from Open Farm; Fancy Feast created flavours for owners to try at a Toronto pop-up; Cesar's web content includes help with doggie bow ties and finding luxe pet hotels.

**D**id you know there are streaming channels for dogs suffering from separation anxiety? Or that the sustainably sourced wild salmon in your cat's bowl can be traced back to the Alaskan fisherman who hauled it in?

What about dog brunch – do you know about that? Or how pets are the new signifier of middle-class status for a generation that can't afford the old staples of car and house?

Have you heard of "Yappy Hour?"

If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, you may be (or know) a millennial pet owner – or "pet parent," as some prefer.

According to IBISWorld, a trend of "pet humanization" has led to spending on everything from pet massages to premium food to pet hotels with TVs and wading pools.

The generation notorious for ignoring the nuclear family model and earning less than their parents

is, somewhat ironically, willing to splurge on their "fur babies."

Certified organic dog treats and lavish cat collars might seem extravagant, but they're a lot more affordable than real estate, says Michelle Switzer, an anthropologist at Idea Couture in Toronto.

"Some of these more mainstream or expected expenses are no longer within reach, so there are other ways to spend money or develop your sense of what it means to be middle class," she says. Pets have become a form of "social capital."

The marketing to "pet parents" is often untraditional. And the parent metaphor can sometimes be taken very literally – for good reason: a U.S. survey in July by agency Gale said 44% of millennial owners saw pets as practice for starting a family (21% answering "Yes, exactly!" and 23% saying it was part of the reason).

Some Canadian creative reflects

this idea. Mars' Iams brand (working with Tribal Worldwide Canada) released an online video in June showing a kitten's birthday party. "Like you, your cat goes through different life stages," the voiceover said, before showing the product's Omega-3 DHA and "real chicken."

In July, Mars Petcare brand Cesar (working with BBDO Toronto and MediaCom) hosted a brunch for dogs at a popular Toronto restaurant. Content from the activation went on social media and lifestyle sites popular with the millennial target.

Purina's Fancy Feast had its own pop-up event in Toronto in August targeting millennial condo dwellers (with Union on creative, GroupM on media and North Strategic doing the PR). Chef Amanda Hassner from the brand's St. Louis, Missouri culinary centre was on hand to serve pet owners samples of the chicken and gravy flavours.



That may sound strange (at the very least) to a non-pet parent. But Hassner creates dishes for humans – specifically the scientists who make the pet food – in order to build a marketing bridge between what goes in the pet’s bowl and the person making the purchases.

“The dogs and the cats aren’t the ones opening up their wallets and buying it. People have to have some sense of what’s in the bag or what’s in the can before they’ll shell out the money for it,” Hassner says.

The growing market for premium pet food mirrors human interest in the food chain, Switzer says. And millennials are just the “canary in the coal mine” as far as the trend goes: the shift is crossing age groups.

Open Farms is one brand taking advantage. Launched in Ontario in 2014, it expanded across the country and into the U.S. the following year. Its roughly \$30 bags of grain-free, sustainably sourced cat and dog food are now stocked in 2,500 pet retailers across the continent. Sales grew by more than 250% in 2016, co-founder Isaac Langleben says.

“We view transparency and an ethical supply chain as a huge and growing trend in the consumer food space. We’re trying to pioneer it and push it forward in the pet food space,” Langleben says.

The brand’s traceability feature lets consumers use the lot code on packaging to find out where all the ingredients (non-GMO coconut oil, locally grown sun-cured alfalfa) originated. It won “Best New Transparently Sourced Product” at the 2017 Natural Products Expo West, a massive trade show for the *human* health products industry.

Switzer, who has been conducting research in the U.S. for a major cat food company, says the big brands are worried. Even mainstream pet owners now use language like “no fillers” and “grain free,” she says. “There’s definitely a shift happening

and brands that aren’t willing to acknowledge that or get on top of that are going to disappear.”

In 2015, Nestlé bought Merrick Pet Care, which owns natural and organic pet food brands. Others are creating new product lines and shifting positioning.

All of Open Farms’ marketing is digital, with Facebook, YouTube and Instagram ads targeting pet owners. The brand also leverages roughly 100 influencers a month – many of them unpaid bloggers who like the products, Langleben says – in an effort to reach the millennial target.

**Pets in Canada**

- Pet ownership is on the rise, the Canadian Animal Health Institute says, up to 8.8 million cats and 7.6 million dogs in 2016 (from 7 million cats and 6.4 million dogs in 2014). In household terms, about 41% have a dog and 37% have at least one cat).
- Household spending on pets and pet food was at \$4.1 billion in 2015, according to Statistics Canada, with spending on veterinary and other services at about \$3 billion.
- A report from Packaged Facts in 2015 said “continued uptake of premium and superpremium products” would drive Canadian pet market sales to \$9.2 billion by 2019.

Which brings us to “Petfluencers.” In New York, The Dog Agency claims to be the first to focus “exclusively on animal influencers.”

Brands are also creating their own content. The Cesar website, for example, helps owners find luxury pet hotels and make a “DIY Bow Tie for a Dapper Dog.”

Some are even getting into lobbying. Mars Petcare announced its “Better Cities for Pets” initiative in June, pushing governments for more pet-friendly spaces. Because “pets can’t speak for themselves,”

North America president Mark Johnson said in a release.

At least for now. Pet products now include Fitbit-like trackers (FitBark) and early forms of translation tools: devices that hear pet sounds, detect certain qualities, translate and deliver them to an owner’s phone.

“If people see their cats and dogs as children, there’s going to be a desire to communicate and bond at a much deeper level, so I think there’s going to be opportunity for these translation devices,” Switzer says.

There are other opportunities for non-pet brands. In August, Time mined its audience data to launch PetHero, a paid membership program offering discounts for pet owners. The publishing company knew it already engaged with more than 100 million consumers interested in pets and could market to them directly.

Amazon-owned audio book company Audible has listening products for dogs. There’s a streaming channel on YouTube called “Relax My Dog.” CleverPet is a gaming device “designed by dog-loving neuroscientists” to keep dogs entertained, offering rewards for solving challenges (a skeptic might view it as a high-tech Skinner Box).

Toys, strollers, Bjorns – all fertile ground for brands, Switzer says.

But where will it end? In some cases, the humanization can adversely affect a pet’s health. Important differences can get lost in the marketing, Hassner says.

Take boneless chicken breasts, now prominent in cat food. There’s more nutrition in the heart and liver, which cats would happily eat but owners turn up their noses at. It creates the absurd situation where cat food makers have to add vitamins and minerals to food that would otherwise have already had it, Hassner says.

A can of chicken liver wet food is less Instagram friendly, but it may be better for the fur babies.



# CIBC, THEN AND NOW

150 YEARS OF TINKERING WITH STRATEGY AND BRAND IDENTITY HAVE HELPED THE BANK WITH FIRST-MOVER AMBITIONS FIT INTO CONSUMERS' LIVES.

BY JENNIFER HORN

**Clockwise:** It took two days to build CIBC's pre-fab branches; the bank was the first to dispense cash from a box and to introduce online banking; the "ski-thru" at Whistler last year; a teller once accepted a cheque on a slab of elm; banking by plane in the 1970s; an illustration from the bank's current branding; ads from the '50s reflected the manly era; and logos from 1966 and the 2001 redesign.

**T**he ink was still drying on the document signed by the Fathers of Confederation when the Canadian Bank of Commerce's own founding father was breaking ground. Blueprints for its first branch in Toronto had been drawn up just six weeks before the country's union took place.

Nearly 100 years later, the bank would merge with the Imperial Bank of Canada (founded in 1875) to form the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, now better known as CIBC.

"When you have a 150-year-old brand, and you look at the world through the eyes of that brand, you actually see 150 years of life in Canada," says Rob Assimakopoulos, SVP and CMO at the bank. CIBC's advertising through the decades shows "the mentality around saving, investing, managing money, and how they change... There's a reflection of the Canadian mindset."

The 1950s saw a "very modest sales-oriented mindset," says Assimakopoulos, with many of CIBC's

ads focusing on saving and investing, showing people building homes, starting companies and doing things they love, like fishing. The '60s and '70s saw the "world open up a bit" and ads were more geared toward spending, with the advent of consumer credit.

The '80s and '90s were about appealing to the "fairly self-indulgent generation of baby boomers" with an even bigger proliferation of consumer credit and spending. And the early 2000s were about better financial management, catering to a more self-sufficient, savvy banking crowd.

Today, CIBC's advertising spans all of that, speaking to Canadians' desire to save and invest in a post-recession economy while showing them the ease with which they can spend, thanks to new technologies and innovation that has taken banking into homes.

As the smallest of Canada's Big Five banks in terms of revenue, and therefore working with a smaller budget, CIBC has to work harder to get noticed. To understand



its approach, it's useful to look at the parallels with its 150-year history.

### FINDING ITS (CUSTOMERS') VOICE

Pencil drawings, cartoons, graphics, stock photography of happy people smiling, hugging, laughing: CIBC tried it all, and that was just the '60s. The bank was admittedly indecisive in the visual presentation of its brand. For example, no-frill sketches in ads communicating personal loan services in the '70s contrast sharply with stock images of farmers planning for their future in other ads from the same era.

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**DID YOU KNOW?** CIBC bankers would travel incognito when visiting Canada's frontier towns in the late 1800s, protecting their identity from rival bankers as they raced for space. A few decades later, the bank would stand out in the fiercely competitive space of Canada's booming cities by constructing 70 "prefabricated" branches that stood two storeys high. It took only two days to assemble the innovative buildings, and some still stand today.

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CIBC also lacked visual consistency within its branch walls. Before the bank's former director of brand strategy, Mary Newman, and her team were tasked to come up with a refreshed brand identity in the late '90s, "there were places where it still said the long words 'Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce.' There

were places where it said 'Bank of Commerce.' There were even places where it said 'Imperial Bank,'" she says. "Nobody had gone through top to bottom, and refreshed the identity and made it uniform. The most prominent identity was not even a logo, it was literally just CIBC written in Palatino type."

Newman, who spent 12 years working between CIBC's insurance and marketing departments, remembers the logo that was created in the '60s and used up until that

point. It was modern at the time, containing a chevron to represent the bank's coast-to-coast coverage and two little feet at the bottom to communicate stability.

"But it was very outdated [in the 1990s] and still kind of kicking around in places," she says.

TD purchased Canada Trust in 2000 and was introducing a distinctive brand architecture for the newly merged bank. CIBC needed to create an identity and naming system that would stand out against its competitors: something that would "incorporate what we envisioned doing in the future... that would carry the bank into the next few decades," Newman says. "Because refreshes are not something you want to do all the time."

Her team hired Ove and Publicis to work on the integrated assignment, with the design shop exploring different identities based on research that showed consumers responding positively to symbols of "growth, progress, optimism and a forward-looking future," she says. In the early 2000s, CIBC landed on an iteration of the logo that's currently in use, with two arcs below the brand's lettering. The idea of growth, present throughout CIBC's marketing history, "was one the key themes we wanted to build into the identity of the bank."

Another decade would pass before CIBC took an even deeper look at its brand. When the bank moved creative strategy over to Juniper Park\TBWA in 2012, the challenge was one it had battled before: the "sea of sameness" in the undifferentiated banking category, says Assimakopoulos.

"In early times, to get out of the sea, when we advertised, we tried not to overstate the care and attention we put into clients' money, and discouraged things like disparaging competitive comparisons," he says.

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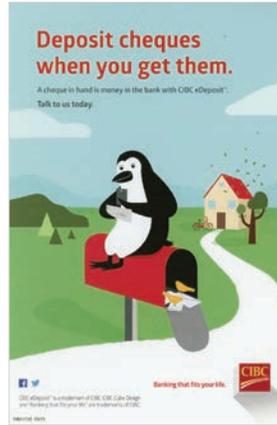


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**Above:** The bank's first mascot, Percy the Penguin, is meant to be the voice of the consumer.



“Fast forward to 2017 – where we make use of a penguin that’s distinctive – we’re trying to solve a similar problem that we had back in the early 1900s.”

Percy the Penguin is the first mascot for CIBC, born out of the brand’s Aventura loyalty program in 2013. What began as an exponent of the rewards program (which differentiates itself with a personal concierge service), the penguin has since expanded to become a regular sighting in the bank’s mass marketing. He’s “warm, likeable,” explains JP\TBWA’s CEO Jill Nykoliation. Percy is a kind of “proxy for the consumer,” adds CSO Mark Tomblin.

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**DID YOU KNOW?** They wrote them on eggs, cabbies’ dirty shirts, boat oars, footballs, even a 50-pound slab of elm – CIBC customers were never short of ideas on what to use as makeshift cheques over the years. As long as the client’s bank details, account information, signature and amount was correct, the bank would accept these creative tokens as ways to transfer money between accounts if they didn’t have an official cheque at the time.

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That’s in contrast to Arby, the Royal Bank mascot, and TD’s green chair, which represent those banks, Nykoliation says. “Percy is the consumer, which is why people have a strong affection for him.”

That connection stems from the bank’s renewed customer-centric focus,

she says. As a result, CIBC has made the mascot a more pervasive character in its campaigns and “Banking that fits your life” platform.

The company is also learning from the past’s inconsistent branding, adopting a style of illustration that’s distinctively CIBC and threading it across multiple platforms. Many of its ads now have the same creative treatment, from “how to” videos that explain features in its app to the print ads that talk about its mortgage advisors who visit clients’ homes.

“They own this now,” says Nykoliation of the bank’s new animations.

The drawings give it licence to be metaphorical, with the penguin doing impractical things like sitting in a tub full of money (to show how CIBC can help you become a saver). “Other banks cannot follow this,” she

says. “The four of them mostly use photography, and we stand alone with sophisticated illustration.”

There are exceptions, of course. For example, its “financial portrait” campaign uses real footage to portray the bank’s intimate and personal relationship with investment clients. In May, a video of artist Jen Mann interviewing and painting a portrait of Monika Deol, a former TV host and founder of Stella cosmetics, showed how “artists capture the real you,” just like the bank.

“It creates a powerful metaphor for what our Private Wealth management professionals do,” says Assimakopoulos. “The idea that they don’t just create financial plans, that they create portraits, shows prospective clients what our current clients get in that relationship.”

Assimakopoulos says consumers are noticing the brand now, thanks to Percy and CIBC’s more distinctive messaging. He wouldn’t disclose numbers, but notes that the brand has “closed the gap” in brand attributes like being client-centric and personalized.

“You have to work hard as a customer to be able to notice one bank over another. Everyone seems to talk in transactional terms,” he says. “We are spinning more of our efforts to show how we deliver, versus just what we deliver.”

## FIRST IN, BEST DRESSED

CIBC’s boat from the 1960s floated along the St. Lawrence River and docked to serve communities en route. Its equally peculiar “mobile banking” counterpart, a jet, would fly to seven cities within the inclement Northwest Territories in the ’70s. And in 2017, a “ski-thru” ATM appeared on top of a Whistler ski run.

This is how CIBC likes to innovate. Its inventive ways to do banking helped the brand fit consumers’ lives, no matter how remote.

But it didn’t stop there. It was also the first to serve communities in Yellowknife (1938), to bring ATMs to Canada (1969), to set up an automated telephone service (1992), and even to use PCs in branches (1996).

“CIBC has a reputation for firsts. There was an expectation that we would always try to be first in market, be better, be best,” says Newman. “I think it goes all the way back to when the bank first started, when land and gold was still being discovered. It was one of the first to have branches on the river when there were no roads. It had branches in the Yukon to support the miners. They would even put branches on rail cars. It’s just part of the brand’s DNA.”

CIBC’s penchant to pioneer “convenient” innovations has carried forward into the tech-crazed present, with the bank claiming to be the first to offer mobile banking via an iPhone app (2010) and the smartwatch (2015). Today, it’s exploring new technologies like Samsung Pay,

being one of the first banks with a presence in the app.

Much like its competitors (from the Big Five to new entrants), Assimakopoulos says CIBC is developing mobile innovation to make consumer journeys more seamless.

As an example, he points to the bank's new Hello Home mortgage app, launched last year, which does

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**DID YOU KNOW?** Back in the early 1900s, the bank used its buildings as "indirect" advertising, while giveaways of calendars, maps and pamphlets were thought of as "direct." But the most popular advertising item of the time was a little book called a Memoranda. One hundred years ago, Canada was still very rural, so the book contained practical information (how to mix paint, sell cattle, etc.). It was given to those with good standing in the community, speaking to a client's status.

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away with human interaction and lets customers apply for a loan by phone (the approval process time is the same, but it eliminates having to visit a bank branch and fill out paperwork).

"Let's not just innovate according to their expectations, let's see if we can exceed those expectations," he says of his

team's mindset when exploring new business areas and platforms. "Innovation is the core tenet that we wanted to install."

While it may have looked internally for first-to-market innovations in the past, the bank now puts its trust in the MARS-housed CIBC Live Labs when developing new digital banking services. Every six

weeks, a dedicated team works on new projects "that help advance the future experience for our CIBC clients," according to the hub.

That's where the bank first tested its app for wearables, like the smartwatch, and it's also where CIBC is experimenting with voice banking inside cars.

It's also working with Alternative Solutions in other areas, creating capabilities such as electronic delivery of money to 90 countries with no fees.

To reflect virtual banking in homes (and cars), CIBC is also innovating inside its branches to meet the potential new world of human-less banking. It's slowly removing queues and tellers in some of its branches, creating a lounge-like atmosphere that's more personal, with only a few staff members at the door and at counters where people can bank using digital kiosks.

"You look at other businesses and you think, 'Oh, that's a delicious chocolate bar' and 'Oh, that's a fast car.' But with something like banking, some people don't think it's that interesting," says Assimakopoulos, who was once the marketing lead at Molson, before moving to General Motors. "But this has been one of the most engaging and energizing jobs I've ever been in. Particularly today, at the intersection of technology and how we can transform the banking experience." 📱

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# Don't worry, marketers – your audience is smarter than a goldfish

BY MARK TOMBLIN

**A** couple of years ago, a story made headlines in many major news outlets, including the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and the BBC. It was about the human attention span shrinking to become shorter than that of the notoriously inattentive goldfish.

The articles stated that, in 2000, the average human attention span was 12 seconds, but by 2013 it had been reduced to a mere eight. Goldfish, by contrast, have a nine-second span. The story went viral.

The only problem was that none of the definitive-sounding numbers were reliable.

The figure that was widely reported across news media was actually cited from a vague third-party source (Statistic Brain) within a non-peer-reviewed Microsoft Canada study that wasn't even about shortening attention spans.

None of this would matter, except that this baseless meme has spread throughout the marketing and advertising community – and, like Chinese knotweed in southern Ontario, is now extremely hard to eradicate. I've lost count how many times people in meetings have asserted these "facts" as though they were as incontrovertible as the laws of thermodynamics.

Yet over the same period we've supposedly lost a third of our attention spans, there has been a sustained rise in our consumption of thoughtful, challenging, complicated long-form TV. Either



we're binge-watching *Game of Thrones* or we're not.

So why did the goldfish story gain such widespread traction among intelligent, well-educated marketing folk?

It's an intriguing question and the answer may lie in a book called *Denying To The Grave*. It was written by two American academics, Sara Gorman and Jack M. Gorman, who set out to understand why many people act so perversely when it comes to their health. The authors explain that sometimes humans won't let facts get in the way of a good story – even if it puts our health in jeopardy. It's sobering stuff.

The truth is that fake (or erroneous) news stories get traction because enough of us want to believe them. And it's frustrating, because these false attention span stats are now being used to justify the use of increasingly short media

formats – which, all things being equal, cannot possibly work as well as long-form to build emotionally resonant connections for brands to achieve long-term growth.

They are also being used to justify sometimes dubious creative decisions about narrative structures, product shots and branding that are reducing the scope for creativity and thus, ultimately, effectiveness.

(The link between advertising creativity and effectiveness is now firmly established – at least empirically – as shown by Les Binet and Peter Field's multiple analyses of the IPA Effectiveness Awards in the U.K. over the last 10 years. In particular, they point out the importance of "fame" when creating advertising that builds brands.)

Advertising that gets talked about really does work better.

The Nissan Rogue is a case in point. Over the past four winters, the Juniper Park\TBWA campaign "Conquer All Conditions" has more than doubled the Rogue's share of the most competitive car market in Canada (see pg. 22) – using unashamedly long-form, action-oriented films as the basis of its distinctive and emotionally compelling appeal to our sense of wanting to be seen as heroic drivers in a harsh climate.

And of course the John Lewis Christmas commercials from the U.K. are not just endlessly entertaining but also remarkably good for business. Again, they're entirely dependent on content that, were our attention spans as stunted as the goldfish story suggests, we would struggle to focus on, let alone process.

So next time you see a story like the one about our incredible shrinking attention spans, think twice before assuming it to be true. You'll be doing yourself – and the rest of us – a favour.



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