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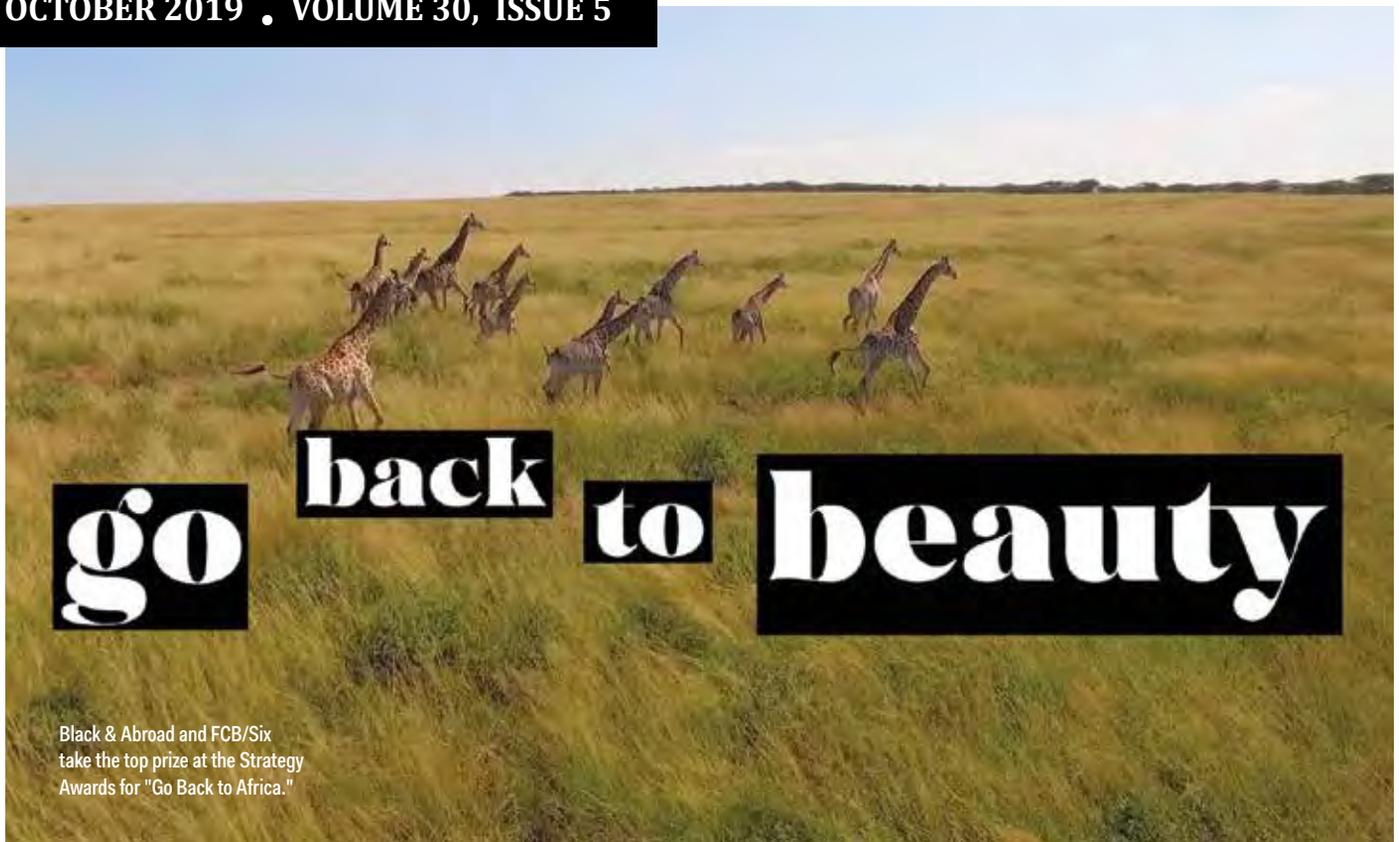


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### Brands of the Year

From going green(er) to finding purpose, the 2019 crop of Canadian companies stand out for their unique market strategies.

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#### ON THE COVER:

Investing in innovation can feel like blasting off into space when you're afraid of heights. But acrophobia didn't stop RBC, Telus and L'Oreal from taking off with investments in building robust tech and digital systems. From a higher vantage point, they can see where they might have gone wrong: all three say they should have gotten in the seat sooner so they could be much further ahead today (although, they're still leading the pack). This month's cover art by Yarek Waszul sets the tone for our feature story that helps map the path to innovation, so that you can fuel your own.

# The innovation playbook

**I**t was Isaac Newton who famously said, “If I have seen further, it is only by standing on the shoulders of giants.” His thinking was that the discoveries of past pioneers could hoist others to new heights. While watching the industry grapple with innovation, I start to appreciate the late-scientist’s metaphor for progress a little more.

Most, if not all, marketers agree they need to embrace digital transformation and are thus spending more on innovation (it now makes up 1 in 6 marketing dollars, according to Gartner’s *CMO Spend Survey* for 2018-2019). But many are still looking for clues on how to make sense of it all. They have the best intentions, but their capabilities just don’t match up. In fact, Gartner found that marketers rate their “innovation maturity” at a lowly 2.2 out of 5 (even though they’re shooting for a 4.3).

There’s an innovation arms race underway and some companies are falling behind, in part, because they lack the vision and strategies to execute. The Imperial College Business School, in collaboration with Ericsson Research, found that “leaders” and “laggards” are two types of companies, with very different mindsets, but which both accept that digital transformation is a must-do, not a nice-to-do.

Laggards, on the one hand, tend to use tech to improve whatever they’re already doing – instead of preparing for an incoming tidal wave of startups, according to Imperial. Those slower-moving companies believe a focus on communication and collaboration within teams is their ticket to innovation. But the researchers say, in order to set the pace and be a leader, companies should follow this playbook: one, lose the hierarchy and organize teams to be autonomous and

agile (that’s how you inspire innovation); two, bring all types of tech systems together to be more efficient (that’s how you create room for innovation); and three, use digital to explore new market opportunities (that’s how you survive through innovation).

L’Oréal, Telus and RBC follow these rules, almost to a tee. From converging teams so that experiments can be coordinated at L’Oreal, to RBC investing in tech to change – not just improve – how it does business, to Telus venturing into new competitive territories (like healthcare). *Strategy’s* Josh Kolm finds the thread that makes these three early adopters succeed, and offers clues for laggards to find ways to become their own kind of trailblazer.

But it’s not just about the organizations that have led the way in stepping up the tech stack. This issue is filled with leaders at companies setting the pace in all sorts of ways.

Our six ambitious Brands of the Year (see pg. 21) have shown leadership on things like data (Loblaw and Ecobee), sustainability (Frank And Oak), diversity (MEC), ecommerce (Ritual) and partnerships (OVO) – so there’s a giant for every marketer to stand tall and see a little further. Perhaps the higher elevation will prepare your brand to shoulder whatever disruption comes next.

**Jennifer Horn, editor**



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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

# On shopper ethics, better data, bolder insights and mapping the road ahead

I've started making regular jaunts to Unboxed Market, a plastic-free shopping alternative. Beyond the extra travel time and improving my DIY container prep, it's been a pretty good experience product- and conscience-wise. Sort of a penance for whenever I have to resort to "Amazoning." And it feels like this may be a permanent new twist to my grocery regime.

This fluid attitude to everything from less meat to less packaging to, just less overall, is one of the reasons brands are upping their data game. It's gone from keeping an eye on competitors to staying ahead of radical change to whole categories.

That's a thread that runs through this issue, from the cover story and Next Big Things, to our Brand of the Year and Strategy Award winners.

The marketers speaking at Marketing Evolution Summit (MES) and AdTech this month – invited for bold approaches to building brands for the future – have taken different routes, from improving their eco game to evolving offerings as tastes change. The counter moves on the brand side, like collaborating with Loop (which shared the story of bringing CPG and retailers into their reusable packaging movement at MES), are becoming as radical as the shifts on the consumer side. See the story of Loblaw becoming a media company on p.22.

Just as brands rely on more and better data chops to compete, ultimately, it's people who find the insights, spot the opportunities and figure out how best to pivot.

And while data can help de-risk, the bets just keep getting bigger. That's why stories that delve into the 'why' behind new initiatives are so important, so please dive into the Brands of the Year and Strategy Award winners' section for inspiration and edification.

To help us get to the crux of what's important next, one of *strategy's* Next Big Things is our CMO council plans. We're reviving a *Marketing* magazine initiative, convening an editorial advisory board on industry issues that spins off or guides our content.

Over the course of a year, we'll be inviting a panel of senior marketing execs to share thoughts on challenges and opportunities. Some topics on the agenda will turn into roundtable features, and the input will also help steer content relevance for deeper-dive reporting, as we want this to reflect everything from organizational and ethical considerations to new approaches and best practices. Upcoming CMO council topics include:

### **Where are we with sustainability?**

Meaningful change across the full product lifecycle is required. Who's getting there and what's the ROI impact?

### **Where are we at with D2C 24/7**

**content?** Consistent, meaningful and customized interaction is the new CRM. Who's mastering it?

**What's up next in innovation?** The biggest factors fueling R&D now... and what's in the pipeline.

### **Where are we with diversity?**

What's working? And where do we need a new plan?

Health and wellness is another space where a ton of change is impacting the category, so in response to feedback, in this issue you'll see our first pharma focus initiative. We launched the Pharma Report sponsored series to keep tabs on how work in Canada is evolving, and next year, expect to see Pharma insights recognized in the Strategy Awards, and we'll also acknowledge the creative challenges of the category in the future.

If there's an area of the industry that warrants more focus, please chime in; we want *strategy's* lens of "bold vision, brand new ideas" to cover all aspects of the radical changes impacting your business.

Given the shared market challenges, seems like now is a good moment for more industry collaboration, similar to competitors coming together on the Loop reusable packaging program. A core tenet of *strategy* is to be a forum that builds community. To that end, if there's a cross-industry issue you're tackling, we probably have a platform for that.

Cheers, mm

Mary Maddever  
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## FRESH WATERS

By Melissa Dunne

**W**hen Judy John left Leo Burnett, she left tongues wagging. During her 20 years at the agency, John helped bold brands make bold moves (read: Always #LikeAGirl). She worked her way up from SVP, CCO in 1999 to CEO Canada and CCO for North America in 2016, before making a bold move of her own, leaving Leo Burnett to join Edelman in 2019.

The PR and marketing consultancy firm is looking to be “the lead creative partner when a brand or business wants to disrupt the market by taking a stand,” wrote Richard Edelman regarding John’s hiring as global CCO. The shop has a history of snapping up advertising bigwigs in an effort to become a creative powerhouse: Andrew Simon stepped into the CCO role from Cundari, while Jordan Doucette did a stint at the agency after leaving Taxi (though she’s now Leo Burnett Chicago’s CCO).

Now more than five months after diving into uncharted waters, John’s enjoying new views you often can’t see if you stay on the shore.

### **SHE’S FOCUSED ON LOOKING FORWARD, NOT BACKWARD.**

“I know there was a lot of curiosity when I moved over. I think traditionally in advertising we’re very siloed in our thinking. People ask, ‘Why did you make the move?’ And it comes back to the way I see the world evolving and the way that everyone is viewing content.

People aren’t really watching TV anymore, so consumers are not waiting for the next commercial to happen. What does that mean for paid media?”

When you look at influencers, you can understand why they’re so big – it’s how people are viewing content. I think social and that whole model has become more important and it’s changed what we create, and how we create, and it impacts everything.”

### **SHE’S FLEXING AND GROWING HER CREATIVE AND CEO MUSCLES ON A GLOBAL SCALE.**

“I’m definitely using my chief creative and CEO skills [at Edelman]. It was really fortunate that I got both [from Leo Burnett], because while this job is highly creative, I’m also often trying to understand how to finance creativity.

On the creative side, I’m connecting the creative community to the strategy and planning group. And having a vision for how we’re organized and how we’re working – that’s the organizational side.

Every day is different, one day I’m on calls all day, I’m in the Toronto office tomorrow, last week I was in Seattle, the week before I was in Chicago, so I’m working with different teams on different clients, existing clients, pitches – I was looking at a piece of work from London today. It’s everything. Even though I worked with Leo Burnett on some global projects, this has more of a cohesive global feel and I think it’s because it’s an independent agency. Edelman is more connected and I’ve really enjoyed getting the perspectives on different markets.”

### **SHE ENCOURAGES CREATIVES TO JUMP BEFORE THEY’RE PUSHED.**

“My advice to the next generation is to work in different parts of the business, as that’s the best way to understand what’s going on and where things are going. Everyone wants to specialize, but the world is changing so quickly. And I think it’s really important that people of all ages continue to reinvent themselves, or evolve, as the business continues to change. But wherever you are, I think curiosity is the most important thing.”

*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity and length*

# WHAT IT TAKES TO GO (GENUINELY) GREEN

By Justin Dallaire



Clockwise, from top left to bottom right: To be certified climate neutral, Aldo needed to address its direct and indirect emissions across the supply chain. Bottom left: CEO David Bensadoun believes building an environmentally conscious business is the right thing to do.

The Aldo Group was, until recently, the footwear industry's best-kept green secret.

In August, the Montreal-based shoe company began rolling out signage across its North American retail network announcing its commitment to climate neutrality. The marketing push came shortly after the launch of its first sustainable shoe collection, RPPL (pronounced "ripple"), in partnership with biomass tech company Bloom.

True, Aldo has been more actively marketing sustainability over the last year, recently announcing the elimination of shopping bags from its Aldo and Call It Spring banners – only a few months after declaring the latter had gone "fully vegan."

But these efforts are actually a part of a long-running green mission that began with its decision to examine its carbon footprint in 2013. Since then, the retailer has reduced its carbon emissions by 46% and claims to have

become the first fashion footwear company in the world to be certified climate neutral.

However, it wasn't until last year that the brand decided to share details of its sustainability journey more publicly, notes Valerie Martin, the brand's VP of communication, culture and CSR. It took time before Aldo "felt genuine and there was no greenwashing, and that we could actually prove every single point."

There are many steps to be certified as "climate neutral" by South Pole, the Zurich-based global org that helps businesses and governments "decarbonize" their activities. Measuring your carbon footprint – which Aldo began doing first through a consultant before hiring its own internal carbon experts a year later – is only the first step.

After quantifying their emissions, businesses must meet robust Scope 1 and Scope 2 carbon reduction targets,

classifications that include direct and indirect emissions under their control, such as those stemming from its vehicles and buildings, as well as electricity use, explains Simon Broquet, manager of sustainability at Aldo. Most companies tackling their carbon footprint begin there, he says, because it's "manageable, realistic, and can be done in an okay time frame." Aldo first met these targets in 2018, and became climate neutral in its offices, stores and distribution centres.

But addressing what's known as Scope 3 emissions – which include supply chain emissions such as travel, procurement, waste and water – is a "totally different game," Broquet says, one that requires a lot more time, expertise and communication with business partners. Aldo reached that milestone in August, receiving additional climate neutral certification for all its ecommerce shipments and transportation.

To be truly carbon neutral, a company must look to further offset emissions that cannot realistically be eliminated from its practices by purchasing carbon credits – that is, by investing in carbon offset projects.

To do this, Aldo is working with South Pole on projects that convert dirty energy into clean energy in the global regions that it operates, says Broquet. This year, its investments include U.S. and Vietnamese wind farms and Chinese hydropower projects, for example.

Aldo's commitment has to be long-term for the investments to pay off, as Aldo customers still aren't ready to pay double or even 25% more for products that are more sustainable, says Martin. "We need to become sustainable and still offer a product with a good quality and a good price."

That doesn't mean the business case won't prove itself out as consumers recognize greenwashing and begin to put their dollars behind companies that have made tangible progress on sustainability. "Will there be a business case soon? Probably," says Martin. "Retail has changed so much in five years, I can't imagine what it's going to be like five years from now."

# THE INNOVATION ROADMAP



## EVERYTHING IS AN EXPERIMENT

L'Oréal Canada has become a hub for innovation within the company's global operations, especially when it comes to artificial intelligence. The beauty giant has been drawing from the country's AI talent and the capabilities of companies like Automat and ModiFace, which it acquired in 2018 and is now working out of its Toronto digital hub.

The personal care brand's earliest forays into consumer-facing technology included augmented reality "try on" apps, like Makeup Genius, which are ubiquitous today but revolutionary for 2014. They also paved the way for digital services from its Vichy and La Roche-Posay brands, which have used ModiFace's image recognition and AI technology to analyze a user's face to detect imperfections, signs of aging and future skincare needs – suggesting a personalized routine using L'Oréal products. Those services are also infused with conversational AI, built using insights from earlier experiments with Automat on a dozen different tools, like

chatbots that make suggestions for gift boxes.

Robert Beredo, chief digital officer for L'Oréal Canada, says there is a direct path between those experiments and where the company is today: building high-tech, digital tools that allow consumers to engage with brands through services, instead of just products. That is now a strategic priority for the company globally and could transform its business for years to come.

"Our global vision is to be the number one beauty tech company in the world," Beredo says. "New technology always comes with a risk because you don't know how consumers will respond to new things. But we're comfortable with risk in a controlled way because we know the potential is endless."

L'Oréal is always in a test-and-learn framework, Beredo says, adding that the key to having it pay off is

## L'ORÉAL, TELUS AND RBC'S INVESTMENT STRATEGIES OFFER LESSONS ON HOW TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR INNOVATION.

BY JOSH KOLM

Investments in technology are table stakes for a successful business, but the rate of change inherent in innovation can make it hard to keep up (or comfortably find room in the budget for what is often a sizeable monetary investment). But as the organizations that have embraced risk and innovation can attest to, even the earliest and simplest efforts help build the foundation for where a company ends up – and position it to be ready for new opportunities that arise.

not in avoiding risk, but controlling it. The inclination might be to keep the budget low, but he warns that could doom a project from the start.

“We try to contain scope to the minimum viable product,” he says. “What’s the minimum we need in order to prove success of what we’re testing? But the investment on an experiment has to be high enough so there are resources available to show success.”

## A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

If a company is looking for a single magic tool or tech to be innovative, Martin Wildberger, SVP of innovation and technology at RBC, says they’re going to be disappointed.

“I know people are looking for that example, but that’s not how it works,” he says. “We looked at the expansiveness of what we needed to do and realized that what would make RBC successful is having the executive leadership commit to providing resources to do the full range of what needed to happen.”

RBC now spends \$3.2 billion annually on technology and innovation. When it started on that path roughly five years ago, the bank decided to spend more on “changing the bank than on operating it,” Wildberger says. It began by carving \$520 million from its budget to devote to strategic initiatives that would transform its culture, specifically when it came to attracting staff, as the bank would have to appeal “to a whole new set of talent.”

Its student development programs have grown from 100 five years ago to over 600 participants today. The Amplify program, which invites teams of four from different backgrounds to solve a business problem over four months in an accelerator-like environment, has expanded from eight teams in 2016 to 21 today.

“Now you’ve got 84 students who are doing innovative things with us and going to their peers and talking about what RBC is doing,” Wildberger says. “We’re augmenting that with a program of 600 initial students. That’s going to change the buzz on campus and get us attention from the best talent coming out of these schools.”

Once the talent reaches RBC, they will find themselves in offices that have been reorganized to work within an agile framework, so they “would be working the same as if they were at the best technology companies in Silicon Valley,” Wildberger says.

The other thing that generates interest in RBC as a centre for technological excellence is Borealis AI, the company’s stand-alone artificial intelligence lab, which focuses on research and development, both in and outside of banking. First spun out from its research division in 2016, it has since grown to 85 researchers and scientists working in Toronto, Edmonton, Montreal, Vancouver and Waterloo, Ont.

A pain point for innovation can be having a fast-moving division work with other departments, like marketing.

At L’Oréal, staff from Beredo’s team “is the centralized innovation hub” that manages innovation projects from start to finish, and also acts as the point of contact between the digital team that develops it, and the brands that understand the consumer behaviour and needs the project is looking to address. But it also works within every brand and company division “because they activate the experiments.”

“[Marketers] help us strategize and deliver against their challenges,” he says. “Innovation needs to be democratized if it’s going to be effective.”

For Wildberger, reorganizing into an agile framework has not just supported technology development, but also helped teams across RBC – including marketing and tech staff – work more seamlessly to develop solutions.

“Banks can sometimes be the worst at collaboration, because they are these massive vertically optimized companies,” he says. “One of the best things a focus on innovation can do is horizontally integrate the organization. When you have somebody from marketing on your team, they are along the journey with you as subject matter experts. It changes the structure of the way you approach, and eventually solve, a problem.”

## THE SNOWBALL EFFECT

Telus Health was created ten years ago when it offered those in the healthcare industry a range of digital

**Top right:** Image recognition and AR experiments have evolved into a suite of digital tools that L’Oréal is using to transform its business. **Bottom right:** Borealis AI’s Montreal lab is a part of RBC’s efforts to transform its culture and attract top talent.



solutions, such as electronic health records, pharmacy management software and services to digitize claims management systems. Today, it offers consumer-facing services, like an AI-powered symptom checker and the Babylon virtual care system, serving the needs of both an aging population that wants to maintain its independence and the young families struggling to fit a family doctor visit into their busy schedules.

Juggy Sihota, currently VP of consumer health at Telus, has served in a number of technology and innovation leadership roles throughout her 20 years with the brand. She has also seen the company through investments outside of what might traditionally be considered the realm of a telecommunications company, which today include things like Telus Health or its dedicated connected home service.

Sihota says Telus has been able to embrace new avenues, like healthcare, because it has a philosophy of taking its already-existing tools and tech and applying it to the core of what a telecommunication company does: moving information to connect people and create experiences.

“While other telecommunications companies at the time were looking at sports sponsorships or acquiring content rights, we thought it was a great opportunity to take what we had and differentiate by helping with what is probably the biggest social challenge of our generation,” Sihota says.

To get ahead, Sihota says the company invested \$10 billion in its fibre optic network. Being an early adopter of high-speed data transmission for faster TV and internet service gave it a head start on technology that made it easier to transition into health and connected homes (which also require high speed networks). But it has also prepared Telus for the coming 5G network upgrade, with data transmission speeds that will improve the function of connected devices and change the role they play in Telus customers’ lives. Sihota says an infrastructure investment creates the “backbone” for the company to provide experiences that meet consumers’ standards in a connected world.

“When I was first building fibre out in 2003, we had a lot of people question why we were going to do that and why would a telco deliver TV,” Sihota says. “No one would question that decision now, because it’s part of the communications landscape. We’re a business that uses technology to give customers a better experience, whether it’s through their phones or TV or healthcare. Our longevity will be dependent on the services we are providing and making sure they are valuable to our customers, and when we know how well it works, it creates affinity for the rest of the brand.”

RBC has also been pushing into new areas with RBC Ventures, the bank’s internal incubator.

Over the last two years, it has been creating and scaling new digital businesses that are tangentially related to finance, such as new loyalty and rewards programs, apps to manage rent payments and tools for everything from job searches to finding a home.

“There’s a whole ecosystem associated with every financial transaction,” Wildberger says. “We have newcomers to Canada and young people entering the job and home markets, and we can lean on RBC’s strengths to deliver value during those moments. There is also an element of capturing data and leveraging that relationship to create new opportunities. We can create an ecosystem where clients understand we are transparent with their data,

how we use it and the value that comes from it.”

Beredo, Wildberger and Shiota all agree that, looking back, their companies would be better off if they had begun their digital transformations even earlier, as failed experiments would have put them further along their current paths. That makes the lesson for any company that is skittish about innovation clear: whatever you do, start now.

“The technology is super complicated and there’s a variety of solutions out there,” Beredo says, speaking specifically to data and AI but offering advice that is applicable across the board. “Among beauty companies, we are much more advanced than a lot of others, but if we could have done the data transformation even earlier we’d be even more focused on how we are going to get power out of our data.”

**Right:** Telus used technology for high-speed TV and internet to push into new areas, like connected homes and healthcare.



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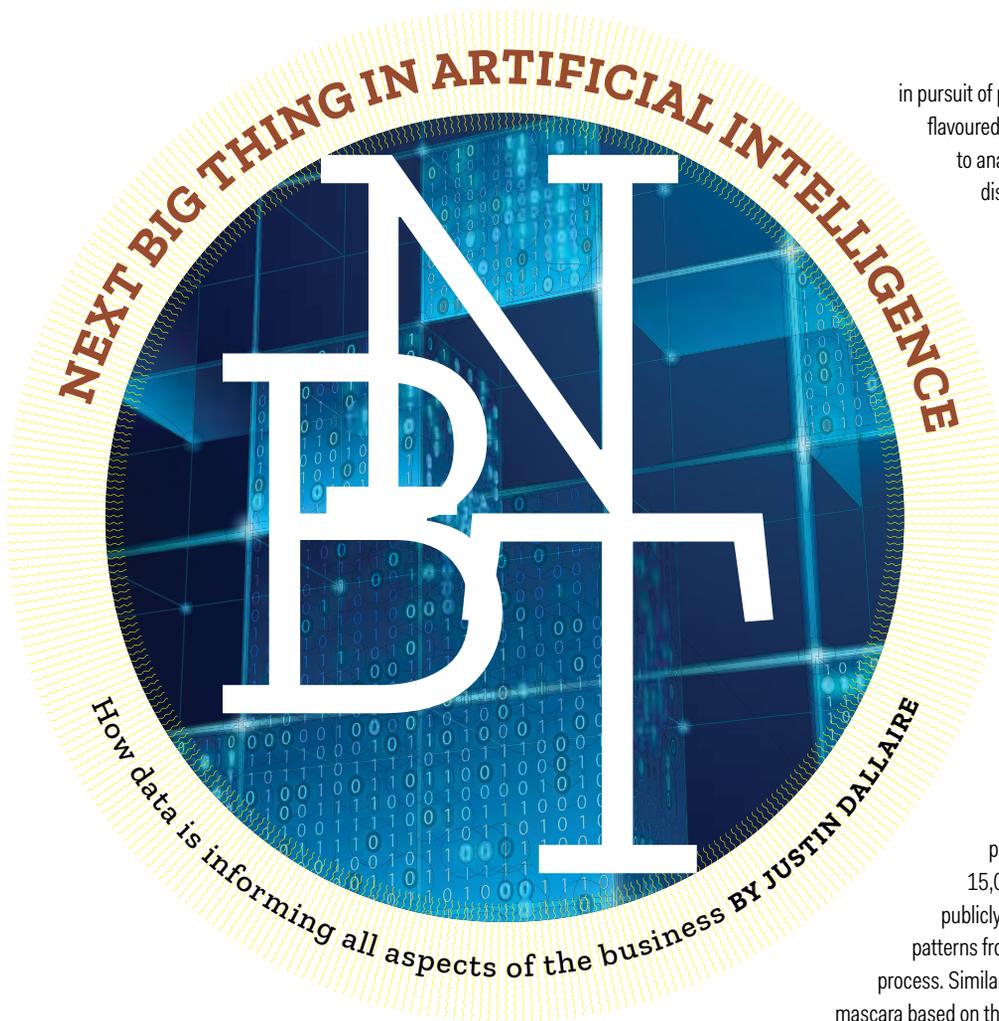
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In recent years, every sector, from finance to QSR, has amassed and aggregated data from various sources to uncover themes around unmet consumer needs, says Meghan Nameth, managing director for customer marketing and product analytics at PwC.

But identifying patterns within defined sets of structured data is “actually the easy part of AI,” notes Anne-Marie Castonguay, who heads up data and insights at Lg2. Now, the next big thing is deciphering unstructured data, such as documents, audio, video, social chatter and product reviews, which are usually qualitative in nature and far more difficult to parse.

Machine learning algorithms typically use structured data – clearly defined data types that can be easily categorized, stored and searched in a database – to function. But recently, Hugo Thibault, VP at Stradigi AI, says the industry has moved away from using tables of columns categorizing the data it thought was important to track to using “unstructured data sets that captures a whole lot more.”

In 2017, Unilever showed the potential of exploiting new data sources

in pursuit of product innovation when it launched cereal-flavoured ice creams under the Ben & Jerry’s label. Using AI to analyze song lyrics in the public domain, the CPG giant discovered as many as 50 songs that associated ice-cream with breakfast. Consumers’ existing affinity for early-morning frozen desserts was backed up with other research, and Ben & Jerry’s soon had a product others have since imitated.

As AI becomes more sophisticated, many companies are beginning to understand the potential of unstructured data to inform their decisions. Advancements in natural language processing has enabled AI to utilize these complex, qualitative data sets to more easily “read, understand, classify and find clusters of information,” Thibault says. This should then influence how products are developed and communicated to their customers.

Last year, Tommy Hilfiger partnered with IBM and the Fashion Institute of Technology on a tool that analyzed customer responses to its clothing line, as well as fashion trends around patterns, silhouettes, colours and styles – using 15,000 Tommy Hilfiger product images, 600,000 publicly available photos of fashion shows, and 100,000 patterns from various fabric sites – to help inform the design process. Similarly, Avon announced in August the launch of a new mascara based on the findings of its Genius Algorithm, an AI-based tool created in partnership with agency Media Monks that enabled it to read, filter, process and rank thousands of social media comments to determine the features consumers want from a mascara, such as “volume, length, lift, definition and dramatic black colour.” While those tend to be the characteristics most people look for in a mascara, Avon has said the big finding was that customers don’t want to choose one feature over another.

Early on, AI required setting clear search parameters, such as keywords, to help machine learning algorithms pull relevant insights from data, according to Line Atallah, SVP at Weber Shandwick and a former VP of marketing at Keatext, a Montreal-based AI company that specializes in unstructured text-based data for consumer applications. But advancements in natural language processing has enabled it to make sense of information outside of established parameters, helping to strip away some of the human bias. This change, she says, has enabled the discovery of potential “blind spots” in product development processes.

Atallah, for example, has worked with a brand in the recreational vehicle space that discovered a disproportionate amount of negative online comments about the company that contained the word “beer.” After digging deeper, the brand discovered its vehicles were poorly equipped to keep beer cold during transportation. Unable to share specifics, she says the brand has since incorporated that insight into product design. “No human in the world would have put beer as a keyword when looking for a

**Clockwise:** Brands including Nike, Avon and McDonald's are leveraging AI to find efficiencies, launch new products and get closer to their customers.

defect in the product," she says. "That's one example of how AI can help discover the unknown."

To date, few companies outside of Google and Amazon have been able to apply what is known as deep learning – a more advanced subset of machine learning and one that powers self-driving cars, for example – into their business practices, Castonguay notes. Unlike machine learning, deep learning learns through its own trial and error. Few companies currently have access to the amount of data required to make deep learning a reality, except of course Google, Amazon, Apple and other data titans.

Still, Thibault believes the future potential of deep learning is "tremendous" and will increase significantly over the next few years, thanks in part to the proliferation of AI platforms, such as Stradigi AI's own Kepler, which can forecast accuracy, make inventory predictions and product recommendations, as well as analyze social media.

What's more, Brent Chaters, managing director of digital customer at Accenture, says the future will see different AI platforms continue to integrate with the goal of enhancing consumer experiences. For instance, IBM has worked with Salesforce to combine its Watson AI platform into Einstein, the CRM company's own AI offering. And Google and Amazon have made some of their AI capabilities available to smaller businesses.

One of the biggest challenges facing brands is correlating their own data with external ones to create Big Data sets that can be fed into AI, notes Castonguay. "Some people are pretty good at finding insights," she says. "But using those insights on a daily basis [to] then inform your business – we're not quite there yet."

PwC's Nameth adds that doing so enables companies to understand their customers before they even become customers, because AI tools can help "merge structured and unstructured data to identify clues as to who might be a potential customer... based on the experiences you've had [with] your current customer base."

Combining various data sets is where the value of AI rests for marketers, she adds.

Thibault sees a recent series of AI acquisitions this year as evidence of the potential of AI when it comes to solving business challenges. He points to a Gartner survey that predicts 85% of all customer interactions in retail will be managed by AI come 2020.

In September, McDonald's acquired Apprente, a voice-based, conversational AI system focused on fast-food ordering that aims to increase the speed of transactions at the drive-thru window. Apprente, which will be folded into the QSR's Silicon Valley-based McD Tech Labs, says it can handle "complex, multilingual, multi-accent and multi-item conversational ordering."

News of the deal came six months after McDonald's acquired Dynamic Yield – a machine learning company focused on personalized experiences – for more than \$300 million. McDonald's is expected to use the company's decision-making algorithms to help tailor its drive-thru menu based on weather, real-time restaurant traffic and trending menu items. And in an interview with tech publication *Wired*, McDonald's CEO Steve

Easterbrook suggested similar predictive tech could eventually connect back to the kitchen, driving efficiencies right through the supply chain.

Outside of QSR, in February, Walmart absorbed AI startup Aspectiva – which specializes in personalized product recommendations based on a combination of reviews and shopper browsing behaviour – in a bid to enhance its ecommerce experience to better compete with Amazon. And in August, Nike acquired Celest, a player in ecommerce AI, to help boost its predictive analytics and better anticipate inventory needs using structured and unstructured data, as part of its ongoing "consumer direct offense strategy."

To Thibault, examples like these suggest brands are "leveraging the whole journey from production to post-consumption to collect data to ultimately optimize the overall experience." Companies often start with two or three use cases to prove ROI, he says, before moving towards a more complete AI roadmap.

"You're seeing a lot of these organizations going out and they're not just looking to buy tools. They're actually looking to embed capabilities into their organization, which is a smart way of thinking about this," Chaters says. "The organizations that are exploring this as part of their DNA are probably building for the future."

**"SOME PEOPLE ARE PRETTY GOOD AT FINDING INSIGHTS. BUT USING THOSE INSIGHTS ON A DAILY BASIS TO INFORM YOUR BUSINESS - WE'RE NOT QUITE THERE YET."**





Last summer, HomeEquity Bank reintroduced its brand to older Canadians with a humorous and emotive campaign that focused on its bread-and-butter: reverse home mortgages. The creative, by Zulu Alpha Kilo, marked a significant departure for the 30-year-old company, whose marketing had long been product-driven.

Later, HomeEquity partnered with Toronto-based neuromarketing firm Brainsights to test 300 participants' unconscious reactions to its creative, measuring viewers' brainwaves while exposing them to content, including old and recent HomeEquity ads and six new prototype spots. It wanted to avoid the "group think" that can occur during traditional focus groups, and prevent respondents from saying what they thought the brand wanted to hear, says Yvonne Ziomecki, CMO and EVP of marketing and sales.

The test revealed that one of the campaign's commercials (a direct-response ad) could perform much better if it reduced the amount of emotional messaging, repeated the company's phone number, and reinforced the value proposition midway through the spot by using checkmarks to highlight key points. Based on those insights, the brand hit reset on the ad and launched a new one with Zulu this summer.

When neuromarketing (also known as consumer neuroscience) was introduced in the early 2000s with the goal of opening a window into consumers' minds, skeptics were quick to point out the field's perceived pitfalls: exorbitant fees, smaller-than-average sample sizes and delays inherent to science-based (and equipment-heavy) approaches to market research. But developments in automation, machine learning and AI, as well as in the science of the brain itself, are poised to help neuromarketing become a more accessible and efficient option for brands.

In 2017, a survey by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) in the U.S. looked into marketers' awareness and perception of the discipline. Of the 187 marketers surveyed, the majority expected to see it either complement (64%) or replace (30%) more traditional forms of market research. More importantly, while only 10% of respondents linked their use of the science to specific business outcomes, they did report an average increase of 16% in revenue.

As Carl Marci, then-chief neuroscientist and EVP at Nielsen Consumer Neuroscience, noted in the report, some CPG companies have moved from "occasional" to "everyday" use of neuromarketing – with one multinational reporting it now tests 80% of its ads this way. What's more, neuroscience has begun to move beyond the realm of CPG and into other categories, such as financial services, media, tech and non-profits, according to Marci.

Kevin Keane, co-founder and CEO of Brainsights, notes that replicability of results has had an impact on marketers' perception of neuromarketing over the last couple of years. As studies from different researchers around the world begin to point at similar results – a critical evolution in any science-based discipline – clients are beginning to feel more confident in its capabilities, he says.

"It encourages the industry forward in saying, 'We've all found the same things and now we can start competing in different ways,'" Keane says. "It's not the Wild West anymore; it's not just a bunch of cowboys saying, 'This is the buy button in the brain.'"

Brand marketing studies at True Impact, another Toronto-based neuromarketing agency founded by Diana Lucaci in 2012, were previously conducted with the help of academic or institutional partners, such as hospitals, and would take weeks or months. Today, that same research can be completed in a matter of hours, thanks in part to advancements that enable companies to glean data much quicker, says Lucaci.

"The analysis, the processing, the interpretation – all of that stuff has been condensed now," Lucaci says. "It doesn't take that long to analyze data coming from a high-grade EEG headset like it used to in the past."

Lucaci says the only thing that hasn't been automated is the interpretation of that data into actionable insights. "You still need a person with expertise in multiple industries to connect the dots and to translate

**Top right:** HomeEquity worked with neuromarketing firm Brainsights to test the effectiveness of a new campaign.  
**Bottom right:** High-grade EEG and eye-tracking gear are used for mobile usability research.

it for them in a way they can understand it," she says. But, in the future, recommendations could one day be automated. "We're moving from being reactive to being intentional, then using AI to solve those challenges that marketers have."

In July, Brainsights began rolling out Express Brainsights, a "self-serve video neuralizer," which Keane says allows clients to go to its website, select their audience and screen size, upload any piece of video content, and receive brain data about it, as well as a performance analysis report – all within five days. And with fees starting at \$5,000, it's cheaper than traditional neuro-based research services, he says. Soon, the company will be adding a cross-screen solution and branded content analysis to the mix.

Having scanned thousands of brains to date, Brainsights now has access to vast amounts of data – its EEG headsets record up to a dozen brainwaves every two milliseconds during a single brain scan – which it hopes to one day leverage through machine learning, he says.

In the future, AI-powered image recognition technology could be used to read and understand video content down to the individual frame, making it possible to seamlessly run that content against previously recorded neurological data – without needing to scan a single brain, says Keane. That would not only speed up the analysis process, but could help further bring down costs.

**"IT'S NOT THE WILD WEST ANYMORE. IT'S NOT JUST A BUNCH OF COWBOYS SAYING 'THIS IS THE BUY BUTTON IN THE BRAIN.'"**

Already, developments in the field have enabled some agencies and brands to apply neuromarketing in new ways. For example, Nish Shah, VP of strategy at Initiative, says the agency worked with Brainsights to better understand video effectiveness.

Shah believed brand familiarity played a role in building brand relevance – a hypothesis it was able to prove out using neuro-based research. That work has enabled it to develop a "video content formula" for driving greater brand relevance in campaigns. According to Shah, viewers find long commercials more relevant after they are exposed to two shorter spots. "We could simulate brand familiarity at a campaign level just by changing the way we sequence ads and see this pretty drastic change."

The agency has now begun to leverage that formula to help drive brand relevance with clients such as beer brand Carlsberg. "They've got a longer story to tell and they don't just want to run six-second ads," says Noah Vardon, VP at Initiative. Introducing video sequencing, he says, has led to a 30% to 35% bump in watch time for Carlsberg's long-form videos.

While there have been advancements, barriers to widespread adoption remain. The ANA study, for example, found that only 14% of marketers have used EEG, while eye tracking (another method used in neuromarketing) was the most widely used at only 36%. And for EEG, 20% of marketers considered it to be a "very valid and reliable" form of research.

Adam Spadaro, marketing insights lead at Shopify, has a PhD in cognitive psychology and has dabbled in neuromarketing, behavioural economics and traditional market research, having previously worked as a



director of behavioural insights and measurement at agency John St.

He agrees that there's been a growing interest in neuromarketing and adjacent fields – including behavioural science – as some major research firms begin to launch these sub-disciplines within their own companies. Deloitte Canada is in the midst of launching an Emotional Experience Index to help evaluate user experience using neuroscience; Nielsen now has 16 neuro labs globally (though not in Canada); and some clients, such as P&G, have reportedly begun bringing neuroscientists in-house.

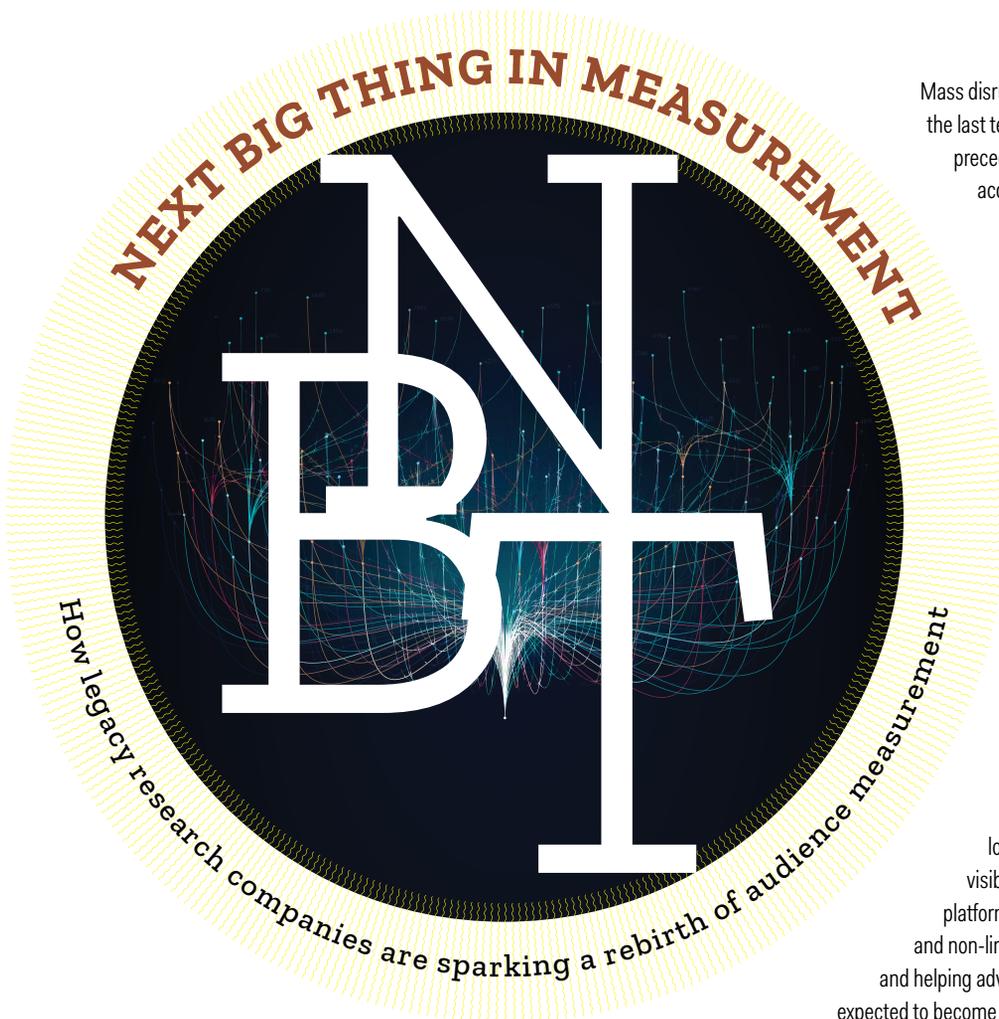
But Spadaro notes that other forms of market research can uncover similar insights through controlled experiments.

"[There are] a lot more simple, less sexy ways of doing it that are a lot more cost-effective... Whether you are experimenting on a website, app [or] social media channel, the insights gathered from research are being evaluated based on their ability to yield significant increases in some marketing metric," Spadaro says. That is why his focus at Shopify has been to "run controlled experiments where we can manipulate our marketing materials or manipulate who gets exposed to certain ads or content on our site, to measure the effects on our performance marketing and on our brand."

Over the next three-to-five years, Lucaci says True Impact will focus on becoming more of a neuromarketing SaaS (software-as-a-service) player, as it builds on its predictive model, scanning brains less frequently as a result.

As for Brainsights, Keane says the business was once very project-focused, but it's increasingly moving towards products (such as Express Brainsights), platforms and partnerships with advertisers and media shops. "We're working with [agencies] to effectively create a neuro-layer to the data stack that they'll be bringing to their clients," he says.





**M**uch like the cultural transformation of the Renaissance, sparked by a return to classical ways of thinking, the audience measurement industry in Canada is in the midst of its own kind of rebirth, argues Rob Young, SVP of PHD Canada.

Vividata has forayed into specialized product studies – including new ethnic consumer research – and has partnered with other companies on a passive media measurement initiative. Nielsen and digital marketing intelligence platform Pathmatics are investing in new ways to measure internet impressions and ad expenditures. And since 2017, media research consultancy Audience Insights has partnered with Ulster Media on a *Canadian Podcast Listener Survey* to shed light on the growing audience segment. Each initiative is “transformative” in its own way, Young says, and points to an industry-wide push for greater cross-platform audience measurement in Canada.

“These measurement initiatives are not proposals or plans or ‘nice-to-haves,’” he says. “They are emerging as well-funded and fully formed initiatives that are being purchased and utilized by marketers and their media agencies.”

Mass disruption in the Canadian media landscape over the last ten years resulted in advertisers giving greater precedence to actionable data-based audience tracking, according to Young. As a result, advertisers began holding back their investments in more traditional survey-based research subscriptions. But as the limitations of relying on clickstream, data-based measurement emerge – for one, they provide information on the devices and browsers being used, not the viewers and listeners themselves – Young says legacy media research companies are responding with new methods that offer more balance.

The impending launch of a Video Audience Measurement (VAM) tool by Numeris – the country’s TV and radio ratings provider – is a notable example of the investments being made. VAM has been spearheaded by Neil McEneaney, who was hired as president and CEO of Numeris in 2016 to help develop its cross-platform measurement strategy.

VAM promises to fix what has been a longstanding pain point for the TV industry – poor visibility into consumers’ viewing habits across multiple platforms and devices – by bringing together linear and non-linear audience measurement across platforms and helping advertisers more accurately track ROI. VAM data is expected to become commercially available next year.

The tool will provide “a holistic digital-plus-linear audience measurement to allow both advertisers and agencies... to be able to manage it better [and] have greater visibility, and for broadcasters to strategically invest in content and monetize it,” says McEneaney. And as a third-party audience measurement partner, Numeris is able to come to the table with a solution that is “standardized, consistent and audited.”

A few years ago, it didn’t matter as much that the industry couldn’t adequately capture data outside of linear broadcast, because non-linear consumption was still in the single-digit percentiles, says Alan Dark, SVP of media sales at Rogers and chair of the VAM Steering Committee. However, with more viewers turning to non-linear channels, the new tool aims to capture all of that data within one ecosystem. “It gives marketers a much more holistic view of all the consumption that is happening around these assets,” Dark says.

“It really does open up a door where you can still go after a mass audience with maximum reach, or you can start to tailor different platforms with different formats of messaging to cut through the clutter or to more narrowly focus your marketing dollars on a narrower segment of a market.”

Outside of VAM, Numeris has also been working with the CRTC on a new industry measurement system for set-top boxes, which should further shed light on the current video landscape, McEneaney says. Together, that work and VAM “are just different components of a cross-platform measurement strategy that are going to snap together when all the pieces are live and position the industry to have better tools to plan, manage,



Cheers to not giving a



about the status quo.

Congratulations to **Loblaws** on its  
nomination for Brand of the Year.

**lg2**

# BRANDS OF THE YEAR

**B**uilding a brand worthy of being recognized as a Brand of the Year takes years of hard work to pull off, as the stories behind the success of Loblaw, MEC, Ecobee, Ritual, October's Very Own, and Frank And Oak all show. In the stories that follow, the marketers behind these trendy and often tech-savvy brands share the steps they took to break through. Loblaw is connecting with Canadians by honing in on shopper insights; MEC is building trust through the outdoor community; Ecobee is democratizing data to bring transparency; Ritual is going from plattform to partner after years of rapid growth; OVO is building brand hype through creative collabs; and finally, Frank And Oak is paving the way for a more sustainable future. Before landing on the winners, *strategy's* editorial team scoured the market for candidates across categories. Then, we consulted with industry experts, debated a long list, and finally narrowed it down to the brands featured on the next few pages. (*Note: the BOYs do not appear in any particular order.*)



# Loblaw zeroes in on shoppers

How Canada's largest retailer is building its entire business around the customer.

BY JOSH KOLM

Loblaw Companies has been laser-focused on knowing everything it can about its customers and how they shop. But despite the intel it has from its 18 million member-strong loyalty program, there is one thing president Sarah Davis is unsure of. "I don't actually know [if a person] could tell you every brand we own in their town," she says. "But we're in every community in Canada, and that community knows what our companies are doing there, banner by banner."

With roughly 30 different retail banners, three private label brands, a fashion label and a financial company, it wouldn't be surprising if Canadians couldn't associate all of them with the parent brand. But running through that full portfolio is the same underlying approach to brand-building. Many companies talk about being "customer centric" as part of their mission and long-term strategy, but Loblaw has

turned that into a core tenet of its business and marketing.

In 2018, the company created a "chief customer officer" role to look at every aspect of its business through a consumer lens, around the same time it launched a "Customer Centre of Excellence" in its Brampton, Ont. head office. The dedicated team works on research projects and analyzes customer data to uncover insights about a shopper's day-to-day challenges and concerns, as well as their relationship with Loblaw's brands.

"We've gotten savvier with our data on our customers, specifically when it comes to how we use it to make what we do more impactful for them," Davis says. "It's not just about making ads stand out. It's using data to develop insights that allow us to market ourselves in a way that makes people feel like we understand them, which makes them excited about shopping with us... It's not about using



archetypes of customers. We want to be specific to the individual customer and have what is relevant to them.”

The biggest shift in Loblaw’s marketing department, according to SVP of marketing Uwe Stueckmann, has been the creation of Loblaw Media. In April, the company piloted a digital ad service powered by a prodigious amount of first-party customer data from its PC Optimum loyalty program, targeting members who have opted in to receive personalized ads in exchange for extra points. It also allows Loblaw to add value to its vendor partnerships, with Stueckmann adding that the company has executed more than 1,000 campaigns with its partners using the service so far.

But Loblaw Media has changed the company’s marketing beyond letting it target its own ads (though Stueckmann says that has been valuable, as has the measurement capabilities that come with it). It also gives the company another way to put the customer first.

“Loblaw Media has turned the whole marketing process on its ear,” Stueckmann says. “In the past, much of our work would have been getting the creative right first, and then buying media to get it in front of the right audience. That process is totally reversed now. We start with finding the right audience and then develop creative against that audience. And it’s not segments in a broad,

**Above:** Loblaw has led platforms for dozens of brands, but all of them are built around celebrating its customers – from No Frills’ “Haulers,” to President’s Choice’ Express pick-up, to No Name’s simple “free from” products, to the company’s “Food Lovers Unite” masterbrand campaign.

demographic way. We are starting with really tightly defined behavioural segments of people actually buying stuff at our stores.”

Davis says the through-line in Loblaw’s marketing, regardless of banner, audience or insight, is that the ideas are all centred around how shopping makes a customer feel. And despite Loblaw operating so many different banners across the country, Stueckmann says getting to those insights is not about being broad. It’s about understanding what makes its core customers happy to shop at each banner on an emotional level, and then amplifying it.

“If we use No Frills as an example, it’s not just about the first answer you get from customers, which is always that [the retailer has] the lowest prices,” Stueckmann says. “If you get to the second and third answers, it’s about feeling smart and being proud of making choices that save money. Tapping into that emotion with something that celebrates their choices allows the customer to celebrate themselves, too.”

The No Frills “Haulers” campaign – which aimed to instill pride in people who found bargains at the discount banner – is one of several platforms Loblaw built on this year with fresh creative. The company also continued the President’s Choice “Eat Together” platform – which reminds people of the importance of enjoying food with loved ones – and released more funny spots featuring comedian Martin Matte for Quebec discount banner Maxi (that campaign was handled by agency Lg2, whereas other campaigns have been led by John St.). Shoppers Drug Mart has also pushed into more influencer- and experiential-led programs to promote its beauty and health offerings.

In the spring, Loblaw launched its first-ever masterbrand campaign, encouraging people to come together around their love of food. The creative assured Canadians that even if they were a picky eater (or did things that would make the stereotypical foodie’s skin crawl, like slathering a steak in ketchup), anyone who cares that much about how they eat must have a passion for food. Creative for “Food Lovers Unite” was also tweaked based on where it appeared, with the end logo changed to a regional banner, like Zehrs in southern Ontario or Provigo in Quebec.

While No Frills championed bargain hunters, fellow discount banner Real Canadian Superstore’s “Shop Like A Mother” campaign also emphasized its customers’ attitude when it launched in the spring. But for a target that is less likely to find joy in a bargain, the work focuses more on shopping the way they want, be it eating in the aisles or buying lobsters with saved-up loyalty points.

As for No Name, what began in June with a Twitter account that posted cheeky, minimalist descriptions of products like evaporated milk (“not an empty can”) and all-purpose tomato sauce (“main purpose: sauce”) grew into a full-fledged campaign by September. The creative used descriptions in meta ads that highlight how the simplicity of its products also means food that is free from additives.

Stueckmann says the company has moved away from traditional retail ads that are promo- and product-focused, instead building a long-term emotional connection. He adds that there has been an effort to buck the trend of “marketers getting sick of our ads before consumers,” with plans to continue building its platforms, instead of chasing what’s shiny and new.



Outside of media, the marketing team at Loblaw has had a number of other changes to help build its house of brands. The company has grown its in-house content and production capabilities, which Stueckmann expects to continue as market demand for content increases. Loblaw has also taken the agile development methodology from the tech world and applied it to marketing, empowering the department to make its own decisions and self-organize into their own teams. That has resulted in things like the two-person team that creates the much-loved content for the No Name Twitter account.

While many major Canadian grocery chains struggle to consistently post positive quarterly results, Loblaw is not one of them. The company recently reported 1.3% year-over-year same-store sales growth in food retail and 3.1% in drug retail for the first half of 2019, along with a 3% growth in revenue.

However, those results might have been higher, had it not been for sluggish same-store sales growth in food retail in Q2. Data algorithms that had improved profitability and margins in its market division were applied to other areas, like discount. But focusing on higher margins resulted in fewer promotions to draw customers in-store at a time when they were experiencing inflation and had become more cost-conscious. Davis told investors in an earnings call that changes to its data strategy would be coming. She later told

*strategy* that the changes have been more along the lines of minor tweaks than a major overhaul “so when we see things like inflation in the market, we can make sure our data and models account for the impact on the way people shop.”

Serving “the way people shop” has also been a driving force for Loblaw to push into new service offerings. The company’s delivery and click-and-collect offerings have been expanding across Canada since it was first piloted in 2017, with delivery through Instacart available at over 250 grocery stores and 60 Shoppers Drug Mart locations. It’s also the Canadian retailer launch partner for Loop, TerraCycle’s sustainable packaging program that delivers products in refillable containers. The partnership not only adds to the retailer’s environmental initiatives – which include programs to reduce food waste and updating its stores to reduce emissions – but it also offers another platform for customers to shop the way they want.

“There are always customers who want to go into the store themselves,” Davis says. “There are others who are time starved or just don’t enjoy it and would rather do it online. We are a mass merchant that tries to appeal to all Canadians, so that means having a lot of different options so people can get what they want, the way they want, at the time that they want.”

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# Ecobee brings purpose to smart thermostats

How the smart home start-up won customers over through innovation, social impact and an empowering approach to sharing data.

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

Clockwise from bottom left: Ecobee injects purpose into the smart thermostat category via an abstract spot; new investments could help propel the brand beyond pure-play temp control; the voice-activated device in a consumer's home.

An object rises like a starship from the ether, dark and smooth all over. Slowly, its surface comes to life with a faint hum and glow. It then begins to interact with its environment, emitting forces that ebb and flow across space, enveloping the world. So goes the spot introducing Ecobee's smart thermostat with voice control.

As abstract as it is beautiful, the video is a testament to how far the Toronto-based company has come since launching the smart thermostat category in Canada more than a decade ago. There's none of the usual shoptalk around features and product functionality, as the video – created by design and animation studio Tendril in the summer – assumes consumers understand the basics of smart home devices.

Rather, the goal is to inspire and disrupt, to transform the way consumers think and feel about a category that, until recently, was decidedly low-interest and uninspiring.

"People are busy. They're not looking to add more devices into the home. They don't need more weekend projects, so it just felt like there was a void in terms of inspiration," says Jackie Poriadjian-Asch, Ecobee's CMO and chief revenue officer. "Being able to communicate the notion of being innovative and planet positive, not

as a tension point, but that they can live in harmony, symbiotically strengthening each other – that's at the heart of Ecobee."

President and CEO Stuart Lombard says the brand's new creative M.O. is the reason he hired Poriadjian-Asch, who previously led marketing for the Ultimate Fighting Championship and Canada Goose. As Ecobee faces stiff competition from industry giants like Nest and Honeywell, Lombard believes success lies in pushing the company – whose DNA is in engineering quality tech products – to become a lifestyle brand that's focused on innovation, social and environmental impact, as well as having an empowered approach to data.

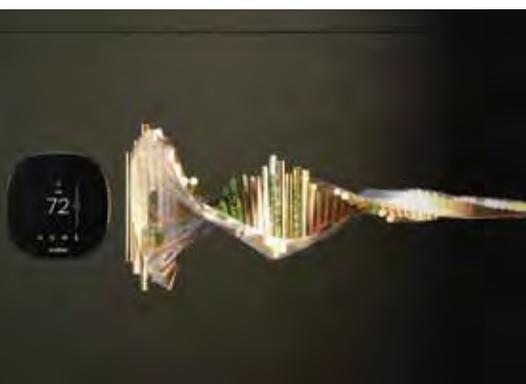
Ecobee's recent investments in marketing are designed to help accelerate its already impressive growth trajectory. Currently on track to reach \$1 billion in sales by 2020, the company has seen its revenues double almost every year since its first thermostat went to market in 2009. Ten percent of its sales are from Canada, the other 90% from the U.S., results that align with the populations of each market.

While marketing spend as a percentage of sales has remained more-or-less consistent in recent years, the brand's strong year-over-year growth comes with "a couple extra bucks to put towards investments in marketing," Poriadjian-Asch says. The



CMO remains focused on running a "lean and mean" operation, she says, even as the company moves into a new office near Toronto's Harbourfront to accommodate rapid workforce expansion. Today, Ecobee holds around 30% market share in smart thermostats across North America, second to Nest, the California-based smart home devices company that was acquired by Google in 2014.

Ecobee was the first to bring a smart thermostat solution to market. Twelve years ago, few people understood the product, let alone how to install it. Today, 75% of Ecobee customers install the device themselves. The early years saw the brand concentrate its efforts on the B2B channel, using HVAC service providers to get its product into Canadian households at a time when the smart home market wasn't as developed.



“Our goal was to win with the toughest critics on the planet, the people who really know about heating and cooling, and then marrying that with our consumer electronics background,” Lombard says.

With the entrance of Nest in 2011 and of long-time thermostat maker Honeywell to the smart category in 2014, it was time to communicate that message differently. In 2016, it launched its first awareness campaign, with the goal of showcasing the product's usefulness to families in unpredictable weather regions like Alaska.

That same year, the thermostat maker launched Donate Your Data, a program for customers to voluntarily contribute their home data towards energy efficiency research. Through the program, Ecobee shares anonymized data – like age, size and occupancy of the home, temperatures, HVAC usage and occupant preferences – with academic, governmental and non-profit organizations.

Donate Your Data has led to tangible benefits for communities. Research for the state of Indiana in 2018 used anonymized data from hundreds of households, enabling researchers to discover a solution that could save the state anywhere from US\$448 million to \$2.3 billion – helping it avoid an energy crisis. Lombard says the program addresses a barrier to entry for consumers (privacy concerns that

come with connected devices) while helping Ecobee differentiate from companies that monetize data.

“It shows how even in this state of panic over privacy and data, companies can still lean into sharing and using data for good – just by being transparent,” adds Poriadjian-Asch. “Organizations are rushing to send you emails and tell you all of the things they are not doing with your data, as a defensive play. You can simply continue to leverage data for good, make it the choice of the consumer, and tell them what every step of that process is.”

As part of its social impact strategy, Ecobee has also worked with Toronto Community Housing to install smart thermostats in 776 apartments in the city, making social housing more sustainable. The strategy has not only helped it win over customers, but also employees. Poriadjian-Asch says around 98% of staff cite Ecobee's social impact and founding principles as one of the reasons they joined the company.

Some of its biggest competitors offer a broad range of products. Nest, for example, sells smoke detectors, indoor and outdoor cameras, doorbells and locks, all designed to work together. But Ecobee has remained steadfastly focused on its core product offering,

subscribing to the philosophy that “less is more” and aspiring to be the “smartphone of thermostats,” says Poriadjian-Asch. Moreover, the approach has given credence to its claim of offering customers simplicity – not a slew of new devices to master.

Instead, it's built a partnership strategy to help customers integrate Ecobee's products with other smart home devices. In 2017, it launched a North American-wide campaign for the Ecobee 4, which comes with Alexa built in, before the product was even available in Canada. When Amazon officially brought its AI assistant to market, Ecobee had already generated excitement around the possibilities of a voice-powered home. Today, its products integrate with Apple HomeKit, Samsung SmartThings, and Haiku Fans.

As for the future, the brand is looking beyond pure-play temperature control. In March 2018, it launched Switch+, a smart light switch that can be operated by Alexa voice commands. It also concluded an \$80 million funding round – supported by Amazon's Alexa Fund – that could help fuel expansion into new product categories. For now, Ecobee remains focused on doing what it already does well. Because as Poriadjian-Asch puts it, the “idea of doing everything goes against the whole point [of the brand].”



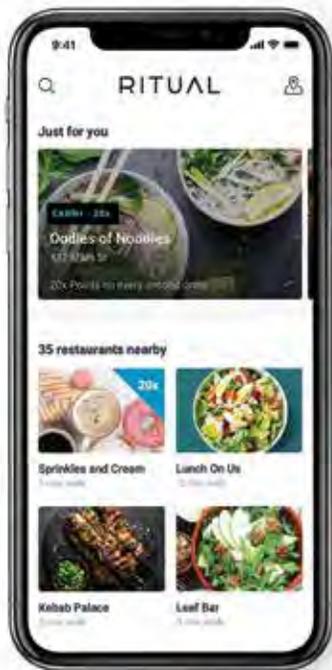
The marble counter at my local lunch stop has a peculiar shape. I can't quite decide if it was by design or out of necessity. The far end draws my attention, not because there's a mob of people eyeing boxes of glass noodles and greens in search of their name, having cleverly ordered ahead. No, I'm curious about the chunk of marble that's conspicuously missing from the counter. It's created a nook that holds just-made bowls ordered through meal-ordering apps like Ritual. Was its original purpose to display drinks on ice? I can't be certain. But it's drawing hungry nine-to-fivers like moths to a flame – of which I'm sure was deliberate.

My speculation was sparked by something Ritual's co-founder and CEO Raymond Reddy said during an interview about what the 2019 Brand of the Year has learned to stand out among the many hopeful meal ordering apps that enable queue-skipping at local eateries. He tells me that restaurants are challenged just as much today as retailers were a decade ago, back when a tornado called technology left disruption in its wake. "[Today] when you add up all of the average restaurant's digital sources; when you add up third-party delivery and Ritual, it makes up half of their business. More than half is digital, not walk-ins," he says. Yet, "most stores today aren't designed for digital-first."

Reddy explains that this gap is why Ritual is pivoting. "During the first few years, we focused on the product for consumers. But now, half of the company is focused on building products for our [restaurant] businesses," he says. "We pay a lot of attention to what the experience is like, which is why we have built a lot of products and have invested a lot into things that you wouldn't even consider being technology."

The app company is making its move into consultancy territory, where food halls in New York, for example, look to its team to design vertical shelving and store layouts. Reddy and his co-founders Larry Stinson and Robert Kim now sit in restaurant logistics and operations meetings, something the software developers – originally hailing from Silicon Valley where they worked at Google – likely never dreamed they'd do.

It helps to understand Ritual's evolving business by going back to 2015, when the co-founders and high school pals first tested the app in a handful of workplaces in Toronto's King St. West neighbourhood. Four years of sweat and tears went into refining the platform. It was a very



# Ritual scales and shifts gears

How the company is investing in its future by building products that go beyond the meal ordering app. BY JENNIFER HORN

slow, but very calculated approach. Reddy says the team used the advantages of a small, controlled operation to perfect the product until it was ready to scale, starting with only 50 local merchants signed onto its app. It wasn't until two years later when Ritual expanded outside of Toronto – a far cry from the 15 cities it launched last quarter, bringing its presence to 40-plus global markets. The company has raised US\$127.7 million in venture capital funds during its four years, and today the app is used to help feed the bellies of “100,000 corporate teams and millions of customers,” according to Ritual's website. Reddy says he credits all of the company's success in 2019 “with the fact that we went slower and smaller than anyone thought we should have in 2015.”

While speed to market was taken at a safe pace, Reddy and his partners enjoy the thrill of a startup by embracing a high tolerance for failure. Tech co.'s, like Ritual, thrive in the assumption that version one of anything won't work, he says, and uses its Piggyback as an example of a product that failed three times (starting at ground zero each time) before it finally clicked into place. The in-app tool essentially digitized the age-old coffee run: “guests” jump on an order made by a “host,” who then retrieves the team's lunch in return for Ritual rewards – which, as an aside, makes it the biggest restaurant loyalty coalition of more than 5,000 eateries and coffee shops. Piggyback wasn't something anyone could have asked for, says Reddy, but today more than 150,000 teams use the system in cities in North America, the U.K. and Australia.

From a wellness program that encourages people to eat healthier lunch options, to meal credits that employers can give staff, Ritual has created products for corporate offices to attract talent and build company culture. But twelve months ago, Reddy and his partners invested more time and resources into the restaurant side of its operations. With the platform becoming more scalable and expanding into new markets (Asia and Europe are next), the company is in a position to offer deeper data and analytics. “Because people on Ritual can rate every order, we now have a feedback loop that never existed before,” says Reddy. “We can measure how many orders were made incorrectly, or if it was late, or if the person didn't have a good experience picking up. Simple metrics like that have a huge impact on retention and repeat visits.”

Ritual's dashboard for restaurant operators is sort of like the equivalent of Google Analytics. It helps businesses find and solve pain points, and feeds into Ritual's own future-proofing plan. By helping restaurants improve their operations, the platform markets itself as a business partner – not just another meal-ordering app. It even has a dedicated ops team that monitors meal requests in progress and calls the restaurant with a fix if an order goes awry.

There are no fees for these services, because while “some businesses build products to make money, we need to make enough money to build products. If we can make it free and build a better experience than we should,” he says. Ritual does, however, make money by charging restos a fee for any new customers they acquire through the app. Partners are given a credit when they onboard people to the app, which helped drive user adoption – more so than PR ever did, “because we would tell the entire city about the product,

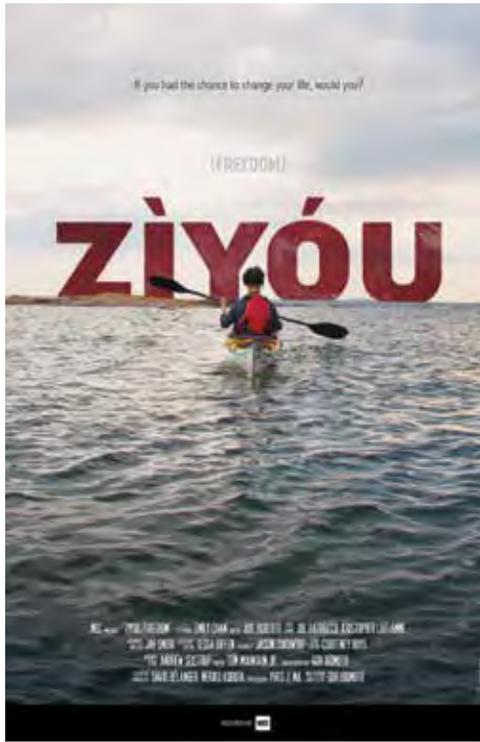


**Clockwise:** Ritual has perks for businesses to attract talent and build company culture; diners use tablets to pick up orders; restos are given incentives to promote the app via blue teal signs; the app's interface  
**Above:** Raymond Reddy is one of the three co-founders

but it would only work in one neighbourhood, so we just ended up disappointing people,” says Reddy.

While Ritual has become a lunch-crowd-pleaser, the co-founder says he'll continue to look for growth beyond its app.

“Food was a great starting point because it's something that's a part of everyday lives. In the same way that Amazon started with books, they transformed that category,” says Reddy. “We have something that works in North America and the next five years will be about taking that formula and making it work across the world. [But] I think Ritual will eventually stand for more than just take-out from restaurants, and people will start to use us more broadly for different things.”



# MEC keeps climbing to new heights

The 48-year-old retailer has modernized its brand by celebrating diversity in its ads, expanding its offerings and upping its experiential game to reach the next gen of Canadians. **BY MELISSA DUNNE**

A recent video on MEC's Instagram page opens with a child smiling and pans over to other kids making silly faces. "With gear this good they might even get excited for back to school," the copy reads. All of a sudden the gentle background music screeches to a halt, and the camera zooms in on a kid looking less than impressed that the end of summer is nigh, paired with the punchline: "We said might." The screen cuts to MEC's sleek logo.

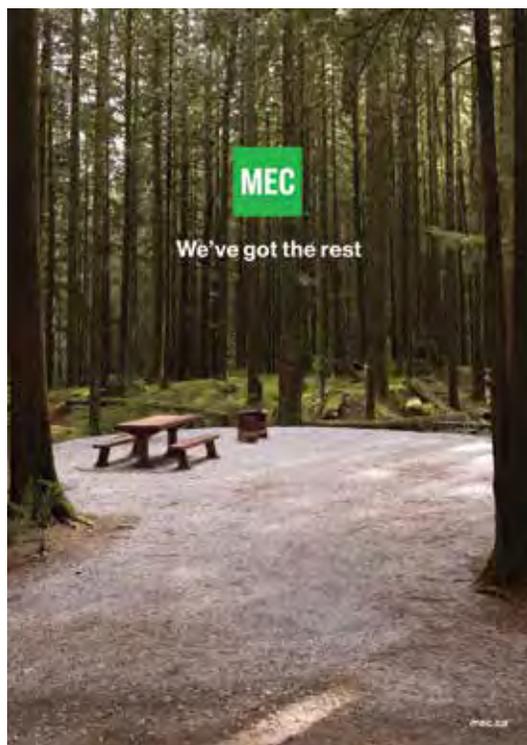
The post features kids of various ethnicities, all decked out in fall outfits from the outdoor and recreation clothing and gear company. Thankfully, there is no backslapping or high-fiving for showing the multicultural reality of Canada in an ad, as this isn't some sort of one-

and-done annual campaign celebrating diversity that many brands do, say, for Black History Month or Pride Month.

No, this is part of a larger ongoing effort for the Vancouver-based retailer to right a wrong. In late 2018, then-CEO David Labistour wrote an open letter acknowledging that for decades the quintessentially Canadian company failed to reflect the cultural mosaic of Canada in its mass marketing. Since then MEC has made efforts to show that everyone, not just straight white guys, go camping and hiking and back-to-school, as it looks to further modernize the 48-year-old brand.

MEC's long-time CEO stepped down after 11 years earlier this year (as planned) and Philippe Arrata officially stepped in as its new CEO on July 2. Under Labistour's leadership, MEC grew from 2.7 million to 5.1 million members and opened 11 new stores by late 2018. Arrata, who arrived from Best Buy Canada where he held several exec roles, has been busy visiting MEC's stores and evaluating next steps, says Anne Donohoe, who has been the brand's CMO since early 2013 and works with a team of about 80, mainly based in Vancouver. While the specifics under a new leader remain to be seen, she says the commitment to communicating MEC's purpose to all Canadians, regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexuality or ability, will be a top priority as the retailer looks toward its 50th anniversary in 2021.

Donohoe acknowledges MEC is "not perfect," adding "it's a learning process [and] an evolution." To that end, on top of having more diverse representation in its consumer-facing ads, the brand now does a territorial acknowledgement for every store that it opens. It's also made an effort to have diverse brand ambassadors and has



**From left to right:** MEC's new HQ in Toronto; a doc that helped the brand reach a wider audience; its fair trade clothing supports women in the workforce; rock climbing walls in its store; the "All Out" program folds its long-term programs under one roof; MEC aims to bring people outdoors.

given queer competency, unconscious bias and cultural appropriation training to staff, she says.

"We're very values driven... our purpose is to inspire and enable everyone, and all Canadians, [but] we recognized that we weren't doing a good job," says Donohoe. "It can be a polarizing discussion, but what we wanted to do was encourage dialogue to shift some perceptions... We've gotten a lot of feedback from the community that they [now] feel they're being represented, that they feel included, from members, as well as from staff."

Modernizing its approach to identity politics is just one of the many ways the company is changing to reach the kids and grandkids of its original Baby Boomer customer base.

Since launching as a single co-op store in Vancouver with just six members and \$65 of operating capital in 1971, MEC has slowly, but steadily, grown in sales and members. According to its 2019 annual report, sales were \$462 million. It now operates 22 stores across the country and boasts 5.42 million members.

While sales only grew 1.7% year-over-year in fiscal 2018 (e-comm grew 12.6%), there has been steady sales growth every year since 2013, when Donohoe led a massive rebranding effort for the retailer. That year, the company changed its name from Mountain Equipment Co-op to simply MEC, as well as expanded its expertise beyond hiking, canoeing and cycling. It has also broadened its offerings beyond what's on shelves, hosting running and yoga clinics and even giving lessons to young urbanites on how to fix bike tires.

This year, the company unveiled a new flagship store in Toronto that acts as a "community hub" for members, says Donohoe. The store features a kids playhouse, bike repair, ski shop, bouldering wall

and lounge area, and it serves as a model for the Vancouver flagship, which is set to open early next year. These locations are meant to be "an extension of the outdoor experience," says Donohoe, likening it to "a candy store for outdoor adventurers."

While the new look and offerings help MEC reach an audience beyond back-country adventurers, it's also using marketing as a way to give the brand mainstream appeal.

The retailer funded three mini-docs, created by Canadian filmmakers that focus on diverse people living MEC's main purpose: inspiring everyone to get outside and be active. The three documentaries, *Escape* (featuring a Montreal-based DJ), *Facing Sunrise* (starring a young Muslim woman) and *Ziyu* (featuring a woman of Asian descent) were screened at film fests and also inside MEC stores. *Facing Sunrise* was awarded the Best Short Mountain Film title at the Banff Mountain Film Festival in 2018, as well as a Gold "M" for Multicultural Online Film at *strategy's*

Marketing Awards. Showing diverse faces in front of, and behind, the camera is just one way MEC is showing how its connecting with Canadians, regardless of their identity, notes Donohoe.

Part of MEC's ongoing evolution has included bringing outdoorsy people together and giving back to adventure communities.

This year it launched the MEC All Out program, which brought all of its long-term community events and investments under one revamped program that focuses on "connecting people to the places to go, the people to go with, and the skills they need to get there." Since 1987 MEC has contributed more than \$44 million to Canadian outdoor recreation and conservative initiatives, according to its website, and the new MEC All Out program will continue to build community connections via a range of initiatives from film screenings to speaker events to Parks Canada Learn to Camp sessions.

"MEC has always been an iconic and much-loved brand in Canada," says Donohoe. "While we were loved, we weren't [always] as relevant as we could be with the Canadian population. We have a very diverse population in Canada, so I think in the last five years it's been about reconnecting with people again and being a loved brand, but also being the retailer of choice for them."

And as the kids in MEC's recent back-to-school Instagram post come of age, Donohoe says the retailer is committed to speaking to the next gen by celebrating Canada's diversity, giving back to the community and ultimately linking it all back to the retailer's unwavering "purpose of inspiring and enabling Canadians to get outside."



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### North extends reach with virtual try-on tool

The smart glasses company is looking to provide remote fittings to expand the market for its Focals smart glasses.



### Tourisme Montreal launches an AI travel assistant

A conversational platform aims to guide visitors through the experiences available to them on a trip.



who design, produce and manufacture art, music, clothing and accessories, as well as special collaborations. During that time, the trendsetting brand has taken the art of driving consumers into a frenzy for limited-edition collabs to a level that's rare in Canada. OVO's savvy co-founders have global goals, but have stayed true to their hometown roots, while consistently selling out everything from sleek OVO Toronto Raptors shirts to OVO Summit tickets (an immersive conference for creatives and lifestyle entrepreneurs).

"Our goal is to continue to establish OVO as a global lifestyle brand," said El-Khatib. "Success to us is measured by happiness and that's derived from doing what we love. We have remained consistent and stuck to our vision and I believe this yields a certain authenticity that connects with people."

That authenticity traces back eleven years ago, when Drake was mostly known as that cute actor from *Degrassi: The Next Generation* but was gaining attention for his mixtapes. Back then, the trio started a blog

# OVO started from the bottom...

Now October's Very Own is creating brand hype at a level Canada rarely sees.

BY MELISSA DUNNE

**Clockwise:** OVO and Canada Goose frequently collaborate on limited-edition collections that sell like hotcakes; basketball players don OVO jerseys; the brand partnered with Japanese artist Takashi Murakami; tickets to The OVO Summit, in partnership with RBC, sold out fast earlier this summer.

The three brains behind October's Very Own (OVO) are masters in building hype. Take the recent opening of an OVO store in Toronto's Eaton Centre as an example of how the brand threw consumers just enough crumbs to feed the hype machine. Prior to the store's debut, OVO posted photos of a young guy with bleached-blond hair and a "OVO Eaton Centre exclusive tee" that read: "Yonge Street Dreams." The post reached the brand's 1.3 million Instagram followers and helped convince (mostly Gen Z and millennial) fans to get up early on the August long weekend for a first peek of the Toronto brand's boutique-style store. The opening also coincided with the ninth annual OVO Fest, which meant The Six was full of hip fans ready to eat up what OVO was serving.

This is classic OVO. Like a song crafted by two of the co-founders (Aubrey "Drake" Graham and Noah "40" Shebib), the brand slowly builds excitement with a beat that gets faster until fans are screaming out for more. Now, of course, one could argue having Toronto's very own Drake as OVO's personal hypeman is the main reason for the brand's success, but there's been plenty of celeb-backed businesses that have failed (remember Outkast's eponymous clothing line? Neither do we). The three co-founders (the third being Oliver El-Khatib), creative collaborators and friends have taken a deliberate slow-and-steady approach to ultimately win a Brand of the Year title.

OVO started as the seed of an idea in 2008 and has blossomed into an influential Toronto-based brand with about 50 staff

with the name OVO (the name is a reference to Drake's October 24 birthday that only his die-hard fans would understand).

And the brand's logo, a line drawing of an owl, had humble beginnings as another insidious reference, this time to El-Khatib's vaguely owl-like chat status symbol he frequently used on BlackBerry Messenger. OVO tinkered with its now-iconic logo for years before it was unveiled in 2011.

Like Nike's swoosh or McDonald's golden arches, OVO's owl visually telegraphs the brand in a single symbol. And seeing that owl, often rendered in gold on a black background, gives outsiders the feeling that they're insiders and that they're in the know about Drake and his definitely hipper-than-thou crew.

While OVO has a boutique store just east

of Toronto's so-hip-it-hurts Trinity Bellwoods Park since 2014, it's recently gone a little more mass market with stores in major malls, including Square One and Yorkdale Shopping Centre. It's also opened stores in Vancouver, Chicago, N.Y.C, L.A. and London.

While the Canadian brand has expanded well beyond our borders, collaborating with other homegrown brands remains key.

business relationship with OVO naturally evolved over time.

"I've always strongly believed that Canadians need to support Canadians," said Reiss. "In 2010 we launched annual Canada Goose x OVO collaborations, which push the boundaries of creativity for our fans and theirs. We've seen amazing success with these collaborations since the first bomber

"OVO has... become an internationally recognized brand while staying true to its Canadian roots. They are brilliant operators and can teach a masterclass in everything from branding, to music, to retail, all of which they execute with a high degree of professionalism," said Mary DePaoli, EVP and CMO of RBC.

Next up for the Canadian business, as



**Left to right:**  
OVO co-founders  
Oliver El-Khatib, Aubrey  
"Drake" Graham and  
Noah "40" Shebib.

"Where we [come] from as individuals is a big part of who we are as a brand and for us it's natural to work with brands we have grown up with [and] that influence our everyday lifestyle," said El-Khatib. "Collaborations allow us to tell a more complete story about OVO's unique point of view on fashion and style to the world."

Over the years, OVO has collaborated with many iconic brands with Canadian connections, including the Raptors (which Drake is also an official ambassador of), retailer Roots, twin designers Dsquared2, parka brand Canada Goose and RBC.

Dani Reiss, president and CEO of Canada Goose, says he has known Drake since the early 2000s when the fellow Toronto-based brand would make custom jackets for the star and his crew. He says the ongoing

[jacket] launched almost a decade ago [and our collabs] continue to sell out within minutes."

And this summer RBC became the most recent Canadian company to officially collaborate with OVO. The collab launched with a splashy one-minute ad, "RBC + OVO ft. Oliver El-Khatib," and garnered widespread attention because of the unexpected pairing of a bank and lifestyle brand. The video features a soundtrack scored by "40" Shebib and imparts an inspiring message about investing in oneself. It has snagged almost 350,000 views on RBC's YouTube channel since late June. The brands have also worked together to support the next generation of self-starters at the OVO Summit, which, like most things, OVO sells out in minutes.

El-Khatib puts it, is continuing "to establish OVO as a global lifestyle brand." To that end OVO is set to open its 10th store, and its first store in Asia, in Tokyo this October. The new store is a big step forward, as OVO had previously not shipped to Asia, so there will also be a new online store to reach that lucrative market. And in true OVO style this all coincides with the Raptors' exhibition games in Japan's capital city.

And if the past is any predictor of the future, then it's likely hats and shirts adorned with its owl logo will be just as big in Japan (where logo-adorned everything sell like hotcakes) as they are in Canada. Like its Eaton Centre store opening, OVO is primed to once again teach a masterclass in hype - this time on the global stage.

# Frank and Oak goes greener

The Montreal-based brand has planted seeds of sustainability as a way to grow in a competitive retail landscape. BY MELISSA DUNNE



**Clockwise:** Frank And Oak is building its brand for the future via sustainable fashion; the retailer has 22 stores on top of its online presence; the “Circular denim” collection featured eco clothing for men and women; the brand has been called a “millennial magnet.”

“We are what we wear,” proclaims Edmonton rapper Cadence Weapon at one point during the “Frank And Oak - And” ad that celebrates Canada and our values.

The Montreal-born retailer, like many others, has taken notice of Canadians becoming more conscious of what they put on their bodies, as much as what they put in them. And Frank And Oak has been listening to the cries for more eco-friendly clothing.

“I think the idea of sustainability is extremely powerful, but you also need to make cool products that customers want to wear, right? I think we’ve been able to combine design and sustainability and that has been a big part of our success,” says Ethan Song, CEO and co-founder of Frank And Oak.

For instance, take its “Circular denim” collection, which the retailer launched this August to wide acclaim and media coverage. The new jean line is made from old denim that was destined for the landfill, but instead shredded and broken down into mere fibres. Those salvaged fibres were then respun into new materials with the goal of “reducing our footprint and giving your old jeans a new life,” according to a Frank And Oak Instagram post announcing the line.

“Consumers have more choices than ever because of ecommerce. They have access to anything in the world now, so just having a product, for example a T-shirt, is not enough anymore,” says Song. “I think when consumers buy something they want to buy the story behind that product too... I always say, ‘When consumers vote for your product, they effectively vote for the kind of world they want to live in,’ so that’s the relation I see between values and products now.”

But Frank And Oak is ensuring that its sustainability efforts go well beyond one denim collection, as it aligns itself with today’s appetite for conscious consumerism. In 2017 only 5% of Frank and Oak products were made through “minimal impact processes,” such as reusing or recycling materials, reducing the amount of water used in production, and reducing the amount of animal products; that number rose to 30% in 2018, and the new goal is to reach 50% by the end of 2019. In addition, its “Good Cotton” collection, launched two months before “Circular denim,” is made from organic cotton that the company says uses no pesticides or synthetic fertilizers, maintains soil fertility and promotes biologically diverse agriculture.

While all of these sustainability efforts may be good for Mother Earth, they are also often good for the bottom line. A survey of more

than 20,000 consumers, released by global firm Kantar Consulting last year, found that almost two-thirds of millennials and Gen Zers express a preference for “brands that have a point of view and stand for something.”

Frank And Oak’s point-of-view has evolved since it was founded in 2012 by high-school friends Song and Hicham Ratnani, currently CCO. The company name was meant to symbolize the connection between humans (Frank) and nature (Oak). The brand started out as an online-only retailer selling men’s clothing, then opened its first brick-and-mortar store in Montreal in 2013 and added women’s clothing in 2016. It now has 22 stores across Canada and grew from a brand that was mainly focused on function (its co-founders both have engineering degrees and were initially focused on personalizing the shopping experience online, and then helping men build a wardrobe in its physical stores) to a values-based fashion company.

“Personalization has always been important to what we do, but in terms of vision we realized that, as a company, we needed to have less impact on the world and that’s where the idea for sustainability came in,” explains Song. “We realized the product that we make, and the values that we have, have to be perfectly aligned and that’s what we’ve been focused on.”

While the privately held company wouldn’t reveal any sales or growth numbers, Song did say Frank And Oak is “still a relatively small company” with an in-house creative and marketing team of about 12, who do everything from creating videos to content for its online magazine and social channels.

“As a brand we’re learning that storytelling has to be a part of what we do well,” says Song. To that end, its online magazine, *The Handbook*, tells stories that directly and indirectly promote the brand and its purpose, from a story about eco-tourism to one that argues that chinos (which the brand sells) are “the not-so basic basic.”

Frank And Oak also promotes its popular Style Plan via a playful video. The 58-second spot shows viewers how to use the brand’s personalized, subscription-box service in an easy-to-understand way, featuring hip-looking professionals donning Frank And Oak attire.

The Style Plan is intended to give consumers the ability to have clothing mailed directly to their home on a monthly basis (and offers the option of mailing back what they don’t want). As part of the retailer’s ongoing journey toward more sustainable practices, Song fully acknowledges that mailing clothing back-and-forth isn’t exactly good for the planet. But the brand has a plan to offset the carbon footprint from shipments via a tree planting program. And while the company’s current packaging is 100% recycled and recyclable, it’s in the process of testing reusable packaging that “never goes to landfills,” says the CEO.

Other sustainability-focused goals that Frank And Oak wants to reach by 2022 include zero virgin plastic in its supply chain, a 100% carbon-emissions reduction, using 100% renewable energy, having zero waste at Frank And Oak’s head office and using more sustainably sourced cotton.

While a recent *Financial Post* article called the Montreal company a “millennial magnet,” Song says he’s less focused on a certain age group and is more interested in reaching purpose-driven shoppers



Above:  
Frank And Oak  
founders Hicham  
Ratnani and  
Ethan Song

who want to fill their fall wardrobes with long-lasting staples, like a \$99.50 machine-washable merino wool sweater dress or a \$229 herringbone wool blazer. “I think our customer base is pretty wide... generally our customers are creative professionals,” says Song. “Nowadays it’s more about being values-based than age-based.”

And in line with promoting those values, Frank And Oak stores are about building a sense of community and often hosts events. For example, it held a “Frank And Oak Talks” event about the future of circular fashion at its Toronto Eaton Centre store in August. Also, all of its stores are built “as conscientiously as possible with recycled materials and minimal waste,” according to the brand’s website.

The retailer has big ambitions, but remains wedded to the Canadian values promoted in “Frank And Oak – And.”

“We’re actually proud of what we consider our care for nature, openness, being inclusive to other people, so we would like to leverage our brand to communicate those Canadian values globally,” says Song. “That would be our dream in five-to-ten years – to continue to be part of this movement of changing the behaviour of consumers.”

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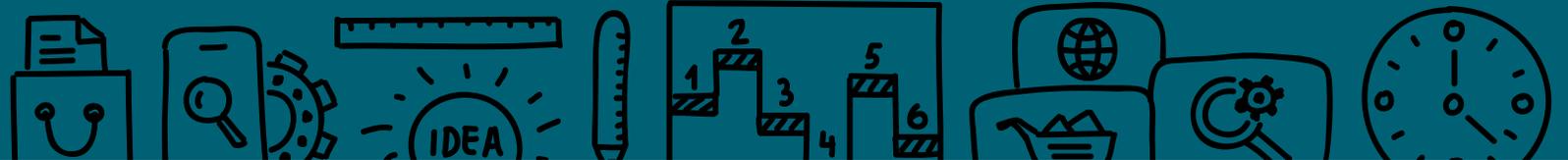
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# FOSTERING INCLUSION AT TELUS

HOW DANICA NELSON IS DRIVING RESULTS AND DIVERSITY AT THE TELCOM. BY CATHERINE PHILLIPS

**D**anica Nelson often quotes Drake’s hit song *Started From The Bottom* when talking about her career path. From selling phones at a Brampton, Ont., Telus store in 2008, to managing two of the company’s nation-wide portfolios in 2019, she certainly isn’t at the bottom anymore.

At just 28-years-old, Nelson is the senior marketing communications manager for Telus, working alongside a cross-functional team of six, as well as The Greenhouse, an integrated full-service agency co-created by The&Partnership and Cossette for Telus in 2017. Five years ago, she was an intern. Now, she manages as many as 20 integrated marketing campaigns at a time, as well as brand partnerships with the likes of Apple, Samsung, Google, Air Canada, LoyaltyOne and Toronto Pearson Airport.

Nelson is the marketing communications lead on Telus’ Add-A-Line and Add Mobility portfolios, which are staples in its growth strategy. Her role is to encourage customers to go exclusive with Telus by adding phone lines and bundling their TV, internet, home phone and home security. Thanks to campaigns led by Nelson, conversions have increased 39% for Add-A-Line and 44% for Add Mobility, year-over-year.

Between 2014 and 2018, Nelson and her team worked with an external company that uses algorithms for creative testing. As a result, engagement on customer-facing communications (across the portfolios Nelson leads and particularly within email marketing) has improved by 53%. Because Nelson led the co-development of those advanced testing strategies, she also helped develop a learning library and, as part of a roadshow, presented the findings to different internal teams, which are now leveraging those learnings.

“There are learnings that we should absolutely be sharing with our broader team to ensure that we’re not only creating a consistent experience for our customers across mediums, but leveraging what we know, what we’ve tested, and what we have developed,” she says.

Nelson injects her passion for equity, diversity and

inclusion into everything that she does, from co-hosting a podcast *Damsel in the Six* – which is about how to navigate career, financial freedom and dating as an empowered woman in Toronto – to her involvement in panel discussions including “Leadership and Diversity in Tech” at tech hub BrainStation.

She has also made significant contributions to Telus’ inclusion strategies as a member of its Diversity and Inclusion Council. Nelson’s goal is to create a company culture where “everyone feels they can bring their whole selves to work.” So she helped develop a curriculum on recognizing unconscious bias that can be used in training across the company – particularly for those in hiring or

leadership positions. She also helped develop Telus’ Equity, Diversity, and Inclusiveness framework, as well as consulted for Telus’ employee resource group, Spectrum, to develop events that focus on fostering inclusive work cultures.

It’s a passion that stems from her experience as a Black woman in an industry where she often doesn’t see herself represented, says Nelson, adding that while most of the diversity and inclusion discussions that take place in companies focus on gender, “people who are closer to the

intersections of marginalization still experience micro-aggressions that can negatively impact their level of confidence, give them feelings of imposter syndrome and overall just negatively impact their career.”

And it’s a reality that Nelson aims to combat from the inside. She accepts nearly every meeting request from those interested in learning how to thrive in the industry – especially people from the IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, People of Colour) community – taking an average of 3-to-4 weekly meetings or calls. “I’m passionate about investing my time and energy into underrepresented people in marketing, advertising and communications, because I wasn’t immediately successful when I was trying to make my way into the industry. I believe it’s important for me to be the person I needed during that challenging time.”



Danica Nelson is *strategy*’s 2019 New Establishment: Brand winner, a title given to junior and/or mid-level marketers who are driving innovative ideas within their organization.

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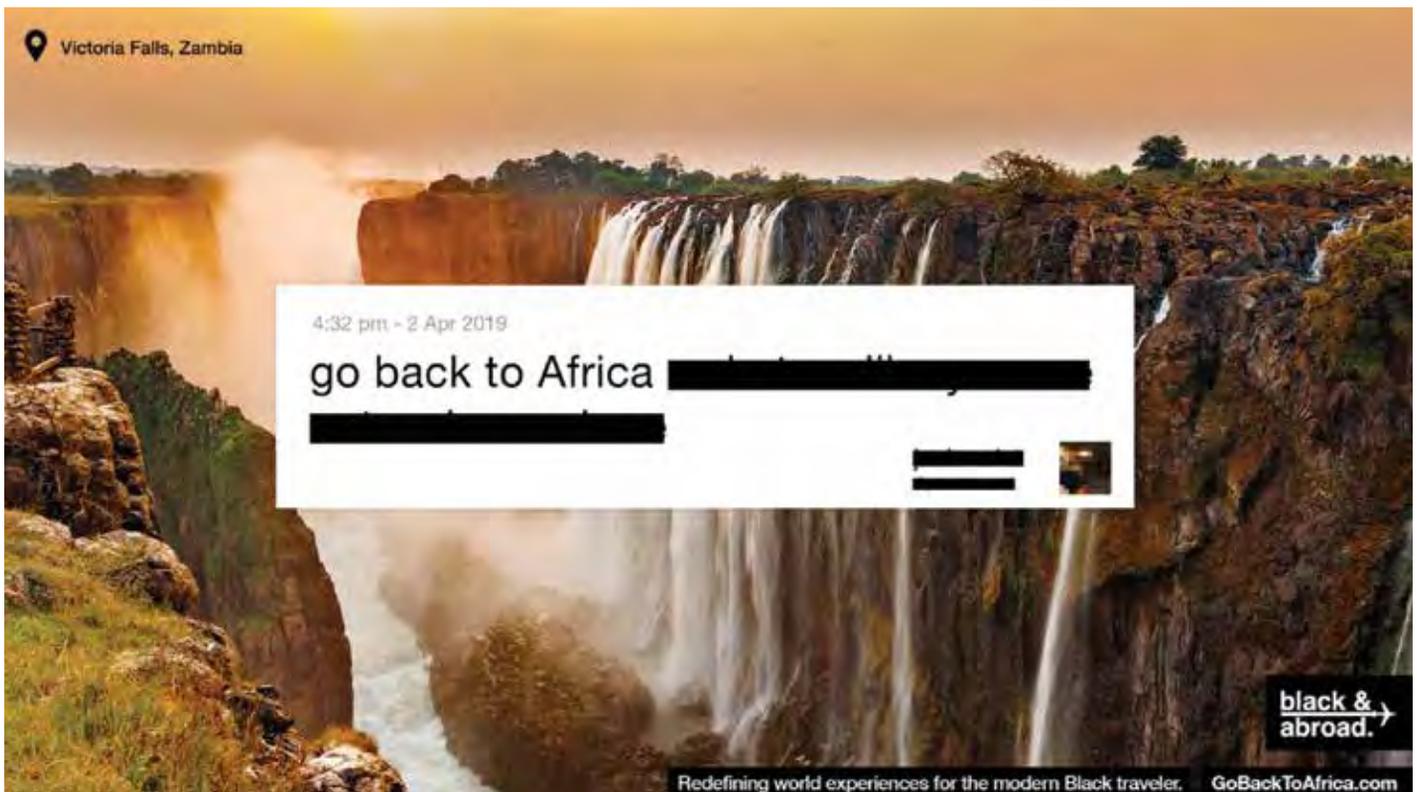
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# strategy awards

The campaigns you're about to read began with the germ of a idea and ended with a Strategy Award. Everything in between was pure planning and executional magic. The big winner at this year's awards gala – which followed the Marketing Evolution Summit on October 1 – was Black & Abroad and FCB/Six. The brand and agency team took home the Grand Prix for the “Go Back To Africa” campaign that brought data-fueling insights to a whole new level. Brands, from retailers to restos, presented work that a jury of strategists and planners – both from agency and brand sides – evaluated based on their ability to lead in market success. Developed in association with APG Canada and an advisory board comprised of senior planning and marketing execs, the fourth annual awards celebrate the ideas that strategists contribute. Turn the page to learn about the insights behind the work that landed these winners on the podium.

**BY JENNIFER HORN**



## Content flows from data stream

The internet is a marketer's oyster, where shucking big data is the order of the day. While finding and consuming gargantuan amounts of information can be thrilling, data gluttony is often difficult to digest. Not for FCB/Six though. Proving once again that it can scrape and assign meaning to an unfathomable amount of data, the agency's "Go Back to Africa" work for U.S.-based Black & Abroad is a feat worthy of a Grand Prix. The campaign also won three Golds, one each for mastering Data/Tech, achieving Game Changer status and its Niche Strategy genius.

The top Strategy Awards winner turned an archaic racial slur into an uplifting call-to-action in a campaign that also has a Grand Prix Cannes Lion to its name. It started with the misperception that Africa is a dangerous and undesirable place to visit. Black & Abroad is "a cultural collective dedicated to redefining world experiences for the modern Black traveler" and set out to address this widespread belief in tandem with the misrepresentation (or lack) of black travelers in commercial images.

For more than 300 years, 12.5 million African people were removed from their homes and shipped to the West where they were forced into slavery, and oppression continues today, with social media users telling those of colour to "Go Back to Africa" every three minutes. Those racist bullies became the target and their slurs became the message: the team hijacked the phrase as it appeared on Twitter and then used it in headlines for hyper-targeted ads promoting 54 African countries.

Those ads drove people to GoBackToAfrica.com – an algorithmically curated content hub that contained 54 galleries, built with the purpose of showing members of the Black community traveling in Africa. FCB/Six used machines to compile and shortlist several thousand travel-related images from millions that appear online every day. The final images were not selected by AI though, the human team had to follow ethical principles around "shadeism" – a type of racism that implies some shades of black are better than others (however, the AI program learned from those decisions for its own subsequent recos).

The living, breathing, data-driven platform powered interest-based programmatic ads to members of the Black community online. And the strategy created a powerful and positive narrative, which trickled down

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**Left:** Black & Abroad reclaimed an all-too-common racial slur via its “Go Back to Africa” campaign by FCB/Six. **Right:** Sport Chek increased sales on Black Friday by tracking data trends. **Bottom right:** Radio-Canada also tapped into the power of data to fight fake news.

to the Black & Abroad brand, creating a 315% increase in awareness.

Sometimes you have to go to war to succeed in the battle for meaningful data. And by that, we mean set up a war room where a team can source, study and respond to data insights in only 24 hours.

Sport Chek and Touché! found an interesting phenomenon that tends to happen during the seven days leading up to the biggest shopping day of the year, Black Friday. It’s called “online window shopping,” where people will abandon their digital shopping carts filled with items while they search for similar goods on competitor sites. So when the clock strikes midnight, they’re prepared for the best deal and purchase whichever cart has the best savings.

To avoid losing business to big spenders like Amazon, Sport Chek took a very tactical approach: its analytics team spent 24 hours watching data trends, determining the top 1,000 products that were being dropped into online carts. And in a very short window (a few hours), they developed dynamic creative that promoted savings on those specific items. The ads appeared across the web from YouTube to Google to Instagram.

The data trail left by the online window-shopping trend drove a search campaign that resulted in Sport Chek being the most searched retailer on Black Friday, with banners appearing in more than 141 million queries. All in all, the campaign increased sales by 54%, and with the same budget as the previous year. For those impressive results, it earned a Gold in ROI and a Silver in Data/Tech.

But Sport Chek wasn’t the only organization that used data to



change online behaviour. During Quebec's last election campaign, Radio-Canada wanted to become the leading destination for credible and verified media coverage. In Canada, consumers trust Google and Facebook as their primary sources of information when a political question arises. Unfortunately, fake news leaves citizens ill-equipped to make educated decisions at the ballot box. So the pubcaster decided to communicate verified, unbiased journalism to several different audiences, based on their interests.

Radio-Canada, alongside PHD Media, was able to optimize the creative according to what was happening in the news.

A constant communication flow with Radio-Canada’s newsroom allowed it to react to what politicians were saying in a matter of minutes. Interests were monitored using search analytics and they were identified at the regional level. More than 100 different topics were covered in only 39 days. Consumers were driven to Radio-

Canada’s fact-checking website, a mobile app and video content to find verified answers to topical questions posed each day.

the campaign, which picked up a Bronze in Content Strategy, tracked more than 15 million impressions for the 150 ads that were delivered in a province with fewer than six million voters. And on election day, Radio-Canada’s website and app saw more than 1.8 million visits and reinforced its role as a source for real news.





**Above:** IKEA added a new twist to the retailer's iconic "Lamp" ad to promote circularity. Meanwhile, WestJet's Blue Santa promoted the airline's new global ambitions through its "Christmas Miracle" program.

# New spin on an old strategy

There's no need to reinvent the wheel when you can add a new spin to it. Or, in IKEA Canada's case, turn what was once a love letter to disposability into a celebration of circularity.

Back in 2002, the retailer and filmmaker Spike Jonze famously spun a tale of (tough) love in a TV spot that showed the heartbreak of a discarded lamp on the street. "Lamp" overtly told people to throw out their old furniture and buy something new. But the world is changing and, in 2019, disposable furniture is considered passé.

The retailer had been doing good for people in

tandem with the planet for several years, but it had not been as great at communicating its mission to become a leader in climate-positive products. IKEA's wants to become a fully circular business within the next decade. So, to demonstrate its commitment to the future, the brand had to face its past.

Working with Rethink, it brought back the iconic lamp. The team created a sequel to the original creative by showing a little girl who finds the forgotten item and gives it a second life in her home. For those who weren't familiar with the 2002 spot, the brand aired it on TV and online before the "Lamp Recycled" sequel debuted. IKEA also rolled out a sell-back program in stores to incentivize people to bring back their used furniture to be refurbished and re-sold.

The retailer put its bottom line on the, well, line, but the risk paid off. More than 200 media outlets covered news of the sell-back program and IKEA received over 10,000 applications in the first three months. Despite telling people to not buy its products, the brand lifted sales by 4%. Following the campaign, IKEA saw its highest levels of brand equity and the planning insight work earned a Bronze Creative Catalyst nod in the process.

Another brand with growing ambitions, WestJet was beginning to launch into new global territory. It had always been known as a low-cost domestic carrier, but needed to build its profile as a global airline.

WestJet's "Christmas Miracle" program – which first saw airline staffers dance and sing in an orchestrated flash mob, back when they were a thing in 2013 – has been a successful annual brand-building event for the last six years. Miracles have generally been granted to locals, but because the brand was expanding globally, it decided to expand the campaign well beyond Canada's borders.

The team, which also included Rethink, looked for common

traditions that would unite people around the world (in fact, 160 countries) over Christmas. The brand landed on a universal truth when it comes to the holidays: no matter where a person is in the world, spending time with loved ones is the most important tradition.

The insight was used to build the "United Through Traditions" campaign, where WestJet's Blue Santa flew across six continents using the airline's global fleet. He created a unique documentary-style video every day, from surfing in Australia and feasting in France to delivering Christmas gifts to villages in Haiti. During his content-filled journey, Blue Santa also surprised unsuspecting guests with family reunions in England.

On its own, the campaign generated \$11 million in sales, which was more than \$12 in immediate revenue for every dollar invested. That's an ROI of 1,257% (which is why the campaign won a Bronze in ROI Strategy). Overall, the effort led to a 27% increase in sales year-over-year and proved that old ideas can be made to feel young again.



## SNICKERS' SOCIAL SWAGGER

The NBA tunnel walk. It's one of the most talked about moments in the league. Which is exactly why Snickers hijacked then-Toronto Raptor Delon Wright's tunnel stroll for a viral stunt.

One day, Wright was photographed strutting through the tunnel while sporting an outrageously oversized suit. It was as if someone had taken over his body. Confused fans reacted online, with Raptors commentators questioning Wright's fashion choice in the media.

However, the next day, the Raptors, Wright and Snickers posted a video revealing that the fashion *faux pas* was actually a hunger mistake and, after eating a Snickers, Wright was back to himself. BBDO's fresh take on the brand's "You're Not You When You're Hungry" platform helped it stand out in a sea of sponsors, generating 1.5 million unique engagements, with "Suit Swag" taking home a Bronze in Social Strategy.

# Launches that stuck

There hadn't really been a massive need for faux meat. At least not one expressed by fast-food diners. To them, plant-based foods were considered die-hard veggie territory. That was until Beyond Meat came onto the scene. Getting meat reducers to shell out for a patty that "looks, cooks and satisfies like beef" was a battle first fought by Beyond Meat. And then A&W decided to join in. While the QSR didn't find the white space, it did play a role in helping veggie burgers go mainstream in Canada.

In the summer of 2018, the QSR partnered with the U.S. startup to bring the popular patty to Canada. At the time, A&W wasn't doing so well on the veggie burger front: only 1 in 100 orders were for its own original plant-based meal. The perception of these burgers was that they were bland and unappealing.

Sometimes new ideas can be met with resistance when the "new thinking" goes against popular opinion. So the trick was to get a positive endorsement from early adopters (vegans, vegetarians and opinion leaders in the food space), who would help accelerate mass adoption. The brand and Rethink hosted a pre-launch event where plant-based food bloggers, chefs and an NHL player got first dibs on the A&W and Beyond Meat meal. They posted the experience on social and the content helped flood news of the patty's arrival in Canada online.

It then spoke to mainstream consumers, launching a TV spot that showed shocked reactions of vegans and skeptical meat eaters trying the burger for the first time. The approach, which won a Silver Launch Strategy award, led the Beyond Meat Burger to become one of A&W's most popular menu items. In fact, many A&W stores sold out of the dish just three weeks after its arrival.

So uprooting an ingrained attitude can be done. But what about reversing deep-seated universal practices?

Betadine faced the daunting task of convincing Canadians to stop seeking relief from cold symptoms, and instead treat the



sickness itself. It was looking to launch new products that claim to treat the virus and bacteria that cause sore throats. But it was imperative that the product be used at the onset of scratchy throat – before a full-blown cold kicks in. The answer lay in a simple yet sticky rhyme: "Feel the sign? Betadine."

In TV and digital spots by Zulu Alpha Kilo, the throat-clear became the hero "sign" of a cold, which triggered people into action, stopping whatever they were doing – in a business meeting, pulling the winning lottery numbers – to gargle with Betadine. The spot (which won a Bronze in Launch Strategy) ended with the memorable line, encouraging a new ritual.

In just three months, Betadine expanded the throat spray category as a whole. The brand's new products accounted for 90% of the category growth versus the previous year and reduced the market leader's volume share from 75% to 49%.

Consonant Skincare similarly rejected band-aid solutions when it cut the ribbon on its Toronto flagship retail store. The beauty industry presents skin problems as

though they're personal failings, when the environment, in some cases, might actually be the culprit. In turn, people seek ways to remedy skin issues after the fact, rather than caring for their skin beforehand.

Consonant Skincare wanted to inspire people to protect their skin, and so it worked with Zulu to demonstrate how a city's surfaces react to the environment just like skin. Posters were applied to walls, sidewalks and lamp posts that featured textures like concrete, brick, plywood and stones. The caption read: "If your skin feels like this, visit us on June 30th." Another execution featured UV-sensitive ink, with the line, "Like the ink on this poster, some signs of premature aging only show up after exposure to the sun."

Through communications as natural as Consonant's products, the flagship store launch received 100% higher-than-average transactions and double the expected coupon redemptions, with non-sale opening-day sales higher than two previous store opening. It also went home with a Silver in the Launch Strategy category.

**Top:** Betadine changed habits with its sticky rhyme: "Feel the sign? Betadine."  
**Bottom, left:** A&W's Beyond Meat Burger launch was popular beyond expectations.  
**Bottom, right:** Consonant used the cityscape to encourage people to take care of their skin and promote the opening of a new store.



## Fake-outs bring brands to new heights

**Clockwise:** San Rafael '71 launched as a beer by a cannabis brand; the "Don't Eat Takis" campaign got teens to... eat Takis; *E.T.* has yet to phone home about the new Reese's Pieces Peanut; Halifax's King of Donair and its fake airline ads drove trial out west.

**T**akis, the "Doritos of Mexico," got teens to finally notice the brand after a year of lacklustre sales with an anti-marketing campaign. To boost sales, it used a teaching method that's popular among parents – reverse psychology – knowing that if you want a teen to do something, just tell them that they can't do it.

The "Don't Eat Takis" campaign, by Cossette, hid the brand and its product by blacking out the logo and its packaging. It even set the brand's Instagram page to private. And a website was also created to tell kids why they shouldn't eat Takis, while influencers pooh-poohed the chips on social.

The non-campaign was a #fail, which means it was actually a #winner, taking home two Bronzes, one for Challenger Strategy and one for Launch Strategy. Takis played up its challenger role and claimed the #2 spot (next to Doritos) in the category. And teens were 20% more aware of the brand while sales jumped 35%.

More shenanigans were reported on both sides of the country when the original creator of the donair (a style of gyro) tricked diners into thinking they could score cheap seats to Halifax.

The King of Donair, from Eastern Canada, used clever wording as a ploy to get people in Western Canada – where it was opening two restaurants – to "Experience Halifax for \$7" in ads for a made-up airline called "DonAir." DonAir had its own website, a booking widget, in-flight offers and video content with a flight attendant. Why an airline? Because seat sale ads perform better than almost any other ad on social media. Plus, West Coasters would typically have to travel to experience a donair, so the messaging was authentic.

The measurement folks were right: click-through rates for the fake seat sale were over nine times the industry average. Those ads reached 384,111 people, the Alberta locations tracked a 429% higher

sales volume compared to its Halifax locations and the campaign, by Wunder, won Bronze in Niche Strategy.

If a marketer can promote an airline that doesn't exist, then they can promote a product that's not legally supposed to exist. Before Mary Jane was given legal status in Canada, cannabis brand San Rafael '71 concocted a beer that was sold under its name as a way to build pre-launch name recognition without repercussions. The brand's parent co. Aurora partnered with Amsterdam Brewery to create the 4:20 Pale Ale and called the brand San Rafael '71. Grip Limited's "Beer Today. Bong Tomorrow." campaign – which won a Silver in Cannabis Strategy – said everything without saying anything. A radio spot was nothing more than thirty seconds of uncontrollable laughter, while billboards and wild postings reeked of pot overtones, including headlines like "4.20%," "Grass Fed" and "Enjoy in a glass, bowl, etc." San Rafael '71 earned significant PR even though communications were heavily restricted at the time.

And, finally, if launching a (non)product seems out of this world, sending candy to space is next level. Reese's Pieces was able to connect with people through something bigger than the candy itself: *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*. In the 1982 film, the product was the fictional character's favourite candy. So the brand and Anomaly decided to go back in time and build a campaign to drive interest for a new Reese's Pieces Peanut candy, without being able to legally say or show *E.T.* in its communications due to licensing rights. It rekindled the iconic connection to *E.T.* by sending its candy into space, which was documented and shared online. The brand worked with *Entertainment Tonight Canada* (also known as *ET*) to air the product launch. A UFO hoax with an image that looked like a ship in space was even seeded, leading to out-of-this world sales over-delivering by 282%.



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# How to win with niche audiences

**Clockwise:**

Sugar-Crisp connected with Gen Z gamers via a clever contraption; Montreal's Little Italy flagged Sweden as the common enemy; the IKEA spokesman called out late-night surfing insomniacs in a cat video hole; Interac brought businesses together; IKEA showed in its true colours in "DRÄG"; truck drivers skipped the drive-thru queue, thanks to Fountain Tire; and Connect Hearing made a big deal about a not-so-small health issue.

**INSOMNIACS**

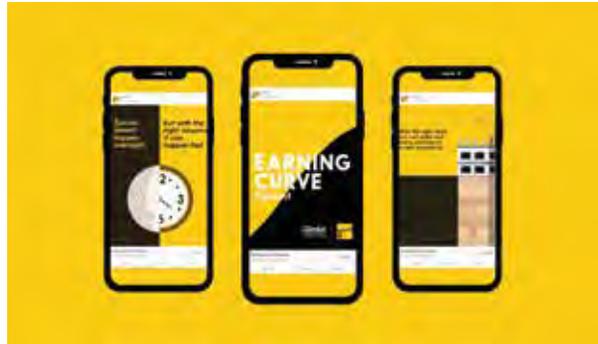
There really is no escaping the rush of new mattress brand entrants, many of which like to blanket the internet with awareness campaigns. The only way IKEA could be heard was to wait for its competitors to be quiet. Somehow, our culture has prioritized being busy (or simply getting sucked into a Youtube rabbit hole) when they should be sleeping. So IKEA and Rethink reminded people of the importance of sleep while they were avoiding it, with ads that ran on YouTube between 10:30pm and 3:30am. IKEA's Swedish spokesman interrupted viewers by asking why they were up watching cat videos or sports highlights, and gave them the time, noting when IKEA would be open again so they could purchase a better mattress in the morning. Whispering sweet Swedish nothings in sleepy ears worked, and the campaign led to a 17% increase in traffic to IKEA.ca, as well as a Gold in Connection Strategy and a Silver in Data/Tech.

**SPORTS FANS**

Following Italy's defeat to Sweden in the 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying round, Montreal expected a major blow to its businesses. It's Little Italy neighbourhood had to attract sports fans (and counteract anticipated losses) by getting them to re-engage in the games. Italian pride is passionate and dramatic, and so the idea was to leverage that bitterness by asking people to support "Anyone But Sweden" during the event. Rethink created banners, posters, collateral, branded gear and a broadcast schedule for people to watch all of Sweden's games. A scarf was also made from flags of every participating team, except the Swede's. They even bought an ad in a Swedish paper on their national day to tease them. Content was captured at different bars, cafés and stores. In the end, bar sales increased 21%, and the campaign generated more than 350 million media impressions, leading it to win a Silver in Niche Strategy.

**LGBTQ+**

To highlight its commitment to diversity and inclusion, IKEA Canada became a Pride sponsor and identified its own unique connection to drag culture. Rethink found that drag queens were transforming the retailer's products into outfits as a form of creative expression. So the team connected with some of Canada's most well-known drag queens and gave them free rein to create something beautiful out of IKEA merch. The result was a Silver Niche Strategy-winning campaign called "IKEA DRÄG," which included a live event that was supported by influencers, online video and social posts. The drag queens first debuted their looks at a fashion show and were then featured in an OOH campaign. The experience was live-streamed during the week leading up to the annual Pride parade in Toronto, and IKEA launched "DRÄG" as a social video, which quickly became the brand's most-watched piece of content.



## TRUCK DRIVERS

The commercial trucking segment is a crucial vertical to Fountain Tire's business. However, fleet owners view tires as a costly expense and end up having a transactional relationship with the retailer. Fountain Tire wanted to show that it wasn't just a vendor, but an invested partner. To help reduce the cost of downtime (a commercial fleet's most expensive problem), the brand and FCB created a drive-thru that truckers could "Truck-Thru" instead of having to leave their vehicles. The 20-foot stall was constructed exclusively for fleets, serving them free coffee and snacks. The Silver-winning Connection Strategy entailed highway ads, announcements on truckers' CB radio, and pamphlets were given out at nearby rest-stops to target the hard-to-reach audience.

## ENTREPRENEURS

Technology has led to new platforms and payment systems for merchants. Interac has services specifically designed to help small businesses navigate these changes, but many are unaware of its offerings. When it comes to advice, entrepreneurs tend to trust their

peers. So Interac and Zulu Alpha Kilo created a branded podcast, called *Earning Curve*, that offered thought leadership in the form of business stories, which were easily digestible. *Dragons' Den* entrepreneur Michele Romanow hosted the podcast, and social videos and audio trailers introduced the show's premise, guests and topics. The content-driven approach led to 90% of listeners feeling that Interac understands the needs of small businesses. The work also picked up a Silver in Content Strategy and a Bronze in Niche Strategy.

## CHINESE FAMILIES

Within the Chinese community, health problems are viewed as a family responsibility. Connect Hearing usually promotes its hearing solutions to a mainstream audience by putting the onus on the individual, so a different approach was required to connect with this new demo. The tag became "stay connected with your loved ones," with the strategy emphasizing the importance of maintaining family relationships as a person ages. A series of ads – one of which shows a grandmother having trouble hearing her

family – encouraged booking free hearing tests at the local clinic. The "Hard to Hear" campaign, by Captive Advertising, reflected the diminished quality of life that happens when auditory health is neglected and drove a 20% increase in appointments. It also won a Bronze in Multicultural Strategy.

## GAMERS

Sugar-Crisp had previously connected with millennials by tapping into their nostalgia for the brand's commercials from the '90s. However, this strategy didn't gel with Gen Z, as they hadn't grown up with the ads. So Sugar-Crisp looked to gaming as a way in with 18- to 24-year-olds. Eating cereal while gaming is common practice with this group, but it also leads to sticky fingers, which impedes game play. So the "Sugar-Crisp Spout" was devised to let a gamer pour cereal directly into their mouth. Ogilvy helped the brand create a blatantly fake influencer, who promoted the Spout online. Around 3,000 were given away and the program (which won a Silver in Content Strategy) led to a 15% sales boost, versus the previous month.



negative effects later in life, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, violence, incarceration and early mortality.

“Boys Don’t Cry” is a three-minute film that begins with a young boy experiencing emotions from love to sadness. But as he grows up, he’s told to bottle up his emotions and gradually transforms from an innocent child into a violent teenager.

The film was launched on Canada’s National Anti-Bullying Day across two national networks, which agreed to air the film for free. The Toronto Maple Leafs and anti-bullying advocates Monica Lewinski and George Takei, as well as parental expert Alyson Schafer helped to share the film beyond Canada. The video was picked up in 150 stories globally, generating 66 million impressions, and landed two Bronzes, one in Creative Catalyst, another in Social Strategy.

To rally support for kids in third world countries who have been deprived of their childhood, Right to Play highlighted the power of play-based learning, which helps children to rise above adversity. Most people think of play as trivial. But games, sports, creative and free play can actually give children critical life skills, while classroom play helps them to engage in lessons.

Because children are the most vulnerable and oppressed group in the world, BBDO Toronto created the anthemic “We Rise” spot, which encourages people to join a movement in helping youth to rise up. The spot’s poetic copy sheds light on the dire circumstances that many children find themselves in, with the film supported by two equally emotional videos, one telling the story of a child soldier and another of a child labourer.

“We Rise” aired with donated media and was supported by Right to Play’s network of athlete ambassadors. Facebook also used the campaign to help launch its “donate now” button. As a result, Right to Play saw a 40% increase in online donations and a 42% increase in new donors, raising enough money to give 40,000 kids a year of play. The campaign insight was recognized with a Silver in Creative Catalyst, as well as a Bronze in Turnaround Strategy.

## Content that sparks movements

Film can be a potent creative catalyst for the discourse around issues like toxic masculinity and youth oppression when you get it right. White Ribbon’s “Boys Don’t Cry” and Right To Play’s “We Rise” tackled those very issues with impact by starting with a powerful insight.

Through content, non-profit White Ribbon and agencies Bensimon Byrne and Narrative explored what it means to be a man in the #metoo era. As stories flood news media, society is finally talking about the devastating consequences of toxic masculinity. But is anything being done to get at the heart of the issue?

As little kids, boys are allowed to express their emotions. But as they grow older, they’re socialized to show only those emotions associated with masculinity, while suppressing healthy ones like fear, sadness, and compassion. Research shows that this can have

**Top to bottom:** Boys do cry in “Boys Don’t Cry,” an emotional film from White Ribbon; child labourers need play to rise above adversity, states Right To Play in its powerful “We Rise” PSA.

### COMING HOME TO CANADA

In 2018, Tim Hortons was dealing with a public dispute with franchisees, new foreign ownership and a controversy over minimum wage. The QSR needed to build love for its brand again, and it turned to Zulu Alpha Kilo to help.

“The Away Game” is a Silver Content Strategy-winning film that followed the brand’s steps to give Kenya’s hockey team the game of a lifetime. It aimed to build



goodwill by bringing Canada’s community together to welcome “The Ice Lions” (a team that had no one to play against).

The brand flew the team to Canada and set up a game with a local league,

as well as pro players Sidney Crosby and Nate McKinnon. The video launched on YouTube and social, with an 18-minute version airing during a primetime game on Rogers’ Sportsnet.

“The Away Game” got four million views in the first four days and eight million social media impressions in just 72 hours. More importantly, a Leger Brand Reputation Report showed that Tims leaped 17 spots from 50th to 33rd.



# Campaigns find strength in numbers



Left to right: Fondation Émergence demonstrates the power of a collective conscience; SickKids rallies the “Crews” to join the fight.

Uniting with others for a cause bigger than yourself offers no greater feeling of belonging. Japanese writer Ryunosuke Satoro said it best: “Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.” It’s an electrifying emotion that SickKids and Fondation Émergence ignited in thousands, if not millions; each issuing a call to arms in the name of kids health and social prosperity.

SickKids Foundation had a pretty hefty goal. It needed to keep the momentum of its award winning “VS” campaign going and raise 1.3 billion over 10 years for its hospital. However, the previous work had been so successful that anyone who had already donated felt they had “done their job.” So Cossette came up with a solution to persuade the altruistic to give again, while also calling on new donors.

The team found “sub-groups” among donors. They were friends, families and co-workers who had shared experiences with the hospital, and together, they became the faces of a campaign that mobilized “Crews” to join the fight.

Fifty-two influencers were chosen to rally support within their crews. They shared content from personal stories to provocative rally cries across social. JoinYourCrew.ca was the hub in which people could identify the crew they most relate to and then pledge their support for SickKids through a donation. Print and OOH ads were designed to reference “crews” in neighbouring locations (i.e. “the straight-razors”



## FANS FOR THE FANS

Fresh tires are a grudge purchase. But Fountain Tire didn’t want to be the dreaded dentist of retail, so it found a passion it could share with customers: the Edmonton Oilers.

As the team’s ultimate fan and sponsor, the brand made the ultimate sacrifice – it donated its employees’ bodies to the fans.

“Fanbods” was a human typeface made for fans, by fans. Real employees were painted as crazed Oilers fans and turned into every letter of the alphabet. Fans could use the “Fanbods” font to create cheers and send them to the Oilers on social.

Real “Fanbods” took to the stands at games and the interface was used by fans from 24 out of 31 NHL hockey teams. The FCB-created campaign also won a Silver award in Challenger Strategy.

near barber shops). And finally, an anthemic spot showed crews converging on the site of the future SickKids hospital, calling on Canadians to join the fight. The campaign managed to raise \$68.7 million during the period, topping the previous year by \$10 million. It also picked up three Golds: Evolution Strategy, Cause and Social Strategy, plus a Bronze for its Connection Strategy.

The power of standing together was also presented by the Fondation Émergence in “Pride Shield.” The work – created by Rethink and which won Gold in Social Strategy and Gold in Cause – allowed the organization to explore a creative platform that could trigger discussions about the plight of the LGBTQ+ community in some less progressive nations.

For the campaign, Rethink created a ballistic experiment in which 193 pride flags (the number of member countries in the UN) were aligned and shot with a .45 calibre bullet. A single flag stood no chance against the bullet, but with each flag, the bullet lost power, eventually stopping in its tracks.

A video was created and housed on PrideShield.com, where people could take action, donate to the cause and bring the “Pride Shield” to their city. What began as an experiment, became a content piece, and now lives on as an art installation: today, museums exhibit the flag to remind people to stand together to make a difference.



Clockwise: CDSS calls for the safety of the first “endangered” group of people; the Peace Collective unravels a symbol of hate; QSRs are shamed for sucking the life from our oceans in a Greenpeace program; Casey House stands up to the misinformed in a stigma-fighting campaign.

## Gloves off: next level cause-vertising?

**M**any of us are uninformed and disengaged about the issue that exists in the Down syndrome community – their numbers are in decline, and it’s creating a ripple effect on the social and health services they need. Plastic in the oceans has reached a tipping point and our great grandchildren may never bear witness to the beauty that exists in the sea. Presidential campaigns carry thinly veiled symbols of discrimination and racism; while ignorant people continue to spew hate on social media, further perpetuating a cruel stigma around those with HIV.

Travesties like these deserve to be called out, which many creative agencies helped nonprofits (and a brand) do.

Greenpeace and Rethink created a campaign that’s uncomfortable to look at, much less reflect. While the plastic straw may be small, it’s causing significant harm to the planet. Sadly, the reality is that they’re in almost every restaurant and bar: in Canada alone, 57 million straws are discarded each day. Single-use plastic eventually ends up in our oceans, where they endanger and kill sea life. But despite consumer uproar (and single-use plastic ban announced for 2021), there’s currently no law prohibiting straws in Canada.

Greenpeace wanted to change that and so created a groundswell by rattling the cage. “Stop Sucking” was intended to wake people up to the problem, and visuals of animals (a turtle, fish and seagull) with

straws brutally inserted into their mouths did the job.

To take it a step further, the team created a series of “Straw Shaming” GIFs for Instagram. The stickers were designed to fit perfectly on the image of a straw, so people could tag the restaurant (where they were given the sipping device) for all of their followers to see. And it worked. The GIFs generated 2.3 million views and have since been used on a global scale.

Marine life and those with Down syndrome face similar existential threats, according to the Canadian Down Syndrome Society (CDSS) in an FCB-created campaign that put a group of people on an endangered list.

An increase in prenatal screening has led the Down syndrome population to decline. But as the community shrinks, so too do the resources that support them, creating an “Endangered Syndrome” that needs attention.

Even though Down syndrome could qualify as “endangered,” wildlife organizations that protect animals tend to receive 100 times more funding than Down syndrome organizations in North America. So CDSS applied for the first group of people to be put on the official endangered species list. Naturally, this created a media frenzy. The press picked up the story, which included a video with real people with Down syndrome dressed as endangered animals and driving



people to sign a petition online.

The campaign kick-started an avalanche of conversations around the silent issue. It also earned half a billion media impressions with only \$2,000 invested in media, while 49,500 people signed the petition, and donations increased by 77%.

While CDSS called out a double standard, the Peace Collective called out Donald Trump for favouring one group (Americans) over another (everybody else).

The Toronto apparel brand sells clothing that captures current cultural sentiments. It also has a history of helping those less fortunate, as well as new Canadians by donating to struggling communities. For the Collective, Zulu Alpha Kilo was inspired to reimagine the infamous “Make American Great Again” (MAGA) hat, which had become a symbol of hate. The agency’s idea was to “Unravel Hate” by replacing the MAGA words with “Welcome to Canada.”

The team unstitched the words on a MAGA hat, letter by letter, unraveling its divisive symbolism. It then used the red thread to weave a new message of acceptance onto a Canadian toque, showing the whole process in a video that featured five new Canadians as they were given the welcoming headgear.

#UnravelHate was Peace Collective’s most successful campaign in its history. With zero paid media, the campaign was shared 2.34 million times on social, while the video got 2.5 million video views.

Hate is an emotion that gets a lot of airtime on social media, and it's

## DYNAMITE IDEAS IN SMALL PACKAGES

Who knew a box of tampons could change lives? Shoppers Drug Mart and Interval House designed discreet protection for disenfranchised and abused women using the innocuous item – and they didn't let anyone (but the intended target) know.

It's not something many people think about, but every month, homeless women face an impossible decision: do they buy food, or tampons? Many, in desperation, will resort to makeshift replacements like socks or paper towels, which can cause infections.

Women who live on the street feel a sense of shame and vulnerability, which prevents them from walking into a Shoppers to ask for help. So John St. created “The Monthly” to preserve their privacy and dignity, creating tampons disguised as periodicals.

The tampons were stored in unused newspaper boxes. Hiding in plain sight, the boxes dispensed tampons when women opened them using a secret PIN given by shelters.

Shoppers has deliberately not promoted the program (which won a Silver in Cause/Public Service) to preserve the initiative’s discretion. But the success of the initiative has led the Toronto City Council to waive the permit fee for Shoppers to install boxes in other areas.

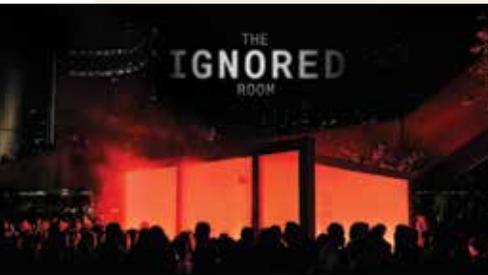
Similarly, the Interval House’s “Freedom Tampons” was a covert effort and relied on the utmost discretion.

Women in abusive relationships are always monitored, so the non-profit gave them the info they need to leave an abusive relationship in the one place a man never looks: a box of tampons.

The Silver Niche Strategy-winning campaign, created by Union, saw Freedom print each tampon with life-saving info, as well as a crisis hotline, and place boxes in public washrooms and also send them to counsellors, healthcare workers and the police (people who are in direct contact with victims of abuse).

Since launch, calls to the Interval House have increased by 176% and the response has been so positive that a second run of tampons is in the works.





## ORANGE IS THE NEW UNIGNORABLE

Sadly, 1 in 10 Canadians live in poverty and many are impacted by social issues. Yet few recognize the problems that exist in their own communities, so United Way created a campaign that drew attention to the local issues that often go ignored.

The non-profit and Taxi partnered with The Pantone Color Institute to create the world's most "Unignorable" colour: a neon orange that calls attention to social issues,

from homelessness to abuse and violence. The hue became the foundation for every execution. Working with an illustrator, the team created minimalist designs, using only black, white and the "Unignorable" colour. The artwork was placed in contextual OOH and print ads, while an interactive art exhibit at Nuit Blanche in Toronto simulated the feelings of insecurity and isolation within those who suffer from ignored issues. The non-profit even partnered with Adidas to create "Unignorable" sneakers.

The program, which won a Silver in Cause, helped raise \$110 million in donations – a record-breaking amount for the United Way in the GTA (and in the world).

conducting skin-to-skin massage therapy at a "Healing House."

The wellness spa in Toronto had 18 HIV+ volunteers perform neck, back and shoulder massages to hundreds of people, with the team documenting the event and sharing the video online. Knowing that it would spark outrage, a team of moderators were poised to respond to the social media backlash and correct people's misconceptions around the spread of HIV (which is, of course, not contagious through touch).

Paid media targeted social media activity in areas where research showed the stigma was especially prevalent.

Research shows that 51% of North Americans won't touch someone with HIV, and while many still share that opinion, the campaign managed to educate hundreds of thousands of Canadians and

usually bred by fear as a result of being misinformed.

Casey House, Bensimon Byrne and Narrative decided to educate the ignorant, creating provocative videos that show people with HIV

decrease negative sentiment by as much as 27% on platforms like Reddit. With a budget of just \$30,000, "Healing House" amassed a media value of \$11 million.

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# Brand strategies that changed the game



**Clockwise:** Nothing beats a bargain. Just ask No Frills' shoppers who consider themselves a rare breed of "Haulers"; Terry Fox Foundation critiqued social media in a program that took Canada's hero to new heights; a look inside "Tina's Uterus" led Motrin to a game-changing strategy.

**N**o Frills, Motrin and the Terry Fox Foundation each went to market with turnaround strategies that defied conventions in their respective categories. The grocery retailer made budget shopping in vogue, the painkiller brand made menstrual pain its North Star, and the non-profit contemporized the charity run.

Millennial "smart shoppers" are motivated by the satisfaction of finding a great deal. With deal bragging showing up everywhere, No Frills decided to connect with the generation of deal hunters.

Instead of rebranding its store, it rebranded its customers as "Haulers" in a campaign that won a Gold in Game Changer and a Silver in Connection Strategy.

First, John St. created "Hauler" merchandise, which was teased with posters and print ads. Next, a music video aired during TV events like *The Billboard Music Awards*, and the track was released on Spotify, while enormous shopping carts in store parking lots epitomized the kind of hauling a person can do in a No Frills.

"Haulers" impacted the grocer's bottom line, beating its sales KPI

with a 1.9% lift and a 1% increase in traffic during the campaign.

Motrin was also a brand in desperate need of resuscitation. To avoid being delisted, it had to demonstrate it still had the potential for growth. So it did what any pharma brand facing a skeptical, disengaged audience (millennials) would do: it put itself in their shoes.

Enter "Tina's Uterus," a creative platform by OneMethod that positioned the brand as a cure-all for women's menstrual woes. Spots showed employees at work within "Tina's Uterus," conjuring up creative ways to generate pain (like a shark attacking from the inside). The humorous spots helped the brand show the demo that it understands their debilitating pain, and went from preparing to be taken off shelves to achieving a sales increase of 16%.

The Terry Fox Foundation faced its own declines in annual donations and general awareness. It too needed to modernize its approach.

How long could the nostalgia of one man last? That question was posed by Grip Limited when the foundation was looking to connect with those (from young Canadians to new immigrants) who might not be aware of Terry Fox and his legacy. The answer lay in redefining Fox's heroic achievement through a social media lens.

The team used archival footage to juxtapose the shallow nature of social, creating the "Millions of Followers" campaign that included ads showing how Fox had "0 likes, 0 posts, 0 shares – but millions of followers." The organization contextualized Fox's story for a younger generation through media they're familiar with. It also developed a digital billboard, where Canadians could tap their card or mobile device to donate to its cause. With each donation, the billboard updated in real time, showing a digital avatar of Fox moving along his historical route.

In an ironic twist, the social-critiquing campaign (which won a Silver in Turnaround Strategy) blew up online, receiving more than 400,000 views in the first 48 hours, while online donations increased by 45%.

# Pot brands speak up in OOH campaigns



**Clockwise:** Tweed and Dosist both created platforms that educated Canadians on the benefits of weed prior to its date with lawmakers.

their brand, stating that Dosist is “Not Available in Canada.”

By positioning the campaign – which snagged a Gold in Cannabis Strategy – as a PSA, Dosist created awareness and built a substantial email database, with nearly 80,000 people signing a petition and contacting the government on Dosist’s behalf.

But Dosist wasn’t the only cannabis brand waiting to introduce itself to Canadians. Canopy’s Tweed took a much different approach, bringing attention to its brand by giving future pot smokers a primer on all that is cannabis.

The “Hi.” campaign, created by Cossette and which won a Bronze in Cannabis Strategy, aimed to familiarize Canadians with weed strains and its benefits prior to legalization. Most felt a little in the dark (and nervous) around the subject, and so Tweed offered answers

**W**hat brand would flaunt its absence on a billboard?

One that isn’t afraid to give weed regulators a sharp nudge, that’s who.

Dosist is a producer of pot that’s not federally approved or allowed on shelves in Canada (at press time, the *Cannabis Act* does not permit the sale of concentrates used in vaporizers). The company believes this is a mistake.

Canada is ranked the third-most-sleep-deprived nation in the world, according to Dosist, while anxiety and depression costs the economy almost \$50 billion a year. But the brand’s dose-controlled vape pen positioned itself as a solution to those sleep and mental health issues.

Dosist, along with Anomaly, decided to create an advocacy platform in response to the government’s non-response.

It launched an out-of-home campaign that called out Canada’s reluctance to allow consumers to treat those issues with Dosist’s product. The team embraced regulations that censor producers from promoting

on a dedicated website, which was promoted via restaurants and bars, OOH, in online videos, as well as mobile ads. Not only did the integrated campaign promote the digital hub for questions and answers, it also introduced the brand to people with a clever double entendre: “Hi.”

The goal was to establish Tweed as a trusted and credible brand in the category. And in the 200 days leading up to legalization, it generated over 700 million media impressions, while getting 34,000 people to sign up to receive communications from the brand as their go-to source for cannabis news.



## CANNABIS-ADJACENT STRATEGY

Heading into 2018, cannabis legalization was top of mind in Canadian culture, especially for millennials. Cannabis enthusiasts have long used 4:20 as code for marijuana, which is known to cause the munchies.

Using this insight, Oh Henry! connected its hunger-satisfying product to cannabis, creating a specifically formulated bar that caters to the intense hunger that hits five minutes after 4:20. Enter “Oh Henry! 4:25.”

The Anomaly-created bar was promoted when and where intense hunger strikes – such as in a Kensington Market “dispensary,” during the Global Marijuana March where it distributed 15,000 bars, and on the morning after the legalization bill was officially passed.

The program won a Silver in Evolution Strategy and a Bronze in Game Changer, while the brand sold more than one million peanut-filled chocolate bars (which some consumers later sold on eBay for three-times the retail price). It even supported growth across the entire portfolio: regular bar sales increased 1%, while the brand’s peanut butter bar sales rose by 5%.

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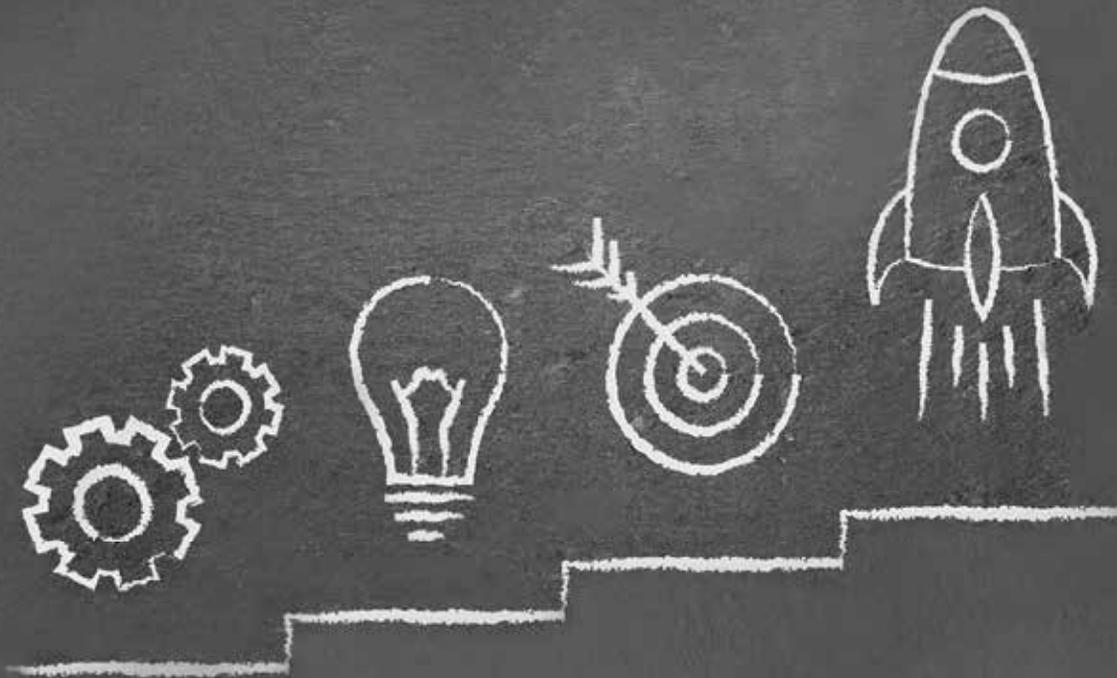


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# strategy presents The Pharma Report

Healthcare marketers are shifting strategies to meet the new pharma reality.

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Marketing healthcare products used to be such a stable, clear-cut business. Brands could bring their blockbuster products to any agency holding company and be treated like royalty by their pharma specialist agencies. They'd craft doctor-focused campaigns, and the marketing partnership on a patent-protected drug could last for years.

Not so much anymore.

As the pharmaceutical market slides over the so-called "patent cliff," marketers are seeing competition increase (a situation complicated when Canada changed how it subsidizes prescription drugs, spreading the wealth further afield).

Marketers serving the healthcare industry have been subject to the same pressures as their consumer-facing cousins. Budgets are shrinking, and local campaigns fight for investment versus adaptations of global platforms.

One more wrinkle in the market: as consumers armed with research become a bigger force in determining what products they're prescribed, drug manufacturers are increasingly looking for consumer insights and strategies that differ from their trade-focused efforts in the past. Pharma brands now need trade marketing backed by mass campaigns.

In this challenging environment, brands are turning to agencies who have diversified their talent and expanded their niche focus beyond the old formula.

As "Pharma" specialists evolve and generalist agencies deepen their credentials in the space, here's a look at some of the players making an impact in the health and wellness market.



# Tank

## Global capabilities plus local expertise

**J**onathan Cogan was always intrigued by Tank. Several of his colleagues had migrated to the 12-year-old Montreal agency, and he knew they did great work. “But from the outside, I didn’t see them as a global threat,” he says. “Their early success was mostly with Montreal-based clients.”

That perception changed. Pitching a big Toronto client, “we delivered what we thought was an unbeatable presentation,” Cogan says. “We were told there was only one agency left to pitch, and they’d have to pull off a miracle to beat us. Sure enough, Tank pulled off that miracle, and it became obvious that their vision was larger than many of us had imagined.”

Cogan is now VP and managing director of Tank’s Toronto operation and is helping realize that vision. Following Tank’s 2016 acquisition by international agency network Grey Group, it has expanded its 150-person Canadian organization to four locations in Europe, one in the U.S. and one in Asia.

The Toronto office is rapidly expanding to serve as a second home base for global work. “We’ve just hired six people in Toronto. As important as their skill sets are, our focus was on finding an entrepreneurial spirit. Many are coming from outside of healthcare, but the curiosity and passion that enabled them to thrive in the industries they’ve worked in before are proving to be transferable.”

Tank president Marc Lanouette says the Grey deal “really opened up the world to us, and let us export our approach to the global pharma business.” Adding that the agency will double in size this year.

That won’t change how Tank operates, however. It prides itself on a flat team structure, making sure each client gets senior-level staff working on their brand. “We want a mix of people with traditional and client-side backgrounds,” Lanouette says, pointing to execs like Christian Roy, Tank’s EVP, healthcare who used to be VP, marketing at Pfizer.

Tank describes its Think Tank methodology as “a blend of world-class consulting and global creative expertise” focused on solving complex business problems and enabling creativity to flourish.

“In pharma, it’s important to have people who understand your reality whether that’s a regional reality or a global reality,” Lanouette adds. “We’re now doing both regional and global work with our Canadian teams. We’re in a position to be able to shape a global platform and represent the Canadian perspective natively.”

The shop has brands from Pfizer, Eli Lilly, Abbvie and others in its portfolio, but its first global account was for a GSK brand. The global and U.S. marketing teams were brought to Canada to take part in the agency’s Think Tank: a unique multi-day process where Tank’s senior leadership works hand-in-hand with marketers to deconstruct business problems.

“We helped solve issues they’d been trying to solve for three years,” Lanouette says. “We’ve gone on to win other GSK brands.”

Lanouette describes the Think Tank process as a blend of world-class consulting and global creative expertise. “We could do well focusing on executional, production-oriented work that doesn’t require as much creativity. But that’s not what we want. We want to get further upstream. We have amazing strategists and experts who’ve come from just about every major pharma company. Why squander that when we can find creative ways to connect with people?”

It’s only been four months since he signed on, but Cogan knows that moving to Tank was the right call. “Many agencies promise a collaborative creative environment,” he says. “But in just a few months I’ve already experienced several examples of how Tank and Grey actually live up to that promise.”



This bathroom takeover for GSK was part of a full Rogers Cup activation that encouraged people to take the risk of shingles more seriously, turning a look in the mirror into a health reminder.



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## Lemieux Bédard

### An independent voice making waves in healthcare

**W**ord is starting to get out about a well-kept secret in Montreal's eastern townships — a female-led independent agency that's turning heads with work for national healthcare clients.

Lemieux Bédard has more than 30 years experience working with major brands such as Bayer, Paladin Labs and Pendopharm, to name just a few. It wields deep expertise in reaching medical professionals with effective campaigns. Now that the industry is shifting, it increasingly finds itself fielding calls from healthcare brands looking to market to both medical professionals and consumers.

"Brands that were traditionally only talking to healthcare professionals are now realizing that the consumer has influence," says Catherine Savard, creative director at the 70-person agency. "They are looking to work in both markets, which means investing in fuller campaigns."

Lemieux Bédard has evolved its offering in recent years beyond expert medical writers and pharma specialists to include creatives and strategists with consumer marketing backgrounds (Savard herself arrived in October 2018 with experience at Cossette, XM and Euro RSCG).

It's also made sure it can serve clients on a national scale, regardless of the target audience. "We often say bilingualism is in our DNA," says Savard.

Strolling through Lemieux Bédard's offices would reveal something else unique about its workforce.

"We're mostly women," Savard says. "And we were founded by a woman — Suzanne Lemieux Bédard. Most of us are mothers and have a 'second shift' after we leave the office. So we've become very effective at getting things done on a tight schedule."

Josée Gagnon, VP, client services who has been with the agency for more than 20 years, adds that "we work extremely hard, and we believe that our emphasis on a healthy work/life balance makes us more focused and this in turn produces better campaigns for our clients."

By rejuvenating PediaVit's whole identity, the agency helped gain access to millennials and Gen Z-ers through a string of digital strategies. The campaign captured the attention of a large multinational retailer, securing a national listing for the brand.

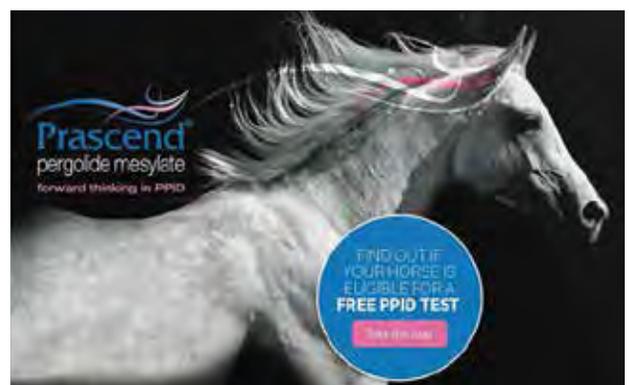
One skincare product that had seen initial success after its launch tasked the agency with spreading the word and keeping that momentum going. Lemieux Bédard's team saw that those already-engaged users were posting glowing product reviews. It contacted a select few and interviewed them on-camera to create a series of online video testimonials.

Testimonials have proven effective in consumer markets, but present challenges to pharma brands. Canadian regulators strictly limit what they can say about products in the consumer sphere. Most consumers don't know these intricate rules, so how can a testimonial remain truly unscripted and honest?

Lemieux Bédard expertly navigated this narrow course, creating a campaign that not only met regulators' criteria, but resonated with consumers. More than 33% of those who saw the 90-second videos watched them in their entirety — well above industry benchmarks. The campaign also saw an increase in click-throughs to the brand's website and drove an increase in coupon downloads.

While success like that is attracting welcome attention from the market, the company is working hard to ensure growth does not come at the cost of the unique culture that drives such success.

"There's a fine line that agencies often stumble over," Gagnon says. "They try to be small enough to be nimble, but big enough to handle work at scale. We have 70 full-time staff, including our translation teams, and a roster of expert freelancers. We've found the path that works."



Lemieux Bédard's expertise extends to the equally challenging animal pharma market. Its campaign for Prascend used a smart quiz to increase awareness of an underdiagnosed equine disease. It boosted sales by 37%.



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## Zulu Alpha Kilo

Get ready to shake up your category

**T**oo much marketing in the pharma category is boring. Zulu Alpha Kilo wants to change that.

Beyond its top-tier automotive, retail and tech clients, the Toronto agency is known for its work with public-facing health and wellness organizations. Take the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), for example, who engaged Zulu to develop a new brand strategy and launch a public awareness campaign to help end the stigma associated with mental health. CAMH then leaned on Zulu to help fundraise for its Krembil Centre for Neuroinformatics. The agency has also steered national campaigns for ParticipACTION and used its design expertise for a brand launch of the East Toronto Vascular Clinic.

Interestingly, the agency's pure-play pharmaceutical clients such as Avrio Health get access to the exact same creative and strategic experts. Zulu intentionally chose not to set up its pharma business as a separate silo the way other agencies have. Zulu founder & chief creative officer Zak Mroueh says, "We don't believe pharma should be relegated to a separate division within the agency. Our pharma clients have access to the same depth of creative and strategic talent as all our clients."

What the agency has done is hire subject-matter experts in account service and strategy who can navigate the regulation-heavy environment. There is some serious pharma know-how in the ranks. With over 20 years of experience, group strategy director Heather Segal has worked with many of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies in both Canada and the U.S. She works alongside group strategy director Maxine Thomas, who helped steer many groundbreaking campaigns for Pfizer while at Taxi. Mroueh himself knows a thing or two about creativity within

Betadine's gargle-y campaign eschewed cold sufferers for cold fighters, and in its first year took the number two position, accounting for an unheard of 90% of the category's growth. In this spot, a barber fends off getting sick by gargling in the middle of a haircut.

pharma's regulatory confines. Working with Thomas at Taxi, he led the creative team overseeing the game-changing early Viagra work.

Agency president Mike Sutton says, "We treat pharma as passionately as we would any other marketing discipline. In many agencies, it is simply seen as a revenue source. For us, we see pharma as an opportunity to break a category wide open through smart strategy and creativity."

Which is precisely what the agency did when it got the call from Avrio Health for its Betadine launch. With a mix of social, trade and mass advertising strategies, Zulu helped drive Betadine's growth as an antiseptic gargle in the competitive cough and cold market. Realizing that the world didn't need another ad about miserable, sniffing people hiding under blankets, the agency leaned into the product's preventative

properties for ear-catching creative.

TV focused on people starting to feel a tickle in their throats. While at their jobs, they drop what they're doing and gargle loudly while co-workers and customers look on in surprise. For social videos, actors were put into similar real-life situations to gargle in grocery stores and on park benches as unknowing consumers looked on with amusement. Trade and digital ads backed the creative with details on efficacy and proven results.

After the campaign launched, Betadine accounted for an unheard of 90% of the category's growth. It achieved a 27.2% market share and for a time was the category leader, eventually securing the undisputed number two position. The main competitor's volume share was reduced from 75% to 49%.

More recently, Senokot began working with the agency on a campaign called "For The #2 In You." From silver medalists to second-born children, the campaign manifesto humorously celebrates all the number twos in the world. The product is a laxative that hopes to change Canadians' attitudes towards constipation (currently, of the 71% of the population who say they've experienced constipation, only 13% use laxatives).

Zulu's reputation in the pharmaceutical arena is growing with the Betadine work and calls from potential clients coming with increased frequency. But as with its non-pharma work, Zulu sets its own pace. It prides itself on only partnering with ambitious clients who want to creatively shake up their heavily regulated category.

"For us, there's no sweeter challenge than trying to innovate within a set of boundaries," Mroueh says. "Some of the most brilliant ideas are conceived when you're forced into a framework by regulation or market pressures."



After feeling a tickle in her throat, a lottery host gargles with Betadine as the country waits on the edge of their seat for her to read the final number.



Out-of-home took a contextual approach by connecting Betadine's gargling ritual to the settings in which it was placed. Social media added a layer of demonstration and hilarity to the campaign. Actors were put into real-life situations to gargle in grocery stores, park benches and butcher shops as unknowing consumers looked on with amusement.

<p>Close to downtown, but far from the clogged arteries.</p> 	<p>Come for the injection sclerotherapy. Stay for the Jazz Festival.</p> 	<p>High Blood Pressure? There's free parking nearby.</p> 
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For the branding of the East Toronto Vascular Clinic, Zulu created an eye-catching graphic approach with a stylized depiction of veins, arteries and blood cells. Messaging played off the clinic's location in the Beaches area of Toronto.



Zulu works with many health and wellness organizations to change perceptions and behaviours. CAMH's "Mental health is health" challenged stigma while ParticipACTION's "better" campaign showed how every aspect of life improves with physical activity.

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Named one of the best workplaces by *AdAge*, *Fast Company* and others, Klicksters collaborate across disciplines from creative to project management.

arrange rides through ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft — billing those rides through insurance providers when needed.

The company may have crossed your radar last year when it was acquired by LogistiCare. By that time, Circulation's rides had covered more than a million miles in service of 3,000 facilities across 46 states.

Where a traditional pharma agency may address problems with marketing solutions, "our heritage is as a tech company, building infrastructure," says Grant. "So as we brought on marketing services, we looked at it through data and outcomes." Klick is able to examine market and consumer data, then ideate, experiment and invest in a solution regardless of the disciplines involved.

"Our clients' industries are changing," Grant told *strategy*. "Our job is to solve problems, regardless of whether that client is in the pharma space, the biological sciences, hospital systems or anyone touching life sciences in any way."

Adding to this solution-focused approach is Klick Labs, the innovation division founded in 2013 that gets involved in products from inception to market launch. Its mix of coders, inventors, data scientists and marketers develop new ideas for tackling products beyond the realm of PSA campaigns.

For example, it created the SymPulse Tele-Empathy Device, which precisely replicates a Parkinson's patient's tremors in real time through a muscle stimulation device worn by doctors and caregivers. SymPulse (currently in the proof-of-concept stage) was designed to give medical professionals a "booster shot of empathy" and a better sense of what their patients go through.

Similarly, Klick Labs developed HealthVoyager with Boston Children's Hospital — an education and experience platform that lets patients visualize their medical conditions through virtual reality and helps them understand their treatment.

Supporting all of this is Klick Health's growing team of passionate "Klicksters," whom the company continually seeks to empower to maintain its culture of innovation (which seems to be working since *Fast Company* named the firm one of the 50 Best Workplaces for Innovators in 2019).

Employee engagement is a paramount priority to Grant and her leadership team. She says interviewing or "casting" for a team is "investing in that team's future."

"We want to know who you are as a person and as a professional when we interview you," she says. "We want to know what you want out of your career. We take our time getting to know you, and then marry what you want to do with the role we have."

It's part of Klick Health's goal to become "a centre of gravity" for the industry's most brilliant minds, Grant says. "A client can sense passion. So if you have happy teams, you have happy clients."

# Klick Health

## Creativity and innovation with a unique approach

**M**any agencies talk about innovating beyond the traditional boundaries of marketing as a new way of doing business. Toronto-based Klick Health, however, has been doing that for years. Because of its unique approach to helping life sciences companies from pre-commercialization through launch of their life-saving therapies, the 22-year-old company has made innovation an everyday affair.

Make no mistake: as a marketing agency it produces head-turning creative that wins international acclaim. In 2018, for example, two of the company's campaigns won prestigious Cannes Lions Health awards. The first was the educational "Lighter Blue" social media campaign for Takeda that raised awareness about Major Depressive Disorder. The second was Novartis's unbranded "The Wrestler," a direct-to-consumer campaign that raised awareness about carcinoid syndrome.

The company is experiencing double-digit growth, reaching nearly 800 full-time staff thanks to its people-centric culture, pure-play focus on life sciences and ability to adapt healthcare brands at multiple points throughout their life cycle. That award-winning creative is backed by strategy, innovation and a vast number of subject matter experts who can bring big ideas to the table upstream of the marketing department.

According to Lori Grant, Klick Health's president, Klick is much more than an agency. "We are a commercialization company," she says.

As an example, Grant points to Circulation, a non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) firm Klick co-founded in 2016 to help get more patients and clinical trial participants to their appointments. Klick Health helped build the privacy- and security-compliant (HIPAA) platform that allows healthcare facilities to



Collecting over 20 years of know-how, Klick's new 230-page Adaptive Brand Playbook is filled with research and insights to help healthcare marketers build, activate and modernize their brands.



Novartis' little wrestler earned a Cannes Lions Health award by dramatizing the symptoms of a carcinoid syndrome sufferer to raise awareness of the condition.



Klick Health worked with Boston Children's Hospital to develop HealthVoyager, a bespoke VR platform to help patients visualize and understand their medical conditions and treatments.



"Lighter Blue" was a Cannes-winning social campaign that explained symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder and illustrated coping strategies with a touch of humour.



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 Senior VP, Sales & Client Services  
 am@klick.com

# CR3AT1V3 BR13F

CLIENT:	Freezza Pies	PROJECT:	WINTER HOLIDAY
BRAND:	Frozen Pizza	CLIENT CONTACT:	Hugh Manns
CREATIVE TEAM:	Andy & Vic	ACCOUNT CONTACT:	Rob Ott
STRATEGY:	A.I. STRATEGIZER BETA 2.0	PRODUCTION:	MPRTNT
DATE:	Winter 2021	JOB NO.:	0010011100101001

## BACKGROUND

During the holidays, humans gather in groups to perform ancient rituals and consume vast amounts of calories. Many traditional recipes have long preparation times and may cause certain humans to forego other rituals like bonding, the sharing of gifts and decorating deceased plant-life.

Freezza Pies Frozen Pizzas contain the daily required caloric intake for the average human (between 2,000 and 2,500 calories) in one slice and need only a fraction of the preparation time of most traditional holiday meals.

Freezza Pies is investing 2.83% of their annual market budget to a holiday campaign to promote the new tradition of cooking Freezza Pies Frozen Pizza instead of an oversized, flightless bird filled with old bread and seasoning, served with pulverized root vegetables and liquified animal fat.

## MARKETING & BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

- Promote Freezza Pies Frozen Pizza as a high calorie holiday meal
- Acquire/establish/nurture relationship with target audience
- Increase market share by 3.14%

## AUDIENCE/TARGET

On average, our target is between their 12th and 18th rotation of the sun, have an advanced form of teenaged angst, often vocalize their displeasure and love pizza. Although lacking seniority, funds and experience our target feels that they are the decision makers. Quoting an elder male human, "it's as if they feel the sun revolves around them."

## TASK

Sell more Freezza Pies Frozen Pizza products.

## MANDATORIES

Logo, Product name, Human touch, Emulated emotion

## TIMING

Internal: 7,200 minutes from time of briefing  
 Second Internal: 168 hours from time of briefing  
 First Client Presentation: 12 days from time of briefing  
 TBD

## INSIGHT

All of the holiday calories with none of the usual prep-time.

## KEY MESSAGE

Freezza Pies Frozen Pizza can lead to a highly efficient, more productive, and hyper-enjoyable holiday.

## MEDIA

- Programmatic media buy
- Online video (OLV)
- Digital out-of-home

## BUDGET

50 Bitcoin (\$699,959 CAN or 529,395 USD or approximately 140,000 frozen pizzas)

54% of us believe A.I. is coming for our jobs, here's hoping strategy isn't one of them.



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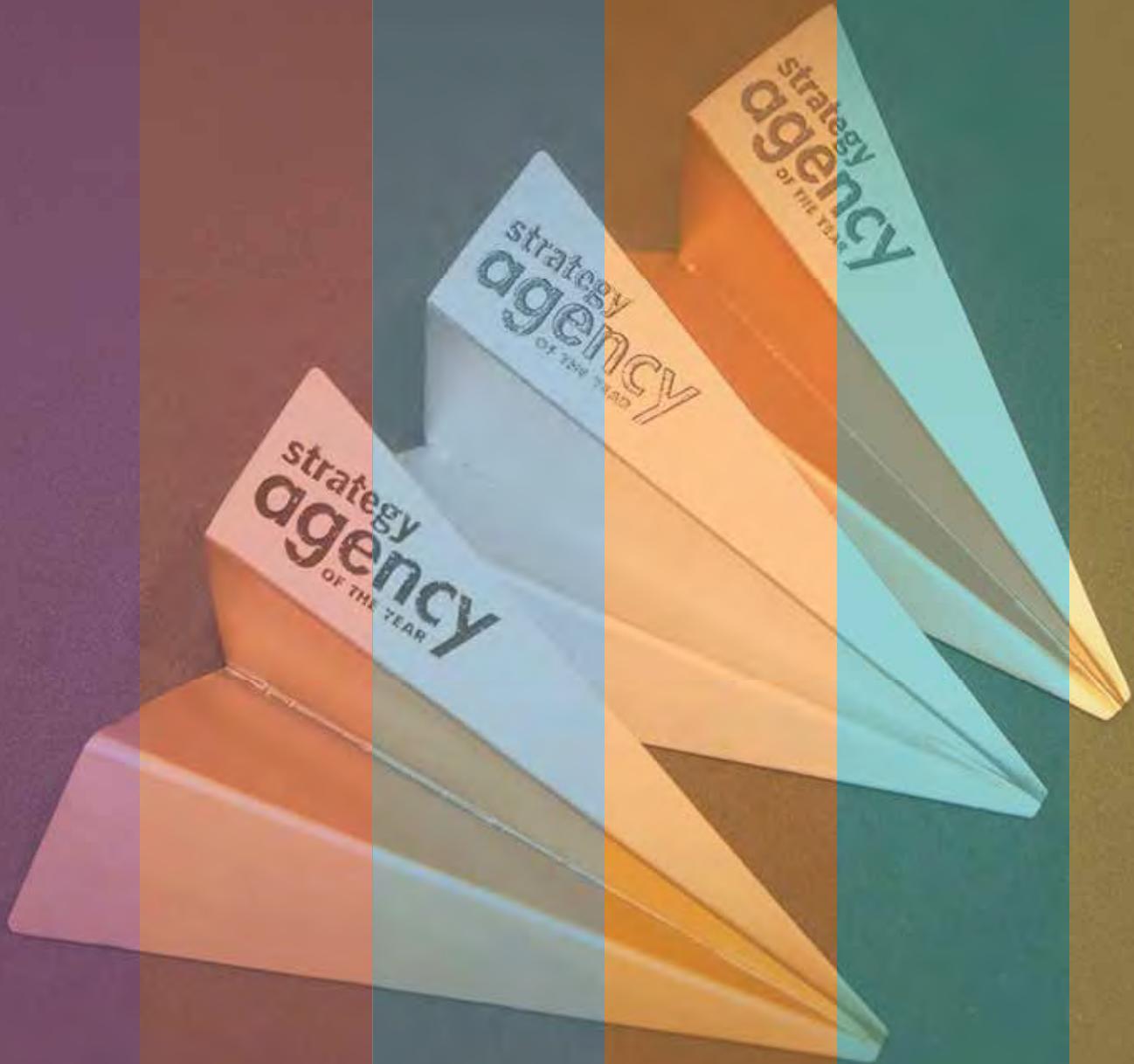
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Design

Digital

PR

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Small



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October 30 | St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts  
Tickets at [agencyoftheyear.strategyonline.ca](http://agencyoftheyear.strategyonline.ca)