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Rethinkers (and their furry friends) have a "space to play" in the #1 CRC agency's Lego Room.

10

The content churn

Labatt, Marriott and Destination Canada on how they're building internal capabilities to speed up and streamline 24/7 content.

16

Creative Report Card

Sitting at the very top, Rethink is one of many indie shops to grace the 2020 Agency list.

31

The AToMiC Awards

The brands and agencies behind this year's Gold-winning advertising, tech, media and content-fueled ideas.

4 Editorial Lessons on good governance • **6 Upfronts** Auto brands put on a show, consumers fall short on their eco duties and Accenture's vision for 2020 • **8 Tissue talk** On the eve of her retirement, Kruger's Nancy Marcus sits down with incoming CMO Susan Irving • **28 New Establishment** Innovators are bucking the status quo at Molson and Zulu Alpha Kilo • **74 Back Page** John St.'s non-meta streamer removes the ads from the ads



ON THE COVER:

Struggling to crack the "who's that on the cover" code? Wondering why food, equations and boats are suspended above bisected heads? Asking yourself what does it all mean? And do they realise they're really bad at math? Behold our most cryptic cover yet. The two fellas you see are Chris Staples to the left and Ian Grais to the right, as illustrated by Toronto artist **Kumé Pather**. This year marks the Rethink founders swan song on the CRC charts as top CDs. Together with Tom Shepansky, they built the award-winning shop around the three Ps: put people (as symbolized by pizza) first as a way to get to a better product (creative, not bad, math). Do that and your agency will profit (the submarine is a bit tricky to explain, we suggest reading p.20).

Conscious capitalism and a culture of care

Chock-full of digestible insights, strategies and lists (so many lists), the Creative Report Card issue is always a beast to compile.

We toil away for months. We plug names into a system every day until we're dreaming rolling credits. We finally sit back and let the database spit out the names of Canada's most creative people and places. But then it's back to work. Plotting pieces on podium-hoggers is no easy task when they spent most of the year in the industry's newsfeed. Nevertheless, we dig. We find the secret sauce of those companies and creatives. And we parse the findings to you, our knowledge-hungry readers.

Peeling back the onion that is Rethink also meant peeling back our eyes on the current state of the industry/world. You see, the #1 Creative Report Card agency lives by the cardinal rule of "conscious capitalism." That is, respect and protect the human journey by putting people before profit.

Suffice it to say, building a culture of care is vital for a healthy bottom-line, today more than ever.

You've all seen the headlines. Anxiety is at an alarming level, affecting us all. Workplace stress costs companies, and the economy, billions of dollars each year. In fact, it's the reason one in four people walk away from their job in Canada. Yet, Rethink has a 30% higher employee retention rate than the industry standard. And in 2019, the shop scored 4.3 out of 5 (its highest yet) in a twice-annual "culture check" survey, which covers things like work-life balance.

The trick to good governance can be found in the pages of *Rethink the Business of Creativity*, a book co-written by #1 Creative Directors Ian Grais and Chris

Staples. They reveal best practices deliberately centred around people, such as building a team of "traffic" operators who manage staffers' stress levels (not just schedules) to prevent a crash and burn(out). It's the indie agency's steadfast commitment to people's happiness and wellness that has seasoned CDs like Aaron Starkman saying, "I'm doing the best work of my career since I've been at Rethink, and I've been working the least."

The reason I bring this issue to attention is because, while putting the magazine to bed, it dawned on me how vital strain-free teams are to the well-oiled businesses in this issue.

When we looked at the race to beat culture via 24/7 content on p.10, we learned about the hulking teams being built inside brands. Just as today's consumers feel the anxious effects of content overload, so too could the teams churning out said content. Leaders will need to balance their own mounting pressure to "keep up" with that of their staff on the frontline.

A candid conversation with outgoing Kruger CMO Nancy Marcus and her successor Susan Irving on p.8 hints at one quality of a people-first leader: it's simple, get out of the way. Build an autonomous team, she says, that has the "ammunition for decision making." Marcus' step-back leadership style is part of the reason senior marketers are clocking in 10-plus years at the company.

So the benefits show.

Jennifer Horn, editor



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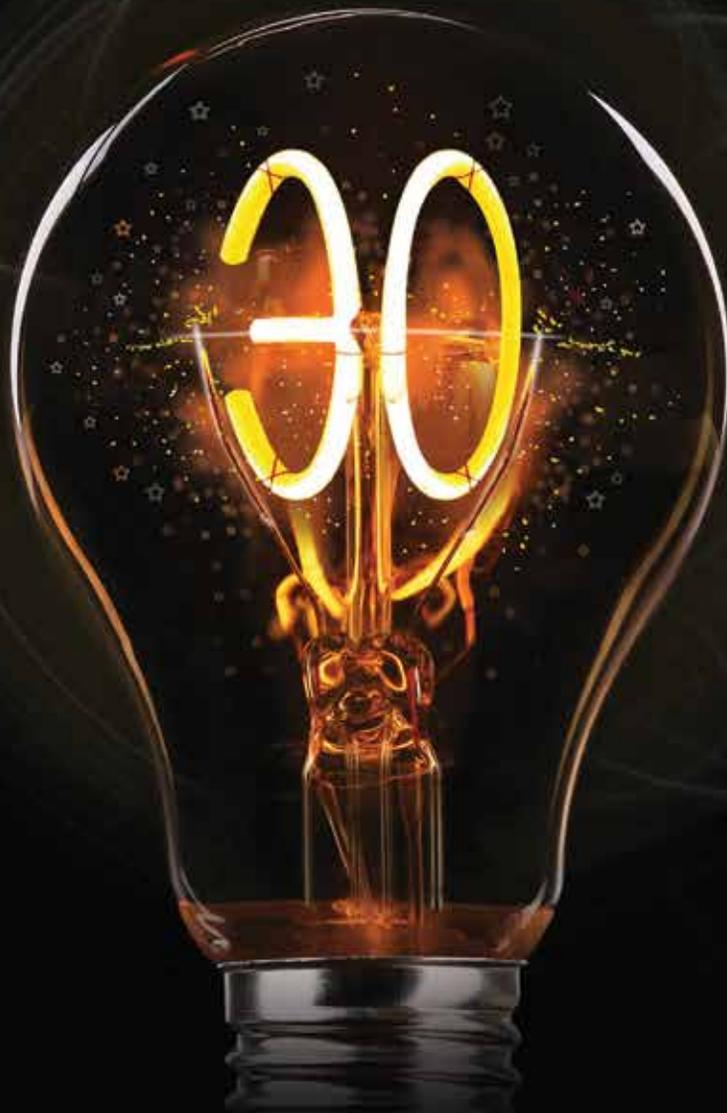
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PREPARING FOR FOREVER BETA

By Justin Dallaire

A new reality has hit the world of connected devices. Even after customers purchase a smart product, they still don't own them – at least, not entirely. More and more, companies need to maintain partial ownership of their connected products throughout their lifecycle, a phenomenon Accenture calls “beta burden” in its *2020 Technology Vision* report. Beta burden is the “unintended consequence” that arises as companies enter “forever beta,” a state in which their connected products are continuously being updated or sometimes changed altogether. Already, 49% of companies say more than half their products require frequent software updates after purchase. And according to Accenture, 74% of executives believe their products and services will require even more updates over the next three years.

Above: In the future, connected products, like Jibo, will need to navigate constant updates, or else risk frustrating consumers.

This presents new risks for connected products brands: if communication fails, it could end up frustrating consumers who don't know what to expect from their products. For example, when the company behind the Jibo home robot shuttered the device's control servers in early 2019, it was suddenly no longer able to respond to simple voice commands. Similarly, Google faced pushback when it temporarily decided to end its “Works with Nest” program in favour of the “Works with Google Assistant” solution.

“Beta burden” is forcing these companies to map out new strategies when it comes to transitioning customers from one generation of a product to the next – which Accenture believes will be critical to customer retention and loyalty in the future. For instance, Signify (formerly known as Philips Lighting) provides lighting-as-a-service, with the brand maintaining ownership of its light bulbs and sensors and swapping them out as needed.

“Thinking of the product as the end-all, be-all for the customer relationship exacerbates the beta burden and puts a hard limit on the company's potential for future growth,” the consultancy says, adding that as brands build updateable products that meet changing consumer demand, they need to rethink how their sales, development, design and customer support teams will support those products for years, even decades, after purchase.

IMMERSIVE AUTO STUNTS

By Daniel Calabretta

Two years of sales dips makes it official: the global auto industry is experiencing a downturn.

In 2019, according to LCM Automotive analysts, only 90.3 million cars were sold across markets. That did not sit well with automakers, having just suffered a decline from 95.2 million cars in 2017 (the industry's record) to 94.4 million in 2018.

In response, marketing departments of some car companies are working hard to get consumers' attention. While we're used to seeing brands show off their vehicle specs, new features and concept models at the Canadian International Auto Show – this year came with a few more bells and whistles.

To rev consumers' engines, Subaru, Honda and Mazda each created immersive brand activations, some of which appeared to be in response to today's consumer zeitgeist – from eco concerns to their fixation with the internet.

Here's the lowdown on what went down at the Auto Show this year.



Honda

Japanese brand Honda is more than a car maker. It also contributes to society through things like the environment and communities.

So, with the help of Community by Design, Honda replaced its static displays with a consumer-first installation called “The Intersection.” In it, the brand presented its own interpretation of the modern-day cityscape, with features that highlight its contributions to the environment, manufacturing, community, mobility and safety.

For instance, the environment pillar featured a hybrid vehicle parked on a section of faux grass, promoting the vehicle's fuel efficiency.

Montrealers were the first to see the immersive

display in action at the city's Auto Show earlier this year – and because of its success (with people spending an average of 30 minutes in the space, much more than previous years), Honda decided to ship the concept to Toronto before going on a cross-country tour.



Mazda

Playing into consumers' desire to photograph everything (and be photographed everywhere), Mazda created an installation inspired by Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Mirrors."

In an enclosed space, a Mazda3 sat surrounded by two-way mirrors to showcase "every angle of the award-winning sedan." Mazda replicated Kusama's exhibit as "a demonstration of Japanese artistry and innovation," because "both captivate the viewer with the wonders of endless reflections," according to Wunderman Thompson.

The installation wasn't inside, but on the streets outside the Toronto Convention Centre. That way, non-attendees could take photos of the stunt – and post on social using the alliteration-friendly hashtag #MazdaMirrors, of course.



Subaru

What's more shareable than a made-for-Instagram car museum? A billy goat in a staring contest. Yes, anyone with a phone would IG that absurdness, it's true.

In what is probably a first, Subaru brought the goat from its "G.O.O.A.T." ("Greatest Outback Of All Time")

campaign – where the brand pits the station wagon against a mountain goat in commercials – to the show and invited attendees to go head-to-head in a staring contest.

Ted Lalka, VP of marketing and product management at Subaru says the booth reinforced Subaru's positioning as an "alternative" to other brands through its humorous brand tone, which, as he puts it, is "inviting to consumers, because it's not just about the product."



GAMIFYING RECYCLING

Many brands, from Hellmann's to Starbucks, pour money into eliminating waste through recyclable packaging commitments. Yet their efforts will be for nothing if, in the end, their wares still end up in the landfill.

In Canada, it's a growing problem. Many consumers fail to recycle properly, if at all. Ordinary citizens remain confused about what's recyclable, tossing everything from egg shells to electronics and clothing into blue bins – contaminating otherwise good litter. Each year, according to Deloitte, only 9% of the plastic waste in Canada is recycled. Meanwhile, 2.8 million tonnes – the weight of 24 CN Towers – ends up in a landfill.

In response, companies have stepped up to fill the knowledge gap. French app Yoyo connects recycling coaches and sorters, fostering a sense of community that the company believes can sustain a long-term commitment to recycling, according to Springwise. Yoyo coaches will distribute bags and teach sorters to recycle properly and earn points towards rewards. Similarly, U.S.-based Litterati uses crowdsourced data to encourage users to identify

and collect litter they encounter on the street. The app automatically identifies and geotags the litter that users photograph, allowing the app community to set goals and challenges.

Summerhill's exec chairman Ian Morton believes these apps can raise awareness of eco issues, which is important, but they will likely have a limited impact on consumer behaviour over the long term.

"It's fanciful to think we can click, swipe or like our way toward a lower carbon economy," says Morton. "Raising awareness is one thing. Changing consumer behaviour is much harder to do."

Shifting habits is something Glad, for one, has attempted to do in Canada. The brand's VP of marketing Matt Kohler works with municipalities on recycling and compost programs to educate Canadians around proper sorting and garbage bag selection.

Beyond raising awareness, Morton believes data acquired through apps could help brands gain insight into consumers who are more willing to take sustainable actions – which could lead to strategies for more sustainable outcomes. **JD**



Nancy Marcus (left) spent nearly 20 years pushing marketing to the forefront at Kruger. Susan Irving (right) brings global CPG experience to continue Marcus' legacy.

PASSING THE TORCH AT KRUGER

BY
JOSH KOLM

Though Nancy Marcus retired from her role as CMO at Kruger Products on March 1, she will provide marketing expertise to parent company Kruger Inc.'s other divisions – such as its wine and spirits importing and distribution business, renewable energy developments and paper manufacturing.

Bringing her knowledge to areas of Kruger that haven't previously prioritized marketing is something she has been doing since she joined in 2001.

A few years before Marcus' arrival, the company – previously known for industrial operations in paper, pulp and packaging – made a massive push into consumer products by acquiring the Scott Paper business. Marcus was tasked with transitioning the brands over, in some cases replacing established ones with new ones due to rights issues during the acquisition process. Nearly 20 years later, brands like

Scotties, Cashmere, SpongeTowels and Purex lead market share in their respective categories.

Marcus has left her fingerprints all over the industry ever since she started her marketing career in the '80s at what was then known as the 7Up Bottling Company, with stops at Cadbury and JTI MacDonald along the way. Over the years, she's had a seat on the Association of Canadian Advertisers (ACA), Canadian Marketing Association (CMA) and Ad Standards boards.

Taking over Marcus' role at the helm of Kruger's marketing is Susan Irving, a 15-year veteran of PepsiCo, where she worked primarily in its food and snacks portfolio on brands like Quaker, Lays and – most recently – a global role on a snack portfolio that included Doritos and Cheetos.

Strategy sat down with both Marcus and Irving to talk about leaving a legacy and transitioning into a new chapter.

What is the biggest change you've seen in marketing at Kruger over the years?

Marcus: The recognition of the importance and vitality of marketing. When I joined the organization, there was no understanding of what “branding” was about. Truthfully, that went back to when the [Scott Paper Company] was purchased in 1997. The thought process was that the brands being transitioned would simply be priced below market pricing. But teaching the organization how vital marketing was resulted in it being part of the executive team's key decision-making and leading strategic endeavours. That made us customer-based in our mission, vision and DNA of the company.

Irving: I'm excited about inheriting everything Nancy has done with these brands. They're at the top of their categories and she's done some groundbreaking marketing. We talked a lot with Dino [Bianco, CEO of Kruger Products] about continuing to make sure marketing is at the forefront at Kruger. We've got to figure out how we are going to innovate differently.

Why have you placed so much emphasis on brand and marketing in a “low interest” category that faces its stiffest competition from private label?

Marcus: People think it's a “low interest” category, but it's one we can make very exciting. The [tissue] business is \$1.8 billion, so we are the fourth-most important industry in the grocery section, behind dairy, cheese and salty snacks. That is a significant player.

Irving: Marketers talk about data, but that's just a tool for our job, which is figuring out how to make brands purposeful. If you can figure that out, you don't have to worry about private label.

Marcus: It all comes back to branding. We own just over 30% of the tissue market and over 50% of trademark in bathroom tissue, and there's only so long you can hold such a great share, especially with retailer consolidation and private label growth continuing in double digits. When competing with that, the opportunity is entrenching loyalty, engaging consumers and reinforcing our Canadian heritage. And there's a lot of other things happening under the marketing umbrella – we're also responsible for sustainability, and our VP of sustainability reports to the CMO.

What's your favourite campaign that you worked on?

Marcus: Our endeavours with breast cancer. I could talk about the Cashmere Collection, I could talk about redesigning a hospital room for cancer patients, or being very brave with our packaging and putting it out there to raise funds. The CSR that we've done has really been amazing, from a corporate level, and also from an employee level and talking to, filming and being with a lot of breast cancer patients and seeing how we really touched their lives.

What industry-wide changes have you seen?

Marcus: The CMO role has changed so much because of globalization. Marketing has become so global that Canada is insignificant in the grand scheme of things, and that saddens me. [Kruger] is the antithesis, because the CMO is a North American role based in Canada – that gives you autonomy to make a difference with consumers and at the corporate level.

With that in mind, Susan, during your time at PepsiCo you worked on Canada-specific campaigns but from within a global company, and then later moved into a global role. What challenges do you see as you move into a company that leads marketing from within Canada?

Irving: I had a ton of great opportunities while I grew up at PepsiCo. You have so many resources to

pull from [globally], lifting and shifting what is right for the Canadian market. But Kruger is a Canadian company, with decisions made here. That is exciting and scary at the same time. Everything starts and stops with us, everything across North America is our call, but if something doesn't work, you have nowhere else to pull from.

Does your global experience benefit a Canadian company like Kruger?

Irving: What was really cool about my global role is realizing how marketers sometimes take the power of brands for granted. [When] we launched Doritos in India and China, [we realized] consumers in North America understand things about our brands' positioning that billions of others don't. You really learn to think about the value of brands differently when you launch businesses that aren't new for you, but are new to an entire market.

How do you make sure data is an effective tool for building brand?

Marcus: We try to take a consumer-centric view of the data that tells us about how our brands fit into their lives. That has given us opportunities with multicultural communities, consumers in Quebec or Western Canada and the U.S., it all comes from viewing data as another way to listen to the consumer.

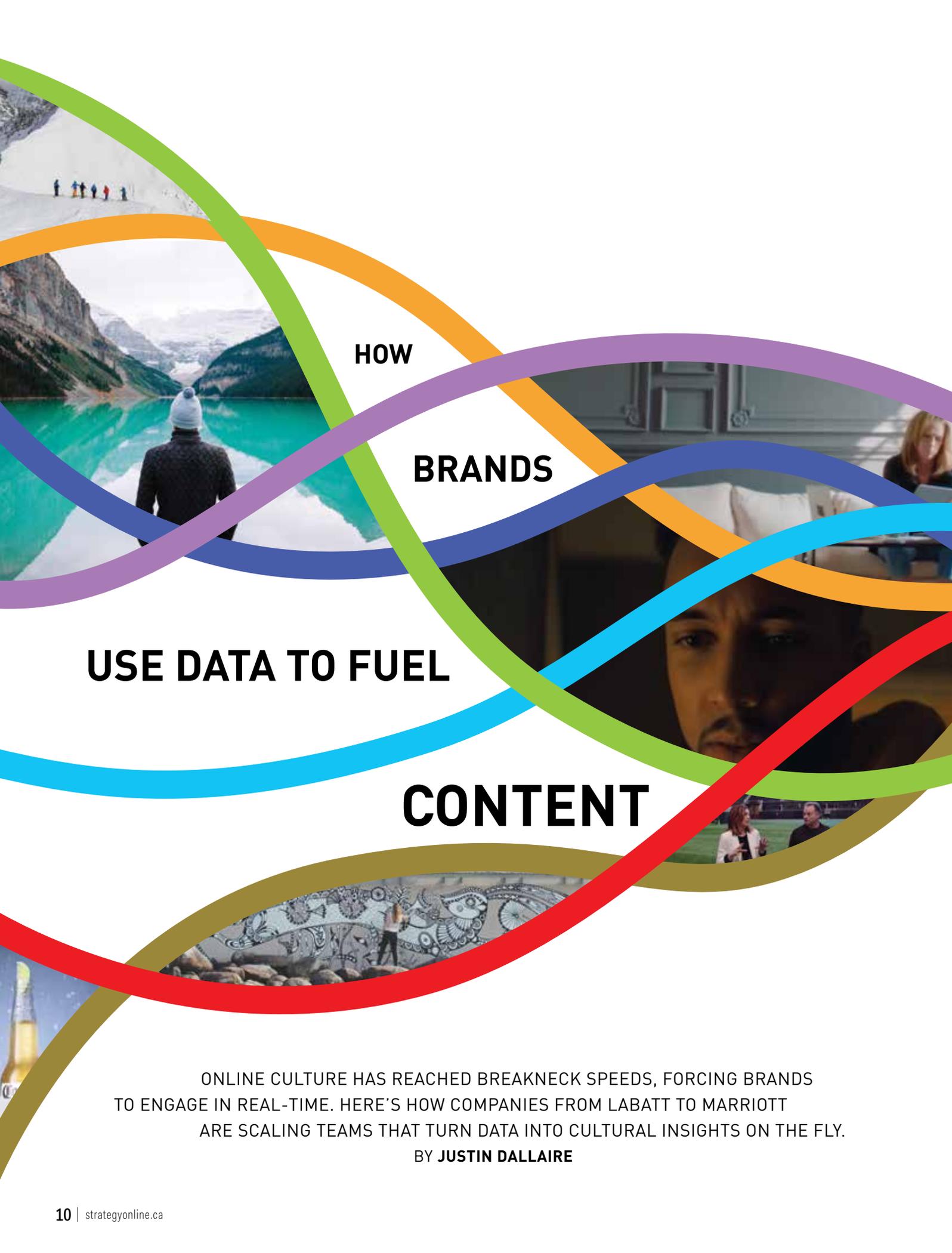
Irving: Some marketers use data to sell an idea they already had. That'll help you put a sexy presentation together that makes it look like a winning idea, but it's disconnected from your original business problem. Brilliant marketers really peel the onion of data back to understand what their business problems and opportunities are, and using that to determine the path forward.

How can marketers build an effective team in 2020?

Marcus: You've got to deal with fundamental competency, and then, as a leader, provide the ammunition for decision making. There is a labour shortage, but I'm fortunate in that most of the senior people in marketing have been [at Kruger for] over 10 years. And you can be at the company forever, but your job will evolve every few years.

Irving: To me, a leader removes barriers so people can succeed and get their ideas working. Nancy has done a great job of building a team that is really passionate about the business. When you work for a global company, people move around every two years, but these guys have been in their roles for a long time. They know the business so well, and when you know your business, you move and innovate that much faster. ☺





HOW

BRANDS

USE DATA TO FUEL

CONTENT

ONLINE CULTURE HAS REACHED BREAKNECK SPEEDS, FORCING BRANDS TO ENGAGE IN REAL-TIME. HERE'S HOW COMPANIES FROM LABATT TO MARRIOTT ARE SCALING TEAMS THAT TURN DATA INTO CULTURAL INSIGHTS ON THE FLY.

BY **JUSTIN DALLAIRE**

In the spring of 2019, Labatt Breweries of Canada set out to create an “in-house creative engine powered by data and technology.” Today, the concept, known as Draftline, helps the brewer insert itself into online conversations in a culturally relevant way, says Todd Allen, VP marketing at Labatt. By mining insights on an ongoing basis, the team creates content for Labatt’s entire portfolio of brands across social and digital platforms.

First tested by parent company AB InBev in Columbia in 2017, Draftline was rolled out to Mexico and the U.S., before being scaled to every major market in which the company operates. “This is a best practice that has been proven, not just in Canada and North America, but around the world,” Allen says. “We know it works. We know it’s the future. [Marketers] just need to take a leap of faith, make the investment.

data into insights on the fly. The goal is not to eliminate agency partners – who remain deeply involved on a number of levels – but rather to create a scenario in which every piece of content, from a long-form video to an email or Twitter post, is backed by a cultural insight.

When Labatt set out to create its own version of Draftline in Canada, it needed employees with “capabilities that have normally been sitting with your agency partners, not within your own company walls,” Allen says. He began by hiring Krisztina Virag, a former account director at DDB and Cundari, as head of the Draftline team. She helped recruit ECD Diego Bertagni, a former CD at Flipp (who also had agency experience), and the pair helped put together the rest of the 25-person team.

Unique to Canada is a partnership with Twitter. Not only did the social platform help identify talent that could support Draftline’s

It will pay back.” The need for an in-house, always-on creative agency emerged as online conversations gained breakneck speed, forcing brands to engage in real-time lest they be left behind. “You might catch lightning in a bottle,” Allen says, referring to an emerging cultural moment, “but you need to be on it within minutes or else the moment’s gone.”

It’s the new reality for brands hoping to be seen as producers of, and participants in, online culture: be relevant, be fast, be everywhere. Consumers are willing to reward brands that reflect the world around them: A study by the Association of National Advertisers found that consumers who were shown “culturally relevant” ads were nearly three times more likely to try a new brand, more than twice as likely to recommend it, and 50% more likely to make a purchase again. But for brands, getting there is an order that grows taller by the day.

To meet this challenge, organizations from Labatt to Marriott International and Destination Canada are leaning on external partners and building internal teams capable of turning

mission, Allen says, but one of its own employees is now embedded in the in-house agency, and that person’s job is to help identify insights emanating from Twitter feeds.

The entire Draftline team is structured around three divisions, which Allen refers to as “understand, create and engage.” The insights and martech teams make up the “understand” division; they conduct social listening and collect data to create audience profiles and share their work with those in the “create” group, consisting of talent typically found inside agency walls – Bertagni and his cadre of art directors, copywriters, videographers and designers. That’s where the “engage” division, made up of community managers, comes in: its role is to push content across channels, monitor the conversation, and jump in when the opportunity arises.

Draftline’s structure also enables Labatt to handle some campaigns entirely in-house. This winter, for example, the company is marketing Corona – a refreshing summer brew often associated with ocean views and white, sandy beaches – as appropriate for other occasions, including snow storms.

The brewer launched a Twitter program aimed at getting beer drinkers to consider Corona, no matter the season. The “weather-triggered” campaign included animated GIFs and personalized “weather reports” targeting consumers in seven cities. One variation of the ad, served during a winter storm, featured a Corona bottle half-buried in snow, with its lime wedge still showing and animated snowflakes falling all around.

Draftline also supports Labatt’s larger integrated campaigns, which remain for the most part the domain of its external agency partners. For the Super Bowl this year, Labatt partnered with Uber to bring back its iconic “Whassup” commercial. Mosaic led on creative, and Draftline developed pre-teaser social content to “keep the conversation going leading up to the big day,” Allen says.

While Allen says the in-house model is going to be critical to Labatt’s success going forward, its agency partners (including Anomaly, FCB, Union and No Fixed Address) remain an important part of the equation. “We’re working collaboratively to [create] the best content that entertains people and doesn’t interrupt them.”

Destination Canada is another organization that made internal structural changes to better parse data and insights in support of its content marketing. As a federal tourism agency that works with partners at the international, regional and municipal levels, Destination Canada promotes overall travel to the country – a mandate that requires having a comprehensive view of consumers all over the world.

Several years ago, the organization moved its internal research group, which previously sat in the office of the CEO, into its marketing department. That research team operates as a mini think tank, collecting and analyzing data from the aviation, hotel, payment and banking industries. By marrying that data with Destination Canada’s Global Tourism Watch – a survey that tracks traveller motivations and sentiment in key global markets – the agency can understand who’s packing their suitcases, and when, says CMO Gloria Loree.

“We [may] know where essentially we want [travellers] to go, or what we want them to experience,”

Loree says. “But we don’t know everything about every nook and cranny of Canada.”

To get a better view, the agency leans on its tourism partners and destination marketers, as well as the front-line workers who provide the visitor experiences, to better understand the nuances of a particular destination. Front-line staff help find the best storytellers to feature in content, while destination marketers offer insights on local “hidden gems” and the best time of day or year to visit.

Today, Loree says the marketing department is

organized cross-functionally, with small groups (referred to as “squads”) whose skills span content, social, paid and earned media. Researchers now also sit on those teams. “[These groups] sit down with an agency team, a creative team, a production team, and in the cases where it’s relevant, pull in specific partners from the destinations,” Loree says. Together, they “review what it is we’re trying to achieve, what the problem is, where the creative solution will be, and go from there.”

Meanwhile, Marriott is structuring its operations to perform like a real-time CRM platform, as it evolves its content approach to align with its mission to be a diversified travel experiences brand, says Wendy Vividor, VP of digital, loyalty and portfolio marketing for the Americas at the company.

In recent years, Marriott went from thinking about destination-centric content marketing to

placing the experiences of its guests at the centre of everything it does, Vividor says.

The focal point of its newer strategy is the Marriott Bonvoy loyalty program, launched in February 2019 as a replacement to the company’s three previous rewards programs: Marriott Rewards, Ritz-Carlton Rewards and Starwood Preferred Guest. Marriott Bonvoy brings together 30 hotel brands and 7,000-plus global locations under a single program. It also ties into the 120,000 destination tours and adventures offered through Marriott Bonvoy Moments, the company’s growing experiences platform.

Reflecting a wider industry shift, Marriott thinks of its loyalty and Moments programs as being intimately



“[DRAFTLINE] IS A BEST PRACTICE THAT’S BEEN PROVEN, NOT JUST IN CANADA... BUT AROUND THE WORLD.”

Left: Labatt’s in-house agency, Draftline, created Corona “weather reports,” which were served to Canadians when a snow or wind storm hit their area.

Right: Marriott’s Courtyard: Unstoppable series (featuring people connected to the NFL) is the result of the hotel brand’s in-house team going deeper on content-driven marketing.

connected to its content efforts. This explains the central role played by M Live, a global social media and real-time marketing command centre launched in 2015.

With hubs located in markets around the world, M Live uses tools and platforms (including geofencing technology) to capture, almost systematically, every social engagement with Marriott hotel brands and properties. The team then works directly with the company's marketing and operations teams to enhance members' experiences.

It's an effective tool given that consumers tend to post up to 10 times more when they travel, Vividor says.

Last year, Marriott wanted to thank a Silver Elite member from Canada, who shared her experience at the Sheraton Waikiki in Hawaii on social. Having captured her activity, M Live reached out to its local tours and activities group and arranged to award the hotel guest a credit on her vacation stay. Before leaving the island, she redeemed the gift for surfing lessons, and documented (once again) the experience on social.

The goal was simply to thank the member for her loyalty to Marriott, but the approach turned her into a "brand evangelist," says Vividor. "She thanked us right back, which is really great. And that, to me, is the beauty of leveraging this information to personalize and create a memorable experience."

Marriott's internal capability extends beyond M Live. In fact, at the exception of large brand campaigns (and occasional support on production), the majority of its creative needs are now handled in-house.

Separate groups are responsible for the content that appears on Marriott Bonvoy Traveller, its online travel magazine and storytelling hub, and on Marriott Bonvoy TV, which has hosted travel documentary series *StoryBooked*. There are also social and digital teams, based on each continent, that lead content and paid strategies for each of its hotel brands.

The setup enables Marriott to go deeper on content-driven work, Vividor says. For example, in June 2018, it launched *Courtyard: Unstoppable*, a 10-episode docu-series featuring people connected to the NFL – from coaches to the first female play-by-play announcer for Monday Night Football and the NFL's director of operations – in pursuit of their personal and professional passions.

The series celebrated Courtyard's existing sponsorship of the NFL, while connecting back to the brand's "Passion moves us forward" platform. Travel was also organically interwoven into each episode. While

"[MARRIOTT'S CONTENT STRATEGY] HAS MOVED BEYOND JUST HOTEL – IT'S REALLY AROUND ENHANCING OVERALL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES."



the hotel chain's presence was subtle, 84% of viewers correctly identified that Courtyard was an official partner on the project, according to Vividor.

Going forward, she says the organization will continue to look for ways to enhance travel experiences beyond the hotel stay. That means engaging members through Marriott Bonvoy Moments by hosting them at the Super Bowl or for an Oscar viewing party. But it also means identifying long-term travel trends, and using those to shape its brand experiences.

Through M Live and its other teams, the company aggregates data to identify macro and emerging travel trends, according to Vividor. A recent internal report, for example, identified #WorkFromAnywhere as an up-and-coming trend, as travellers increasingly mix business with pleasure and work wherever there's wifi and amazing views. Another, #ShesNotLost, speaks to more women "taking charge of their destinations" and wandering the world solo, Vividor says.

The ultimate goal, she says, is to better understand what Marriott can do – from its overarching loyalty program to its hotel brands and individual properties – to enhance the travel experiences of its members.

"We have moved beyond just hotel – it's really around enhancing the overall travel experience," she says. "As we evolve as a company and as a brand, we are focused on taking care of our guests and providing the best overall travel experience. And so our content strategy is really going to capture that." 

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CREATIVE REPORT CARD 2020

A lot of blood, sweat and tears goes into the Creative Report Card each year. It takes the *strategy* team months to pore through awards credits as vast as the annuals they're published in.

And it's totally worth it.

To see the lists unfold – revealing all of the creative glory that Canada's ad scene has to offer – is intoxicating. From the sidelines, we journalists watch the best of the best win award after award. This year, we saw a lot of that repeat behaviour from #1 Agency, Rethink.

The timing couldn't be any better: in 2020, CCOs Chris Staples and Ian Grais will step back from the agency they founded alongside Tom Shepansky 20 years ago. They're celebrating the milestone birthday by each claiming the #1 Creative Director title.

As for the top Brand rank, that one goes to Right to Play for "We Rise," which saw slick design from BBDO's Mike Nugent (#1 Designer) and strategy from Tom Kenny (#1 Planner).

And last, but certainly not least, Bensimon Byrne's David Mueller and Narrative's Debbie Chan made their way to the top of the Copywriter and Art Director lists, respectively, for blending advertising with PR for clients like White Ribbon.

To see the full rankings, make sure to visit Strategyonline.ca. For now, flip these pages to learn more about this year's CRC toppers.

BY JENNIFER HORN



Indies rise to the top

It's interesting to note that, of the top 20 agencies on the Creative Report Card, seven are independent agencies. And in a bit of landslide win, owner-operated Rethink was the most medaled advertising firm in Canada for 2019. The 180-person shop was all over the map, with 35 of its clients gracing almost every awards annual that *strategy* counts in its report card.

Could the agency's impressive showing, combined with this year's noticeable indie turnout, be a sign of a renaissance to come? Some pundits peg 2020 to be "the golden age for independent agencies," while reports describe the current business climate – shrinking budgets, shifting models and rising project-based work – as fertile ground for nimble shops unchained by shareholders' shackles.

"Without all the red tape, and this is generally speaking, independent agencies are better at adapting faster and better at providing certain specialized services," says Stephen Argent, founder and CEO of marketing and agency search consultancy Listenmore. "That's really the perceived value that independent agencies offer – they have fewer layers and a stronger interest in being hands on."

Beyond being adaptable to an industry in flux, Rethink's Tom Shepansky believes independents are also more aligned with a growing cultural force. For

the last 20 years, he and co-founders Ian Grais and Chris Staples have governed the agency with a set of values that put people first, product second and profit third (see p.20). From an all-employee profit-sharing model to sabbatical plans, Rethink practices "conscious capitalism" – a deliberate balance between doing what's right and building a business, says Shepansky. It's these type of principles and priorities that he believes the next gen of talent and client leaders are attracted to.

"I think the workforce today has a real need for values that guide business," he says. "I see it among anyone under 35, they're looking for companies – and companies are looking for agencies – that are doing the right thing." Whether you're publicly or privately held, you can still have strong values, "it's just a bit easier when you're not beholden to the quarterly demands of shareholders," says Shepansky.

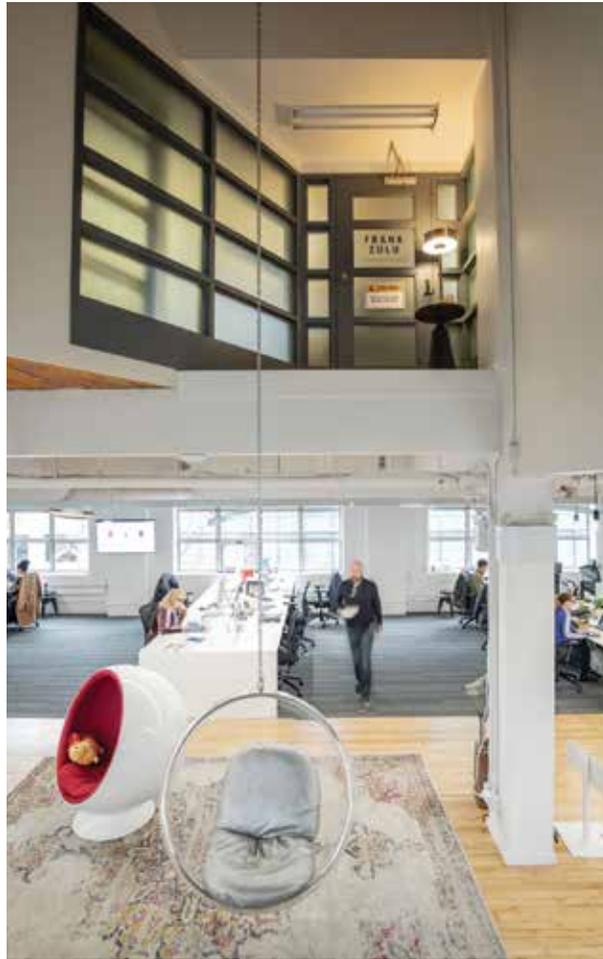
Indeed, marketers like Interac's Andrea Danovitch look at values, just as much as creative and chemistry, when choosing an agency. The CMO says she specifically sought out an independent shop to handle its business, selecting Zulu Alpha Kilo (the #6 CRC Agency) based on "its size, culture and values" which were a fit with the brand.

The agency nurtures a high performance culture, but it also pushes back on wasting hours pitching spec

THE TOP 10

1. Rethink
2. Cossette
3. BBDO
4. Lg2
5. FCB
6. Zulu Alpha Kilo
7. Bensimon Byrne
8. Leo Burnett
9. Taxi
10. McCann Worldgroup

AGENCIES



Clockwise (excluding bottom right): The offices of Bensimon Byrne, Zulu Alpha Kilo and Lg2, three independent agencies that landed on the 2020 CRC. **Bottom right:** While Cossette was acquired by China's Blue Impact, it continues to operate its "campus" model across its offices.

THE WORKFORCE TODAY HAS A NEED FOR VALUES THAT GUIDE BUSINESS... COMPANIES THAT DO THE RIGHT THING.

work, a stance that's given the shop industry profile (and one that could only be possible in an independent structure). Meanwhile, in 2019, *National Post* featured Zulu as one of "Canada's Most Admired Corporate Cultures," while Deloitte added the shop to its list of "Canada's Best Managed Companies."

Jack Bensimon, partner and founder of Bensimon Byrne (#7 CRC Agency) believes another cultural force that could drive business to boutiques is "a shift to greater accountability."

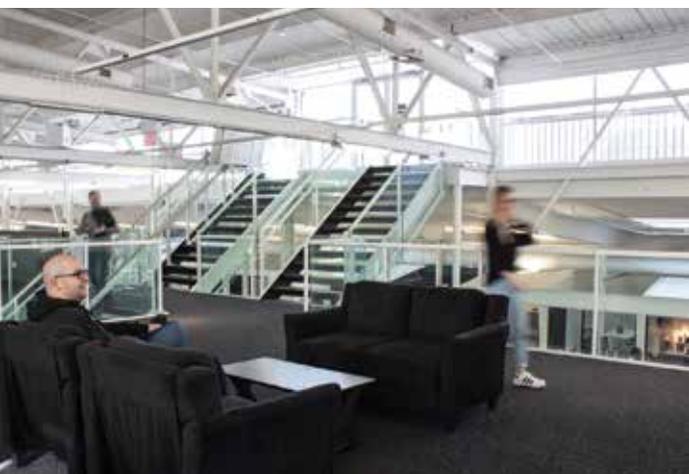
"I think that's one of the biggest changes in advertising that I've seen over the last 30 years. You could argue that it's driven and by digital marketing, data and measurement, with a bigger focus on ROI - but I think it's having an interesting cultural impact on the marketing profession," Bensimon adds. "As clients are focused on the way dollars are being spent, that culture of accountability becomes more prevalent in the way they look to their partners. I think that's a competitive advantage that independent ownership offers." As a business owner, there's no safety net or room to become complacent or fail, says Bensimon, you have to earn the business every day.

All of this isn't to say network agencies can't walk like independents.

It would be unfair to re-categorize some agencies just because there's been a change in ownership, says Bensimon. "I'm thinking about the Taxi's, the John St.'s and the Mosaic's - the most prominent formerly independent agencies, I would argue, have largely maintained their operational independence."

Indeed, while Vision 7's Cossette (#2 Agency) and its sister agencies were acquired by Blue Impact in 2014, it's continued operating its "campus model" (where a lead agency is surrounded by other service offerings and areas of expertise) and, led by Blue Impact's CEO Brett Marchand, is now being tapped as the model pursued for the rest of the company.

Independents also don't have a lock on creativity. BBDO, for one, placed third on the report card and was also awarded an Agency of the Year title in 2019. BBDO's co-ECD Denise Rossetto previously told *strategy* that maintaining the ethos of a "boutique network" is part of global CCO David Lubars' vision; while BBDO Canada's CEO Dom Caruso said inspiration is the lifeblood of the creative shop, which it nurtures through things like cross-departmental "Factory" workshops led by Rossetto and her partner Todd Mackie. During these bi-monthly meetings, creatives, strategists, account managers and technologists



England and Netco in France for their local insights when pitching WestJet on marketing its European routes. Rethink won the account and has since rolled out U.K and E.U.-specific work, again, in collaboration with the London and Paris boutiques.

Getting access to global insights so that it can help brands move into new territories was also a “weakness” for Lg2 (#4 CRC Agency), admits partner and CEO Claude Auchu. “It’s always been a struggle to convince our clients that we can help them on their international business, and we were always partnering with [research firms] and media companies to get the data and insights from markets outside of Canada,” says Auchu. So in November the shop joined another family of global boutiques, Worldwide Partners Inc. (WPI).

John Harris, president and CEO of WPI, says being a part of the 82-year-old network allows Lg2 to collaborate with 70 agencies, sharing brand and market intelligence, as well as business best practices.

Harris says he’s witnessing more clients and search consultants reach out to the network directly, instead of the other way around. He’s optimistic about the traction and likes to think that independent agencies aren’t just experiencing a “moment” but rather a “movement.”

While time will only tell whether an indie renaissance grows from the current climate, Bensimon wonders if boutiques have ever truly been out of fashion. Looking back at *strategy*’s AOY Hall of Fame, there’s enough

mention of agencies like Zig, Geoffrey B. Roche & Partners Advertising and John St. (before MDC, IPG and WPP respectively took ownership) to paint a picture of decades of flourishing independents.

As long as there have been holding companies, there have been acquisition waves. And while that may never end, Bensimon believes the value of independents has gone beyond “the networks buying stuff so they can get bigger” to “doubling down on equity.”

In the early days, for example, McKim Baker Lovick was purchased, only to be folded into BBDO. But then, in the 2000s, John St. stayed John St. and Taxi stayed Taxi when WPP took over. And now, giant consultancies are purchasing ad powerhouses to up the creative ante.

“If you look at Accenture’s acquisition of Droga5, I think that’s more an indication of what’s to come,” says Bensimon. “It’s no longer simply about adding scale... Today, it’s think, it’s about the bigger shop making the acquisition, looking strategically at what’s being purchased and asking themselves, ‘What does that do for us? What opportunities does it open?’”

So whether today’s business climate will translate into a golden age for indies, their abundance on the 2020 Creative Report Card certainly shows they’ve been basking in the rays.

THAT’S THE PERCEIVED VALUE THAT INDEPENDENTS OFFER - FEWER LAYERS AND A STRONGER INTEREST IN BEING HANDS ON.

dissect the strategy and cultural insights behind creative campaigns.

Having “skin in the game,” says Zulu founder and CCO Zak Mroueh is something that some clients are attracted to – as an entrepreneur of an independent shop, says Mroueh, you’re a proven risk-taker. But even network shops, like FCB (#5 Agency), can embrace that entrepreneurial spirit. The four-time Digital AOY-winning agency has made pioneering moves with Tyler Turnbull at its helm. In recent years, the CEO turned the creative shop into a bit of an early adopter, investing in digital training that equips the entire agency with emerging software and tech know-how.

While an indie’s footprint is no match for a network’s scale, some global brands recently looked past this shortcoming to work with (comparatively) smaller independent shops.

In the U.S., McDonald’s named Wieden + Kennedy as its AOR after decades with holding co. agencies, most recently Omnicom’s DDB. Here in Canada, Rethink has been charged with leading the global strategy for Arc’teryx and WestJet, which Shepansky says is work that “probably would have gone to a multinational in the past.”

Shepansky says Rethink solved the reach riddle by joining global independent network ICOM in 2018. As a member of the group (which is signed with 80 shops in 60 countries) it tapped Golley Slater in



Three pillars, one agency

This year's #1 CDs Ian Grais and Chris Staples opened the doors to their Vancouver agency, Rethink, way back in 1999. The two have come a long way since first meeting at DDB. Staples has sat atop the CW list a whopping ten times, with Grais close behind at seven times as an AD. As part of their exit plan, the creatives (and fellow co-founder Tom Shepansky) wrote a book on how to build an agency. Here are the Coles Notes.

PEOPLE

Rethink's philosophy goes, "if you take care of the people, then the product and the profit will follow." This people-come-first attitude translates into shepherding leaders who are approachable, reachable and teachable; fumigating the agency of egos ("assholes can singlehandedly derail the three Ps," they say); and fostering a culture of gratitude (all-company shout-outs and \$300 bonus dinners), creativity (a Lego play space), and silliness (irrational celebrations with little rhyme or reason).

BARGES, SPEEDBOATS, SUBS

To keep peeps motivated, the CDs say you should ration their time across three metaphorical clients: (1) barges, the slow-chugging, gas-guzzling brands that pay the bills; (2) speedboats, clients with shallower pockets and fewer levels of approvals but which are enjoyable to steer; and (3) submarines, the prized pro-bono passion projects that lurk below the surface,

waiting to suddenly appear and blow up the internet. The perfect mix = less burnout = happier employees = better output.

DFIU: DON'T FUCK IT UP

Directing creatives means giving them a map, not just a compass. The "Don't Fuck It Up" tool is an acronym for CDs to leave clear and actionable... Direction (clarify the creative and strategic approach); Feedback

(tell the team what's working, what's not, and why); Instruction (give clear priorities); and Understanding (what are the specific challenges and opportunities). This tool is born out of Rethink's culture of mentorship: be the kind of boss you wish you had, and don't fuck it up.

FOUNDER FACETIME

It's time to democratize mentorship. Be a founder that's not just a figurehead at the door, with a photo and quote on the wall. Commit up to two solid days of speed dates with staffers once a quarter. Either in person or via Skype, the usually time-poor, but knowledge-rich founders invite staffers to ask Qs and seek career tips and work advice. It's also an opportunity to hear from the horse's mouth any issues that are arising at the agency, the creative directors say.

THE TOP 10

1. Ian Grais, Rethink
1. Chris Staples, Rethink
3. Peter Ignazi, Cossette
3. Carlos Moreno, Cossette
5. Todd Mackie, BBDO
5. Denise Rossetto, BBDO
7. Aaron Starkman, Rethink
8. Zak Mroueh, Zulu Alpha Kilo
9. Joseph Bonnici, Bensimon Byrne
10. Mike Dubrick, Rethink

CREATIVE DIRECTORS

PRODUCT

Is creativity born from chaos? Or does structure and rigour help the idea breeding process? The answers are “no” and “yes,” based on way the Grais and Staples run Rethink. Creative businesses are like airports, they say. Briefs are landing while projects are taking flight. Similar to an air controller, “Traffic” manages it all. Rethinkers are obsessed with overcommunication – where frequent huddles are booked through “Traffic,” and “Office Hours” are scheduled blocks of time with CDs to review work. They keep it going through “Peer Reviews,” internal polls that test-drive ideas. Even the brainstorming can be formulated. Here are three “how to have an idea” tools.

1+1 = 3

No, Rethinkers are not bad at math. They're right-brained folks who can put two unrelated things together, over and over again, until they find a winning pair. Smash together words, images, concepts or objects and see what happens, the founders say. For example, Rethink's ping pong tournament, King Pong: King Kong + ping pong = gorilla paddle logo.

BE THE BALL

Similar to 1+1=3, this tool helps creatives to unlock ideas by combining (a) a business or a project theme with (b) a medium that brings it to life. Think, coasters made of metal from car wrecks for an anti-drunk driving campaign. Or sandpaper business cards for a carpenter, and ones made of beef jerky for a survival gear co. to create a meaty visual language.

FAST & LOOSE

The trusty napkin sketch didn't die the day digital tools arrived. The founders say it's easy for young ADs to dive into computer programs to design stuff, but a client-and-Cannes-winning idea doesn't need all of that. This principle encourages creatives to channel their stream of consciousness to paper: set the timer to five minutes and write as many ideas as you can; don't craft one script, jot down ten blurbs on ten angles the script could take; and doodle, sketch, draw, scribble every single idea.



PROFIT

Rethink's founders are stepping aside (Shepansky will make music, Staples will travel, and Grais will create art), leaving 22 partners to share leadership of the three offices. Each partner was gifted equity on merit. This way all employees have something to aspire to. And even if they never become partner, they're still treated like one: everyone receives a portion of the profit when it hits a 7.5% margin (lower than the standard 18% to 25%) – which means execs (who typically only stand to gain from margin bumps) don't compromise on their values by making decisions through a pure-profit lens. Here are other ways to drive profit via the product:

CHANGE PROPOSALS

CPs are also called “submarines.” Remember those? They're the lurking purpose-driven projects that resonate. The agency sets aside 2% to 3% of its profits to cover the hard costs of these U-boats. An idea is struck (usually out of the blue) and then there are a lot of

cold-calls to prospective clients to make it happen. The DIY nature of the proposals drives innovation and galvanises the whole agency – which improves happiness scores, the creative output, and ultimately keeps the agency in the black.

R+D DAYS

That's R for Rethink and D for Develop. They're sort of like those hackathons of the tech world, but not. All client work is put on pause for 24 hours. Across all three offices. The radio silence is in effort to unlock Rethinkers' hidden talents, quirks and secret passions. R&D Challenges (creative problems, like solving a pain point for city-dwellers) have led to actual client proposals, making them a bit of a profit centre. But arguably more beneficial, they break down departmental walls, get people out of their shells and encourage shared learning.

prevent the transmission of HIV in Uganda. It empowers girls to say 'no' to unwanted sex in Tanzania. And it does all of this through play-based learning, training teachers and designing games that turn at-risk kids into "Uprisers" (a term coined by BBDO and used to describe the 2.3 million kids impacted by RTP's programs each year).

The organization understood its purpose, but the public did not. Most, says Nugent, thought it just gave out sports equipment. Many, adds Kenny, dialled in on the word "play" and "while that's a good thing, it's somewhat trivial. If you have the choice between donating to cure cancer or donating to play, most people are going to donate to cure cancer."

Plus, Frey says Right To Play had typically shied away from showing the ugly side of its work. "We were always a very happy brand," he says. "But BBDO helped us see that... you have to bring the context and the reality of these kids' lives to bear so that the viewer understands what they're facing."

The team landed on "We Rise," a series of uncomfortable, powerful spots, where kids are shown fighting against child marriage, slave labour and armed conflict, while a young girl waxes poetic. The anthem was inspired by two Malian girls who shared a powerful poem with their village elders, reducing many to tears, says Frey. While the spots graced the annuals of almost every awards program in the Creative Report Card, there was far more to the piece than slam poems set to drum beats.

It took eight months to revamp Right To Play's entire visual ID, says Nugent, who was the self-professed "gatekeeper" of its rejigged brand guidelines, ensuring all communications - including editorial, promotional items, clothing, letterheads and business cards - were up to code. "Without exaggeration, we probably developed 10,000 slight variations of the new logo. I still have stacks



on my desk as memories of that process," says Nugent.

The beefy design challenge entailed consultations with Right to Play stakeholders to ensure the visual and verbal language was consistent across its 15 operating markets. Through all of the changes, Frey says the brand went from being in the spotlight to hiding in the shadows. The children were made the heroes, which was initially "tricky" for the organization to wrap its head around. Because, he says, Right to Play was always the protagonist. It previously sold its work primarily to high net worth individuals, corporate and government donors by speaking to the specifics of what it does. So before the shift, it had to be in the spotlight.

Right to Play looked to future-proof by building a different group of supporters: monthly donors. They're much less interested in hearing about the "methodology" and far more attuned to "impact," says Frey, which "We Rise" delivers in spades. Before the rebrand, he says, the non-profit had about 150 active monthly donors. Today, it's close to 3,500. "So the proof is in the pudding, we massively increased the size of our supporters on the back of this repositioning."

While Frey is mum on the details for phase two, he does hint at stripping the campaign of its "cinematic" approach. The team is exploring lower production methods of capturing kids in situ. "Raw, real and authentic" is how Frey describes the next spots that will show the realities of vulnerable children. "It will be their voice telling their stories," he says, perhaps giving them cell phones to document their days. Unscripted first-person narratives? It's safe to say Right to Play won't be shying away from context next time either.



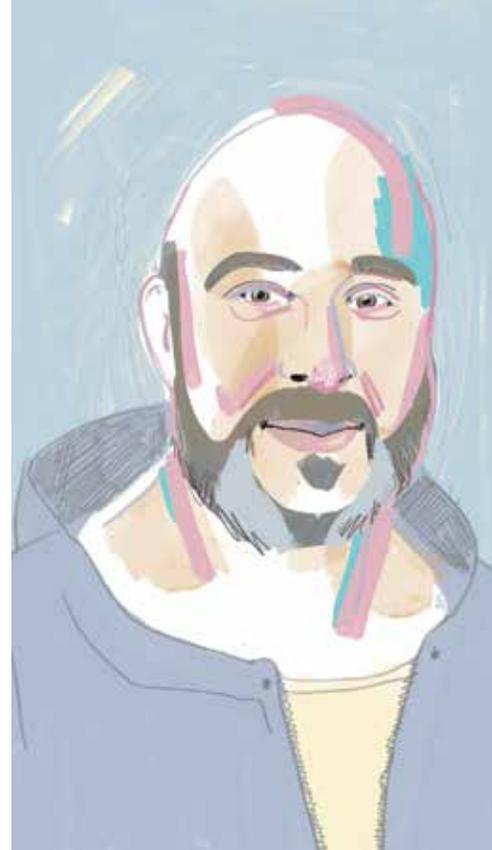
THE TOP 10

PLANNERS

1. Tom Kenny, Ogilvy (formerly BBDO)
2. Sean McDonald, Rethink
3. Rosie Gentile, Cossette
4. Anna Percy-Dove, Superbia (formerly FCB)
5. Pascal Routhier, Rethink
6. Brittany Dow, John St.
7. Paul Hanlon, FCB
8. Shelley Brown, FCB
9. Simran Kaur, FCB
10. Hannah Newport, Rethink

DESIGNERS

1. Mike Nugent, BBDO
2. Jake Lim, Rethink
2. Ramon Charles, Isobar (formerly FCB)
4. Ryan Booth, Lg2
5. Trevor Shaikin, freelance (BBDO)
6. Rasna Jaswal, freelance (Taxi)
7. George Katz, McCann
8. Timothy Chuang, freelance (Anomaly)
9. Jack Curtis, freelance (Zulu Alpha Kilo)
10. Aaron Mohr, Jam3



THE TOP 10

1. Debbie Chan, Narrative/Bensimon Byrne
2. Anand Iyer, freelance (BBDO)
3. Maxime Saute, Rethink
4. Mario Cesareo, Cossette
5. Cody Sabatine, FCB
6. Andy Ng, Cossette
7. Jaimes Zentil, Cossette
8. Mike Schonberger, BBDO
9. Dan Cantelon, Taxi
10. Spencer Dingle, Cossette

1. David Mueller, Bensimon Byrne
2. Dominique Raso, BBDO
3. Xavier Blais, Rethink
4. Matt Doran, Bensimon Byrne
5. Curtis Chapman, FCB
6. Craig McIntosh, Cossette
7. Andrew Chhour, Rethink
8. Matt Hubbard, freelance (Cossette)
9. Marc Levesque, Taxi
10. Jordan Hamer, Cossette

Blurring the boundaries of advertising and PR

Kevin Costner was lying in *Field of Dreams*. If you build it, there's no guarantee they will come. Today's field of brands, need advertising that ignites with PR fire.

Just ask Bensimon Byrne clients White Ribbon (#3 brand) and Casey House (#11 brand). The former non-profit's anti-toxic masculinity film (see AToMiC winners, p.31) went gangbusters online when a coalition of celeb influencers, like Monica Lewinsky, spread its seed on social. Casey House's stunt was on every Canadian TV news network for three days straight. What did that equate to? \$11 million worth of media spend.

Lighting up social is what clients with shoe-string budgets look to trigger in an effort to make their dollars go further. It's also an approach that the CRC's #1 Copywriter, David Mueller, and #1 Art Director, Debbie Chan, say they've begun to take for even the highest paying clients in Bensimon Byrne and Narrative's fold.

Chan and Mueller previously shared desks at Bensimon. But last year, Chan (who studied graphic design and had been on the advertising side for 10 years) segued to PR, having moved across to sister shop Narrative when creative director Meredith Klapowich went on mat leave. She's staying put because she loves the work and wants to bring her creative chops to what she now sees as blurring fields.

"The industry is moving to a place where you need both

advertising and PR," says the Narrative CD. "And I think [my background] helps me see work in a different way."

Mueller, on the other hand, started out in film school before switching to advertising, and is clocking in 18 years on the creative side. In his CD role at Bensimon, Mueller also sees blurring lines; not just within the industry, but also in the way his team tackles strategy and creative.

"What we're doing differently now is we're involving everyone right away," he says of all-department kick-off meetings for new briefs that come through the door. "Every meeting there is a debate."

With no walls between them, communication has become fluid: Narrative personnel like Chan are now briefed at the exact same time as the creative team, says Mueller. Having PR involved at the outset, instead of being an afterthought, leads to collaboration and efficiency, he adds.

"In advertising, it's all about nailing that idea and the tone, how it looks, how it sounds, and now with the PR lens, it's about finding the real meaning behind [the idea] and how to get people to care," says Chan.

Mueller concurs: "We're lucky to be able to create work that's meaningful, like for White Ribbon; it affects change, reaches people and changes opinions. To me, that's the best kind of work."

METHODOLOGY

Strategy's Creative Report Card tracks and tallies the awards taken home by agencies, advertisers, creatives and strategists over the past year to help the marketing community know who's at the top of their game.

We select a range of shows that incorporate a variety of media and assign every award a point value, weighted to recognize that international shows are bound to be tougher to win than regional ones.

As the books arrive throughout the awards season, we keep a database of wins for each advertiser, agency, CD, AD, CW, designer and planner, and tally them to determine a ranking in each category.

Please bear in mind it accounts for thousands of individual awards and relies on the credits as published by the various shows. Therefore, there is room for error and/or omission.

SCORING

Point values are highest for international awards, followed by national and then regional. Best of Show and Grand Prix will receive more points than Gold, which receives more than Silver and so forth. We reserve the right to review and/or change the weight of awards each year based on their level of prestige and difficulty.

AGENCIES

The points for agency offices in multiple cities have been combined. However, distinct but affiliated agencies (with the same parent company) are listed separately, unless considered a single entity by the agency. If two agencies are listed on a single campaign, each receives the same points.

INDIVIDUALS

Points are awarded to the individuals credited

in the award show books as they appear. If a name isn't listed, the individual doesn't receive any points. In some cases, agencies have provided corrections, which have been taken into account on a case-by-case basis. We have done our best to fix any discrepancies in spelling of names between various books.

ADVERTISERS

Points are awarded for the brands as listed in the awards annuals. Sub-brands or brand extensions are grouped together under the main brand.

THE AWARDS THAT COUNT

Regional: ACE, Ad Rodeo, Créa

National: ADCC, Applied Arts, AToMiC, CMA, Marketing Awards, Shopper Innovation Awards, Strategy Awards

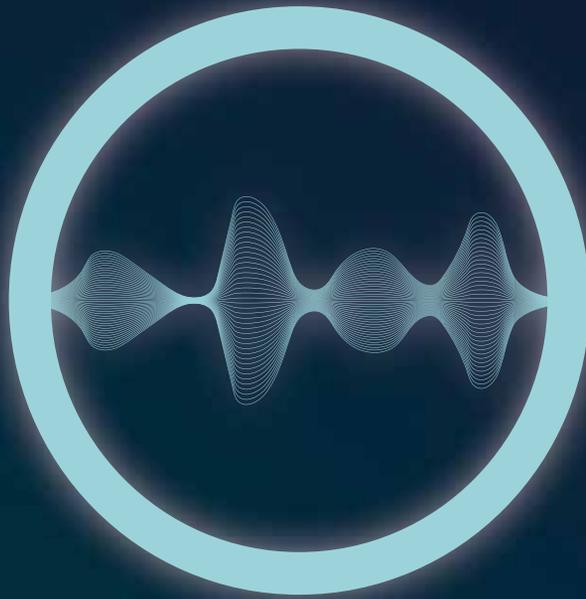
International: Cannes, Clios, Communication Arts, D&AD, Epica, One Show

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EXPANDING PR'S PORTFOLIO

How Molson Coors' Jessica Vieira Teixeira earned a major bump in spend. BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

Prior to 2017, Molson Coors' PR team was mostly brought in for activities deemed "PR-able" by the marketing department – product launches, stunts and the like.

Then Jessica Vieira Teixeira joined the company.

As the brand PR manager at Molson, she pushed for a permanent seat at the table, believing PR tactics could help Molson's portfolio shine at a time of declining trust among consumers and shifting tastes in bev alcohol, resulting in faltering beer sales across the industry.

Jessica's leadership, that it's an effective tool to drive brand breakthrough in today's fragmented media market," says Ghosh.

Vieira Teixeira says she has "earned a place for earned at the table" by making Citizen a critical agency partner, improving measurement and reporting systems, and encouraging Molson to do what Ghosh says would have previously felt "uncomfortable" for the brewer, like working with micro-influencers for Mad Jack to raise awareness among younger beer drinkers. She also recently helped gain airtime for Molson with local news outlets when promoting The Molson Partnership, a program that awards grants and mentorship opportunities to small businesses.

Outside the PR department, Vieira Teixeira is a mentor to a couple Molson employees, who have either approached her directly or been recommended by their manager. Last year, she and one of her mentees organized Molson's first International Women's Day event – which featured workshops and industry speakers – as a passion project. She helped lead the event again this year, in addition to sharing insights on diversity and inclusion with Molson's global leadership team, as part of a panel at an internal conference in January.

When it comes to inclusion, there's still work to be done, she says. For example, there are some D&I programs run out of Milwaukee that she would like to bring to Toronto. "We all benefit so much from having a diverse work environment," she says. "Different perspectives will lead us to be empathetic marketers."

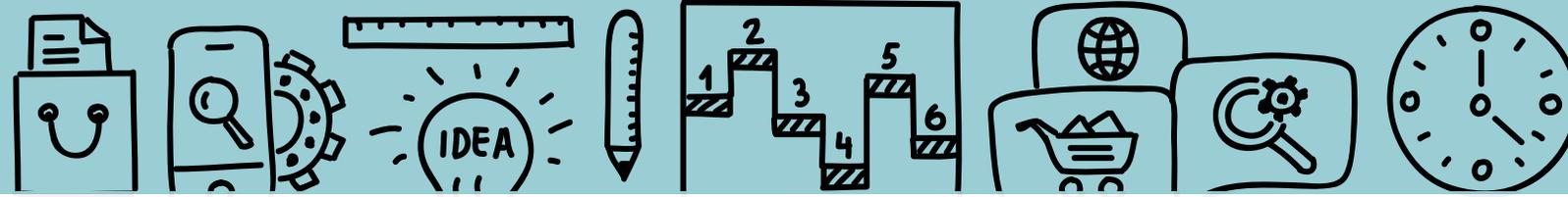
A University of Toronto alumnus, Vieira Teixeira started her career agency-side, holding account management positions while at The Marketing Store. A few years later, she moved to DDB, working with Volkswagen during the diesel emissions crisis in a hybrid CRM-brand role. That's where she learned to become a generalist, handling everything from product launches to experiential auto shows, while "dipping her toes" in crisis management.

Today, she's one of the few people who work across Molson's entire portfolio, 24 of which have active PR budgets. Moving forward, she'll continue to work with the marketing team to make PR "a part of the integrated marketing communications process from the get-go, so that we can make an impact," she says. "That, for me, is the biggest [achievement] beyond any project or campaign."

At times, it's a slow build, says Vieira Teixeira. Much of what she works on – influencer campaigns, for instance – is relatively new for Molson. But after three years, her efforts have led to an impressive 350% bump in PR investment. This comes as overall budgets are flat to declining, notes Joy Ghosh, marketing director for Molson North America. In the fall, the global company consolidated its Canadian and U.S. business units into a single operation as part of a restructuring that's expected to cut costs by \$150 million.

"PR budgets have grown because we believe, through





FROM MD TO AD

How Michael Romaniuk's work ethic and unconventional background put him on Zulu's (and Canada's) creative radar.

BY JEREMY LLOYD

Michael Romaniuk must enjoy leading a frantic, sleepless life. Outside of his day job as an art director at Zulu Alpha Kilo, Romaniuk and his fiancé run an award-winning gluten-free and vegan dessert business, which includes a line of baking mixes. He also helps oversee a historical building redevelopment in Hamilton, Ont., while somehow finding the time to compete in swing dancing championships.

But, to Romaniuk, it all ties together.

"The best place to find inspiration is outside the ad world," he says. "It's about noticing all the little details in life. The more random stuff you have floating around in your head, the better off you are in this industry."

It took only two years for Romaniuk to become a go-to art director at Zulu. His boss Zak Mroueh is not shy with his praise for the 30-year-old. After working alongside him on Tim Hortons, an award-winning KitchenAid campaign and Coalition for Gun Control initiatives, the founder and CCO told *strategy* that Romaniuk "is one of

those rare and gifted creative talents that don't come around often."

In his first year as a full-time creative, Romaniuk landed on the Creative Report Card at #89 (this year he's #16), won a Grand Prix in the Carte Blanche contest for KitchenAid's "City Colours" (which also won LIAA Gold) and earned Bronze in the Cannes Young Lions' film competition. He returned to the fest for a Gold in 2019.

While it's not rare for talent to rise quickly in advertising, it's rare when it arrives with no formal training. When Romaniuk knocked on Zulu's door in 2018, he had zero agency experience. He'd just finished five years studying to be an emergency room physician. All he had was an unconventional self-promo and a disguise that got him past reception.

Romaniuk's always been pulled towards both creative and scientific endeavours. At school, science won out and he went into pre-med at McMaster University. But while volunteering at hospitals and working emergency response on campus, his natural creative drive continued to emerge. Working in the school's anatomy lab, he became a medical illustrator to scratch that itch.

Surprisingly, Romaniuk's path towards professional art direction began in 2016 when he was asked to develop a branding platform for a medical conference he was helping to organize.

"They knew me as the guy who dabbled in Photoshop, the PR guy," he says. "I had this idea of creating a post-apocalyptic wasteland out of McMaster University" and showing gas-masked responders being first on the scene. Romaniuk taught himself AfterEffects and turned the campus into a fiery ground-zero for a campaign video he spent 90 hours producing. Diving in like that made him realize how much he loved the creative process. Something had to change and he left medicine behind.

Romaniuk discovered Zulu while flipping through awards annuals and was drawn to its creative output and policies on not doing spec work. To finagle an introduction, he and copywriter Patrick Godin (whom Romaniuk went to high school with) designed a self-promo mailer – "No Spec Specs" eyeglasses – that they delivered to Zulu while dressed as "FedUp" delivery workers.

The "FedUp" schtick got them a meeting with Mroueh and half an hour later (while still in uniform), Romaniuk was put to work on branding RGD's DesignThinkers conference. Mroueh says he had seen similar hire-me stunts but was drawn to Romaniuk's attention to detail when tailoring the mailer to the agency's branding.

"Michael is the real deal," the founder adds. "Within only two years, he's had a mind-bending creative run and an astonishing impact at Zulu."

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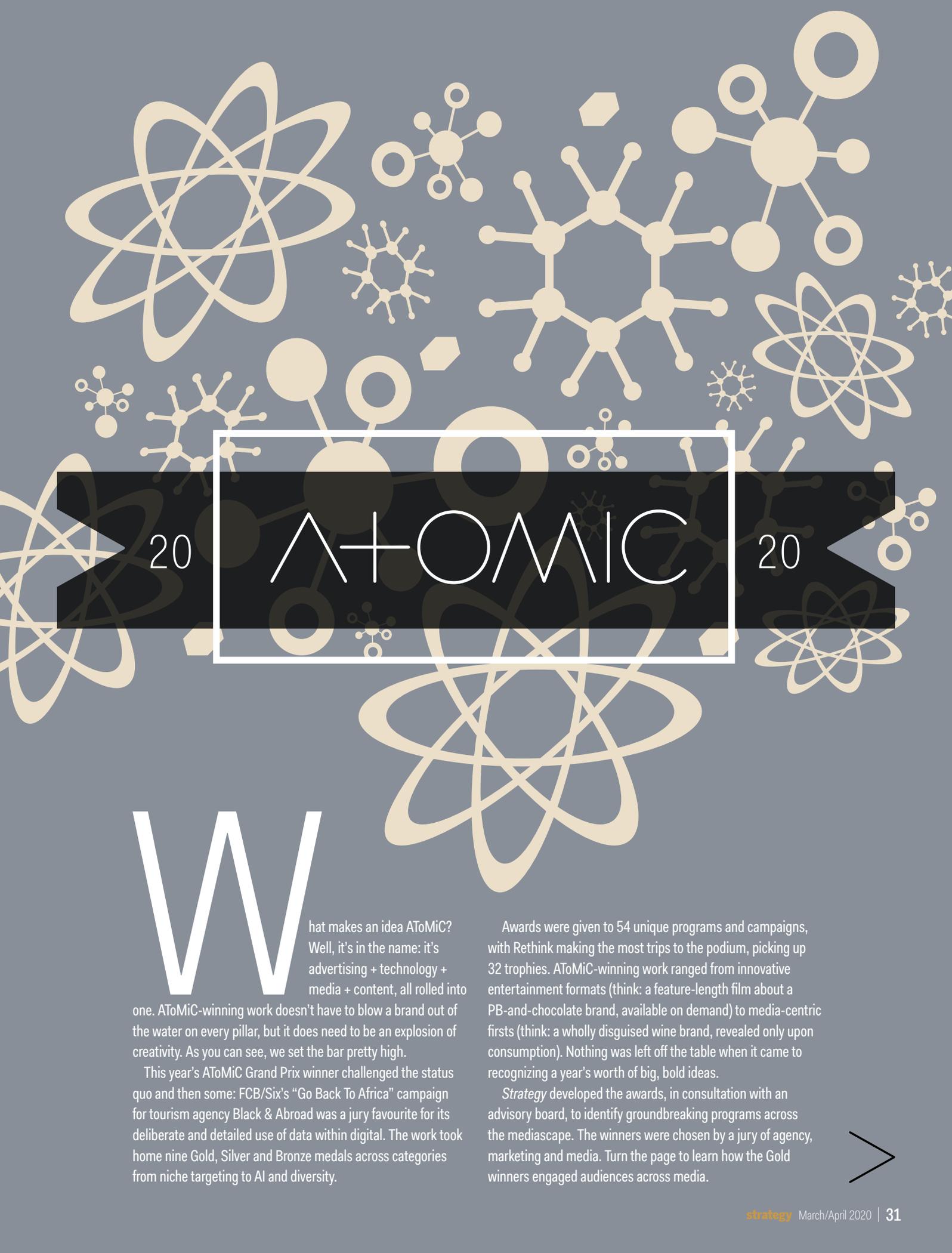
Cadillac Fairview to develop retail solutions with Scale AI

The Ravel by CF innovation division is pursuing ways to offer more personalization within physical retail.



WestJet expands its voice services

The airline is bringing its Juliet digital assistant to Google devices to help



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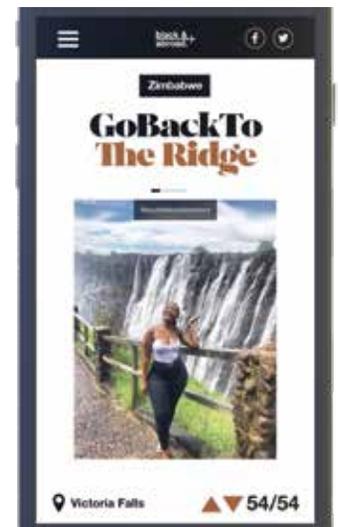
hat makes an idea AToMiC? Well, it's in the name: it's advertising + technology + media + content, all rolled into

one. AToMiC-winning work doesn't have to blow a brand out of the water on every pillar, but it does need to be an explosion of creativity. As you can see, we set the bar pretty high.

This year's AToMiC Grand Prix winner challenged the status quo and then some: FCB/Six's "Go Back To Africa" campaign for tourism agency Black & Abroad was a jury favourite for its deliberate and detailed use of data within digital. The work took home nine Gold, Silver and Bronze medals across categories from niche targeting to AI and diversity.

Awards were given to 54 unique programs and campaigns, with Rethink making the most trips to the podium, picking up 32 trophies. AToMiC-winning work ranged from innovative entertainment formats (think: a feature-length film about a PB-and-chocolate brand, available on demand) to media-centric firsts (think: a wholly disguised wine brand, revealed only upon consumption). Nothing was left off the table when it came to recognizing a year's worth of big, bold ideas.

Strategy developed the awards, in consultation with an advisory board, to identify groundbreaking programs across the mediascape. The winners were chosen by a jury of agency, marketing and media. Turn the page to learn how the Gold winners engaged audiences across media.



THE WINS Grand Prix, Gold: Diversity, Gold: Idea, Gold: Social, Gold: Niche Targeting, Silver: AI, Silver: Engagement, Silver: Cause & Action, Silver: Tech Breakthrough, Bronze: Digital Engagement

Go back to hyper-targeting: Black & Abroad dives into data

America has a deep history of racism, stretching back to when millions of Africans were taken from their communities, brought to the West and forced into slavery. While this dark moment in time should be relegated to the dusty annals of the past, anyone who's ever been on the receiving end of the slur "Go back to Africa" knows that racial oppression endures to this day.

GRAND PRIX

In an effort to hijack the phrase and strip its words of their intended meaning, American travel brand and cultural collective **Black & Abroad** turned "Go back to Africa" into a pan-African tourism campaign that flipped the racial slur into an uplifting call-to-action for black travellers.

Created by **FCB/Six**, the platform looked to dispel widespread misperceptions of Africa as a dangerous, undesirable destination and redress the lack of representation of Black travelers in commercial imagery. It also reinforced Black & Abroad's position as a leader in redefining world experiences for the modern Black traveler.

The campaign rolled out on Twitter, where racist tweets using the slur were redacted and turned into hyper-targeted ads for each of the continent's 54 countries. The social ads then directed people back to GoBackToAfrica.com, a mobile hub designed to address the lack of representation in commercial travel imagery. The content platform used Google Vision AI to aggregate images of black travellers in

Africa into 54 galleries, organized alphabetically by African country.

Working with media agency Initiative and data firm Acxiom, the campaign targeted people online with 6,840 customized ads based on interest, helping black millennials see themselves in Africa.

The online efforts were then supported by a commercial that showcased the scenery and bustling urban life in Africa. From vast savannas to swank restaurants and nightlife, the spot created an aspirational picture of the adventures to be had across the continent.

The campaign succeeded, by all measures. Black & Abroad saw a 60% increase in booking interest for African trips and 88% of its audience said their interest in visiting Africa had increased. The brand also tracked a 315% increase in brand visibility and its online searches doubled.

Most importantly, perhaps, by changing the context of "go back to Africa," the brand succeeded in stripping the racist intent and changing the meaning of the phrase. The campaign contributed to 89% of Black & Abroad's audience saying they felt it reduced the hate from the term "go back to Africa," as well as 52% saying they feel the term is more "hopeful" or "empowering" and 92% saying they know more about what Africa has to offer travellers.

THE WINS “#10YearChallenge” (top) Gold: Digital Engagement // “Airbnb” (middle) Gold: Collaboration, Gold: Experiential Engagement, Silver: Engagement, Silver: Idea, Bronze: Social // “Crews” (bottom) Gold: ROI, Silver Social Silver: Niche Targeting, Bronze: Engagement

SickKids VS. a trilogy of digital campaigns

Toronto’s SickKids is a world-leading pediatric hospital. But the reality is that its current infrastructure, some of which was built in 1949, is no longer equipped for its patients. With nearly \$400 million in fundraising still required to build a new hospital, **SickKids** created a trio of donation-driving campaigns.

The first step was to unite people around the cause and unearth a new donor base. With most of its prospective donors from previous campaigns already converted to donors, SickKids discovered that many people were banding together to donate as a team.

Using this insight, **Cossette** created “SickKids Vs. Crews,” a campaign and donation platform where people could self-identify with different sub-groups. Fifty-two influencers – from cosplayers to fashionistas – called on people to join their crew and donate to SickKids, generating over 11.7 million social impressions. From this campaign alone, the hospital raised \$68.7 million in only two months and generated 155,000 new donors, a 19% gain.

To bring more eyes and donors into its fold, SickKids also partnered with Airbnb and **No Fixed Address** for the “SickKids Airbnb,” which gave media, consumers, and special guests the ability to see what life is like in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) firsthand.

Influencers, such as Toronto Raptor Fred Van Vleet, were invited to stay in a crowded, noisy and stressful PICU room – which was listed at \$16,744 on Airbnb, the amount it costs to operate a four-patient room in the PICU for one night – giving them a sense of what families face in their moments of crisis.

The campaign, also by Cossette, generated 115 million earned media impressions, 200 pieces of coverage, and 26,000 visits to the Airbnb listing, the most viewed in Canada. SickKids also saw a 28% increase in new users to its site and a 27% increase in donation revenue.

Finally, the hospital looked to humanize the kids who have been helped by its fundraising efforts with “SickKids VS - #10YearChallenge”.

In 2019, the #10YearChallenge encouraged people to show just how much they had changed over the course of a decade by posting side-by-side selfies on social media. What was an exercise in public vanity turned into something profound when SickKids adopted the trend.

Cossette helped create the challenge, which used the same two-image format to tell the story of patient transformation and how donors helped make it happen.

SickKids selected four patients who had battled and overcome life-altering medical conditions over the last decade. Put together in just one day, the images became SickKids’ best-performing social posts.

The campaign reached over 439,000 people with zero media spend and received 15 times more engagement than SickKids’ Facebook page average. And hundreds of former patients and families shared their own “SickKids Vs - #10YearChallenge” stories. For some, 10 years is marked not in wrinkles gained or in pounds lost, but in lives saved.





THE WIN Gold: Design

It's all Subjectif design

Whether or not someone prefers their red bold and leathery or light and fruity depends less on their taste buds, and more on the judgement of others. Wine preferences are often shaped by ratings, reviews or opinion.

In fact, blind taste test studies have shown that these factors all influence what a person thinks of a wine before they even try it. If a wine is not lauded by so-called experts in ratings and reviews, the perception is it can't possibly be any good.

So when **13th Street Winery** wanted to encourage drinkers to try its wines, the Ontario vintner worked with **Lg2** to help eliminate these external influences so that people would try something new and come to their own conclusions about its wines.

To do so, it introduced Subjectif, a series of 12 wines, identically priced and uniquely designed to reveal the varietal only after a person was done drinking it. The bottle's unique die-cut label revealed whether the wine was a merlot or pinot noir, for example, only when light passed through the glass, thereby eliminating the possibility of any external judgment of the wine.

The initial limited run of Subjectif cases sold out in less than a month. The success prompted the winery to triple the amount and the brand plans to relaunch the initiative in the spring of 2020. More importantly, Subjectif led drinkers to return and request the 13th Street specific varietals – based on their own opinion.

THE WIN Gold: Design, Silver: Idea, Silver: ROI, Bronze: Engagement

Heinz Ketchup's off-kilter label

Heinz Ketchup has been an iconic and ubiquitous brand for the last 150 years. Yet, people still struggle to get its sauce out of the classic glass jar. In fact, searching for “the best way to get ketchup out of the bottle” yields over 74 million results and there are countless blogs and YouTube videos with knife-poking and bottle-tapping tips.

At the same time, Heinz had noticed that, with new competition, it was starting to lose market share and brand affinity scores were slipping. Realizing there was a chance that its ketchup could go from iconic to old fashioned, it decided to shake things up by getting people to, well, stop shaking its bottles.

Working with **Rethink**, it created a super-simple but eye-catching modification: it took its classic label and repositioned it to sit at a 31.578° angle on the bottle, which happens to be the precise angle to achieve the perfect pour.

Limited edition glass bottles were placed in stores and restaurants, giving Canadians the answer they'd been after for decades, and creating breakthrough design on cluttered grocery store shelves where attention is at a premium.

The campaign launched on social and immediately generated buzz. Within a few weeks, the “Pour Perfectly” bottle was picked up by over 340 news stations globally. Worldwide search interest for Heinz Ketchup increased 400%. With a production spend of only \$15,000, the campaign garnered 238 million earned media impressions. “Pour Perfectly” was also extended to print ads based on its success online and future plans include partnering with a national restaurant.





THE WINS Gold: Collaboration, Silver: Niche Targeting

Now that's service: BMW showrooms luxury cars

The ultra-luxury shopper has no time for marketing messages, making them a lucrative but extremely hard market to reach. To promote its new luxury X7 and i8 models, **BMW, FCB** and **Media Experts** found an unexpected way to connect with this elusive audience: through real estate.

Since luxury begets luxury, the carmaker reached high net worth drivers (without negatively impacting its cost-per-lead) by turning the driveways of multi-million-dollar homes into showrooms for BMW.

With "Stage Your Driveway," FCB made BMW's lineup an unexpected and welcome part of the home-buying journey by partnering with high-end real estate agency Heaps Estrin and embedding cars in its listings. When a home-for-sale was photographed, the driveway was staged with a brand new X7 or i8. When homebuyers visited online real estate listings and flipped through the photo gallery, they found a BMW in every exterior shot, turning a well-known part of the house buying process – the image carousel – into a BMW ad.

Open houses also included the brand's car in front of the house, turning driveways into showrooms. Neighbours in these tony 'hoods were also geo-targeted with neighbourhood-specific ads to bring attention to the driveways. Anyone who clicked on one of the ads or inquired about the vehicle at an open house was contacted by a BMW dealer.

The ultra-low cost effort allowed BMW to reach its target when they weren't even looking for a new set of wheels. It also saw the cost-per-lead for this class of vehicles lower by 56% and added a new pool of 37,000 prospective buyers.

THE WINS Gold: Diversity, Silver: Engagement, Silver: Experiential Engagement

Casey House has your back

Touch has the power to heal, yet for people living with HIV/AIDS, physical contact with others is something they are often denied. That's because many people believe they can contract HIV through touch – which is simply not true.

To dispel the myth, provoke conversation, and demonstrate how an HIV-positive person's touch has the power to heal rather than be threatening, Toronto-based HIV/AIDS hospital **Casey House**, **Bensimone Byrne** and **Narrative** created "Healing House," a wellness spa where all massage therapists were HIV-positive.

The team worked with the RMT from the Toronto Blue Jays to train 18 HIV-positive volunteers (called "Healers") to perform neck, back and shoulder massages on visitors to the spa. "Healing House" opened to the media (of which 60 journalists booked a massage) and to the public during World AIDS Day.

The execution stoked fear, shock and hate but that was part of the plan. It spurred questions from people online, which the team leveraged to share facts about a disease that's still largely misunderstood.

With a media budget of \$30,000, "Healing House" amassed a media value of 11 million dollars and generated over 540 stories, 120 of them broadcast, as well as 360 million impressions. On social, the campaign generated more conversation around HIV stigma in three days than in all of 2018. Most importantly, it changed minds: 85% of participants felt more compassion for those with HIV and 77% said it changed their perception of people with the life-threatening condition.



THE WIN Gold: Engagement

East West Market's plastic-shaming bags



We've all been there: despite best intentions, we end up at the grocery checkout without our reusable bags. After a moment of self-admonishment, we say "yes" to needing a plastic bag. It's only a couple bags, right? No big deal.

Except that, around the world, over one million plastic bags are used every minute – most of which are used once before being discarded. To reduce the use of plastic, Vancouver organic grocer **East West Market** redesigned its bags with fictional company names that made its customers think twice before accepting plastic.

If a person forgot to bring a reusable bag, they would be forced to take one that read "Dr. Toews' Wart Ointment Wholesale," "The Colon Care Co-op," or "Into the Weird Adult Video Emporium."

The bags of shame worked. During and after the campaign, created by **Rethink**, 96% of customers brought reusable bags instead of plastic.

The initiative was picked up by national publications like *Huffington Post*, *The National Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *Daily Hive* before quickly sparking a global conversation in international publications like the *New York Times*, *People*, and *The Telegraph*. The idea was even shared by celebrities like Kevin Bacon, Stephen Fry, Jessica Hische, and George Takei.

By adding a dose of embarrassment to the traditional bag, East West Market helped people around the world think twice about taking home those little plastic sacks.



THE WINS Gold: Idea, Gold: Online Video

The gov's risky sports marketing

The ethos of winning at all costs is deeply embedded in sports culture. It's seen in movies and TV, especially sports marketing with slogans like "Risk it all" and "Whatever it takes." But winning at all costs takes on a whole different meaning when the price is someone's life. That's why, in 2019, the **Government of Ontario** enacted Rowan's Law, a concussion protocol named after Rowan Stringer, a teenage rugby player who passed away after multiple concussions.

With a law in place to protect young athletes, the Ontario government set out to raise awareness around the signs of a brain injury, and change the risk-it-all mentality among coaches, parents and the athletes themselves.

So **Rethink** created "The Risk," the government's own sports marketing spot that looks and feels like a typical high-octane creed to just doing it. In the commercial, you see a young soccer player continuing to get up after each hit. As the story unfolds, she begins to falter with each impact reflecting a sign of concussion, including impaired hearing, blurred vision, dizziness and ringing in the ears. She eventually collapses as warnings "Don't risk everything" and "Know the signs of a concussion" appear, articulating the dangers of pushing too hard after a concussion.

The film ran in cinema, broadcast and social, alongside a brand icon – a stop sign divided to represent two sides of the brain – that was placed in arenas and on uniforms and apparel. Hockey legend Eric Lindros, whose own career was cut short by concussion, was the campaign's celebrity endorser.

The coverage gained more than 27 million impressions in just the first week of the campaign. In the days following the launch, "Rowan's Law" became the number-one searched term on Google Canada, and in 2020, Rowan's Law will become mandatory for all amateur sports across the province.



THE WIN Gold: ROI

WestJet unites holiday makers across markets

Christmas is celebrated in 160 countries around the world and traditions vary greatly. Differences aside, there's one thing that's the same wherever you go: loved ones want to be together. **WestJet** leveraged this insight for its holiday campaign, which needed to reach new audiences and communicate that the once low-cost domestic carrier was now global.

Studio M's "Uniting Through Traditions" leveraged WestJet's fleet to send its holiday ambassador, Blue Santa, on an epic journey to six continents to explore different holiday traditions. Short doc-style videos saw Santa surfing in Australia, feasting on local delicacies in France, and delivering Christmas gifts to villages in Haiti and Kenya. A new video was released daily through a digital advent calendar, including stories of Blue Santa surprising unsuspecting guests with magical reunion experiences in London, England.

Here in Canada, WestJet engaged in social listening to hand-pick real Canadian families who couldn't be together over the holidays and reunited them in real-time content. In total, the campaign included 25 videos from 16 different countries, demonstrating that even though we may come from different places, we are all "Uniting Through Traditions."

And it was a complete success, generating \$11 million in direct sales, which is over \$12 in immediate revenue for every dollar invested, a campaign ROI of 1,257% and a 27% increase in sales year-over-year. It also tracked 438 million earned media impressions and generated over eight million video views, which represented a 19% increase in organic views year-over-year.

THE WINS Gold: Shift, Silver: Idea

Big Mac buddies for (work) life

Big Macs don't flip themselves. In fact, those **McDonald's** burgers are most likely made by a young adult. That's because 74% of McDonald's staff in Canada is under 24, meaning the business depends on constantly attracting thousands of young workers to keep customers McHappy.

The problem is that with low youth unemployment in Canada and a somewhat negative perception of working at McD's, many young people take a pass on working the drive-thru window, lest their friends judge them for working there.

But friends can't judge when they're along for the ride, so the burger brand devised "Friends Wanted," a recruitment campaign that changed the way McDonald's recruited by encouraging friends to apply together, interview together and work together.

The campaign by **Cossette** included an online video series about all the ways two friends have each other's backs while working together at a McDonald's. Videos were distributed on social channels, as well as targeted ones like Twitch Connected TV, where they had a 91% average view-through rate. The campaign also included posters, in-restaurant videos and tray liners that featured two job applications, but flipped so that friends seated across from each other got the message. McDonald's also changed their online application process to include a "recommend a friend" field and franchisees have begun to interview friends together.

Bringing the buddy system to McDonald's workplace worked. The first month of the campaign generated over 75,000 new applications, 7.5% more than the previous year and consideration of working at McDonald's increased 42%.



THE WIN GOLD: Audio Branding

The Fondation Émergence brings hate speech to radio

Homophobic rhetoric is not tolerated on traditional media. Aside from the fact that there are rules prohibiting such language, public outcry would be certain if hateful messages were broadcast on TV or radio. Yet, every 23 seconds, a homophobic or transphobic comment is posted online, and unlike traditional media, such vile behaviour on social media is rarely acted upon, reported or removed.

To demonstrate how jarring, and wholly inappropriate, some online messages are, **Fondation Émergence** – a non-profit whose mission is to raise awareness around the plight of the LGBTQ+ community – brought that online hate to radio.

“Homophobe Radio” was an ad that was so abhorrent it played only once. The radio spot, by **Rethink**, included actual homophobic comments from social media that sat online, unreported, for more than four years. During

a one-minute, one-time ad, vitriolic statements such as “we should create a group to make faggots disappear” or “if my daughter were a lesbian, I would cut out her tongue” were read on-air.

After reading the real comments, the announcer conceded that most listeners were probably offended right now, rightly so. But that was the goal: to shock listeners and remind them that homophobia and transphobia is rampant – and largely ignored – online, while also inviting them to flag, report and mark homophobic and transphobic comments on social media as inappropriate.

As expected, six listeners called the station for the ad to be removed in less than two minutes, proving the point that if such scrutiny was placed online, people could collectively affect positive change.



THE WIN Gold: Digital Engagement

The Fountain Tire typeface, now in Oiler orange-and-blue

Advertising at national sporting events requires deep pockets, which is why the logos of deep-pocketed corporations are commonplace in arenas. While the multinationals might have the dollars, it's the employees and management of local companies that have hometown pride.

Fountain Tire took its love of the Edmonton Oilers and, with the help of **FCB**, came up with a way to cheer on the hometown team and promote its brand – without getting into the costly game of outspending the competition. To get in front of NHL fans, Fountain Tire turned its employees into the first human typeface. Just like diehard fans in full body paint, real employees ranging from senior leadership to tire techs were hand-painted as crazed fans and then filmed to create a unified typeface including numbers and emojis.

Using a mobile interface, people could then use the “Fan Bods” to type messages of support for the home team and share it on social (though the in-built profanity blocker kept the cheering clean). The “Fan Bods” were also featured during an in-game activation at the home-opener. Real “Fan Bods” also took to the stands and spelled out the cheers that were generated online.

With a media budget of only \$60,000, the campaign engaged Oilers fans despite fewer resources than other sponsors, generating two million impressions in six weeks. What started as a local platform for the Oilers quickly spread to become a North American-wide platform for the entire NHL as rival fans also hijacked the “Fan Bods.” In all, messages were created for 24 NHL teams in seven provinces and 13 states, giving Fountain Tire a 142% lift in share of voice.



THE WINS Gold: Experiential Engagement, Bronze: Cannabis Branding

Leaf Forward's pint-sized cannabis bill fuels PR fire

The day recreational cannabis became legal in Canada was a monumental day, but it was not without its delays. Bill C-45 didn't actually pass until months after it was initially set to become law and people were talking about it. The actual bill, that is, not just legalization.

Out of 63,212 tweets related to legalization, 10.54% of Canadians specifically mentioned Bill C-45. **Leaf Forward** and **Rethink** decided to use the physical document to celebrate the monumental day and help it stand out among a rush of fledgling cannabis companies.

It created "Pass The Bill," a smokable version of the legalization bill – with all 90,659 words – printed on ultra-thin rice paper using safe, smokable, non-toxic ink. The rolling papers were then packaged like a document and closed with a wax seal sporting a cannabis-inspired version of the Canadian crest.

The campaign was launched on social with a kickoff video on legalization day in October. Papers were then sent to influencers in the cannabis space, who quickly shared the idea with their followers. The initiative made headlines across the globe and in cannabis publications, including Herb.co and High Times. Finally, the papers were made publically available so that Canadians could pass the bill while they celebrated the passing of the Bill.

THE WIN Gold: Experiential Engagement

Donate a second chance at life

When someone receives a donor organ, they are given a second chance at life. Yet less than 20% of Canadians are registered donors, a rate that is well below most western countries, despite the fact that 90% support organ and tissue donation.

This gap between intent and action is what National Organ Donation Awareness Month addresses. In 2019, the **Canadian Transplant Association** and its agency **McCann Worldgroup Canada** partnered with the Calgary Police Service to help people understand (on an individual level) what it feels like for an organ recipient to have bad news turn to good.

They did that by transforming one of the most stressful situations a driver can face – getting pulled over by the police – into a rewarding experience.

For two days, police pulled over Calgary drivers for minor infractions, but only those who were organ donors were given a "Second Chance" ticket – a warning instead of a fine – since they were giving someone else a second chance at life. A tool kit was made available on Secondchancesdonor.org for police everywhere to implement the program, which was picked up in the U.S.

The "Second Chances" campaign generated over 30 million media impressions and generated 60,000 new Canadian donor registrations in April 2019 (organ donation awareness month), which represented a 300% increase in donor registrations over an average month in Canada.





THE WIN Gold: Print/Out-Of-Home

The SAAQ puts bone to steel

We've all been told not to jaywalk. Yet so many people ignore pedestrian crossings and walk when and wherever they please. In recent years, the number of Quebecers recklessly crossing the street has increased. So have the amount of road accidents involving pedestrians.

To save lives, the **Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ)** wanted pedestrians to realize just how vulnerable they are when they put themselves in cars' way. Since people already know jaywalking is dangerous, the Société needed a less didactic, more visceral approach.

Targeting a bus shelter next to the most dangerous intersection in Montreal, **Lg2** set up "Bone vs. Steel," an interactive display that made it alarmingly clear how devastating being hit by a car can be.

The installation used stereoscopic cameras to detect the human skeleton of a passerby and transposed it on a screen, mirroring the participant's movements. After viewers enjoyed a few seconds of fun watching their body move around, an automatic sensor triggered an incoming car, which then hits the skeleton and simulates the impact of an accident. Seeing human bones respond to a car collision was a horrific reality check for many pedestrians. A message displayed: "Bone vs. steel, you have no chance."

Hundreds of pedestrians tried the bus shelter and "Bone vs. Steel" was the most shared video in the province of Quebec for two weeks. Most importantly, accidents involving pedestrians decreased 8%.

THE WINS Gold: Print/Out-Of-Home, Gold: Cannabis Branding
Bronze: Collaboration

Tweed's mindless, yet mindful, OOH

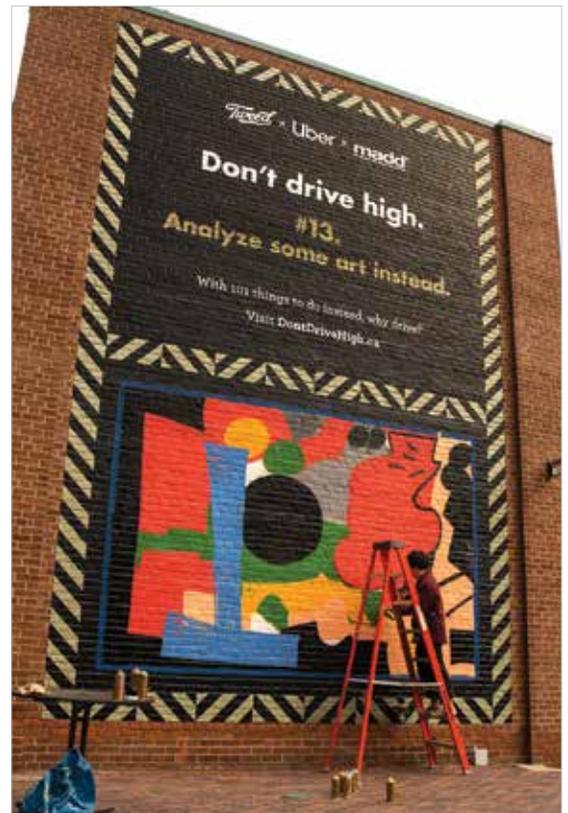
Decades of PSAs have made drunk driving socially unacceptable. But the same scorn that comes with driving after drinking is not necessarily directed at those who get behind the wheel while high. That's because many people don't equate being stoned with being impaired.

So when cannabis became legal in Canada, **Tweed**, the flagship brand of Canopy Growth, saw the opportunity to promote responsible cannabis consumption without being perceived as a finger-waving buzz-kill.

Tweed, **Cossette** and **Cossette Media** developed a cheeky (not preachy) campaign that offered 101 things to do instead of driving high. Consumers were invited to engage with the 101 ideas across social, digital, radio, TSAs, OOH, murals and street level activations. Suggested activities included counting buttons piled high or popping a bubble-wrapped bus shelter.

The brand partnered with MADD and Uber to speak to Canadians without having to age-gate, and to remind them of ridesharing alternatives. On legalization day, Tweed placed a massive Uber button at a busy intersection in Toronto, providing free rides for those committed to not driving high (it was also the first time Uber discounts were included in OOH advertising).

The campaign increased awareness about the dangers of high driving, with 93% of Canadians say that they understand the dangers of driving high, and #DontDriveHigh has been adopted by other organizations, such as CAA. The partnership with Uber resulted in over 10,000 discount codes redeemed, effectively removing over 10,000 potentially high drivers from the road.





THE WINS Gold: Brand Content, Silver: Online Video, Bronze: Diversity

White Ribbon's emotive film

No one ever tells an infant to buck it up and stop crying. Babies, boy or girl, are treated with love, support and empathy. However, the same can't be said for boys as they grow older and the message becomes "Toughen up and take it like a man." This pervasive cultural norm robs boys and young men of emotions – and in its worst instances, leads to aggression and violence.

It's the root cause of toxic masculinity that **White Ribbon**, a non-profit working to end gender-based violence and promote a new vision of masculinity, set out to address in a short film by **Bensimon Byrne** and **Narrative**.

"Boys Don't Cry" follows one boy from childhood to adulthood and illustrates how a lifetime of social inputs results in the most toxic form of masculinity. When the film begins, the young boy is shown experiencing a wide range of emotions. As the story develops, he is told by society to bottle up his emotions as boys are not supposed to cry. The once innocent child gradually transforms into a hateful and violent teenager. Each scene highlights the escalating nature of his toxic masculinity.

The film was released on Canada's National Anti-Bullying Day, and by partnering with national broadcasters, the Toronto Maple Leafs, and notable anti-bullying advocates Monica Lewinsky and George Takei, the group was able to reach 66 million impressions without a paid media budget and a mere \$10,000 spent on production. The film is also now being used as a teaching tool in classrooms, and White Ribbon has since conducted 200 workshops, educating 10,000 young men and boys about the root causes of toxic masculinity in the hope that they will reject the rigid social definition of what it means to "be a man."

THE WIN Gold: Brand Content

Reese craves cup content

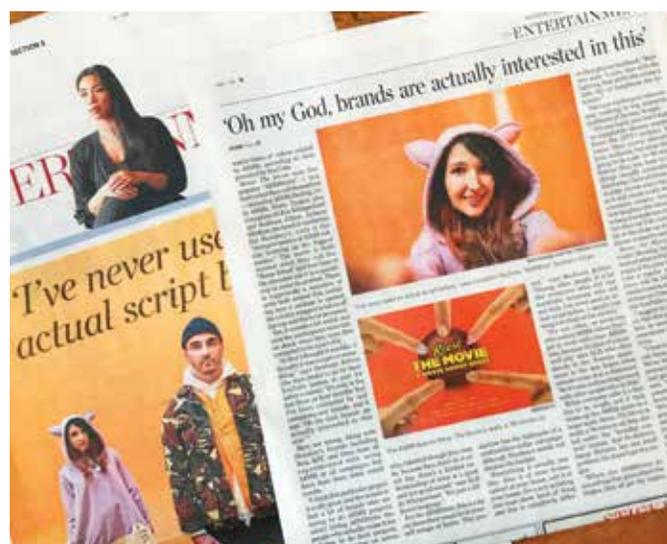
Reese's Peanut Butter Cups have long been a market leader, but in recent years, sales had declined, particularly among younger snackers. To maintain **The Hershey Company** brand's top position, **Anomaly** came up with an idea that would celebrate the tactile experience of unfurling a pack of Reese cups. It made an ASMR movie.

A growing trend online, Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) videos offer viewers comforting sensory experiences best described as "the chills." The brand brought five of YouTube's top ASMRtists together into one very silent, very orange room and had them star in a feature-length film shot by Hollywood cinematographer André Turpin. For 82 minutes, they crinkled, tapped, snapped, chewed and whispered about the ways real Reese fans eat their Peanut Butter Cups.

Distributed on Crave, "Reese The Movie: A Movie About Reese" was given the blockbuster launch treatment with ubiquitous OOH advertising. As a special preview, a total of twelve minutes of the film was shown as commercial breaks during the *Handmaid's Tale* season three premiere. The film was immediately made available on Crave, and then on YouTube a week later.

The campaign also included trailers on TV, in theatres, and on social, with an audio trailer on Spotify. Movie posters ran in bus shelters nationally, the ASMRtists went on a national press junket and the brand set up pages for the film on IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes.

The significant effort yielded significant results. Reese saw a 9.2% increase in sales and a 70% increase in Google searches. It also garnered 62 million media impressions. Finally, the movie was viewed over 500,000 times, proving there's a market for films about whisper-talkers who crinkle Reese wrappers.





THE WIN Gold: Niche Targeting

Interval House protects women. Period.

Every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner, yet women in abusive relationships are terrified to leave. If their abuser finds evidence that they are trying to leave, the violence will escalate, and their lives will be in danger.

Interval House, Canada's oldest shelter for abused women, had a very unique challenge: reach those in abusive relationships and get them the information they need to leave, all without their abusive partners finding out.

Working with **Union**, Interval House created "Freedom Tampons," a special brand of feminine hygiene products that discreetly provides information about escaping abuse in the one place that a man would never look.

Packaged with an exterior sleeve that masks the vital information inside, each tampon has life-saving information printed on it – including Interval House's crisis

hotline, a checklist of what a woman needs to leave, and signs of abuse.

Each tampon also came in a resealable package that didn't give any indication of the information that was inside.

Full boxes of tampons were sent to counsellors, healthcare workers, and the police, knowing that these people have direct, daily contact with women in abusive relationships. They were also distributed in public women's washrooms, the one place that a woman in an abusive relationship is alone and away from her abuser.

Since the launch of "Freedom Tampons," calls to the Interval House Crisis Hotline have increased 176%, all with zero media coverage and no PR amplification. The response has been so positive and the demand so great, that a second run of tampons is in the works.

THE WINS Gold: Tech Breakthrough, Gold: IP, Gold: Digital Engagement, Silver: Design, Silver: Idea, Silver: Niche Targeting

WestJet's global ambitions lit up

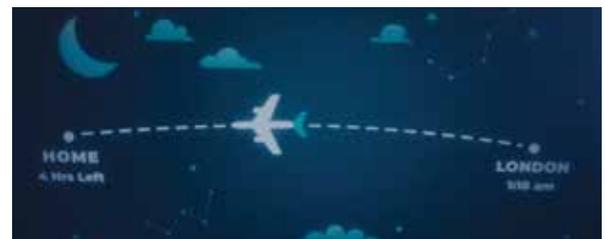
WestJet has grown from a regional Canadian carrier to a global one with an expanded fleet and premium products. The brand needed to reach a business traveller audience, but do it in a way that stayed true to its reputation of being the airline with the most heart.

Rather than leaning into destinations, service or price, WestJet tapped into the most significant challenge business travellers face: being away from their kids.

To help families stay connected, **Rethink** developed the "Flight Light," a nightlight that uses live flight data to project a parent's flight path onto their child's bedroom ceiling.

A kid-friendly and sleek smart home device, the "Flight Light" connects to an app where parents enter their flight number. Flight data is then projected onto the ceiling. Parents can also use the app to send messages and emojis to their child's "Flight Light," letting them know they're thinking of them as they make their way home.

The "Flight Light" was introduced in a spot that showed a daughter following her mother's flight from London to her home in Calgary. Within the first two weeks, 230,000 people clicked through to explore the "Flight Light" site and the campaign tracked 2.6 million impressions. WestJet also collected 6,200 email addresses, expanding its potential business traveller base. And in the month following the campaign, the airline saw a 63% lift in sales for its Premium Cabin. Due to demand, the "Flight Light" has been greenlit to go into mass production.



20

The AToMiC Awards Silver and Bronze Winners

20

BRAND	CAMPAIGN	AGENCY	SILVER	BRONZE
5 Gum	The Self Controller	Momentum	Immersive Reality	
A&W Canada	The Last Straws	Rethink		Cause + Action
Battered Women's Support Services	Peephole	Rethink	Print/OOH	
Berlitz Canada	Worst Christmas Carols	Rethink		Audio Branding
British Columbia Schizophrenia Society	Songs of Schizophrenia	Rethink		Audio Branding
Coalition for Gun Control	Dodge The Bullet	Zulu Alpha Kilo	Tech Breakthrough	
Fondation Émergence	Brutal Postings	Rethink	Diversity + Print/OOH	Experiential Engagement
Fondation Émergence	Pride Flagging	Rethink	Social	
Greenpeace Canada	Straw Shaming	Rethink		Engagement
IKEA Canada	Bedtime	Rethink	ROI	Engagement + Niche Targeting
Interac	Earning Curve	Zulu Alpha Kilo	Audio Branding	
Mars Wrigley Canada	M&M's Finger Lickin' Good	BBDO Toronto	Collaboration	Social
Mars Wrigley Canada	Snickers Suit Swag	BBDO Toronto		Engagement
Metrolinx - GO Transit	The Ultimate Ride	BBDO Toronto	Experiential Engagement	
Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto	MOCA Rebrand	Leo Burnett		Design
National Film Board of Canada	Clit Me	Rethink	Diversity + IP + Transmedia	
Nissan	Tech Drive VR	Critical Mass		Immersive Reality
Peace Collective	#UnravelHate	Zulu Alpha Kilo	Online Video	
Raptors Republic	Ka'Wine & Dine	Rethink		Engagement
Responsible Gambling Council	YOU-turn	FCB Canada		Digital Engagement
Right To Play	Right To Rise	BBDO Toronto		Online Video
SingleCut Beersmiths	Big in Japan	Zulu Alpha Kilo		Idea
Sport Chek	Digital Window Shopping	Touché!	Tech Breakthrough	
The Clorox Company of Canada - Brita	Walkumentary	DentsuBos Toronto	Cause + Action	
The Hershey Company	Hershey's Popped Mix vs. Chips Snacking Challenge	UM Canada		Broadcast Engagement
The Hershey Company - Reese's Pieces	Peanutception	UM Canada		Print/OOH
Tim Hortons	The Away Game	Zulu Alpha Kilo	Brand Content + Online Video	Broadcast Engagement (UM Canada)
Unilever - Hellmann's	Real Food Rescue	Ogilvy Canada	Cause + Action	
Up Cannabis	Saving Grace Financial	Bensimon Byrne / OneMethod	Cannabis Branding	
Volkswagen	Jetta GLI	DDB Canada	Broadcast Engagement + Online Video	
Weston Foods Canada - Dave's Killer Bread	Club Fed	Mosaic		Experiential Engagement
Whirlpool - KitchenAid	Mix 'n Match	Zulu Alpha Kilo	Print/OOH	Tech Breakthrough

The 2020 AToMiC Awards Jury

CO-CHAIRS



ANDREA HUNT
Arterra Wines



ROEHL SANCHEZ
BIMM

JURY



TOM EVANS
Zulubot



KELLY GRAHAM
Ritual



JACKSON HITCHON
The Hershey Company



BROOKE LELAND
Cossette Media



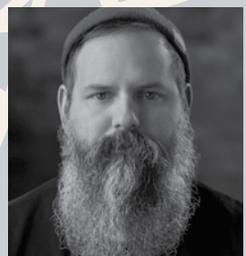
IAN MACKENZIE
FCB/Six



ANTHONY PALERMO
Connect&Go



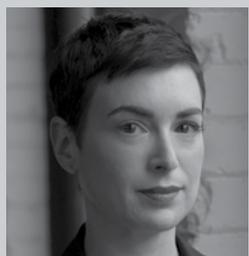
MIA PEARSON
North Strategic



VINCENT RAMSAY-LEMELIN
Sid Lee



SAMANTHA REDMAN
Yum! Brands - KFC



TAL RIFF
Shaftesbury



STEVE SAVIC
Critical Mass



MARY BETH WILLIAMSON
CCI Deloitte

ONLINE JURY

SHARYN BYRNE NEARING
Metrolinx

RAUL GARCIA
Momentum Worldwide

LIAM GREENLAW
Wasserman + Partners

JASON HILL
Target Marketing

KAREN HOWE
The Township

ALYSSA HUGGINS
Princess Margaret
Cancer Foundation

ALISON LAWLER-DEAN
ALD Consulting

STUART MACMILLAN
Lg2

LYRANDA MARTIN-EVANS
DentsuBos

GAETAN NAMOURIC
Perrier Jablonski

RON SMRCZEK
The&Partnership

The New Collaborators



Creative production solutions for brands' new content needs

IN SIMPLE TERMS, GOOD COLLABORATION is a case of matchmaking. Does one company's skills meet the needs of another? Do the cultures and people gel? When expertise and chemistry align, it can be a productive match made in heaven.

However, as in the search for a romantic union, it can sometimes feel like the perfect partner just doesn't exist.

A keen sense of "what's missing in the market" has been fuel for the fire for the New Collaborators featured in this report.

Recognizing that business as usual was failing to ignite the necessary sparks for clients, these companies have developed new models, expanded skill sets and invested in their talent and infrastructure.

From developing agile ways of producing content and bringing services together in streamlined ways, to completely disrupting the way brands and agencies access talent and expertise, the new collaborators are positioning themselves to be a perfect match for the evolving needs of advertisers.





To capitalize on the rabid appetite for all things Raps, Zulubot created a social campaign that recalled that very famous dinosaur movie for Tim Hortons in just 24 hours.

Zulubot makes the impossible possible

Agile production model meets clients' time-sensitive needs



WHEN THE TORONTO RAPTORS WERE MAKING their now legendary run for the NBA championship, marketers were working overtime to find ways to capitalize on Canada's infatuation with the Raps.

The challenge was during the playoffs, things moved quickly, and the outlook changed after every game. So, speed to market was key for brands looking to make a mark. Tim Hortons was able to respond to the Raptors' success in real time by working with Zulubot, the content production arm of Zulu Alpha Kilo.

To mark the team's first appearance in the NBA Finals, Zulubot produced a simple but effective clip for social media that signalled the Raps were coming for the defending champs, the Golden State Warriors. The piece evokes a famous movie scene with a pair of coffee cups on a dashboard shaken by incoming dinosaurs. It was posted on Twitter before Game 1 of the Finals with the text: "From prehistoric to historic. Let's go Raptors!" It came together in less than 24 hours, thanks to Zulubot's always-on dedicated, social production team.

Zak Mroueh, CCO and founder, says the video wouldn't have been possible if his team had approached the production conventionally. The in-house production was set up in a few hours and shot in Zulu's parking lot. "We had to move at lightning speed," he says. "This was only possible because our production team was one floor down, ready to mobilize instantly."

For this reason, Mroueh calls Zulubot the agency's "secret

weapon." By tailoring production approaches to a client's budget, Zulubot is able to support brand and retail ideas that otherwise might not come together. "In the past, ideas would die because of production realities," he says. "With Zulubot, we're able to make the impossible possible. The team finds a way to pull it off."

The company's success at offering nimble production to clients can be seen in its growth. In the last year, Zulubot has doubled in size and now has 19 employees, allowing it to offer full production services to clients.

Executive producer Tom Evans says all this has helped Zulu's internal creatives lean more on Zulubot, when they previously might have been skeptical about an in-house production studio. "They have seen first-hand how our production process gives a crazy last-minute idea a greater chance of seeing the light of day."

But Zulubot isn't just about agility, they add real value in terms of craft, storytelling expertise and surprisingly high production values. The work has been as varied as the needs of clients, from Snap lenses and Insta stories to longer-form video pieces.

When Tims wanted to tell longer stories for its Tim Horton Children's Foundation, Zulubot shot two documentary-style films about people who were impacted by the foundation's camp as children. Evans says, "Within a short time-frame, we were able to mobilise quickly and sculpt powerful and emotive films with high production values usually limited to more traditional production approaches."

To support TV spots for the sore throat gargle, Betadine, Zulubot created a comically awkward social campaign shot on cellphones, in which actors would suddenly and publicly gargle Betadine.

For HomeEquity Bank's sponsorship of the Royal Canadian Legion, Zulubot took two different approaches to encourage young people to buy a digital poppy. First, an online film called #PauseToRemember asked young gamers to lay down their controllers on November 11 at 11 am. Secondly, the studio took a more emotional strategy, dubbing a 95-year-old World War II veteran "the world's oldest social media influencer" in a film that shows him learning how to buy a digital poppy. The message: if he can do it, surely you can.

Zulubot's plan this year is to build on its experience with agile production and expand into a full digital content studio, bringing together digital content specialists from creative, strategy and production. The studio has also set its sights on going direct to clients not currently on Zulu's roster. If they come directly to Zulubot, they can access select parts of the agency as well, Mroueh says, calling it reverse engineering to how Zulubot currently works.

"Zulubot's mission is to change the paradigm of how people are used to working," he adds. "We're fighting against the preconceived notion that to create great content you need to produce things in a traditional way."



Zulu Alpha Kilo has a history of short films sending up the ad industry. Its most recent, produced by Zulubot and its in-house director, tells the tale of what happens when an agency sells out, as told through the lens of a kid's lemonade stand.



When Tims wanted to tell longer stories for its Tim Horton Children's Foundation, Zulubot shot two documentary-style films about people whose lives were impacted by going to the foundation's camp as children.



The tagline for the sore throat gargle, Betadine is "Feel the sign? Betadine." To illustrate that people should grab the meds the moment they feel the sign of a sore throat, Zulubot filmed users gargling in public spaces, to delightfully awkward effect.



For Remembrance Day, Zulubot produced two videos for HomeEquity Bank's sponsorship of the Royal Canadian Legion. Dubbing a 95-year-old WWII veteran 'the oldest social media influencer', and showing him learn how to buy a digital poppy, drove home the message 'if he can do it', surely you can. Another piece urged gamers to lay down their controllers on November 11 at 11am to #PauseToRemember WWII vets.



Toronto-based clothing brand, Peace Collective, decided to #UnravelHate by removing the thread from a 'Make America Great Again' hat and using that very same thread to create the 'Welcome to Canada' toque. Immigrants, refugees, and newcomers to Canada then reacted to both garments in a film by Zulubot.



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Fyfe Shader unlocks access to top directorial talent

The freelance filmmaker model lets brands up their content game

THE PAST DECADE HAS SEEN significant changes to how agencies, brands and production companies work. Those changes have been the result of client needs, including smaller budgets, mass deliverables, integrated and interactive components, and tighter timelines. Brands and agencies may be producing more work in-house, but there's still one skill they can't easily access: directing talent. Fyfe Shader offers a solution.

Launched in November 2019 as an offshoot of content production studio HeydSaffer, Fyfe Shader manages independent directors, helping them get opportunities without committing to an exclusive relationship with a production company. This model, which is new to Canada yet has proven results in Europe and Asia, also allows brands and agencies to work closer with content creators.

Fyfe Shader offers a pool of independent directors for agencies and brands, allowing them to up their creative game for internal productions. "This keeps pace with the changing relationships we see in the advertising industry where teams are built differently," says co-founder Kevin Saffer. "Fyfe Shader's mission is to build the next level of Canadian talent and see its directors working as much as possible."

Fyfe Shader directors have been deployed to in-house divisions of brands and agencies and to production companies. One of the first completed projects had Paul Constantakis directing a short film with SickKids' in-house creative department.

"More than ever, work is coming from places beyond advertising agencies, and many directors don't see this work because they are

Kevin Saffer and Cynthia Heyd, founders of content production studio HeydSaffer, put on new masks with Fyfe Shader, their new company that allows brands and agencies to more easily access directing talent.

exclusive to a single production company," says Cynthia Heyd, co-founder of Fyfe Shader. "At the same time, in-house agency production units and brands are scrambling for the same freelance talent. What's new and disruptive about Fyfe Shader is an open acknowledgment that more directors are going freelance. We provide a solution to organize and support their career growth and business management as they work for a variety of different production entities."

Saffer says a core part of the model is supporting directors by helping grow their careers and providing business management. "The directors we manage are varied in terms of skill level and experience," he says. "Some want help with managing their schedules, billing and business affairs, whereas newer directors might need more help when it comes to exposure and building contacts."

Fyfe Shader is currently working with 16 directors, including established names Matt Eastman and Lisa Mann. After his experience on the SickKids film, Constantakis says he sees value in the approach. "Early in my career, I believed the only route to becoming an established director was through production company representation," he says. "The more I've progressed, the

less I saw the benefit and the more I protected my independence."

Heyd says that just as companies such as Sesler and Mantle represent DPs and The Assembly Reps manages editors, this is a natural evolution for the directing community. "Fyfe Shader directors have a non-exclusive relationship with the support they need, and agencies, brands and production companies can access them and plug them into their model," she says. "In an advertising production landscape where the rules are changing, Fyfe Shader is positioning itself to be the go-to for independent directing talent."



Working with SickKids inhouse team, Paul Constantakis directed a spot that tells the touching story of a SickKids patient who shares some Valentine's Day love with a patient at Mount Sinai Hospital, located directly across the street.



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The H.U.G. Collective: (front row) Derek Sewell and Josefina Nadurata, Holiday Films/H.U.G. co-founders; (back row) Michael Corbiere, Nimble Content/The Cavalry exec producer; Mike Hachey, Recess Post exec producer; and Andrew Lynch, Nimble Content/The Cavalry exec producer

Holiday Films' one-stop H.U.G. solution

The full-service production network adds ease and value

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON. For Holiday Films, helping clients make the most of their budgets, regardless of size, was reason enough to package its various offerings and off-shoots under one neat banner.

Holiday United Group (H.U.G.) launched in July 2019 as a one-stop production network designed to help clients work in increasingly flexible and creative ways. It formally unifies Holiday Films (broadcast production), Nimble Content (online video and digital projects), Recess Post (editorial, colour and VFX), and The Cavalry (stills photography), offering clients end-to-end service while delivering faster turnaround times.

The idea for H.U.G. grew out of Holiday's experience with Nimble Content, which it launched in 2014 to provide a production solution for clients in need of maximizing small budgets for digital projects.

"We saw with Nimble Content that to make budgets work, we had to include post," says Josefina Nadurata, H.U.G. co-founder and executive producer. "So when we were looking for ways to be creative problem-solvers for agencies at all budgets, we knew we had to include a wrap around approach to production."

This model appeals to small agencies and clients that don't have the infrastructure to manage a complete production process, adds Derek Sewell, H.U.G. co-founder and executive producer. But the H.U.G. offering also brings the efficiency developed with Nimble Content to the largest broadcast productions.

"Agency producers can take one budget and give it to us to figure out," he says. "We can borrow from post and put it into production if that's what the project needs. It allows for flexibility and ensures the highest-quality end product."

Now operating out of larger offices in Toronto's Distillery District, H.U.G. is attracting global business including U.S. and U.K. agencies.

"We're not trying to be an agency, but we tend to see outlier projects that don't fall into an agency's scope," Sewell says. "We see scripts from senior freelance creatives and from clients who have developed their own scripts. We're in a position to guide them through the entire production process and we're transparent and supportive throughout. We recognize these may be uncharted waters so we do our best to simplify the process."

Nadurata says the H.U.G. model is especially valuable to charities and not-for-profits and the agencies that work with them. In 2018, Holiday set up Holiday for Good, a division dedicated to creating work that promotes positive change.

"We are proving to be that go-to place to help social purpose clients better tell their stories, and in turn align with and drive their capacity to generate significant revenue" says Nadurata, noting that relationships with charities can help develop the reels of newer Canadian directors from Nimble Content while also giving back.

Delivering great service and creative is also of utmost importance. "Being all under one roof, we're able to bring the culture of Holiday and Nimble across all divisions," Nadurata says, noting that she and Sewell work closely with Nimble Content EPs Andrew Lynch and Michael Corbiere and Mike Hachey, EP for Recess Post. "Our team does things purposefully; we're hands-on across all companies and approach each job as one voice."

"We're not about being cheap, either," Sewell adds. "We're about better value. Whether it's a smaller or larger budget, we make sure we put our clients' money on the screen."



Clockwise from top left: HelloFresh "Hungry Hearts," directed by Jesse Senko for Taxi; President's Choice Children's Charity "Raindrops," directed by Melanie Chung for John St.; Sonnet "Exercise," directed by Bob Rice for Whitney Creative; "RBC Training Ground" directed by Adam Azimov for RBC



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Thinkingbox leadership team (left to right): chief technology officer Paul Solomon, chief creative officer Michael Kern, and chief executive officer Amir Sahba

Thinkingbox's expanding talent network

The Vancouver company's acquisitions give studio access to a roster of specialists under one banner



WHEN AGENCIES WANT TO SCALE UP and gain access to a broader swath of clients, they frequently look to holding companies for greater opportunities. Production companies have no such option. Without the long-term revenue channels that come from agency-of-record relationships, production companies aren't the kind of dance partner holding companies are looking for.

So when Vancouver-headquartered interactive and experiential production studio Thinkingbox wanted to expand its offerings to better meet the high-volume cross-platform demands of clients, it created its own solution. As with holding companies, which look to specialized firms to round out capacity, Thinkingbox acquired two shops to bring together a network of like-minded and skilled creators specialized in experiential, digital and content production and delivery.

Thinkingbox, which also has offices in Toronto and Los Angeles,

bought Salt Lake City digital and live-action company Welikesmall in January, followed the next month by New York digital production studio Aarra. Founders from both have joined Thinkingbox's leadership team. Two other acquisitions are in late stages of completion for 2020 as the company is also opening a new 20,000-square-foot production facility at its flagship Vancouver location.

"As there is more demand for production, there's a need for more support and scalability for production first shops," says Thinkingbox CEO Amir Sahba. "There is a place in the market for larger-scale production power to deliver to a larger group of clients."

Core to Thinkingbox's growth strategy is finding companies that share its commitment to creating work in-house.

"Part of our DNA is that every project that goes out our door has been done by us. That's one of the key reasons we're successful – when you know the people under your roof, you know your capabilities and are able to consistently deliver," says Sahba. "We're looking for companies that believe in the same thing; they execute on what they promise to a client as opposed to being coordinators of outside talent."

This dedication to excellence in execution has resulted in breakthrough work for Thinkingbox clients. For Verizon and Momentum Worldwide the shop created a fully immersive experience in New York for fans to get a sense of what it's like to be Shawn Mendes. The project included a microsite to drive traffic to an event featuring the pop star meeting contest winners, and the live experience immersed fans in his creative process.

It also collaborated with Wrangler and Mother New York to capitalize on Lil Nas X's shout-out to the iconic jeanswear brand in his breakout hit "Old Town Road." Thinkingbox designed a microsite that leveraged machine learning to recognize a "Wrangler booty." Using mobile phone cameras, the site scanned and detected the Wrangler logo on jeans, which unlocked exclusive behind-the-scenes content from the video featuring Lil Nas X and Billy Ray Cyrus.

On the experiential front, Thinkingbox, Innocean Worldwide Canada and car brand Genesis Motors came together to create an immersive visual story at Toronto Pearson Airport. Travelers passing through a moving walkway at Terminal 1 were instantly immersed in a motion-graphics story about the creation of the G70 midsize sedan projected on 11 x 55" LCD displays. The project took over a year to produce and is active over the course of two plus years.

Moving forward, Sahba says Thinkingbox is looking to bolster its creative capacity with companies specializing in micro content and social content, as well as motion graphics and animation. The benefit for these companies is the ability to deliver the full scope of production on projects that couldn't be tackled alone.

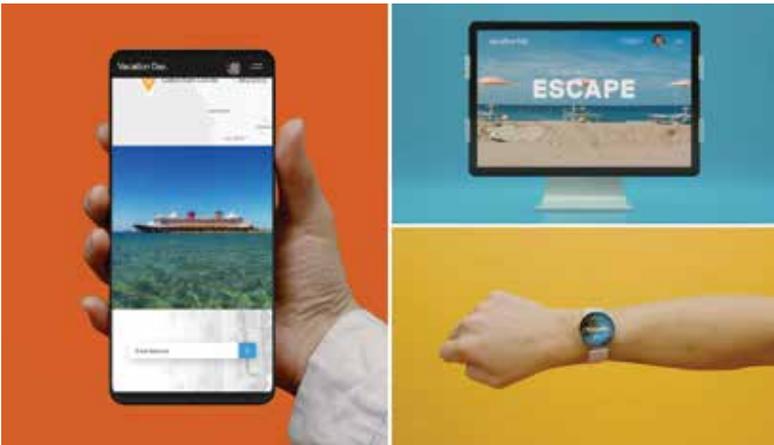
For Thinkingbox's clients and partners, meanwhile, the beefed-up company offers a convenient project-delivery solution due to the network of specialized talent under one banner. "Our clients can trust that we can bring any idea to life as best as possible. We believe this model is best for the market and now we're executing on that model."



For National Fry Day, Thinkingbox worked with McDonald's Canada and Cossette in collaboration with WondrMakr and Quiver to create a kiosk that allowed fry fans to proclaim their love from a mountain top via a massive mock drive-thru.



For the 2019 Riot Games season, Thinkingbox developed branded key art, a motion graphics package, a digital client hub experience, and a microsite.



Thinkingbox created a new narrative that speaks to the utility of Adobe Experience Cloud. From live-action footage to 2D and 3D motion graphics, they created three videos that showcased how Analytics, Campaign, and Sites could help a marketer in their day-to-day lives both in and outside of work.



For *Avengers: Endgame's* launch, Thinkingbox, We Are Unlimited and Marvel transformed McDonald's flagships in New York and Chicago into Avengers recruitment centers.



For the newly overhauled Mazda3, Thinkingbox partnered with JWT to create an interactive kiosk for the 2019 auto show circuit featuring a magic mirror, tablet display and traditional Japanese artifacts that, when touched, triggered content that told the story behind the design.



For Verizon and Momentum Worldwide, Thinkingbox created a fully immersive experience that gave Shawn Mendes super fans an inside look at how he crafts his hit songs, from inspiration to performing on tour.



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When Canadian Tire set out to create a dreamy winter wonderland for its winsome, heartwarming Christmas tale, there was only one problem: they were shooting in August. Alter Ego was tapped to bring the storybook world to life – and to add a lot of snow.

Alter Ego brings vision to life

The post shop's full-service offering delivers ambitious briefs on budget

GROWTH STRATEGIES VARY FROM COMPANY to company. Some race to keep up with client demand while others pivot into completely new waters. For Toronto's Alter Ego, the trajectory from colour-grading shop to one of Canada's preeminent full-service post-production companies can be summed up with one simple principle: if you build it, they will come.

Since 2007, when the company established itself as the first to bring non-linear grading to the Canadian commercial market, it has grown from 14 employees to 45 and now boasts five colouring suites, five finishing suites, plus compositing, CG and motion-graphics capabilities.

"When we started Alter Ego, we became known as tech leaders in colour grading," says executive producer and partner Greg Edgar. "A few years later we wanted to get into bigger and better visual effects. Even though we weren't known for it, we invested in the tech and space and talent to drive that forward. We've always had this mentality that if we do the best work we can, that will bring more great work."

This investment – and leap of faith – has resulted in an exceptional client experience. By focusing on developing an efficient workflow and a collaborative culture, Alter Ego can move shots seamlessly from the colour suite to Flame VFX to CG with ease. "If clients are sitting in a VFX suite and want to make a change on colour, they can do it on the spot," Edgar says. The company can also livestream sessions, making it easy for teams to collaborate on a job no matter where they are.

Because agencies increasingly have in-house departments that can handle smaller post work, Edgar says the company is seeing projects that are larger in scope and have more visual effects.

What hasn't changed, though, is the need to make the most of budgets on a tight timeline.

"Most clients come to us with an idea and a budget and ask us to

figure out how to make it happen," Edgar says. "Generally, the idea is bigger than the budget, which is why we encourage people to bring us in early in the process. In cases like that we can be creative problem-solvers and offer solutions up front that save time and money."

That's how Alter Ego helped Canadian Tire create a storybook winter wonderland in August. Working closely with director Pekka Hara during pre-production, the team created pre-visualization complete with camera moves and landscape references, as well as full CG shots and compositing.

It's also how a trio of astronauts engaged in a light game of frisbee in space in an AFPM commercial.

Beyond commercial work, Alter Ego has worked on films including *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part*.

As the company has grown, Edgar says Alter Ego has retained its boutique feeling, something he owes to an environment that encourages teamwork and nurtures its talent.

"We have a great team that's very collaborative both internally and externally," he says. "Our people love to be creative and get their hands on projects and add something to it. I feel like that's what separates us from competitors."



Alter Ego delivered on an ambitious extraterrestrial brief for AFPM. In "Space Playground," the company created a vibrant spacecape in which a trio of astronauts engage in a gravity-altered game of frisbee.



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