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THERE'S NO FFWD BUTTON FOR 2020

(WE LOOKED)

*How Rethink
pulled off double
AOY Gold despite
all hell breaking
loose*



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Knix – a 2020 Brand of the Year – is all grown up. Pushing eight, the company is maturing even more, moving its marketing from aspiration to inspiration.



15

Brands of the Year

While 2020 may be a year of the digital reset – deeper, broader shifts at many of *strategy's* BOY winners were already well underway.

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Agency of the Year

All the big and small creative, design, digital, media and PR firms, coupled with the work that broke through.

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Telus turns 20

The telecom hasn't left its brand's side since 2000. We look at how that loyalty has paid handsome dividends over the years.

4 Editorial Playing catch-up at warp speed • **8 Upfronts** Could ghost kitchens and dark stores be retail's solve for the stay-at-home era? Plus, all the top news hits from the year and *strategy's* goals to drive BIPOC equity in the marketing industry • **10 Certain uncertainty** Brand and agency execs congregate (and commiserate) over Zoom on scenario planning their way out of the pandemic • **82 Back Page** FUSE Create's puts a positive spin on a year we'd rather forget



ON THE COVER:

While 2020 is not the worst year recorded by man (536 A.D. takes that horrendous title), it was certainly one worthy of a FFWD button. If only we found one. OK, so it wasn't *all* bad. Dolphins were, after all, spotted in Venice canals. Clean hands finally came back in fashion. Sing-along-lockdowns provided hours of entertainment. And everything Rethink touched seemingly turned to Gold. While we'd love to claim the "easy" button cover idea for ourselves, we have FUSE Create's Chloe Kim, Samuel Rudykoff and Darren Marranca to thank for planting a seed of the idea while pitching concepts for our back page. Oh and we're still on the hunt for a FFWD 2021 button. Just in case.

The great acceleration

Time slowed to a slug, sloth and snail's pace in 2020. Yet we all had to move at warp speed to mitigate the blow served to businesses by the coronacrisis. The irony of it all.

So much took place over the last nine months. Beyond the corporate world's own accelerated shifts (hello remote working for the unforeseeable future), this year shall go down in history as the one that hit FFW on things like the evolution of cities, the self-love movement, the burnout generation, cord-cutting, deglobalization, the list goes on.

All of these accelerations, however, pale in comparison to the digital revolution. The year started with many simply trying to migrate to or perfect

the art of ecommerce. And it's ending with a roaring virtual experiences economy where you can shop, dine, work, learn, watch, date, dance, exercise, do anything-and-everything online and in-place. That's how fast the world spun.

Many of 2020's pivots and accelerations were fuelled by already-existing trends, the experts say. Some of this year's AOY medalers would have to agree.

For instance, Rethink, the competition's biggest winner two years in a row, had developed a creative approach well before the pandemic, treating every piece of marketing that it creates as an "experience." The agency's Sean MacDonald told us that its not-so-secret method was only heightened as lockdowns left people entertainment and experience-starved.

Meanwhile, one of this year's Media AOY winners, UM, saw its consulting practice jump to be a more robust offering with teachable workshops, industry

guides and such to help its clients through the crisis.

And over at both big and small AOYers BBDO and 123w, big bets were previously made on in-house production, which has seemingly paid off as the need for speed, flexibility and affordability becomes more of a client requisite.

It's clear that the pandemic isn't changing the world so much as it's accelerating it. The only way to survive moving at warp speed is to keep building (or simply fixing) the plane mid-flight.

Jennifer Horn, editor & content director, *strategy*



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Each year, the Canadian Young Lions Competitions bring out the best young talent in the advertising and marketing industry. This year, 375 teams across five competition categories tackled a challenging brief under extreme time pressure for their chance to qualify and compete in the global Young Lions Competitions. Competition is fierce. Congratulations to our winning teams!

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Kristina Komhyr
Customer Marketing Manager,
Coca-Cola

MEDIA

Dustin Wilson
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Naveed Ahmed
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PRINT

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Senior Copywriter, Cossette

FILM

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Director, Kabane Brand Agency

Alexis Thériault-Laliberté
Creative Director, Kabane Brand Agency

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Each year, submissions for the Young Lions Competitions are judged by an esteemed panel of industry experts. Juries of experienced advertising and marketing executives review, debate and determine the top winning teams. Thank you to our jury chairs and judges.

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SVP Editorial Director,
Brunico Communications,
Jury Chair, Print, Digital and Film Juries

MARKETERS

Susan Irving
Chief Marketing Officer,
Kruger Products Ltd,
Jury Chair, Marketers Jury

MEDIA

Cathy Collier
Chief Executive Officer,
OMD Canada
Jury Chair, Media Jury

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ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Short-term pivots, meet long-term brand-building

THE ROLLERCOASTER OF EMOTION experienced during my first foray into real estate felt easier to tackle on my most recent home-buying journey. Could it be that 2020 has weaned us off measuring success through the achievement of planned outcomes (or our obsession with setting concrete plans in the first place)? The year has been filled with plans A, B and C, but what happens if we need plans D through F as well?

We've all rallied behind so many projects and tried to launch at record speed, only to have to let go at the last moment due to unforeseen circumstances. At the same time, the work we've come back with has been equally great, sometimes even better. So perhaps this one step forward, three steps back kind of year lets us go with the flow and recognize the freeing role of impermanence in plans.

Our final media roundtable of the year tackles this planning conundrum (p.11). How do you continue to plan for an unpredictable future? Senior marketers and planners provided insight into how they're addressing consumer needs. Kruger CMO Susan Irving talked about how the company has moved to a scenario planning framework, relying on mild, medium and severe pandemic scenarios that help it navigate with a shared map and journey overview.

While building brands this year has not been easy, the team at *strategy* chronicles some stand-outs in our annual Brands of the Year competition. Guiding alpha brands requires a long-game strategy, so

in a year of pauses and short-term pivots, our 2020 BOYs benefited from building blocks they'd already put in place. The big bets and consistent strategies enabled them to respond to abrupt and ongoing consumer shifts. So kudos for picking a lane, acting on insights and investing in change.

Maple Leaf Foods (p.16) weathered a storm once before and began a long journey to do right by their consumers. From stripping down its ingredients, investing in plant proteins and going 100% carbon neutral, the company has become a case study for brands looking to reset.

Several years ago, Knix saw a disconnect between its retail strategy and brand, and embarked on a plan to rectify it (p.24), flipping to a DTC model to best serve its community. By putting its customers first, Knix went from a hero brand to a major category player. And its authentic connection with consumers has enabled it to tackle hard conversations head on.

Sobeys (p.18) invested heavily in elevating the role of brand marketing to create a more compelling consumer proposition. By speeding up timelines to enter the heated grocery delivery wars during lockdown, it was able to challenge existing players' lead by relieving pain points in the online shopping experience.

Lululemon, meanwhile, doubled down on investing in community (p.22). The Canadian-grown athleisure brand supported its global community by taking

ambassador-led workouts online, re-tooling the sales offering, launching a loyalty program and investing in the right tech at the right time.

And Collective Arts has stayed true to its investment in the arts while growing the Ontario-based brewery out of a start-up mentality and into a global brand (p.26). By starting with a clear purpose, it has been able to differentiate, spill into new categories and tackle global markets using its original formula.

Strategy has also been in planning mode for most of the year, and we are excited to be resuming our regularly scheduled bi-monthly magazine issues; our Forums and our awards programs are also restarting in 2021.

While we don't know what the future holds (along with everyone else), there's a continued desire for big ideas to be shared and celebrated. Our AToMiC program turns 10 next year and we're excited to see this year's crop of boundary-breaking work. We're also getting started on planning for our AToMiC conference, which will look at the most impactful content marketing initiatives and programs from this year. Stay tuned for more details.

As the year (thankfully) comes to a close, I think we can all agree that in 2020, hindsight takes on new meaning. And with no handbook to guide us through this \$#@T storm, necessity is indeed the mother of innovation.

**Lisa Faktor, associate publisher
*Strategy/MiC/Stimulant/CARD***

PERHAPS THIS ONE STEP FORWARD, THREE STEPS BACK KIND OF YEAR LETS US RECOGNIZE THE FREEING ROLE OF IMPERMANENCE IN PLANS.



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A NEW D&I ADVISORY BOARD AND GOALS FOR 2021

Earlier this summer, *strategy* and *Media in Canada* pledged to do better when it comes to elevating voices of colour across its editorial products and programs. As a first step towards that commitment, the publications convened a Diversity & Inclusion advisory board.

Clockwise from top left: The D&I advisory board consists of Dhaval Bhatt, Danica Nelson, Terry Rogers, Ishma Alexander-Huet, Jefferson Darrell and Sabrina Babooram.

The initial focus of the board is to help address the publications' role in increasing BIPOC equity within the marketing industry. Going forward, the brands hope to expand the board's scope and make-up to address other forms of discrimination and prejudice.

The inaugural board consists of six members who identify as Black, Indigenous or People of Colour, representing various disciplines, functions and levels of seniority across creative, media, communications and PR, brand marketing and account management.

They are Ishma Alexander-Huet, VP of client advice and management, Initiative; Sabrina Babooram, community partnerships lead, Dairy Farmers of Ontario; Dhaval Bhatt, creative director, Rethink; Jefferson Darrell, founder, Breakfast Culture; Danica Nelson, senior product marketing communications manager, Telus; and Terry Rogers, account manager, Corus Tempo.

In addition, *strategy* pledged to have its conference speakers, advisory boards and juries reflect Canadian diversity, using Statistics Canada census projections as a guide. As the brand strives to represent the industry as a whole, it believes goals should be based on national statistics. And here's why that's important: the industry's mission is to speak inclusively to all Canadians, so the people creating marketing – and thereby influencing culture – should understand, respect and reflect the cultural reality of the entire audience.

Aligning *strategy* with national data means that, in 2021, its event speakers, advisory board members and jurors should be 3.4% Black, 22.1% PoC and 5.1% Indigenous. By 2023, it plans to have their representation grow again in lockstep with general population projections, reaching 4.1% Black, 23.4% PoC, and 5.4% Indigenous.

In some cases, this will require moving the needle as many as 13 percentage points between now and the end of the next year. As part of those commitments, the brand will publicly report the data once it has the systems in place to track it accordingly.

– the *strategy* team

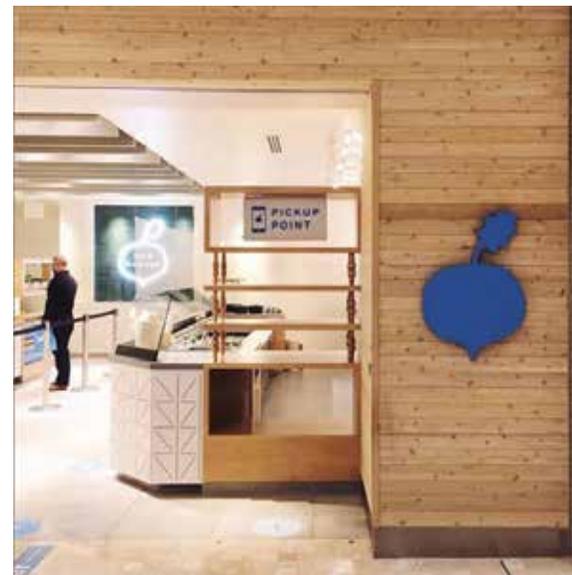
GHOST CONCEPTS SUDDENLY APPEAR

By Justin Dallaire

In a sign that COVID-19 will spur long-term innovation across bricks-and-mortar, a growing number of businesses are experimenting with “ghost” concepts.

It started with “ghost kitchens” (a.k.a. “dark kitchens”), professional kitchen facilities used exclusively for online delivery. In recent months, many businesses have started using them to reach restaurant-goers and increase sales at a time when people are staying home.

In the spring, Recipe Unlimited opened Ultimate Kitchens, a delivery-only location through which customers can order food



from its various banners, including Harvey's, Swiss Chalet and Montana's. Meanwhile, Kitchen Hub opened a food hall in Toronto, giving restaurants access to space they can rent to prep meals that are delivered through partners including SkipTheDishes, DoorDash and UberEats.

In a different take on the model, Mad Radish, a fast-casual restaurant chain for “gourmet” salads and bowls, recently began serving pizzas and burritos in Toronto and

Ottawa under two new banners, Luisa's Burritos & Bowls and Revival Pizza. Each brand has their own digital storefront on UberEats, but the food all comes from one Mad Radish store. Founder and CEO David Segal (also the founder of DavidsTea) tells *strategy* that the model will help boost sales without the risks or operational costs of opening physical storefronts for the two new brands.

While suddenly more relevant, the "ghost kitchen" concept isn't new. Based on a model in the U.S., Toronto-based Dekotas Group opened Ghost Kitchens in 2014, serving different menu concepts out of the same kitchen space. It now has 20 such locations across Canada.

This trend emerged in response to pre-COVID declines in restaurant dining, notes Robert Carter, managing partner at StratonHunter Group, which helps foodservice brands digitize their operations. Meanwhile, online orders placed through third-party apps were also already growing in the double digits, he says. "This idea of dark kitchens is the way the future of the market is going to evolve."

With the pandemic, however, the trend has infiltrated other categories. In grocery, Whole

Left:

Mad Radish is dabbling with its own version of a "dark kitchen" for two newly launched brands.

Foods opened a "dark" store exclusively used for online orders. The purpose-built location acts more like a warehouse – with longer aisles and no fancy checkout

displays – helping parent co. Amazon keep abreast of booming demand for online groceries.

Even CPG brands are getting in on the action. Kraft Heinz Canada recently transformed the kitchens of its Toronto and Montreal office buildings (currently ghost towns) into dark kitchens that test and serve comfort food to customers through online-only Kitchen 57 and Cuisine 5à7.

"We are using platforms like Kitchen 57 and Cuisine 5à7 to come up with innovative food options that blend Kraft Heinz products and that may also serve as growth opportunities for our foodservice customers," says the CPG's chief administrative officer, Av Maharaj. For example, its "Death by Cheesecake" dessert, offered through the kitchens, includes five Kraft Heinz brands: Philly cream cheese, Kraft Hazelnut Spread, Kraft Peanut Butter, Cool Whip and Baker's Chocolate.

"Ghost kitchens are here to stay and represent a growth opportunity as food consumption at home increases," adds Maharaj. "They're a platform for new ideas, products and choices as the food landscape continues to evolve."

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

To recap 2020, we dug into the stats to find the stories that made the most waves in *strategy's* daily news.



MOST-READ AGENCY NEWS:

The industry knew something was afoot when several high-profile creatives began leaving their posts for "undisclosed opportunities." Those rumours were confirmed in late March with the launch of Broken Heart Love Affair, an agency founded by CSO Jason Chaney, co-CCOs Carlos Moreno, Denise Rossetto and Todd Mackie, and chief business officer Beverley Hammond (pictured above). Many thought they were, um, brave for debuting during peak COVID. But the group hit the ground running with work for Kids Help Phone, Kruger and other clients.



MOST-READ CAMPAIGN:

In April, as the going got tougher for those on the pandemic frontlines, Dove worked with Ogilvy to reframe its "Real Beauty" messaging, highlighting the courage of healthcare workers with their faces bruised and lined from wearing masks and PPE. The spot's "Courage is Beautiful" tagline captured a broader Canadian sentiment.

MOST-READ PIVOT:

Tim Hortons had big eco-friendly plans for its annual Roll Up The Rim promotion heading into the spring. Tims planned to hand out 1.8 million reusable mugs at its stores – but then COVID-19 happened, forcing the company to overhaul its plans. In a matter of days it unveiled a new randomized draw at the cash, designed to ensure Roll Up could live on, while also protecting customers' health and safety.



MOST-READ INDUSTRY NEWS:

In the wake of racial justice protests, a group of professionals released an open letter, calling on agencies and clients to commit to 15 steps to improve representation of Black, Indigenous and PoC talent across the industry. To date, more than 590 individual people, and more than 90 organizations, have signed the pledge. The group that spearheaded the letter, People of Colour in Advertising and Marketing, continues working towards holding the industry accountable. **JD**

BLM PHOTO: CLAY BANKS/UNSPLASH



Rehearsing for a future you can't predict

BY BREE RODY AND JUSTIN DALLAIRE

The certain uncertainty of today means having to scenario plan your way out of the pandemic. Marketers are forced to craft a new brand script with a new consumer cast. How much planning is enough? Or how much forecasting is too much? Whatever happened to good ol' intuition? *Media in Canada* and *strategy* "sat down" with marketers, media execs and strategists over Zoom to discuss how to predict an unpredictable future in our final roundtable for 2020.

How are you balancing long-term planning in the face of continued uncertainty?

Starcom's Christine Saunders: Last year, we would have talked about three-year plans. I can't imagine writing a three-year plan now. I think long-term planning is for 2021.

Canadian Tire's Eva Salem: When you're a large organization, you have to plan out multiple years in advance. Everything from inventory to supply chain, these are massive things that require a lot of time and planning. Balancing between those things has been a challenge.

Saunders: It's also made us question all of our processes and our structures. Maybe it's the right time to ask, "Is this the right way of doing things?" We can't reinvent while in the fire, but it's interesting, when you talk about future planning, supply lines and distribution, these are long-term things. I think everyone's questioning the way things were done.

Leo Burnett's Brent Nelsen: I think the pandemic has affected clients differently. Some brands are grappling with long-term questions, [like], "If everyone banks online, do I even need a branch?" Scenario planning has made a star-struck return.

Kruger's Susan Irving: When consumers started pantry-loading in February, [Kruger was] just getting ducks in a row, cancelling advertising and having to rewrite the whole back-end of our plans. We were in crisis mode, but then we hired Deloitte to help, and now our planning is scenario planning. Depending on where the economy is going, across the entire business, we have a mild plan, a moderate plan and a severe plan. We are now ready and can pivot depending on where the pandemic goes.

But I think it's funny, because we all write three-year plans, we all write annual plans, but

Top Left:

GRACE AHLBERG, SVP, head of business insights & analytics, MediaCom

SUSAN IRVING, CMO, Kruger Products

BRENT NELSEN, CSO, Leo Burnett

Bottom Right:

EVA SALEM, VP marketing, Canadian Tire

CHRISTINE SAUNDERS, president, Starcom

I'm sure I could look at each of you and ask, "Have you ever been in a year in which the plan you wrote was the one you executed?" It took a pandemic for all of us to realize that, yes, you need a three-year strat plan – but I think we all know that plans change every three months.

Salem: And even the objectives have changed so much. We're being asked in some situations to throttle back demand and lead-generation because we don't want to attract too many people to stores. Problems we've never had before!

MediaCom's Grace Ahlberg: What I found interesting is that it's forced us to take a step back and question things. I love the fact that we're back to being curious. With established brands, you go on auto-pilot. You think you know your customers. COVID has forced us to question, "Do I really know this customer?" It's almost like, back to the good ol' planning days of when we did that relentless research.

So many marketers had specific business challenges, from keeping inventory stocked to calming shoppers, during the lockdown. How did you balance putting out fires while also focusing on the brand?

Salem: We tried to focus on channels that give us as much flexibility as possible. Buying and planning TV ads – when you're not even sure if you're going to have that product in stock for a few months – was really challenging. For the hard-working, SKU-specific stuff, we're trying to keep it as digital as possible so we can be as responsive as possible. With traditional media, we're focusing on brand-led messaging, on our role within the country, because the back-end stuff doesn't matter as much.

Irving: Given that [Kruger's] products are essential, we've kind of backed away from communicating functional benefits and innovation, because we don't know if we're going to have those products in stock. One of the Cashmere ads we had on TV in Jan-Feb said it was "exclusively available everywhere." Well, during the pandemic, we weren't. Not until we caught up with demand. So we needed to pivot our strategy, and that's how "Unapologetically Human" was born, where we talk about putting the consumer first. It was more of a strategic company and portfolio play.

Several of you mentioned scenario planning and how it's become important again. What impact has that had on your resources, particularly on the agency side?

Saunders: The media business as a whole has really grown in terms of tools and automation. And thank goodness for that, because I think it would have crushed us if we didn't have the automation.

Yeah, it's been tough, but no more than on our clients. If we're working hard, so are the

clients. I would also say we made some good bets earlier this year and late last year where we really invested in platform specialists.

Nelsen: Our clients are involving us in every single call. Where I can see a change in the agency structure in my discipline of planning is a bit of a hollowing out of the bottom rung.

“WE'RE THROTTLING BACK DEMAND AND LEAD-GENERATION BECAUSE WE DON'T WANT TO ATTRACT TOO MANY PEOPLE TO STORES. PROBLEMS WE'VE NEVER HAD BEFORE!” **Eva Salem**

“The questions that clients are facing are usually really big. Look at our airline clients: are they even going to have a business at the end of this? Each industry is going to have its different scenarios based on economic return, or structural changes that will happen regardless of the economy. And those questions require more senior talent with maybe a little grey in



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“With the amount of change we’ve experienced in our industry, discussions like these help identify emerging marketing trends, discover new tech advancements, like artificial intelligence, as well as establishing best practices.

That’s why The Globe supports this roundtable series. It is a deep dive into how we can all work together to build a sustainable Canadian media industry for the future.”

– Andrew Saunders
CRO, The Globe and Mail

To keep investment and to create effective advertising in Canada we **NEED** a strong ecosystem.

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their beards. The questions are complex and the ramifications are significant. It's not a place where junior talent, through no fault of their own, can play a part on their own.

Salem: The distribution of work within organizations right now has been a massive implication. What level people are working at, because of the stakes of the situation, has been a big thing.

The other thing you mentioned is the amount of testing that we're doing. It is crazy. The reality is that it's very difficult to get a real sense of where people's heads are at. We're testing like we've never tested before because it feels like things are so fluid.

“

SOMETIMES WE OVERDO THINGS. THERE'S A LOT OF GUT-FEEL THAT NEEDS TO PLAY A ROLE. WE SHOULDN'T BE OBSESSED WITH NUMBERS TO JUSTIFY OUR ACTIONS **Grace Ahlberg**

”

Ahlberg: There's a need for more research because everything is so unpredictable. However, there's also this crazy frenzy around the need to test and research everything. I think there's a bit of an obsession and a bubble in terms of how much we think human beings change. It took us a billion years of evolution to go from here to there. I don't think COVID is going to change the way we do everything.

People will still behave in an expected way. Of course there will be nuances depending on the industry. Hotels will need to retool. Travel will need to retool. If you're a pet care brand, you do not need to question everything. We do not have to have 500 scenario plans a day. Sometimes we overdo things. As marketers we all agree, there's a lot of uncertainty that's part of our jobs. There's a lot of gut-feel that needs to play a role. We shouldn't always be obsessed with the numbers to justify our actions.

Saunders: That's fair, but I think there are some things that will stick, and we've seen one of the most drastic changes in media consumption of our lifetimes. The commerce channels have changed, and that affects every single client that

we have. Even pet food, you don't only go to your local store now, you buy on Amazon or you even go to a big box store.

Ahlberg: Yeah, I'm with you.

Saunders: Then there's media consumption. I can't watch any more news. I'm done. But the first few months of the pandemic was insane, we were begging clients to go on the air because they'd reach every Canadian!

Mid-pandemic, we hit “peak report period,” with studies looking at who the post-COVID consumer will be. How much have you been relying on this type of research?

Irving: We were getting reports from everyone, not just weekly but daily. We're now in the long middle. We all knew that, come back-to-school, the second wave was going to hit, and unfortunately it has, but in that long middle, things have stabilized for us a bit, but we're spending on research like never before.

Ahlberg: Staying close to the consumer is rule number one, COVID or no-COVID. We should never question whether or not we should be researching. How much, of course, is a different question.

Nelsen: What I'm finding hard to figure out is the variables; there are so many to account for. I like the idea of a long middle, but I don't know if it's leading to a long ending or a quick ending. Even the economists aren't in consensus about the shape of the recession or recovery. The financial well-being of a lot of categories is dependent on gainful employment and an income that's high enough for discretionary payment. No matter how much research I do, I think people are very fearful to talk about it. It's very difficult to forecast.

The need for higher-level hands on the business puts a lot of pressure on leaders in a time when it's difficult to manage virtual teams. So how sustainable is it to have a million Plan As?

Irving: For the past six months, we've just been in survival mode. It's been go, go, go. I look at my team, everyone's tired, everyone's working 24/7. As much as we thought working from

home would be great because the commute is gone, we thought we'd have all this extra time, and we don't. We need more people, but I don't think finance will be happy when I ask for 20 more heads.

If I look at how we're planning mild, medium and severe, we've picked a lane. We're not planning A, B or C. We've picked a lane of what we're planning toward so we can pivot one way or the other.

Salem: The outcome of prioritization is you can start distributing the workload down the chain of command. When you're always on the fly, it sits at a very high level, to Brent's earlier point. The more we're able to pick a lane and prioritize a plan, the more you can start passing it along to other people. Early on, the lower- and mid-level [staff] weren't getting the work they normally get because a lot of it was still living really high. Prioritizing will help on that side for sure.

What does the relationship between brand and agency look like today compared to pre-COVID?

Saunders: The collaboration between media and creative will continue to be very important. That's going to be the next frontier that we need to really focus on. Media vendors have also stepped up tremendously.

Ahlberg: We've always talked about siloes being the number one enemy of how we work together. This has forced us to collaborate more closely and become one ecosystem of different things coming together, with the business at the heart. I think it's fast-forwarded that constant dream we've been chasing for a while now.

Salem: A lot of people were initially looking at efficiency and bringing media in-house and being all about performance. What this has really brought to the surface is the real role from a media agency partnership perspective in terms of strategic thinking. It's so much more than bottom-funnel performance metrics. My hope is that in the future, the expectation isn't that you're turning around back-half-of-the-year plans in 14 days, because that's not sustainable.

Saunders: And it can't excuse bad behaviour. Just because we can do something in two days or two weeks, doesn't mean we should.

1. Bacon

2. Victory

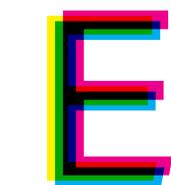
The two best smells. Congrats on being one of strategy's Brands of the Year.
From your friends at Sid Lee.



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2020 BRANDS OF THE YEAR



Every year, *strategy's* editorial team goes hunting far and wide for the brands whose savvy strategies and hard work deserve a little extra recognition. We look across the worlds of retail, CPG, apparel, financial services, auto and more, consult with industry experts, debate amongst ourselves – and crucially, examine company results – before placing five outstanding companies on the Brands of the Year pedestal. But this was no normal year. For many, winning in 2020 has meant hanging onto every new societal restriction, consumer shift and marketing budget change, and finding some way to adapt. However, this year's BOYs did more than make it through COVID-19's early days (relatively) unscathed. In many cases, they thrived, thanks to long-term strategies focused on building truly resilient brands. Maple Leaf Foods focused on creating shared value; Sobeys set itself up to win grocery ecommerce; Lululemon got a running head start on pandemic-proofing apparel retail; Knix built an inclusive brand in the image of its customers; and Collective Arts successfully applied its “formula” to new and exciting categories. Featured on the next few pages are the stories of how they did all this and more. (Note: the BOYs do not appear in any particular order.)



We've gone Beyond.
It wasn't Impossible.



The making of Maple Leaf Foods 2.0

How and why the company adopted CSV, instead of CSR, as part of its sustainability mission.

BY JENNIFER HORN

It was the soggy summer of '08. Cities sat under water and beneath grey skies as Eastern Canada saw its wettest months on record. The water torture test, as one climatologist called it, set the tone for the worst days of CEO Michael McCain's life.

That year his company, Maple Leaf Foods, was linked to the biggest Listeriosis outbreaks in Canadian history. A compassionate man, McCain shouldered the tragedy. He would later tell his sustainability VP Tim Faveri that "23 Canadians died on my watch."

Issues surrounding food safety came to a head as a result of the incident, and McCain vowed to do better. "The buck stops here," he said at the time. The next eight years were about "fixing" the company, says Faveri, as it reinvested in its systems to make good on McCain's promises.

But this isn't a story about containment nor crisis management. It's about reflection and looking to the future, taking the defining moments of a crisis and using it as a catalyst for change. It's a story for any brand living through 2020, the year of the great reset.

SHARE VALUE, NOT CHECKBOXES

After the health crisis, Maple Leaf Foods experienced a turning point, taking on the "responsibility to give back to our communities and to work with others to enhance food security and sustainability."

Over the years, the company reported its sustainability data and rolled out some pretty ambitious energy conservation programs. But it wasn't until 2016, when the leadership team came together to discuss Maple Leaf Foods' place in society, that it adopted



what Faveri calls “CSR 2.0.” Among academics, it’s referred to as “creating shared value” or “CSV” – where companies don’t look to tick a generic set of sustainability checkboxes, but rather they solve core issues for the benefit of the company and society/the world – a term coined by Harvard theorists Michael Porter and Mark Kramer.

The creation of the Maple Leaf Centre for Action on Food Security is just one example of this root-fixing approach.

Many wonder why one in eight families in Canada – among the wealthiest countries on Earth – are food insecure. “It’s not that there’s not enough food,” says Faveri. “What we heard loud and clear from grassroots organizations was, ‘Hey, Maple Leaf Foods, we appreciate that you want to do good, but sometimes big food companies are a part of the problem. You throw all this food at food banks to feel good, but guess what – we don’t have the infrastructure or resources to distribute it, so it ends up going to waste anyway.’”

So now, through the foundation, Maple Leaf Foods donates 1% of its pre-tax profits to orgs to help build their capacity and remove those types of barriers to food security.

“Michael’s belief, fundamentally, is that the current food system is broken – and that we should try to fix it,” says Faveri. He explains that the food system is at the hub of many other societal issues: climate change, water scarcity, animal welfare, obesity, the list goes on. To reap the shared benefits of addressing systemic issues in the food system, the company has since reconfigured its products to address health and eco needs: raising meat without antibiotics and removing artificial flavours and preservatives while simplifying ingredient decks. Then came the next step – investing in plant-based proteins.

With the objective to capture a \$3 billion share of the \$25 billion industry (projected for 2030 in North America alone), Maple Leaf Foods looked stateside for its entry into the meatless category. In early 2017, the company acquired Massachusetts-based Lightlife, which at the time had a 38% market share of the U.S. refrigerated plant proteins market and came with a \$140 million price tag. A year later, Seattle’s Field Roast was picked up for another \$120 million. Sitting comfortably in its new position, in late 2018 the company combined the brands under a new subsidiary, Greenleaf Foods, based out of Chicago and co-led by president Dan Curtin and COO Adam Grogan. Meanwhile, the rest of Maple Leaf Foods’ brand portfolio is led by D’Arcy Finley, its VP of marketing, in Toronto.

“The plant proteins category is actually more developed in Canada than the U.S. as a whole... but it’s still very nascent,” says Grogan, who cut his teeth at the company 22 years ago, when it was looking to “inject new blood” through a management trainee program or what he calls a “real-life MBA.” He’s held ten roles at the company over the years, many in marketing, experience he’s used to differentiate Lightlife and Field Roast in a category that’s being invaded by tech startups, like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods.

When Maple Leaf Foods purchased Lightlife, the brand that was founded in 1979 along the east coast “had gone out of love for a while... It was started 40 years ago by two hippies making tempeh,” Grogan explains. It’s a lot more traditional and competes in the meat alternative space by promoting itself as “nourishing,” he adds. Field Roast, on the other hand, was created by chef David Lee in 1996 and

goes after those more keen on “indulgence” and “taste.” Both have their own distinct lane, but how they’ve learned to compete against encroaching competitors is, once again, by creating shared value.

Talking to 11,500 consumers about the plant protein space last year led Grogan’s team to dig up an insight that Maple Leaf Foods knew all along. A third of those who eat alt proteins say they have some concerns: “There were questions like, ‘Why do plant burgers have to bleed? How does that even happen? And why do they still have an ingredient deck that’s 20 items long?’” he says. “It’s the biggest thing holding the category back.”

Greenleaf decided to strip its plant protein SKUs of syndicated compounds and fillers, whittling the ingredients down to 11. With creative from Jackman Reinvents, it recently placed ads in the

New York Times, with an open letter to Beyond and Impossible stating that it’s taking “a clean break” from superfluous additives. “We’re pretty bullish on how we go to market,” Grogan says, adding that OOH and online ads have also been promoting Lightlife’s simple ingredients and new packaging in time for its entry into KFC and Harvey’s.

Maple Leaf is also hoping to grow the category by working with Sid Lee to convince hardcore carnivores to try its 50/50 product, which is made of 50% plant-based protein and 50% meat, acting as a gateway for consumers to enter the meat

alternative category. “It provides a great launching point for them to at least give it a try,” says Grogan.

When you look at social purpose, Faveri says it should break down why your company exists: “You need an aspirational shining star that you live and breathe.” That’s why, in 2018, the company announced its mission “to become the most sustainable protein company on Earth” and “Raise the Good in Food” under four pillars: better food, better care, better communities and a better planet.

It’s since hit some pretty big environmental goals, like going completely carbon-neutral in 2019 (the first food producer in the world). It was also the first major food company in Canada to set UN and Paris Agreement-backed science-based targets to reduce emissions by 2030 (one of only six consumer brands in the country). Performance goals were achieved in food safety and quality. Even consideration is given to the care of its animals: 77% of its pigs live in an open-house system and enrichment toys sit in 90% of nurseries.

“It’s important to note that all of this didn’t just suddenly happen a few years ago. If you want to change your food system, that kind of thinking started to happen over 10 years ago... it takes a long time to get things in place to be able to pivot,” says Grogan. “We’ve had an incredible leader in Michael McCain. He’s invested a ton of capital into the future of the company and he’s not prepared to let short-termism get in the way of the long-term game.”



Above: When tragedy struck Maple Leaf Foods in 2008, Michael McCain made it his company’s mission to put purpose ahead of profits. **Left (clockwise):** Achieving carbon neutrality is helping Maple Leaf get closer to becoming “the most sustainable protein company on Earth”; Lightlife is entering QSRs with products at Harvey’s; Maple Leaf has been removing harmful ingredients for years; Lightlife shows off new, clean and simple packaging; the company takes aim at its plant-based competitors.



Sobeys' grocery delivery mic drop

This year the company showed up in the ecomm space, while spending big on marketing for its banners. BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

When SVP of marketing Sandra Sanderson completed a cross-country check-in with Sobeys banners in late 2018 – her first month on the job – she noticed every store was running the same creative. “Not only was the campaign the same across the banners, all other elements of the marketing for the holiday season were exactly the same – there was no differentiation.”

Hired by president and CEO Michael Medline in November that year, Sanderson was one of several new leaders tasked with helping Sobeys' parent co. Empire Limited transform the country's second-largest grocer from the bottom-up.

She immediately got to work creating clear and distinct brand strategies for every banner in the family, from Sobeys and Safeway to FreshCo and Thrifty Foods. The goal? To “sharpen the edges of our brands,” she says, “so that each one would stand for something unique in the market and enable the enterprise to differentiate at scale.”

Prior to Medline's arrival from Canadian Tire in 2017, Sobeys' marketing department didn't play a leading role in the organization, according to Sanderson. With the goal of long-term growth, she says the CEO tasked the unit with “bringing the voice of the customer to the table, being a champion of the brand and a strategic business leader.”

New investment in marketing came even amid Empire's broader cost-reduction plans. Over the last several years, the Nova Scotia-based company has undergone a

massive restructuring aimed at simplifying its business and operations. Between 2017 and 2020, under a plan dubbed “Project Sunrise,” it successfully streamlined its way to \$550 million in cost savings, in part by centralizing its operations.

With that heavy lifting behind it, the company unveiled “Project Horizon,” an ambitious three-year plan, in July 2020. Through this next phase of its transformation, Empire is looking to “win Canadian grocery ecommerce,” expand its footprint and private label portfolio and invest in data and analytics to deliver more personalized communications at scale. And with its new strategic mandate, the marketing team will play a central role across all of these initiatives.

One of the most notable developments to come out of Sunrise was the development of a new ecommerce platform, Voilà by Sobeys. The grocer went bigger with its launch than planned to capture demand during the height of the pandemic. Through a partnership with British ecommerce company Ocado – whose technology has advanced ecommerce adoption in the U.K. and the U.S. – it began testing Voilà in April, later rolling it out GTA-wide in June.

With the pandemic in full force, demand for grocery deliveries was at an all-time high. Some incumbent grocers, with more ecommerce experience than Sobeys under their belts, struggled to keep up with the overwhelming demand: deliveries took days or even weeks to fulfil and sometimes arrived without the correct items.

However, even as a latecomer to grocery delivery, Sobeys found success in a model that enabled it to circumvent many of COVID's demand issues. With Voilà, groceries are delivered directly from a fulfilment centre equipped with Ocado technology that can process a 50-item order in less than five minutes. As demand peaked, groceries arrived within one-hour windows, often on the day the order was placed.

“There were certain elements of our value proposition that we knew would be important to our customers – fresh products, affordable prices, reliable and convenient deliveries,” says Sarah Joyce, SVP of ecommerce for Empire. “With

Above: Voilà by Sobeys launched with tremendous applause during the pandemic, dropping off food at homes faster than most of its competitors.

Sobeys

just cleaned up
on aisle #1

Congratulations
from

fish

AGENCY





and private label brand. The acquisition enabled Farm Boy to accelerate its expansion in Ontario, with plans to double its stores from 26 to 42 in five years.

Meanwhile, the marketing department added new brand strategy and planning teams for each individual banner, as well as a new in-store marketing team, says Sanderson.

Through that process, the Sobeys banner was repositioned as “Canada’s family grocery store.” Safeway leaned further into its Western Canadian roots, and Foodland became the “friendly neighbour” communities could depend on, says Sanderson. But the most work was done on FreshCo, which she says was in need of a “bold rebranding and an expansion plan aimed at driving our discount business to the next level.”

The FreshCo banner’s previous black and white design had led shoppers to believe prices were as much as 10% higher than at competing stores. To help change perceptions, new decor and signage were rolled out across the banner’s Ontario stores and carried through its expansion into Western Canada, where it plans to open 10 to 15 stores in fiscal 2021; it currently has more than 100 locations across the country.

To support the rebrand, FreshCo worked with Toronto-based agency Juliet on a new brand platform, “We Let Our Prices Do The Talking,” which played up the banner’s low prices (see p. 41). The campaign successfully drove value perceptions of the brand: 77% of shoppers who saw the ads said they made FreshCo seem different from other stores, and the banner outpaced category sales growth by 72% during the campaign period.

Across the entire portfolio, the company has made sponsorship and CSR a priority – the group even folded its community investment arm into the marketing team – as it looks to foster a more emotional connection with customers across its banners, says Sanderson.

In early 2020, Sobeys became the first national grocery chain to eliminate all plastic bags from its 255 locations – an eco-friendly move that got a boost from a “Say Goodbye to Plastic Bags” campaign. Last year, it implemented “sensory friendly” shopping hours across all of its banners to accommodate shoppers with sensory sensitivities – an initiative first suggested by a store manager in P.E.I. that serves as an example of the company’s commitment to “bottom-up innovation,” says Weatherbee.

More recently, Sobeys and the Sobeys Foundation launched a mass campaign to drive awareness of its “A Family of Support” initiative, through which it will raise and donate millions of dollars in support of mental health programs at 13 children’s hospitals and healthcare facilities. Sanderson previously said the investment represents “the broadest participation in a collective cause that we have ever had in our company’s history.”

With the pandemic heating up the grocery wars, the company’s ecommerce wins and bigger marketing focus couldn’t have come at a better time.

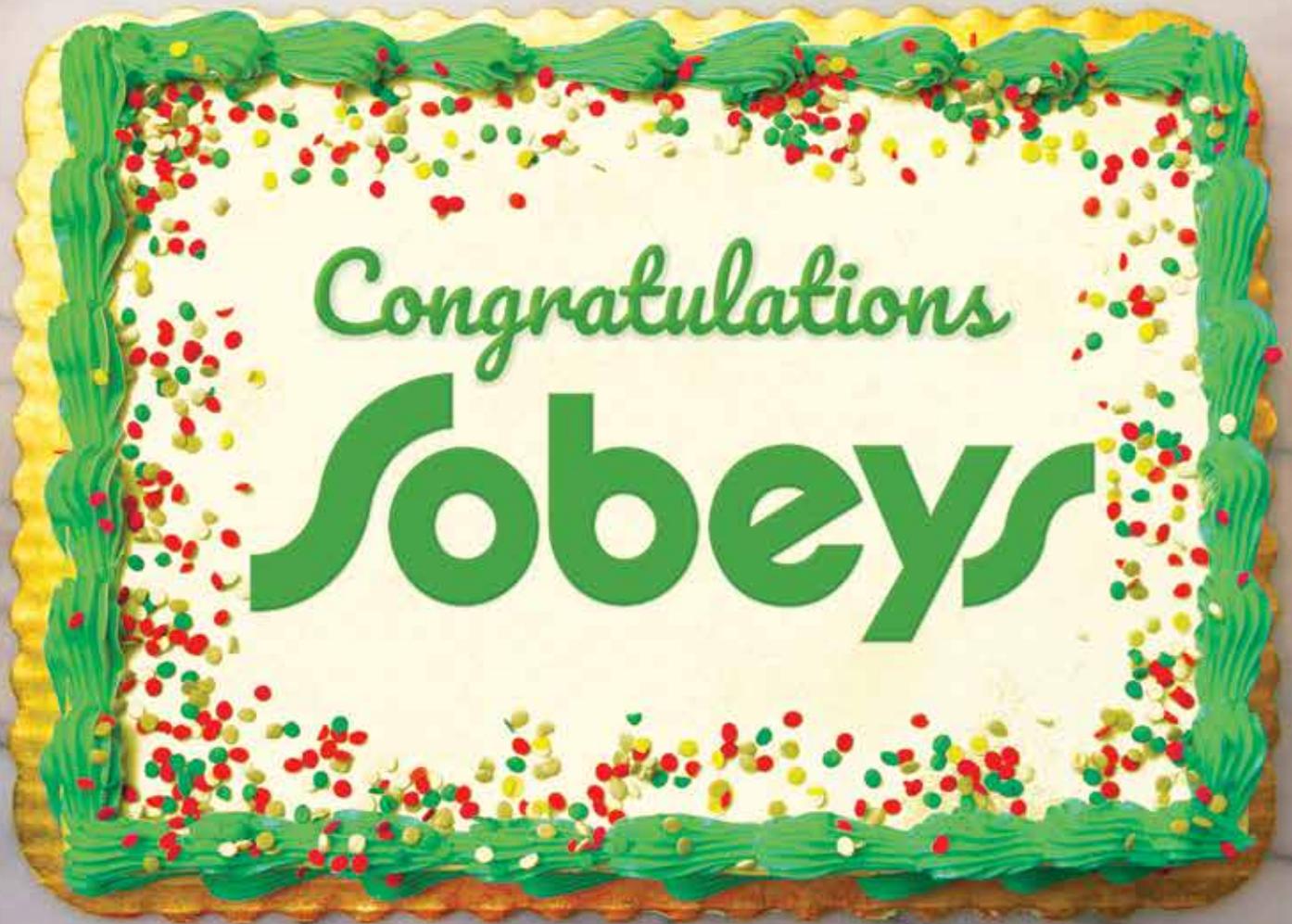
Clockwise from top left: New branding for FreshCo captures its discount positioning; the acquisition of Farm Boy accelerated the Canadian banner’s expansion; the grocer is also making CSR a bigger priority, launching initiatives like “A Family of Support,” which shines a light on youth mental health.

COVID-19, a new consideration emerged around safety. We started highlighting for customers that we deliver from a robotic automated warehouse, not a store, meaning their order is packed safely and with less handling.”

Joyce, who led all aspects of Voilà’s development, including marketing and branding, says “Voilà” (a word that works as well in French as it does in English) was chosen to communicate the delight and “magic” with which groceries appear on customers’ doorsteps. “We needed the brand to pop and to grab your attention,” says Jacquelin Weatherbee, Sobeys’ VP of communications, adding that brightly coloured Voilà delivery trucks are like “beautiful billboards zipping around neighbourhoods throughout the GTA.”

The company is currently building the second of four planned fulfilment centres in Montreal that will serve Quebec and Ottawa customers starting in 2022. And it has rolled out a curbside pick-up option in the Atlantic provinces to expand its reach. Come the end of Project Horizon, the company expects to reach as much as 75% of Canadians and represent 90% of the potential ecomm spend pie.

Outside of ecommerce, the company has made good on its promise to refresh its brands and expand its footprint. In 2018, it grew its portfolio with the acquisition of Farm Boy, the fast-growing Ottawa-based grocer known for its fresh food, farm-to-table produce



We are beyond proud
of our Sobeys family for being named one of
strategy Magazine's 2020 Brands of the Year.





Lululemon keeps calm as shoppers carry on

How years of community building gave the retailer a running start at a moment when everyone is about the “sweatlife.”

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

Lululemon was training for the marathon no one anticipated. In April 2019, the Vancouver-based apparel retailer unveiled a five-year plan under CEO Calvin McDonald aimed at doubling its digital and menswear revenues and quadrupling its international revenues by 2023. Success, McDonald said, would rest on a “Power of Three” growth strategy: driving product innovation, expanding deeper into new markets, and creating more omnichannel experiences.

Fast-forward to this year, and the 2020 Brand of the Year has so far overcome the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic – reporting a 2% net revenue increase during Q2 2020 – by sticking to the pillars of its long-term strategy. Having doubled down in the face of adversity – like a runner sprinting the last 100 metres – it may even emerge stronger and more agile, a frontrunner in the race for the loyalty of the athleisure-obsessed.

The 20-year-old retailer has historically thrived on a hyper-local grassroots marketing approach. It has actively avoided tactics employed by competitors in sports apparel, with their mass advertising and celebrity endorsements. Instead, it engages with consumers through more than 2,000 global brand ambassadors, who teach classes and host events in

their communities, sporting Lulu gear.

“Lululemon was founded on a community-led model and our culture is grounded in authentic human connection,” says Nikki Neuburger, a former global marketer at Uber Eats and global VP for Nike Running who became Lululemon’s first chief brand officer in January. “This continues to be a unique differentiator for our brand.”

A major challenge arose, however, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily shuttered stores and studios across the globe – starting in Asia (where the company has been aggressively expanding), then later in Europe and North America. In many regions, the crisis put a halt to ambassador events. But, thanks to years of community building, Lululemon was in a favourable position when the time came to shift to a virtual world.

“We were already in the [process] of elevating our digital offerings to create more guest-centric omni-experiences, but the pandemic increased and accelerated digital engagement across the board,” says Neuburger. “In the absence of in-person connections, we saw an opportunity to foster a deeper social community.”

During the pandemic, Lululemon launched Community Carries On, an online hub featuring free ambassador-led workouts and mindfulness practices; similar content was shared on YouTube and IGTV, helping customers connect with ambassadors online and through social. It also introduced a “Move & Stay Connected Challenge,” where 300,000 people tracked their workouts together using the exercise tracking app Strava. And it’s annual SeaWheeze Half Marathon, now in its tenth year, went virtual, attracting 23,000 participants from 100 different countries.

In recent years, as Lululemon grew into more of an experiential brand, it looked to utilize bricks-and-mortar retail as a focal point of its community-based strategy, with stores serving as “community hubs.” Retail expansion, both at home and abroad, has also been central to helping the company achieve its 2023 growth targets.

The clearest articulation of that vision was the opening of a sprawling 20,000-square-foot megastore in Chicago last summer, which Celeste Burgoyne, EVP of the Americas and global guest innovation, described to investors as the “physical manifestation of the heart and soul of Lululemon.”

On top of offering an elevated shopping experience, the store features a studio space for fitness classes and meditation, as well as a

restaurant that serves an array of smoothies and salads. At the time of the opening, the store was home to 45 local brand ambassadors – far more than the typical four to eight found at its other locations. The company opened its second experiential store in Minnesota in November, and while COVID has stalled a further roll-out, the company said the concept could one day account for 10% of its stores.

Last year, Lululemon used its Chicago location as the latest test store for its new loyalty program. First piloted in Edmonton in 2019, the membership program is one of the many ways Lululemon is developing stronger relationships with customers. For \$168 per year, members gain access to events and classes (online or in-person, where available) and first dibs on new and exclusive products, among other perks. This year, the test program will return to Edmonton and launch in Toronto for the first time.

In Chicago, the test yielded positive results: not only did the brand hit its sign-up goal within one month, but roughly one-third of members participated in ambassador-led classes, 90% of them for the first time. The frequency of store visits from medium- and high-value customers also increased significantly.

In addition to its loyalty and ambassador programs, Lululemon gained another entry point into consumers' homes through the \$500 million acquisition of at-home fitness company Mirror in July 2020. Neuberger says Mirror will play a key role in bolstering the company's digital ecosystem by creating "immersive and personal in-home sweat and mindfulness" experiences. While Mirror is not yet available in Canada, users in the U.S. have access to weekly live classes, thousands of on-demand workouts, and one-on-one personal training. Instructors already wear Lulu apparel, and the retailer has hinted at one day making their outfits available for purchase directly through the platform.

While Lululemon has, to an extent, benefitted from pandemic fashion trends – as consumers, holed up at home, seek out leggings, loungewear and other comfy WFH attire – its success can also be attributed to investments it made during the outbreak to meet customers where they felt most comfortable shopping.

Unable to offer personalized recommendations in store, the brand launched personal virtual shopping and concierge appointments with "digital educators" over video chat. To help meet growing demand online, it fast-tracked investments in digital initiatives that were planned to roll out over the next two years. For instance, the retailer introduced curbside pick-up and, once stores reopened, launched a virtual waitlist that informs shoppers by text when it's their turn to enter the store, helping them avoid lineups. Throughout August alone, nearly 400,000 customers made use of that offering.

These investments helped shelter Lululemon from the COVID-19 storm. While the company's overall revenue grew only 2% for the quarter ending Aug. 2 – a result of temporary store closures, reduced operating hours and limited in-store occupancy levels during the period – a whopping 61% of overall revenue came from ecommerce sales, which grew nearly 25% from the year prior. Now, whether online demand subsides or remains strong post-COVID-19, the brand finds itself in a much stronger position to deliver an omnichannel experience.



Opposite: The company's new CBO Nikki Neuberger
Top right: Lululemon has hinted that, one day, users may be able to purchase the brand's clothing through its newly acquired exercise platform Mirror;
Bottom right: The retailer's immersive and wellness-obsessed store acts as a community hub for its biggest fans.

Meanwhile, on the marketing front, there are signs the brand is beginning to outgrow its grassroots approach. In 2017, it launched its first global campaign ("This Is Yoga") with assistance from Vice's global creative agency, Virtue Worldwide. The campaign – its first to appear on mass channels – focused on how the tenets of yoga, such as self-discovery, discipline and trust, can help people succeed in other aspects of their lives. And it now counts several globally recognizable athletes on its roster, after having hired NHL quarterback Nick Foles as its first "global brand ambassador" for Lululemon Men in March 2019.

"As we look to the future, our aim is to innovate more ways for new and existing guests to engage with us and one another... through a seamless, flexible omni ecosystem," Neuberger says. "It creates a great deal of whitespace in the way we can show up for our guests."



Knix finds its voice

The intimate apparel brand's inclusive approach is a byproduct of putting its customers at the epicentre of everything it does.

BY JENNIFER HORN

Joanna Griffiths is a bit of a cybernaut. She likes to study conversations online as though she's some sort of digital anthropologist, trying to understand what makes people (or in her case, women) tick.

Griffiths has discovered a lot about the female psyche from her fieldwork. One of her biggest findings was in 2013 when she'd visit forums and observe women lament about period spills and the fact that there weren't many good solutions to protect their underwear from Aunt Flow.

Like any good listener, Griffiths asked questions and took notes. "I gained their trust and got them to complete surveys about what they wanted from a product. From there, I came up with Knix."

Seven years have passed since she invented the high-tech, leak-proof underwear and Griffiths is still listening and watching.

Most marketers like to say they're focused on the consumer; Griffiths is positively obsessed. "We put the customer at the epicentre

of everything we do," she says. As a result, the Toronto entrepreneur's brand has become a mirror image of them.

Look at any ad for Knix products and you'll see every skin tone, age, body shape and size under the sun. Its inclusive model shots weren't by design, says Griffiths, but rather a byproduct of that obsession with consumers. Knix doesn't chase or promote to a bulls-eye audience (namely stick-thin models who are more male fantasy than real woman) like so many intimate apparel brands that came before it.

"We're a multi-generational brand, so we'll often find that someone will buy for themselves, or maybe for their teen daughter, or they'll get their mom hooked on it," she says. "So as our customer has been evolving, our marketing has evolved. One would say that every step that we take, we become more and more inclusive. That's simply because we're listening to our customer."

It seems so simple. Look at who makes up your audience and reflect their every colour and curve in your advertising. Yet so many brands continue to be out of sync and produce marketing that 70% of women feel do not represent them, according to a Dove report. What's more, 67% of women want companies to step up and take responsibility for the imagery they use.

Knix makes it look so easy. When Griffiths first launched the brand, she hustled to get shelf space in Hudson's Bay and other retailers. The company was well on its way to having 800 locations when seemingly suddenly, she pulled out of wholesale and went wholly direct-to-consumer online. Griffiths says that while Knix was



Above: There is no one look for the Knix customer. Over the years the intimate apparel brand has reflected a dynamic consumer in ads that don't discriminate against body shape, ethnicity, age or even post-baby scars.

marketing size-inclusivity in ads, a lot of its partner retailers weren't interested in carrying sizes above the industry's average.

"We ended up having this disconnect between what we were saying and the customer experience," she says. "People would drive to a store to buy the product only to be turned away because it only carried a small or medium."

So Griffiths took half of the company's revenue and started all over again online, where she could offer the brand's entire inventory to consumers of every shape and size. "One of the best and most daunting decisions we made came down to making sure that we were walking the walk and not just talking the talk."

According to Griffiths, the now 85-person company grew 4,000% in the three years following, at times growing so fast that it was hard to keep up. She says tightening the relationship with customers by cutting out the middleman was a critical moment for Knix, and for her as an entrepreneur. It taught her to use her instincts when it comes to other aspects like marketing, which is done in-house and mostly lives on digital with about 80% of the brand's spend.

Working with director Soleil Denault, the brand recently launched the "Age Doesn't Matter" campaign, featuring 14 women in their 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s in power poses, set to Demi Lovato's "What's wrong with being confident" and the tag "50 is the new... who gives a f*ck." The goal of the music video-style commercial was to create a ripple effect on other brand advertising that turns a blind eye to the mostly unrepresented audience, she says.

"As a 56 yr old woman I have been and felt invisible for so many

years," a viewer wrote to Knix, echoing Griffiths. "Women are incredible at every age, it doesn't stop because we turn a certain number."

Having produced the spot in early 2020 to be debuted during the SuperBowl, Knix was one of the lucky ones to have fresh creative going into the lockdown. Its entry into loungewear at the end of 2019 was also fortuitous at a time when people were holed up indoors. And with many work-from-homers ditching underwire bras, Knix was able to make a case for people to try its more comfortable wire-free garments. Griffiths says she even saw sales gains for its sports bra, which had been a slow mover for the last three years, as people shifted to exercising from home.

Company sales are on pace to be up 60% year-over-year as Knix hits over one million customers, with expected sales of two million items in 2020, she says. More than half of its revenue comes from the U.S, one of its two major markets. It's also expanding with more SKUs, recently debuting its first leggings in a "Papaya Box" that contains Knix items curated by body-positive influencer and long-time consultant to the brand Sarah Nicole. The box sold out within 30 minutes of it being released,

with 30,000 people signing up for the waitlist.

"We started out as this hero product brand and evolved to be a larger category player," says Griffiths. But now it's seeing another evolution from the point of view of its marketing. "For a long time, it was all about aspiration... which was just about liking yourself. But now I think what we're seeing in 2020 is this shift from aspirational to inspirational."

She says Knix is evolving to become a movement brand that gets behind even bigger issues and causes. "We started out by combating problems that were traditionally quite taboo," she says of conversations the brand has ignited around menstruation, fertility, and postpartum among its community of Knixers. "So we've always kind of gone to the places people don't want to go."

Having that history of tackling conversations that happen in the shadows sets Knix up for being able to approach even more challenging issues, like intersectionality. She says that one of the most important decisions it's made since launching was removing the word "women" from its mission statement. And beyond donating \$100,000 to Black Lives Matter, Knix is making a concerted effort to give its platforms to BIPOC in order to share their stories.

"Everyday, we're finding our voice," she says. "We're still in the first year of megaphone mode. But I think one of the interesting things about being inclusive and customer-centric is that, as every month passes, our voices in the echo chamber get louder and prouder."

To think - after everything Knix has done around diversity, inclusion and community - that was just the beginning.



its brews to Florida for the first time in 2018, it hosted a week's worth of events accompanied by art installations, live music and "tap takeovers."

And, over time, Collective Arts has looked beyond craft beer for growth. Since 2019, it has applied its M.O. to cider, spirits, ready-to-drink, and even a series of coffee blends in partnership with Dundas, Ont.-born Detour Coffee Roasters. Most recently, in the U.S., where cannabis packaging regulations allow for more flexibility, it launched a series of CBD-infused sparkling juices and teas (through sister company Collective Project). True to form, the products' labels and cans are regularly refreshed to ensure new creative voices are given the opportunity to shine.

Innovating continuously is part of its vision to be as creative on the inside as it is on the outside, says Johnston. "There's art in innovation," adds Toni Shelton, director of brand marketing and communications. "Our brewmaster and distiller are artists in their own way."

Beyond new product lines, the brand has established a resident artists program and launched Collective More, a charitable initiative

The rise of Collective Arts

The Hamilton craft brewery is scaling and finding success in a formula it spent seven years mastering.

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

A long Dundas Street West, Collective Arts' new Toronto brewery shines like a beacon, calling on beer drinkers with a penchant for the arts. On its facade, a folkloric fantasy comes to life through colourful shapes, articulating the artist's aesthetic – and the brewer's creative purpose.

In 2013, Collective Arts co-founders Matt Johnston and Bob Russell set out to build a company that could fuel creativity by lending support to emerging artists and musicians. Early on, the concept hinged on swapping out its beer labels with different artists' work every few months so that it could always have fresh packaging. To date, more than 2,000 artists from 40 different countries have been featured on its labels.

The concept helped solidify Collective Arts' place within Canada's booming craft beer scene. Today, the Hamilton, Ont.-based brewery distributes its suds across the country, more than 20 U.S. states, nine European countries, China and Australia. Sales have grown by 29% over the last year and, in Hamilton, a new canning line was added to boost production to 200 cans per minute, enabling future expansion. In addition to the new Toronto pub, it plans to open a taproom and music venue in New York City in 2021 to cater to its growing U.S. audience.

While the brewer consistently works with artists from around the world, it has entered new markets, such as China, through a localized strategy, partnering with local creators on limited-run packaging to drive awareness and trial. When it brought

whose goal is to create paid production opportunities for artists and which has led to special-edition beers and artist apparel, with proceeds going to organizations like Rainbow Railroad and the Bartenders Benevolent Fund.

In short, Collective Arts goes wherever creativity beckons. It approaches every new product, label and line of business as a potential platform for artist exposure – hence the murals on its Hamilton and Toronto breweries, where even a wall can be made into a canvas.

"We have a system, and it works," says Shelton. Now seven years old, the company has mastered what she calls the "Collective Arts formula," which can be applied to new markets, products and sister companies knowing "it's going to be beautiful [and] we're going to support artists as we do it."

And the goal isn't growth for growth's sake.

Above:
The craft beer brand's newest brewery embodies its creative purpose like no other.



Rather, Johnston says the company wants to use its success to connect an even greater number of creators with new audiences and paid opportunities – which is why it will work with the same artists on multiple projects. “We become old friends with a lot of these people,” Shelton says. “We knock on their door when we have more paid opportunities, and it’s how we develop these deep relationships.” At every turn,

have since become “the centrepiece of how we tell our story.”

For its live music series, the brand invites musicians to take over Instagram Live. The social channel delivers strong engagement for other content, such as artist Q&As and doodle sessions, but Shelton says musicians found the platform less-than-ideal for musical performances. So Collective teamed up with Soundbox Productions on a monthly concert series. Videos are shot at empty music venues and streamed on social, with better sound quality and multiple camera angles. “We’re going to try to keep scaling that,” Shelton says. “It’s ticking the box of experience and it’s also supporting musicians, which is the goal.”



Above, clockwise from top left: Collective Arts opened its first brewery in Hamilton in 2013; it’s expanded beyond beer, making steady moves into categories like cider, spirits and even CBD-infused drinks; illustrations from artists from all over adorn Collective Arts’ storefronts and cans in Canada, the U.S., Europe, China and Australia.

the company looks to tell the personal stories of the artists, which the marketer says reinforces its position as an ally to the community.

In a typical year, those stories come to life through digital and social content, as well as creativity-based experiences. The brand hosts launch parties to celebrate the release of new labels, and its annual Liquid Art Festival – one of its largest events of the year – brings together brewers, artists, musicians and foodies from around the world. “That’s when things are best,” says Johnston, “when creativity is in balance across those different mediums.”

With the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020, which restricted in-person gatherings, the brand had to accelerate efforts to bring more content and experiences online, according to Johnston. Its live music series and resident artists program, for example, were “already in play” but

In the name of authenticity, the grassroots brewer has traditionally avoided paid advertising and invested those dollars in content instead. But Shelton admits there are obstacles to delivering a purposeful message using mostly unpaid channels. So this year, it’s exploring paid advertising. “I’d love to see us have a Collective Arts media house one day,” she says. “Telling stories is how we’re going to scale.”

Recognizing it required more support with video and photography, it hired its first full-time content developer at the start of the pandemic. Shelton, who was hired to lead social four years ago, now oversees all aspects of brand marketing, working alongside CD Ryan Thibault. The team handles everything internally, including strategy, design and content. To lend further support, VP Chris Waldock was hired to lead sales and marketing across markets and to serve as a mentor to the growing marketing team. Johnston, himself a one-time VP of marketing at Moosehead Breweries, says it was time to bring on expertise to help “organize the chaos a bit.”

A brand that rests on ever-changing packaging and constant collaboration would seem the most challenging concept to bring to life and scale, says Johnston. But Collective Arts has stuck to its original formula: blending the craft of brewing (and now distilling) with art. As it launches new products and enters new markets, Shelton says it will stay true to where it began, telling the stories of the artists it works with and letting consumers know “where this art is living.”



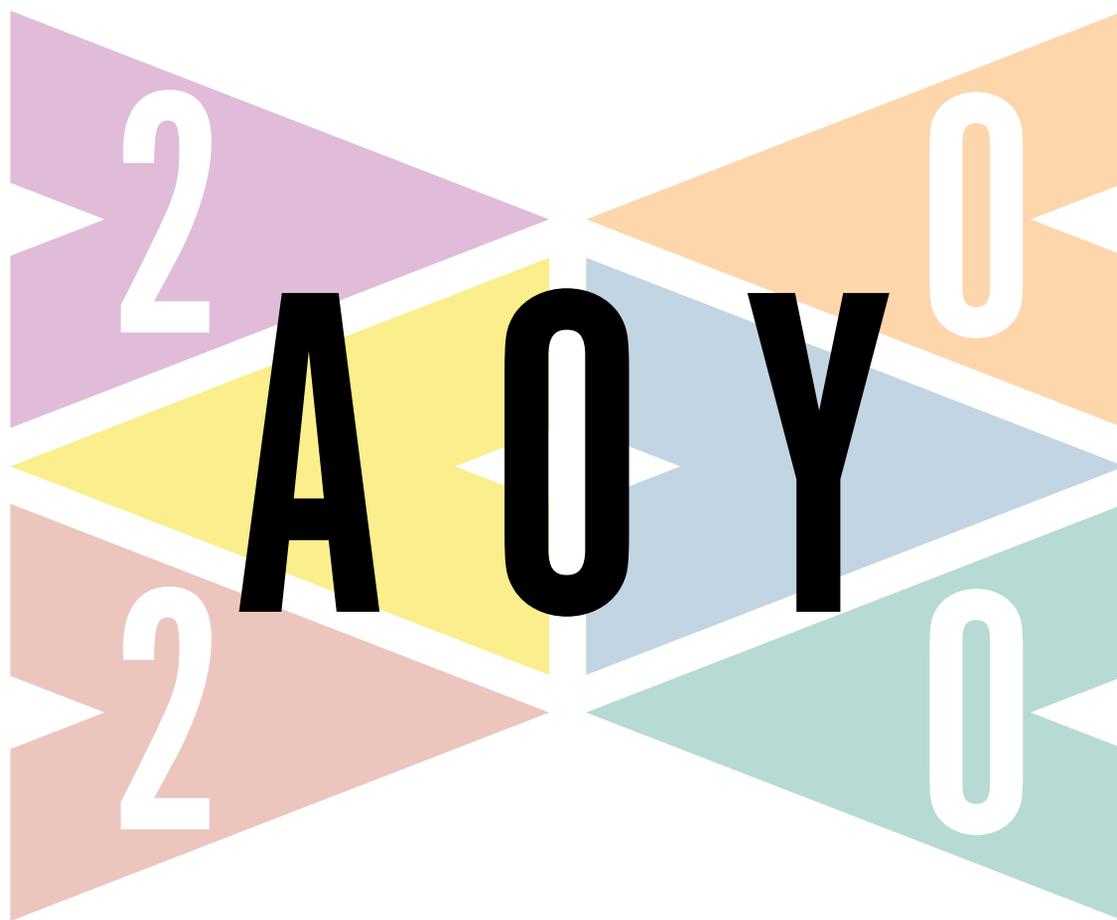
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AGENCY OF THE YEAR

TO SAY A LOT HAS CHANGED SINCE LAST YEAR'S Agency of the Year awards would be one hell of an understatement. Yet even as the rules of the game change by the day, a number of agencies remain in top form, knocking every new fastball (including a pandemic) out of the park.

For the second year running, Rethink found itself only one short of a Gold trifecta: in 2020, the agency is walking away with Gold in Agency and Design, as well as a Silver in Digital – thanks, in part, to an everything-is-experience ethos and a “secret sauce” that keeps on giving.

Meanwhile, FCB remains the agency to beat in Digital. For the fifth consecutive year it held onto its Gold title by putting creative ideas ahead of new capabilities.

Touché! – this year's Media AOY winner – has had similar

success by putting media creativity at the core of problem solving for its clients.

Meanwhile, Gold PR winner The Colony Project focused on remaining nimble enough to evolve and address clients' needs on the fly (and let's face it, this year was a big one for that).

Finally, Vancouver's 123w – which just opened a new office in Toronto – became the second shop in AOY history to win Gold in Small. When the going got tough, the agency's leadership remained focused on talent to get the job done.

The shops were judged on their work (see the criteria on p.66) by jury members from brands and agencies (see p.64-65), but our stories on the 15 winners go beyond the campaigns, also focusing on the strategy behind their structures, with a look at the work that won.



AGENCY | GOLD + DESIGN | GOLD + DIGITAL | SILVER



Rethink's secret sauce

BY CHRIS LOMBARDO

EXPERIENTIAL, AS MOST PEOPLE understand it, is typically tied to a physical event. However, Sean McDonald, Rethink's managing partner and head of strategy, says experiential should actually touch upon everything an agency does.

"A lot of things are experiential – packaging design and how you hold something in your hands... Interacting with social is experiential," McDonald says, using WestJet as an example of how the agency even applied its "everything is an experience" mindset to a TV spot that focused on the brand's customer service, putting a spotlight on aggravating travel experiences with other airlines that treat people like cattle in airports.

Rethink's creative approach also worked in the agency's favour when the world suddenly became void of physical interactions. While brands were pushing pause

on activations at the start of the pandemic, Rethink was behind-the-scenes thinking up socially distant ways to get Kraft Heinz inside people's homes.

At the onset of the crisis, people turned to stockpiling comfort foods and necessities – so much so that it looked like pantry-stable brands were flying off the shelves by themselves, without much marketing required.

While panic buying did lead to category gains, this was not always the case across the industry. For example, Kraft Heinz posted a net loss, but its arm in Canada reported double-digit Q2 growth, resulting in the global CEO highlighting the country's performance in its conference call.

McDonald believes the CPG company's success in Canada was no accident, but, in part, a result of the marketing Rethink rolled out, even during its darkest

stay-at-home days.

During the pandemic, the agency reimagined slow methodical pastimes like playing baseball and building jigsaws in a COVID environment, linking them to the notoriously slow-to-pour Heinz Ketchup.

This meant bringing the ballpark experience indoors with Game Day hotdogs and condiments (delivered through DoorDash, with an accompanying “Heinz Sounds of Baseball” playlist on Spotify), as well as designing a Heinz Ketchup-branded puzzle, all for family physically distanced fun.

According to McDonald, Rethink first identifies what makes a brand iconic or great and then contextualizes it within the framework of the current culture or climate. That strategic litmus was applied to guide Kraft messaging throughout the pandemic, and is the same approach Rethink has applied to IKEA since the agency picked up the account in 2017.

For instance, since IKEA’s focus on the home speaks to aspirational lifestyle goals and creating a comfy haven, the latest work is set in a bucolic countryside, reflecting our lockdown-triggered communal desire to get outside,

AOY CASES

1. Reuse, reuse, reuse. ➤

We all have a lot of “stuff.” Recognizing that IKEA’s affordable furniture contributes to the waste problem, Rethink helped the retailer convince consumers to repurpose their existing wares – rather than purchase new ones. With the help of a giant animated “Stuff Monster” made entirely of IKEA furniture, the campaign delivered an eco-friendly message rooted in giving items a second life.



2. The agency resorted to “bag shaming” in an effort to get customers at Vancouver’s East West Market to bring reusable plastic bags. The store’s single-use bags were designed to look like they came from other embarrassing stores.



3. For Kraft Heinz, Rethink guided customers through a flawless ketchup pour using a tilted label that revealed how to get the condiment out of the bottle.

4. The shop created a limited-edition variety pack for Molson, containing only born-in-Canada brews (including non-Molson brands) in an effort to get consumers to #MakeItCanadian.



➤ For full cases, go to aoywinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



AGENCY | GOLD + DESIGN | GOLD + DIGITAL | SILVER

DESIGN AOY CASES



1. Verywell, then

To stand out against cannabis brands focused on getting consumers high, Truss (a joint venture between Molson and licensed producer Hexo) created Verywell, a wellness-focused brand. With Health Canada regulations preventing Truss from putting the word “wellness” on packaging, Rethink told the brand’s story using approachable, human typography, a soothing colour palette, and a design system that helped educate customers on recommended dosage.



2. Rethink noticed puzzles were making a comeback during a period when many people were looking for new pastimes. Working with Heinz Ketchup, it created a game to match the condiment’s reputation for being slow out of the bottle and red all over: a 570-piece puzzle all in the same Heinz Ketchup hue.

3. Canadians send more than 40 million Valentine’s cards every year. But the perfect card is often hard to find for people from diverse backgrounds, including the LGBTQ+ and disability communities. So, for London Drugs, cards were designed by local artists celebrating the diversity behind those messages of love.

► For full cases, go to designwinners.strategyonline.ca/2020

NEW KEY BUSINESS

Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation; Shaw Mobile; Kraft Dinner; Philadelphia Cream Cheese; Starbucks at Home; Classico; BonLook; Vans; Greenpeace; The North Face; Saputo; Canadian Dermatology Association; Farmboy; Double Tree by Hilton

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create new comfort zones and be more respectful of our planet. “One Little Thing” opens up new ways to experience the brand in light of our changed behaviours, yet speaks directly to the brand’s long-term focus on the environment.

The Swedish retailer has made sustainability one of its long-term brand pillars, touting the importance of the circular economy and reusing products for the benefit of the planet. In the latest creative, environmentally friendly LED light fixtures were plugged into trees, a visual metaphor for IKEA’s planet-first ethos. That connectivity was reaffirmed by showcasing simple green-friendly behaviours, like drying laundry outside and riding bikes, all shot in a single take, in order to tell the story that little actions can lead to big results.

It’s one thing to market a brand like IKEA, which has strong affinity among consumers, it’s another to build one from scratch in a category where brand allegiances have yet to be formed.

When Rethink was asked to design the brand identity and packaging for a new line-up of cannabis-infused beverages from Truss – the joint venture between Molson Coors and Hexo – McDonald says the agency decided to take a masterbrand approach. It positioned Truss as a beverage specialist, developing the identities and strategies for its five different brands, including wellness-focused Veryvell.

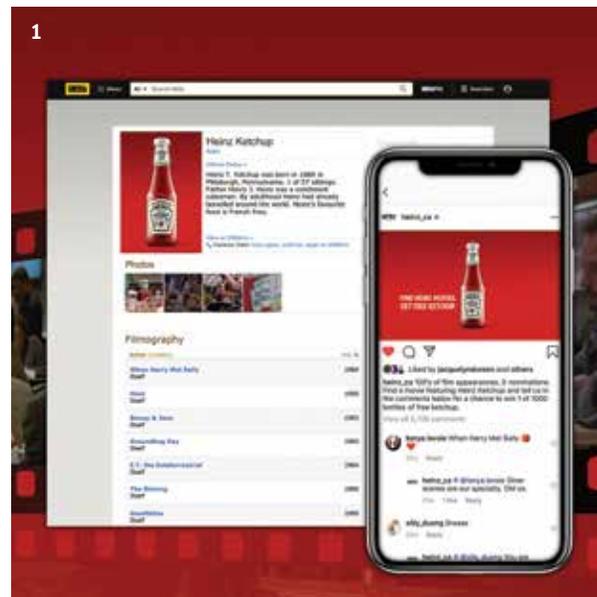
“Given that they are not cannabis generalists – they are beverage specialists – the idea is to introduce Truss through the looking glass of all their brands,” he said at the time of its launch in August this year.

To draw a connection between the experience people are more familiar with (drinking a beverage) and its cannabis-infused product, Rethink worked with Truss to create rolling papers that can easily be transformed into straws. An instructional video also demonstrated the “new way” people can experience cannabis, while unique campaigns will be created for each of the brands going forward, says McDonald.

While keeping up with culture and trends is important, he says it is even more vital to keep a higher order point of view of a brand’s broader purpose and positioning. He attributes Rethink’s success with its mission to align itself with brands that it believes in, ones that have developed equity over “everything that they do.”

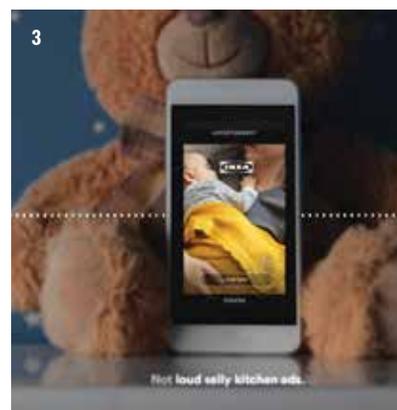
It is these values, he believes, that drive true differentiation.

DIGITAL AOY CASES



1. Don't get snubbed, get credited.
For years, Hollywood has given Heinz Ketchup the cold shoulder. With appearances in hundreds of award-winning films, the brand decided to take credit once and for all. Since IMDB is open-sourced, it edited the cast list with its cameo spots. But before it could tell anyone about its actor page, IMDB deleted it. So Rethink created a movie database that lived on the brand's social feed, with content sourced entirely by users.

2. Hate speech thrives online. Social media cos don't take enough action to moderate their platforms, so Rethink and Fondation Emergence did it for them. It created a plug-in that flags homophobic words in posts, striking through them with the Pride symbol of inclusion.



3. Ambient noise playlists on Spotify are a gift to parents trying to get their baby to sleep. But not everyone has a premium account, so they risk waking their baby with the sounds of sometimes obnoxious ads. IKEA cares about sleep, so Rethink found the most popular sleep-aid playlists and replaced the loud, baby-waking ads with silent, calming spots from the retailer instead.

► For full cases, go to digitalaoywinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



NFA stays fixed on growth

BY JOSH KOLM

IN LATE SPRING, NO FIXED ADDRESS (NFA) co-founder and CEO Dave Lafond got a call from a Kraft Heinz marketer in the U.S. looking for Jordan Doucette.

Doucette had recently returned home to Canada to join NFA as a creative partner before being elevated to president just a few weeks later. Kraft Heinz had been one of Doucette's clients during her prior gig as CCO at Leo Burnett Chicago, and they were looking for new creative.

That was when Lafond let the marketer in on a secret: in a few weeks, the agency was planning to announce the launch of Mischief, its New York outpost helmed by Greg Hahn, the much-revered BBDO New York CCO who left the agency amid pandemic cost-cutting.

Kraft Heinz was on board and after Mischief cracked the brief, it worked with NFA's more established team in Toronto to come up with the campaign concept, before shipping it back to New York for execution.

"We picked up work for a couple brands before we even launched [Mischief]," Lafond says. "There was a lot of uncertainty in March, but one thing we decided very early on is that we need to keep being who we are."

Since opening in late 2016, No Fixed Address has grown to 140 staff, and launched dedicated divisions for PR, health and media. And in a year when most agencies had to play defence, NFA not only survived, but stuck to its growth plans, like expanding to Montreal.

NFA MTL debuted at the peak of pandemic uncertainty after Jack Latulippe, co-founder of Supernormal, approached Lafond to absorb his agency last year. Lafond was feeling the pain of not having a Quebec office when NFA walked into national pitches, so he was in a receptive headspace. While there were delays, NFA stuck with its plan, formally launching the agency in May.

Creating Mischief was more of a whirlwind. It came about after Hahn left BBDO in April and reached out to Lafond over LinkedIn. New York wasn't on Lafond or NFA co-founder Serge Rancourt's radar, but – similar to Quebec – they felt it was needed for U.S. client pitches.

"We've all heard the stories, a lot of Canadian agencies just don't do well in New York," Lafond says. "They go in big, then spend the next few years shutting it down. But when we heard from Greg, we realized we could take the

KEY NEW BUSINESS

Revive SuperFoods; Canada Learning Code; CMHC; Options for Homes; Xplornet; Allergan; AstraZeneca; Janssen; Sanofi; Sobi Pharma; Virica Biotech; Novo Nordisk

KEY HIRES

Jordan Doucette, president; Rena Hula and Trent Thompson, VP, CDs; Joy Panday and Fred Roberts, CDs, Health; Sam Cote, ACD; Ryan Dzur, AD; Darrin Patey, VP creative technology; Martin Szomolanyi, CD emerging technologies; Charlotte Macgregor, senior digital strategist; Katie Maxfield, senior CW; Ray McIlroy, VP, PR; Will Kozma, director experiential and sponsorship

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talent-first approach that helped us start the agency, and his profile would let us pick up assignments quickly.”

Even amid new offices, some of the agency’s most impressive successes this year were in Canada. The health division, first launched at the beginning of 2019, was already growing before March, and sustained demand allowed the division to keep hiring during the pandemic and swell to nearly 40 staff. The division now makes up roughly 20% of the agency’s revenue.

“It gave us the confidence to place some of the bets we placed,” Lafond says. “We felt it was future proof, because it works on things that have nothing to do with a global pandemic or recession. The ‘main’ agency has not grown at all this year, but health just kept going.”

Just a few weeks after Doucette joined the agency in April, Lafond and Rancourt decided to move her from a creative role into the president’s position, leading day-

to-day operations so Lafond could focus on turning NFA into a network (though he doesn’t love that word).

“It wasn’t until she started and connected with clients that I realized, holy shit, I don’t even need to be in this meeting,” says Lafond.

For several years, Doucette was ECD and GM on Taxi’s Telus account, so she knows how to lead both the business and creative. Focusing on supplementing how NFA works with learnings from the U.S. is a big focus during the uncertain months ahead, even though Doucette has never met most of her staff in person.

“I’ve literally only been in the office one time,” she says. “But the culture here makes it really easy to do pulse checks and make sure people can work the way they need to right now. That’s really my focus, because there’s nothing worse than trying to be creative when you’re afraid. Luckily, all the surprises have been good ones.”

CASES



2. Questrade tripled the amount of account openings during the 2019 RSP season by urging Canadians to “save your retirement” through creative that promised retiring 30% wealthier if they chose the bank.

3. People don’t realize how dire the conditions are at SickKids hospital so the agency showed them. It partnered with Airbnb to build a replica of a room at SickKids, offering the opportunity to stay the night and experience what it’s like to be a patient and why they need to build a new hospital.

4. To bring focus to a worldwide epidemic, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection worked with NFA to create a striking installation that immersed visitors in “lollipops,” the disturbing term sexual offenders use for victims of child pornography.

1. No hard feelings, oats.

Compared to dairy alternatives, the coolest thing about milk was its spot in the fridge. Dairy Farmers of Ontario needed the product to appeal to millennials, so No Fixed Address showed all of its potential in wacky creative that asked the simple Q: “What can’t milk do?” The campaign was an energetic ode to milk, with hundreds of digital assets that pointed out its benefits, like how it “makes your baking taste like grandma’s.” Consumers were driven to a constantly updated digital hub, showing milk’s limitless uses.



► For full cases, go to aoywinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



BBDO's flare for fast work that works

BY JENNIFER HORN

REMEMBER THE WEEK OF MARCH 9? It was a bad one. Italy had suddenly gone into lockdown and a worldwide domino effect of city shutdowns was about to begin.

Here in Toronto, BBDO had a call out for creators in Canada, the States and Europe to produce content for a project that was in the works for Doritos. The agency had a wafer-thin window to help creators in different regions (safely) pull content out of their hats before production came to a halt. It was nothing short of a feat.

BBDO was able to gather, animate and edit 20+ short films inspired by, and featuring, Doritos Ketchup chips in just a couple of weeks, says president Christopher Andrews. Some of that content (approx. 1.5 hours' worth) included sports docs, thrillers, cook-offs, fashion

and science-based shows. It was all for a free streaming service, Ketchup+, targeted to Gen Zers until the seasonal LTO was no longer available in Canada.

News media gave it a major PR boost and even Heinz Ketchup added to the frenzy, tweeting, "The mystery we'd like uncovered is why you

didn't call us?" (a nod to the platform's conspiracy show *Uncovered Mysteries*).

Doritos did well for its first entry into the streaming wars, getting 100,000 "subscribers" to stream and snack while sheltering in place – which ultimately led to a 10% year-over-year increase in sales.

Andrews says the agency pulled the untimely project off as a result of a 14-person production unit it's been scaling in Canada ever since being shipped here from the U.K. in 2016. Flare, as it's called, is led by former *Big Brother* exec Dave Lembke as its VP and executive producer, with the division acting as both a production and post-production arm with a roster of directors, editors, flame artists – the works.

KEY NEW BUSINESS
Baycrest Health and Sciences; Sobseys

NEW HIRES
Chris Andrews, president; Mark Holden, VP, CD; Dan Koutoulakis, VP, planning; Carissa Dougall, VP, group account director; Wes Dean, senior account director; Stephanie Balmer and Sarah Atteck, account executives; Lauren Ackley, digital marketing specialist

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“Clients used to have this triangle [scenario] where they’d say, ‘Make it good, fast and cheap.’ And we would say, ‘Pick two.’ But these days it’s often got to be all three,” says Andrews. “This has been going on for quite some time – but it’s certainly something that’s been heightened by the pandemic – where clients aren’t able to plan incredibly far out because of macroeconomic uncertainty and factors affecting their categories... So we’ve had to learn to be really responsive [and] to do quicker productions.”

The president joined BBDO from The&Partnership in July this year, filling the seat left by ad vet Dom Caruso who retired shortly after. A few months prior, CCOs Denise Rossetto and Todd Mackie left the shop, leaving the creative department in the hands of CDs Derek Blais and Chris Booth.

These days, the teams are having almost daily check-ins with clients, as opposed to just meeting with them over creative presentations, says Andrews. “And I think it’s getting things moving faster,” he adds, pointing to GO Transit’s “Safety Never Stops” spots, which were completed in 3.5 weeks, and Visa’s “Small Business with Dan Levy” campaign, with its one-month turnaround.

Beyond refining its communications and go-to-market speed, Andrews says BBDO is also evolving its mantra from “the work, the work, the work” to “the work that works” as it looks to bring more results-driven ideas to the table.

“We understand and passionately believe that creativity is an economic multiplier and that it can be a source of competitive advantage,” says Andrew. “But ultimately we have to be results-driven, whether it’s higher level brand-building metrics that shift over time or work that has immediate metrics – ‘the work that works’ is going to be very important for us as we move forward.”

CASES

1. A never-ending revenue stream.

To break the cycle of relying on government support for funding, The Regent Park School of Music and BBDO created “Parkscapes,” the first music library that funds music education. The album includes original tracks from students, which musicians can use in their music, paying royalties back to the school.

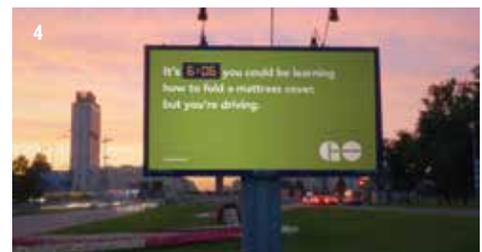


2. The cultural appropriation of Indigenous regalia during Halloween has gone on for too long. So BBDO worked with the Chiefs of Ontario to send a message: “We’re not a costume.” The team created a line of holiday garb that presented Indigenous people as doctors, lawyers, firefighters and other vocations that challenge the appropriation of their traditions.

3. Gen Z is streaming more than ever. And when they stream, they snack. Doritos needed to promote its Ketchup LTO where its target is, but because streaming services are ad-free, it decided to launch its own. “Ketchup+” was the first “snack you can stream” with hours of content from creators across the globe.



4. GO Transit’s billboard campaign aimed to show people what they could be doing instead of sitting in traffic. With every minute of their commute, ads showed the time and copy pointed out how they could instead be napping, browsing memes, proofreading their work, and so much more.



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123w kicks into crisis mode BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

THE FOUNDERS OF VANCOUVER'S One Twenty Three West (123w) like to make light of the sacrifices that come from running a tight ship.

As the shop's origin story goes, four men set up shop in co-founder Jeff Harrison's garage in 2013; they later upgraded their digs to an industrial laundromat, and eventually, a mediocre office space with plywood floors – all to “keep the talent high and the overhead low.”

Over the years, that ethos is what helped the 2020 Gold-winning Small Agency of the Year thrive. With fewer than 40 staff, 123w has packed its creative bench with 15 CDs, including brand new CDs of design Tim Hoffpaur and Moreen “Mo” Bofill.

But never has 123w's financial discipline and talent focus faced an adversary like COVID-19, whose claws have sunk deep into the economy and clients' budgets.

When the crisis hit, the agency's leaders pulled together a seven-stage plan that included measures such

as reducing the five partners' salaries and spending all the money the independent shop had in the bank, says Bryan Collins, co-founder and CD.

Having been able to keep everyone employed throughout the pandemic, Keith says the agency “rallied” as things began to rebound.

“It allowed our staff to focus on the work and not worry about their mortgage payment, not worry about themselves,” adds Collins. “I think that comfort we were able to give [our staff] that we've invested in them and invested in getting through this allowed them to invest their time in our clients and solving their problems.”

Fortuitously, Collins says the agency had brought new production capabilities in-house before the pandemic started. In late 2019, it began building out its videography, editing and motion graphics chops and later hired Natasha Lakhani as head of production to manage the team.

NEW BUSINESS

Alpine Credits; B.C. Liquor Distribution Branch; CAA; Clearly; MEC; Nature's Path; Rocky Mountaineer; Saje Natural Wellness; Sleeman's; Spence Diamonds; Weber; Westbank; Western Hockey League (WHL)

NEW HIRES

Tim Hoffpauir, CD; Heleena Webber, account director; Natasha Lakhani, production director; David Felizarta, account manager

STAFF

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The timing “could not have been better,” says Collins. “That was very helpful for a lot of our clients, being able to create assets ourselves.”

In fact, it’s worked out so well for 123w, that it’s expanding the capabilities and moving some of the early hires from contract to full-time, according to Collins.

The agency put its new in-house chops to work for Mogo, the B.C.-based fintech brand. A “Change your card. Change the world” campaign – the company’s first marketing effort, and the agency’s first work for the brand – promoted its new MogoSpend account as a way to achieve “zero debt and a zero carbon footprint.” With an assist from Murmur Music and Sound on audio, the digital spots were produced in-house, on a small budget and in “record time,” Collins says.

Beyond adding new capabilities, 123w brought on Bofill, who previously led the design department at John St., as a partner in October to build a new Toronto office from scratch. The new arm will help grow the business in Ontario, which already accounts for roughly 30% of the agency’s revenue, by initially taking a design-centric approach to work for Sleeman, CAA and the Canada

Media Fund, among others.

Design was a strong focus for 123w when it launched in Vancouver. However, today, Keith and Collins say it has grown more integrated over time, with the work now roughly split between design assignments and more traditional advertising.

“Our bread-and-butter right now is clients that say, ‘Help me! We were number one, now we’re number four, and we’re falling fast and there are more competitors, so we need to up our game on a whole bunch of fronts,” says Keith. That means a lot of brand pivots, revitalizations and accelerations – work that many more brands will need as the pandemic rages on.

There’s no doubt the last year has been challenging, as the goalposts shifted from “increasing revenue by X percent” to putting everything aside to “work for each other and our clients,” Keith says. But the ordeal has also revealed that success comes from putting people first.

When tested, 123w stayed true to putting all its eggs in the talent basket, Keith says. And in the end, “I’m probably more proud of how we handled that situation than winning a Cannes Lion.”

CASES

Small Agency Campaign of The Year



1. Saving the whales with a killer collab.

The orca is an iconic mammal in Vancouver, but one that is declining in numbers. Vancouver Island Brewing decided to do something about it, partnering with 123w to create a special edition pack of beers (brewed by four local breweries), designed based on actual orcas, with the proceeds helping to preserve their population.

2. White Spot worked with the agency to create a new term that everyone could get behind: “Spotitarian.” The inclusive catch-all term for anyone who likes White Spot food was trademarked, added to Wiki, and supported by spots that called for vegetarians, meatatarians and flexatarians to eat at the iconic chain.

3. To prove the theory that spending time in nature can have major health benefits (and get more visitors from the U.S.), the shop created ASMR-inspired spots to reflect the calming effect of British Columbia’s landscape.



► For full cases, go to smallaoywinners.strategyonline.ca/2020

Juliet walks like a giant

BY JOSH KOLM

GIVEN THAT JULIET HAS FARED RELATIVELY WELL this year, one would assume Ryan Spelliscy is sleeping a little more soundly, but making all those pivots has been tiring work.

“It has been an exhausting year, for sure,” the agency’s co-founder and CCO says. “But right now, I’m as optimistic as someone can be. We operate relatively well when we aren’t sure what’s next.”

The kind of economic upheaval that 2020 brought with it could topple a young agency that’s trying to establish itself – that’s not been the case for Juliet.

Three years ago, the shop was founded by Spelliscy, creative director and head of art Denise Cole and chief strategy officer Sarah Stringer. But now, the agency boasts a head count of just over 40, including additions to its creative and design teams, a new head of performance media and a growing U.S. presence to handle new clients in Atlanta and L.A. It also hasn’t had to do any layoffs or salary reductions.

Spelliscy credits doubling down on investments Juliet made prior to the pandemic for driving the agency over the last few months, something it has been able to do because of its independence. Performance media, for example, is an offering Juliet leaned into early and has been especially beneficial to clients who are accelerating a shift to digital and relying more on ecommerce.

“You don’t need to be a psychic to see that things are going that way,” Spelliscy says. “But we could quickly place bets where we believed we needed to place them and not have to go up the line to New York [if we were part of a network] to respond to the obvious fact that ecommerce was exploding.”

Another bet that’s been paying off is new research



arm Real Talk Insights. Instead of focusing on the major moments brands tend to spend marketing dollars on, Real Talk focuses on what it calls “micro-marketing decisions,” the countless choices a consumer makes in their day-to-day lives that can add up to major insights.

Real Talk findings come from tracking a dedicated group of up to 50 consumers and enabling the brand to follow up with the cohort digitally throughout the course of a year. The offering has become very attractive after months of rapid consumer behaviour change based on how the pandemic is playing out in towns or regions on a day-to-day basis.

These offerings, along with razor-sharp creative ideas, have helped Juliet add roughly a dozen brands to its client roster over the last twelve months, including an increase in retainer assignments.

But the fact that it is finding its footing doesn’t mean Juliet plans to abandon one of the biggest advantages of being a small indie shop. “I’ll be the first to admit, I don’t know what the fuck is going to happen next,” Spelliscy says. “But we’ve fared well because our culture embraces uncertainty and is not afraid to try new things. And I don’t mean we try different things in our creative ideas; I mean forming new businesses and arms and structural



KEY NEW BUSINESS

Diet Coke; Sprite; Fairlife; Lawtons; Sobey's Pharmacy; Harry Rosen; Director's Guild of Canada; Nature's Path; Milestones; Capstone Partners; Sweet Reason; Bio Raw

KEY HIRES

Marco Tramonte, head of performance media

STAFF
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things. If you're willing to pivot, but it's not in your DNA or structure to do that, it's going to be hard, because you're a bit frozen and miss some opportunities while you're figuring out if and how to do it."

Being nimble doesn't mean simply jumping on new tech, being comfortable with your staff not being in the office or other startup-esque things that have been forced on most companies. It means being responsive to what's happening and what works. So, while many agencies touted their ability to adapt to work-from-home and looked for silver linings that could be embraced long-term, Juliet opened its office back up in late August when the number of COVID-19 cases were trending downward, while being ready and willing to close and open again depending on the situation.

"I'm of the attitude that Zoom is a proficient tool for treading water but a terrible tool for swimming," Spelliscy says. "Human interaction is essential to advertising and I don't think agencies perform their duties well when everyone is separated. We're not embracing with open arms this idea that everyone is going to work remotely forever. We're not accountants where the answer is in a spreadsheet. You need those moments that happen with human interaction."

CASES



1. Brain power as buying power.
Only 15% of Manitoba's newly licensed engineers are women. A first for the Engineers Geoscientists Manitoba, the org partnered with school boards across the province to empower students to become an army of change – and Juliet created their uniform. Shopify helped the agency control who was able to purchase a series of specially-designed shirts, asking students to solve a challenging math or science-based problem printed on the tee. Posters also petitioned organizations to improve their hiring practices and set a goal to employ 30% women engineers by 2030.



2. Thanks to its B&W branding, people's perception of FreshCo was that its prices were 10% higher than competitors. So the agency overhauled the grocer from top-to-bottom with creative that told shoppers "this is a discount grocer." A TV campaign overlaid a store clerk's pitch with a sale tag, letting its "prices do the talking."



3. For the Directors Guild of Canada, Juliet aimed to get HBO, Universal and Paramount execs to hire Toronto talent by speaking directly to them in ads during TIFF, with creative suggesting award-winning local talent for their next shoot.

► For full cases, go to smallaoywinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



SMALL AOY | BRONZE



Two-man Wunder gets scrappy

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

IN 2019, MIKE POSTMA AND STEPHEN FLYNN boarded a plane for Cannes. The duo behind Halifax agency Wunder was to compete in the festival's Change for Good Hackathon against teams from shops like Dentsu Philippines, McCann Romania and Y&R Miami. There was just one problem: they were three creatives shy of filling the five-person team that was required to participate. So the pair recruited two ad industry friends and Flynn's fiancée to join them, and returned home with a Bronze.

It's the kind of scrappy, punch-above-your-weight mentality Wunder has applied to every piece of client work since launching in 2017.

As co-founders and Wunder's only full-time employees, CD Flynn and director of strategy Postma are de facto generalists, willing to get their hands dirty but not afraid to ask for help from specialists when the need (and client budget) permits. "When starting Wunder we threw our titles out the window," says Flynn, adding

that their goal when launching the agency was to offer clients a "sliding scale" of options to match the depth of clients' pockets. "If you don't have the budget for the partnership with the production house... we'll pick up a camera; we'll figure out a way to bring this thing to life."

For example, in May 2020, United Way Halifax engaged the agency to help highlight the impact the pandemic is having on the city's homeless and marginalized population. With few production options at the time, the team modified the trending "Stay Home" Instagram sticker to read "No Home," and promoted the message on social. Later, as restrictions began to lift, it expanded the concept through ambient installations.

"Pretty much everything from the video content [we shot] to the actual installations that ended up in the real world, that was Mike and I roughing up sleeping bags in the backyard and getting all the props designed, driving around in a van to set them up and documenting it, with

NEW KEY BUSINESS
United Way Halifax;
Pexels; Credit
Union Financial
Management;
Framewell;
Shopper
Intelligence

STAFF
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our in-house gimbals and equipment,” says Flynn.

The duo’s gumption likely comes from having spent time in the startup trenches. They met during a stint at Halifax-based Trampoline Branding, where Flynn was an AD and Postma a developer with a computer science background. When Flynn left to launch mobile app Tap in 2015, his former colleague followed suit. They routinely travelled to Silicon Valley and eventually sold their startup to a U.S.-based company, going full-time with Wunder (originally a side-gig) soon after.

It was a risky-enough endeavour considering Wunder wasn’t launching with a founding client, such as a large CPG or telco, as startups sometimes do, says Flynn.

“We always assumed, if you do enough good work, the money will follow,” adds Postma. “That has so far proven to be the case.” Even through COVID-19, he says the agency continues to hit revenue targets. “We haven’t had to make any adjustments. We’re right where we said we wanted to be 12 months ago.”

Having picked up new assignments from Pexels, Netherlands-based Framewell and other brands, the team has started to consider hiring an additional full-time employee, though the founders must decide what

type of outside talent they need most.

The challenge, Flynn says, is choosing to scale by hiring more creative problem solvers – a role he and Postma already fill – or people from specific disciplines, such as digital and PR. In addition to campaigns, the team currently handles a lot of “good paying” digital assignments around UI, UX and mobile app development.

Postma says a PR pro could help fine-tune the agency’s approach to creating ideas that are more likely to garner media coverage for clients. It’s something he and Flynn have already experimented with for the agency itself, having originally caught the attention of United Way with its 2019 self-promo piece.

To promote their agency during the holidays, the duo ran blank billboards, newspaper and OOH ads through the month of December. It only later explained the reasoning – to give people a break from holiday advertising – on social.

The stunt cost each of them their \$5,000 bonus that year, says Postma. But with the number of new clients who took notice, the experiment “paid for itself at the end of the day.”

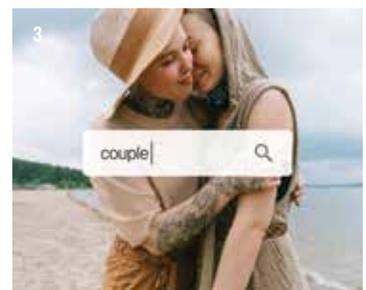
CASES

1. Hoarding space ➤

What some might see as a way to keep people out of a construction site, Bruno saw as a valuable OOH ad space. On its hoarding along sites, Wunder used the power of clever copy to demo what makes the construction company different. For example, “If you hear us whistling we’re just admiring our work” and, “For updates on our progress just stand here a while.” Millions of impressions for \$0 spent on media.



2. The shop highlighted the fact that not everyone has a home to “stay home” in Halifax, recreating homeless scenes coupled with a “no home” sticker for United Way.
3. Before Wunder, if you searched “couple” on Pexels stock site, you’d be faced with images of heterosexual duos. To be more inclusive, it updated the site’s algorithm to include LGBTQ couples.



➤ For full cases, go to smallaoywinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



Touché! is still all about creativity

BY BREE RODY

KEY NEW BUSINESS

Canada Post; Reckitt Benckiser; Diageo; Fondation; Harnois; BonLook; Exceldor; Quebec Environment Ministry

KEY HIRES

Terry Horton, VP of strategy; Terra Sharek, Michele Duschesneau and Caroline Archambault, group account directors; Melissa Giorgio, associate director of strategy; Karina Black, Chris Diakos, Caroline Marin and Antoine Leroy, supervisors of digital and strategy

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KARINE COURTEMANCHE AND THE LEADERSHIP team at Touché! have never been shy about their quest for award show glory. It's not just about the bragging rights, says the CEO. It's about pushing innovation and showcasing your best work on the best possible platforms. The awards stage – both at home and internationally – is where the bar is set.

When *strategy* caught up with Touché! in October, the Canadian shop had just been named Agency of the Year at the 2020 M&M Global Awards during the annual Festival of Media – now it can add *strategy's* Gold Media AOY trophy to its mantle. The two major wins come at a time when most agencies have had to be selective about what award shows they enter, if at all. But that's not been the case for Touché!, says Courtemanche.

"When we won at M&M, we sent an email to all of our clients saying that it might seem trivial to talk about winning awards at a time when people are struggling," she says. "[But] it was especially important this year for us to keep our focus on innovation and creativity. Why would we scale back on it during the times when we probably need it the most? This is when our clients need us to be really creative in the way we go to market."

As planning and brand stewardship become more complicated, Courtemanche says Touché! has been able to balance those changing needs – and calm client anxieties – with solutions for business-specific problems.

Take, for example, one of its biggest retail accounts, Canadian Tire. Marilyne Alie, AVP of strategy, says one of the most challenging aspects of the pandemic was that store closures were different from province to province. In Ontario, she says, virtually everything was shut down, which was very different from places like Alberta or British Columbia. "We had to constantly adjust [media], because the intensity of the pandemic wasn't just evolving, it was different everywhere."

A similarly quick-adapting mindset was required for another one of Touché!'s accounts – Lysol producer Reckitt-Benckiser, which the agency picked up this year.



"At the beginning, we saw Lysol fly off the shelves. So we not only took into consideration what stores were open, but also added in product availability," says Alie.

The solution for both was not a particularly sexy approach, but a hard-working one. It meant a media strategy of moving most product- and sale-based ads to platforms such as digital and social, where swaps could be made easily and quickly. Big national media (like TV and radio) became a destination for brand-building and message-led campaigns, but not ones that put the spotlight on any particular SKU.

But despite the pragmatic focus, the agency still found ways to play in its favourite space: media creativity. Marc-Antoine Grenier, AVP and group director, says in the case of one of the agency's biggest clients, BRP, this meant a pivot beyond media planning. The company couldn't sell whole units – like snowmobiles – because of closures at consumer-facing dealerships and factories. But, says Grenier, "they could sell parts to associations and dealers." So the agency created a content-focused

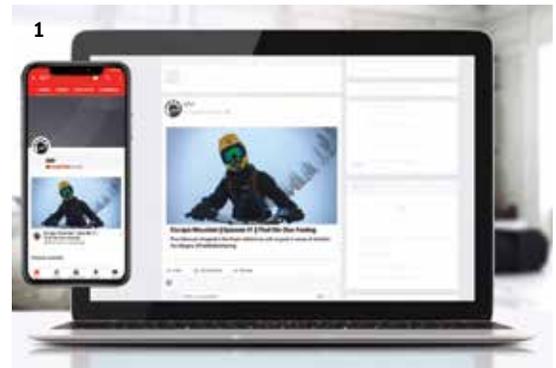


campaign, “Garage Therapy,” which focused on the DIY aspect of owning the products. “We showcased things like how to change the oil, how to change the windshield. It’s great because people were looking for this type of content. For BRP, it didn’t cost them much.”

There’s good education in crisis, says Courtemanche. It causes one to take a pulse check, to figure out what works and double down. In some cases, for Touché!, it meant discovering what was truly part of its DNA. For the last four years, the agency has been on a mission to pivot clients toward more Canada-specific media investment. The pandemic has only exacerbated the urgency in those conversations, says Courtemanche.

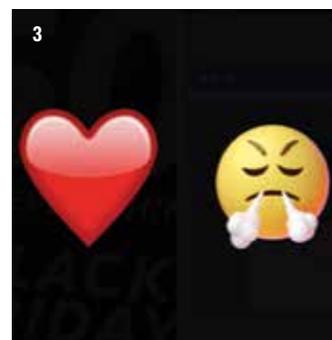
“When our clients were asking to cancel ads or pull them away, we had healthy conversations where we said if they really had to cancel, then yes, they could. But if they had a cause, maybe they could use that money to promote it.” She says Canadian Tire is the best example of that, using its TV buys to promote its response fund for COVID relief efforts. “They really set the example.”

CASES



1. Going beyond paid media.

Snow is falling later in the season (no doubt thanks to climate change). This isn’t good for BRP, because people tend to buy snowmobiles when the first snow hits the ground. Rather than follow its competition and buy reactionary ads late in the season, BRP created a content series that showed five pro snowmobilers racing to escape a snowstorm. Running for four months in the fall, the series was also supported by a doc on *Discovery*, with sneak peeks in an online teaser campaign.



2. As part of a broadcast integration, Canadian Tire’s CEO sat in the backstage of CBC’s *Dragons’ Den*, watching entrepreneurs pitch products and then selecting two for a retail distribution deal.

3. For Sport Chek, Touché! used social listening tools to find what consumers love and hate about Black Friday deals. It then matched their comments with a product that met their needs and targeted them with ads online.

► For full cases, go to mediawinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



PHD taps into the art of science

BY BREE RODY

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, PHD undertook the big task of galvanizing its leadership team with a slew of hires and promotions, as well as a new vision.

Following the retirement of SVP of marketing sciences Rob Young in late 2019, its leadership changes included establishing marketing sciences managing director Matt Devlin as the senior-most leader of the division, adding Emma Matthews as VP of strategy, hiring Zoryana Loboyko as managing director focused on planning and upping Angie Genovese to lead client business.

It was also looking to re-establish some of its values and priorities. “We were looking at what our ethos was, what direction we were heading in,” says PHD president Caroline Moul. It came up with a new vision, established at the global level, called “Make the Leap.” Moul describes it as a call-to-arms for its agency and clients to strive beyond incremental jumps and aim for “disproportionate returns from imaginative leaps.”

The need for greater imagination came fast and furious in March. “We’d just started rolling out all these

changes, and we went into lockdown,” she says.

One of the biggest (and quickest) shifts she noticed was a hard lean into data and insights. “Our teams and our clients were really in tune with what was happening in the media space,” she says. Devlin, along with Matthews, were already prepared to pick up a lot of the slack from Young’s departure. Data and insights have always been crucial for media agencies, but Devlin says now it’s precisely what has enabled PHD and its clients to take those big leaps.

The data-savviness, he says, is best accompanied with humility. “There’s been a big mix of day-to-day uncertainty, but also a lot of clarity. And there really isn’t an expectation that we can get anything right these days. That actually allows a lot of room for innovation. People are not afraid of doing things differently, because that’s the way the world is now.”

Taking risks with long-established clients is one thing – doing so with a brand-new client is another. PHD won Arterra Wines early in the year, and subsequently

KEY NEW BUSINESS
LG; Casper; Arterra Wines; Allergan; Cubert; Ferrero; University of New Brunswick

NEW HIRES
Ben Roth, director analytics; Danyal Syed Ali, associate director; Emma Matthews, AVP, strategy, innovation

STAFF
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onboarded the client virtually. Moul says that if it weren't for the current crisis, the agency wouldn't have carved out a strategy for the wine brand at a breakneck speed. PHD knew the client for four weeks when it came up with a sponsorship strategy for its Jackson-Triggs brand, which had an established association with music, says Moul. "How do you keep that association alive when live music isn't really happening right now?"

The agency partnered with Bell Media's iHeart Living Room Concert Series to have Jackson-Triggs be the main sponsor. Moul says the integration prompted more investment in online and digitized events, both from other Arterra brands (like Naked Grape's sponsoring of a social media dating show accompanying Bell's *Love Island* broadcast) and other clients on its roster (like former client Rogers Communications creating an online campaign to showcase its support for small businesses).

Not every outcome of the past seven months has been positive, says Moul, but they're at least prompting curiosity. For example, she says, the agency has been testing the effectiveness of digital audio (including music streaming and podcasts) with some clients. While Moul couldn't share which ones exactly, she says

advertisers from categories including CPG and auto are experimenting more in the medium.

"When we dove into our numbers, we saw that digital audio was growing in double digits in some places throughout the pandemic," she says.

While it would be easy to "over-exaggerate" and simply double down on digital audio investment, Moul says she's eager to understand how to measure these media channels. "What we've found is a need to explore digital audio as a means to actually sell through. Measurement hasn't been there."

Moul and Devlin expect the marketing sciences team to be busy on the measurement front for months and years to come. With brands being ever-watchful of their marketing spend, they're very quickly expecting more in terms of hard numbers and proof of return on ad spend.

As a result, PHD has already added six new employees to its marketing sciences team, while also heightening its focus on automation in that department. The team will need all the resources it can get, says Moul.

"I think 2020 has been the year that measurement [in general] got a wake-up. We have to get there quicker and prove that business outcomes have been delivered."

CASES



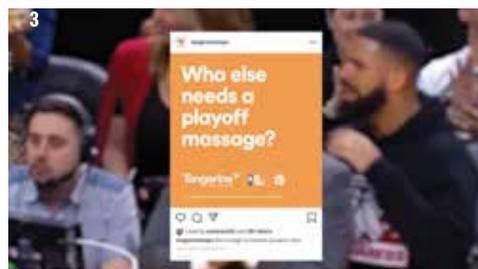
1. The future, today.

Most commuters drive because it offers (a) convenience and (b) personal time. It somehow doesn't occur to them that riding a bus offers them exactly that. To convince car-addicted commuters to use GO Transit, the brand introduced its bus at an auto show with the bells-and-whistles of a sports car launch. The campaign likened the bus to autonomous cars, allowing people to sleep, watch and text while commuting. In addition, PHD targeted people with ads for the new Presto app in unlikely places, like the Google Play store, which helped drive adoption.



2. To show how Scotiabank supports small biz owners, an installation showed the obstacles women, in particular, face, while a choose-your-own-adventure experience on Twitter showed the realities of being an entrepreneur.

3. When the Toronto Raptors experienced its surprise winning streak, Tangerine shocked basketball fans as it fired off real-time, contextual ads that spoke to Playoff moments as they happened.



► For full cases, go to mediawinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



UM proves its worth

BY PATTI SUMMERFIELD

LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, UM WAS blindsided by the pandemic.

But unlike some, the agency had already begun looking at changes to its structure and process prior to the crisis. As a result, its phones have been ringing off the hook with calls from clients this year.

“We had been on the journey to drive greater efficiency and agility into our structure and process well before COVID hit,” says Shelley Smit, UM president.

For example, to help clients address the rapid change around them, Smit says the agency expanded the scope of its consulting services. Consulting is a part of UM’s core offering and covers many aspects of a client’s business – from growing brand health to creating digital roadmaps and building data strategies to market mix modeling, she says.

“In a recent example, we successfully designed and facilitated a three-year growth plan workshop for a client, which involved senior stakeholders from various disciplines across their business,” she says.

UM also retooled its planning approach to be able to build better plans for sustained growth, which it calls “full funnel forensics.” Canadian marketplace data has now been integrated directly into its planning system on a category level to optimize plans for different client business goals versus just campaign metrics.

Thought leadership and communication have always been important in building strong client relationships, says Smit, and the impacts of the pandemic accelerated its efforts to a greater extent. For instance, UM created what it calls “The Moment” – a dynamic, weekly client



update of business news, insights, and timely innovations to fuel smarter decision making.

The newsletter is customized for each client and contains both broad industry updates as well as agency POVs on marketplace trends. Smit explains that “This Moment” initially ran as a pilot prior to the lockdown and has since been expanded.

New talent was also hired and new “power roles” were created in marketing consulting, investment optimization, e-commerce and retail strategy, advanced analytics, modeling, and data management, plus the expansion of its decision sciences team. UM also created a Canadian IPG Media Lab, which identifies innovations and emerging trends.

To understand the impact of COVID at all stages – responding, recovering, resuming – UM developed forecasting tools to inform future activity in both the short and long term. That’s in addition to a business accelerator that helps clients analyze their current business state and, through a deep-dive, workshop-led process, identifies growth opportunities and ways to drive incremental growth.

“While the UM team has done a tremendous job working remotely by staying committed, focused and productive – we really do miss being together – their commitment to clients and culture throughout this challenging time has been nothing short of amazing,” says Smit.

NEW KEY BUSINESS

SkipTheDishes; Ulta Beauty; Voila by Sobey's; Giant Tiger; Air Canada; Behr Paints; Emirates

NEW HIRES

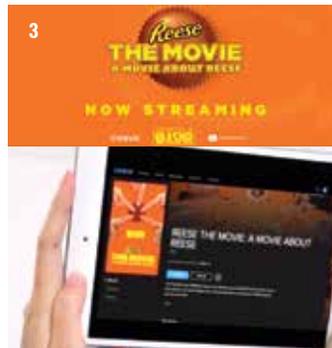
Petra Moy, head of agency development; Tushar Subramaniam, senior director of analytics; Mustafa Attar, VP, data, tech; Leanne Burnett-Wood, VP investments

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CASES

1. Swapping jerseys for nets.

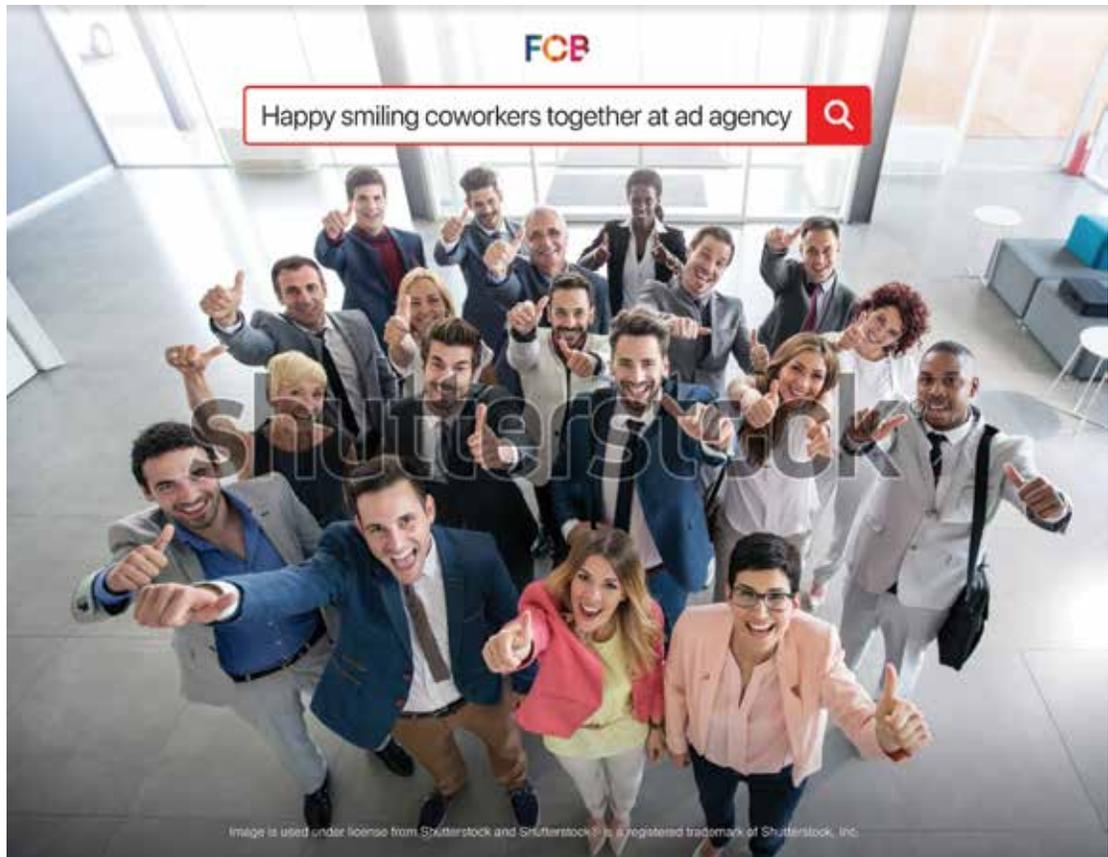
BMO asked 500 soccer fans to donate their old jerseys in exchange for the new 2019 Impact shirt. The brand then turned those discarded jerseys into a soccer net and donated it to a Montreal community. To promote the “Jersey Swap” story during a time when all the attention is given to hockey’s Montreal Canadiens, UM struck a broadcast deal with TVA Sports and RDS, creating 12 integrations for a total of 17 minutes of live programming dedicated to the BMO campaign.



2. To cut through the clutter of other fundraisers and get more men to participate in November, the agency partnered with *ET Canada* and Sportsnet to create content integrations during sports and lifestyle programming.

3. And to promote the ASMR-inspired movie for Reese on Crave, UM treated its debut like that of a Hollywood blockbuster, using movie marketing tactics like blanketing the city with wall postings, taking over every ad during *The Handmaid's Tale* premiere and running trailers in-cinema.

► For cases, go to maoywinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



FCB puts creativity above capabilities

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

ONE MIGHT ASSUME THAT FCB CANADA – this year’s Gold Digital AOY winner for the fifth time in as many years – has relentlessly invested in “capabilities.”

Not exactly, says Bryan Kane, the former Publicis exec who became FCB’s first Canadian president in September 2019. In fact, Kane, who oversees FCB’s Toronto and Montreal offices (as well as its production arm, Fuel Content) says the agency has been more focused on helping clients solve their business problems through creativity.

“The tendency is for agencies to continue to hunt for capabilities,” he says. Even though the shop of around 150 has been scaling its content offering, while also bringing more data-driven insights and automation to the fore, Kane says the goal is not to participate in a capabilities “arms race” with other agencies, but rather to “make sure we arm our creatives with [the specific]

capabilities they need to bring an idea to life.”

“Our core is not necessarily something we look to change from year to year,” Kane adds. “It’s about understanding what value we create for our clients. And that’s just mind-blowing ideas that propel their businesses forward.”

Over the last year, FCB took steps to ensure its creatives have the resources they need at the North American level. Following Tyler Turnbull’s promotion to group CEO of the network in Canada and New York last year – with a mandate to promote collaboration – Kane was hired to embark on a similar mission in Canada.

Soon after, Nancy Crimi-Lamanna was elevated from her CCO position in Toronto to leading creative for the whole of FCB Canada – a new country-level role for the agency with the goal to further share resources and develop deeper ties with FCB’s creative teams across its

**KEY NEW
BUSINESS**

Sobeys; Sephora;
HBC; GoodLife
Fitness; McCain
Foods; Mike's Hard;
YWCA; Lassonde
Pharma

NEW HIRES

Bryan Kane,
president; Jordan
Gladman, ACD; Eline
Goethals, strategy
director; Travis
Metcalfe, integrated
production lead;
Jessica Lax, VP,
group account
director

**STAFF
146**

five offices in Toronto, Montreal, New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

Through its new model, FCB can pull talent in from other offices to work on briefs for business pitches that sit within North America, says Crimi-Lamanna. And, twice a year, the group's lead creatives come together in the form of a global creative council to workshop ideas.

"It gives us access to briefs we may not typically get, and it gives our creative talent the ability to work on really high profile projects," she says. "But it also allows smaller offices like San Francisco... to pull our talent as they need and as resources allow."

Brands' need for effective creative ideas has only grown stronger with the pandemic, says Crimi-Lamanna. For example, new client McCain was looking to put more spend towards digital as COVID-19 kept many people at home – but it knew its audience (younger content consumers) dread pre-roll ads.

So the agency created a "McCain Golden Oven" digital contest for the CPG brand that reflected the experience of waiting for fries to come out of the oven. Patient viewers who watched two-to-ten-minute-long pre-roll ads in their entirety could win an assortment of high-

end prizes.

In another instance, for AB-InBev's low-cal beer brand Michelob Ultra, the agency targeted "social actives" (a group that cares about what goes into their bodies, but that still want to enjoy a beer post-workout) by tapping into their desire to share workout results on social.

Its "Cal for Cal" campaign transformed the calories people burned during a workout into calories of food to be donated to food banks across the country. Beer fans participated by simply taking a screenshot of their phone or fitness tracker and posting it on social.

When COVID-19 hit and the need for food banks began to rise, the program was relaunched to reach an audience stuck at home using live online workouts. It was later extended across North America, resulting in 770 million calories donated.

"The majority of clients don't really care about what capabilities we have. It's ultimately the ideas that we can bring forward – and then how you do that becomes relevant," Kane says. "Unless you're bringing forward those incredible ideas that change the landscape for a client – the rest is irrelevant."

CASES



1. Do you understand me now?

Get this: in 2023, there will be eight billion voice assistants. The technology is becoming a way of life, say experts, however, it's not very usable for those with Down Syndrome as the tech isn't able to fully recognize their atypical speech. That's where "Project Understood" comes in. FCB worked with Google and the Canadian Down Syndrome Society to create a platform that allows people with Down Syndrome to donate their voice and teach the tech to better understand them.



2. FCB asked Michelob Ultra drinkers to donate their sweat equity for a cause. It asked people to burn calories, share their hard work on social media and watch as the brand turned their energy consumption into food donations, calorie for calorie, to food banks.



3. For BMO, the agency created an online film exposing the microaggressions that erode a women's financial confidence. Influencers helped change the narrative, while a petition pushed to remove gender bias terms, like "gold digger," from dictionaries.

► For full cases, go to digitalwinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



Sid Lee was born this way

BY JENNIFER HORN

"Yes, we were two kids, but the first partner we had was a Mac, actually. It was a computer. And from that computer, we tried to do everything."

- Philippe Meunier, Sid Lee

AS SOON AS SID LEE'S FOUNDERS FIGURED OUT what the hell the internet was, they were designing and developing websites. They were really good at it. In fact, Quebec's first commercial website was coded in the Avenue du Parc offices of the agency back in 1995. One of only a few companies to own a Mac in the building, you could say that Sid Lee was born digital.

But a lot has changed since the advent of the internet

and it's been a slog for any agency (let alone one whose original bread-and-butter was computer-generated graphic design and desktop publishing) to keep up.

Over the years co-founders Philippe Meunier and Jean-Francois Bouchard watched their agency grow beyond websites and bloom with a distinctive creative credo, one that's immersed in culture, art, music, even architecture. By helping global marketers like Adidas become culture-driven giants, Sid Lee made a name for itself in the world of long-term brand-building. As a result, CEO Bertrand Cesvet admits it hadn't really focused on mastering data and measurement – now the shiniest tools in the current digital era.

The build-or-buy question came up a few years after

Sid Lee joined Kyu, a collective of like-minded companies based in New York. Sid Lee veered toward an acquisition growth strategy, assisting the network in finding innovation partners to expand the group: in 2018 digital and CRM marketing co. Bimm joined the collective; in 2019 immersive US-based agency Digital Kitchen was integrated; and in 2020 Sid Lee welcomed France-based data-driven design firm Haigo.

Taking the direct route by curating this digital infantry for Sid Lee to tap into was well-timed, Cesvet says. The pandemic has accelerated the need for lateral thinking across the consumer journey and these strategic moves were thankfully already in place, he says.

“Every year there’s talk of transformation. But this year, it really arrived. Nobody, no client, no creative, is going to argue that digital transformation is not here,”

says Cesvet. “There’s a requirement now in terms of strategy and I think that shift was important.”

The world of brand-building that Sid Lee comes from is focused on the long-term, he says. “But the current crisis is forcing clients to have a more immediate perspective on their business.”

But that doesn’t mean brands aren’t looking to agencies to help them with the long game. “Our secret sauce as an industry is that we have a cool relationship with the future, after all. We can look beyond the next year, the next quarter,” says Cesvet. However, clients require results now, which Sid Lee has become better at doing with the help of Bimm. “These guys live in the world of measurement and outcomes.”

As for the perks of linking arms with Haigo and Digital Kitchen, Cesvet says that the former shop, a creative

DESIGN CASES

Design Campaign of The Year

1



1. Building a legacy

To visually express how CN has helped shape the geography, culture and economy of Canada since 1919, Sid Lee designed a milestone commemorative book. Shipping containers, which CN transports across the country, was the inspiration for the book’s design. Inside, it looked at the company’s 100 years through 100 perspectives. The manifesto was filled with a year’s worth of research, interviews and historical images, which the brand then made 40,000 copies for all of its employees to have as a keepsake.

2



2. For the Design Vanguard, Sid Lee created iconography that gives each word in its mission statement deeper meaning, turning letters into lightning rods, infinity signs and the like.

3. The Toronto Raptors 25th season calling card was a flexible photographic logo, replicated in hand emojis and giant statues in city streets.

3



► For full cases, go to designwinners.strategyonline.ca/2020

DESIGN | SILVER + DIGITAL | BRONZE

experiences company, understands how to make “digital live” and complements Sid Lee’s own immersive capabilities. The two shops also recently worked together on an opening title sequence for the show *Godfather of Harlem*, which screams of Sid Lee’s edgy signature aesthetic and led to the agency’s first Emmy award win this year. Haigo is new to the agency, but Cesvet says it’s so far helping to up Sid’s game on the UX and UI design front.

Even with six offices across North America and Europe, Sid Lee has prided itself in creating a “borderless community.” But there’s always room for improvement when it comes to communication and collaboration, which Cesvet says the pandemic has no doubt accelerated.

“For me, personally, I would spend most of my time on planes going to all of our offices around the world,” he says. “But now I find that I engage much more in the moment, in a much more sustained fashion with these companies. I find that COVID is making this collaboration so much easier.”

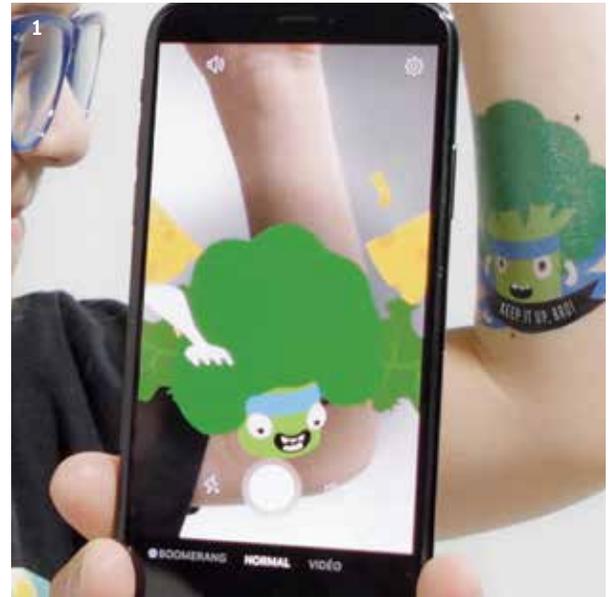
Proof of Sid Lee’s creative excellence also comes in the form of a Best of Show “M” award, which it picked up at the 2020 Marketing Awards in the summer for its “CN 100” project. That same work went on to grab a Design Best of Discipline prize at Quebec’s inaugural Idea Awards in September – Sid Lee actually won four of the six top prizes that night, all campaigns that it entered and got top marks in *strategy’s* AOY.

That cross-discipline haul speaks to another ingredient in Sid Lee’s secret sauce.

According to Cesvet, “It goes back to our diversity. From day one, we’ve always pushed boundaries. The way we define our business is that we are a creative community that uses storytelling, technology and design to create what matters. That’s basically our M.O.”

“Having those different points of view, and basically trying to cross-pollinate within the business [by bringing in new companies], I’d say that’s a part of our success.”

DIGITAL CASES



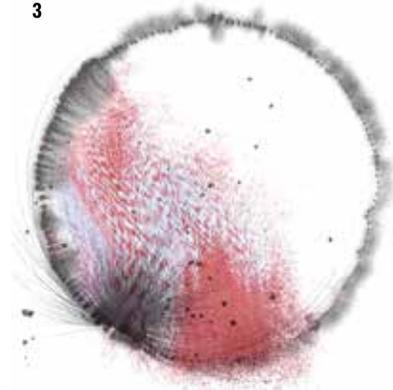
1. It’s not real, silly.

IGA wanted to help Fondation Charles-Bruneau fight cancer in youth. So Sid Lee went to work, selling stick-on tattoos that came to life via AR. It invited news anchor Pierre Bruneau to get a tattoo of his own, but didn’t tell anyone that was it a fake. When the truth was finally revealed (with the anticipation drawing plenty of news coverage), people bought 225,000 tattoos, raising \$450,000 for the charity.

2. To “fact back” against climate change deniers, Protect Our Winters created an online tool that buried them in the truth. Every time a person tweeted a false fact, users who signed up were alerted via notification and invited to respond with a proven scientific fact.



3



3. Sid Lee started an experiment for Parkinson Quebec. In it, people with the disease were asked to trace a circle image on a mobile device, tracking the speed, pressure and tremors of their hands. The three data points were then translated into an artistic representation of the disease, as it progresses, day by day. Each piece was sold, with the proceeds donated to research.

► For full cases, go to digitalaoywinners.strategyonline.ca/2020

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OneMethod leaves no stone unturned

BY DANIEL CALABRETTA

JUST AS ONEMETHOD'S FOUNDER – serial entrepreneur Amin Today – helped give birth to the agency's "experimental" culture (having created restaurants and a clothing line from behind its walls), so too has he had a hand in its affection for branding and design.

Over the last couple of years, the Bensimon Byrne-owned agency has made a conscious effort to tighten its focus on that side of its business, with Max Sawka, strategy and creative director at OneMethod, describing the agency's CCO, Today, as "a designer at heart."

To be able to pitch for more branding and design business, the agency brought in three new designers and launched an experience design division, led by XD director Kurt Krumme. Only a year-and-a-half since its

refocus, and the fruits of the team's labour are already starting to pay off. This year OneMethod picked up the Bronze Design Agency of the Year medal, its first-ever AOY title.

The KitKat Chocolatory – a Yorkdale store where people can create custom chocolate bars – was one of OneMethod's first large-scale design

projects for its biggest clients at Nestle. The agency not only designed the retail space – which was anchored by a "Chef's Table" where chocolatiers make KitKat bars on site – but also the customer experience, says Sawka. Instead of simply emailing or texting a customer when their order was ready for pick-up, OneMethod designed a physical sign that displays the customer's name with a special message inside the store.

Sawka adds that KitKat chose OneMethod for the project because of its history in blending experiential design with branding through its La Carnita restaurant and ice cream brand Sweet Jesus. He says La Carnita started as an experiment inside OneMethod's office, with the agency selling tacos from a pop-up and later growing

KEY NEW BUSINESS

Canadian Tire; FIGR; Bentall GreenOak; Reactine; Nicorette; Benylin; The Juno Awards; Tangerine

KEY HIRES

Bonnie Cheung, Daniel Cullen, Mario Gelleny and Lisa Phuong, ADs; Nathaniel Houseley, CW; Dalton Halligan and Rudy Cho, studio designers; Matthew Ames, VP, director of consumer experience

STAFF 45

to be in seven retail locations across Canada and the U.S. The agency-born ice-cream brand Sweet Jesus has also gone on to open 20 locations, including one in Dubai.

Experiential, brand design and marketing communications are typically treated as three different disciplines, says Sawka; however, OneMethod has worked to remove silos between the three and create an inverse relationship.

“Anytime we take on brand design, even if it just starts with a logo or a full visual identity, we always map it out beyond that and look at how it will come to life in physical spaces,” Sawka says.

For example, when the shop started the KitKat project, it first focused on the physical store, but then addressed components like packaging, ecommerce and marketing. And when designing Toronto-based cannabis dispensary Miss Jones’ new store, it not only worked on the building design, but also the merchandise, display tags and staff clothing.

“It’s one of those things where it had three different streams of design, even though we were only really focused on one,” he says. “[By blending the three] we are able to have a real intimate understanding of those disciplines [and it] allows us to have a more holistic view of the problems and the solutions.”

CASES



1. Colour me a new brand personality.

When tasked with freshening up the Scotiabank brand, OneMethod expanded beyond the bank's signature red, using a multi-coloured palette for its marketing and communications material. The agency immersed the company in fresh, bright, optimistic and rich colour to bring out its more human side. From in-branch to online ads, all of its brand collateral was updated to reflect the more friendly Scotiabank signature.



2. The shop showed its design chops in the KitKat Chocolatory that brought the brand's new revenue stream to life in so many delicious ways. The light fixtures were in the shape of KitKat fingers, and the store's clean wafer-inspired lines were a sight for design-hungry eyes.

3. Using a colour palette drawn from sunny skies and super high eyes, OneMethod created a vibrant visual identity that brought an artsy trippy-ness to the Good Buds brand.



► For full cases, go to designwinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



As the world changes, so too does The Colony Project

BY JOSH KOLM

KATIE MUIR STARTED AT THE COLONY PROJECT at an interesting time, to say the least.

Hired as an SVP in late 2019 to partner with founder Amanda Shuchat on leading the agency, Muir's first task was to settle into the interim managing director role as Shuchat prepared to go on maternity leave.

"Running an agency amid the biggest global health crisis we've ever had was not part of those plans, no," Muir says.

The Colony Project, founded in 2016, was meant to be a smaller, scrappier and nimbler offshoot of Vision7's more established Citizen Relations, which had grown into an international PR player. Muir says its origin, above all else, is what helped the shop fare well amid the shifting tides of 2020. Despite the challenges, the agency is still projecting roughly 11% year-over-year growth, adding four new staff and a Gold PR Agency of the Year title for the second time since it was founded.

"We were designed to flip things really quickly," she says. "We don't have as much hierarchy as some of the bigger agencies, so we're able to turn plans out on a dime to react to culturally relevant topics. That positioned us well for the situation we've found ourselves in."

While The Colony Project does have some clients in hard-hit sectors like tourism and automotive, others are in categories that are insulated or thriving, including Kraft Heinz, General Mills, Alcatel and L'Oreal.

Muir says that, in some ways, everything has changed for the agency – learning to work, collaborate and execute programs from home. But while the agency has been forced to pause, cancel or vastly reimagine some of its programs, the basic principles haven't changed.

"Our job as PR people is to make news, to tell client stories in a way that makes headlines," Muir says. "And from March until May, there was only one story. You had

KEY NEW BUSINESS
Aphria (Broken Coast, Good Supply); St. Michael's Hospital Foundation

NEW HIRES
Sean Citrigno, senior account director; Emily Kett, Harriett Austin and Spencer Emmerson, senior account managers

STAFF
25

to pivot every single client and every single plan to shift to that story. But while the stories we're telling have completely changed, probably on every client we have, the actual tenets of our job as storytellers, and how we do that, hasn't."

For example, The Colony Project was on the agency roster for Philadelphia's search for a new "Philly Angel" spokesperson, launched weeks before lockdown measures began in Canada. While the winner announcement needed to pause, the fact that Kraft Heinz had recently revived the "angel" imagery opened the door to recognizing "local angels" like frontline workers and community volunteers, and building a CSR hook into the program by making food bank donations for every nomination that was shared.

With Canadians looking for reassurance and trusted information, Muir believes there has never been a stronger place for PR. But instead of promoting a buzzy product launch or stunt, the focus moved to providing clarity around clients' store closures, product availability and safety practices to put consumers' minds at ease.

Instead of using influencers to push out playful or aspirational content when many Canadians are dealing with anxieties around safety and finances, they've been retasked to champion programs that support frontline workers or communities in need. And instead of trying to stand out in social, the shop is looking more to traditional media, which has become an increasingly trusted source of information.

"Our clients come to us to help speak to people who were scared and looking for transparency, authenticity and even vulnerability from brands they shop," Muir says. "That's where PR really shines, and an approach we were really comfortable jumping to."

Growth is still part of the strategy for The Colony Project, but it's also pivoted that plan. Prior to March, Muir says the agency was looking to build out its experiential offering, plans that obviously changed in favour of stepping up its investment in digital capabilities.

"When you look at expanding, maybe things you were originally looking at are now no longer a priority, based on what this new world will look like," Muir says. "The long-term strategy is still there for us, but what we prioritize in order to get there has changed."

CASES

1. We be puzzling.

At a time when jigsaws were trending during the pandemic, Kraft Heinz designed a slow-building puzzle to mimic its ever-so slow pour. The product expanded to 16 markets, as The Colony Project built buzz through social contests and giveaways to red sauce enthusiasts.



PR Campaign of The Year



2. Toronto Raptor Pascal Siakam (a.k.a "Spicy P") was a pro at bringing spice to the court. Fans were asking to bottle him up, so Nando's created a limited-edition sauce after the player, while the PR agency went ballistic on media outreach, paid social and life-size POS in stores to reach new audiences for the resto.



3. The agency helped promote the Yukon as an epic vacation spot via an Indiegogo campaign, which raised funds so it could recreate the "Gold Rush." It mailed panning kits to donors, dropping real Klondike gold into a creek for its visitors to fish out.

► For full cases, go to prwinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



Craft digs its toes in CPG stories

BY CHRIS LOMBARDO

KEY NEW BUSINESS
Jumpstart Charities; Brown Forman; Mark Anthony Wine & Spirits; Earth's Own; The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair; Yves Veggie Cuisine; Tim Hortons

NEW HIRES
Jordana Wolch, VP

STAFF
14

FASHION, BEAUTY AND MOVIES ARE natural passion points for Canadians, but “what about getting people excited about apple sauce and talking about washing machines?”

Lisa Pasquin, president of Craft PR, an agency which just celebrated its five-year anniversary this October, confesses that less-than-sexy categories have always been a passion of hers.

“When I founded [Craft] and looked at the landscape of smaller agencies I was competing with, so many focus on lifestyle brands... I didn't see a lot of smaller ones focused on CPG, but to me that's always the most interesting kind of work to do.”

Craft has developed creative PR for “boring” categories like household appliances, strategically positioning GE from a masterbrand to a house of brands, via the hit TV show *Queer Eye*, and getting an endorsement from the show's resident Canadian, Antoni Porowski. “Nobody wants to do laundry, let alone talk about it,” Pasquin jokes.

In the early days of her career providing communications for clients such as Labatt Breweries of Canada and Unilever, Pasquin learned the importance of CPG brand storytelling. She says that great marketing starts with a deep understanding of what influences consumers – many of whom are looking for brands that have a clear sense of what they stand for.

Earth's Own is an example of a company that understands the power of brand purpose, she says. For years the alt dairy company has used the positive environmental impact of plant-based diets as a cornerstone of its positioning. When the brand wanted to get the message out about its efforts to battle climate change to a more mass audience, it worked with Craft to create a program for its \$25,000 “plant grant,” which is given to any organization working on unique projects that are linked to the brand's ethos of getting people to eat more plants. For its digital-focused campaign, the agency helped reinforce the environmental impact of



Earth's Own products, calling on consumers to take part in a plant-based revolution.

And earlier this spring, Craft helped Mott's Fruitsations promote its efforts to dial back on sugar content as part of its goal to "have a positive influence on society" through health and wellness. The "Buy a Cup Give a Cup" donation program for the Breakfast Club of Canada included a cross-province media tour with Jason Priestly from *Beverly Hills 90210* having a fireside chat with lifestyle, parenting and food media about the Breakfast Club's impact, resulting in 40 million media impressions.

Pasquin adds that while "functional benefits are becoming a dime a dozen," they're still a critically important proof-point in a brand's story. However, simply promoting things like new product packaging, "that's not something people are going to talk about at the dinner table. That new formulation of your product? Well, that's probably improving quality scores by 10%, but it's not the thing that's going to get people passionate and sharing stories about your brand in the way that you want them to."

CASES



1. This PR push ain't no game.

Nintendo wanted to spark interest among little ones, many of whom aren't growing up with the console in their hands. Reaching kids through traditional channels just wouldn't do, so the brand created a one-of-a-kind playhouse that immersed visitors in Nintendo-themed game rooms. All Craft had to do was drive kids to visit in droves, a task it pulled off through a contest with Corus and influencer media relations with kid-centric personalities. The agency tracked 42 million impressions and 15,000-plus contest entries, all of which helped Nintendo track its strongest hardware sales in history.

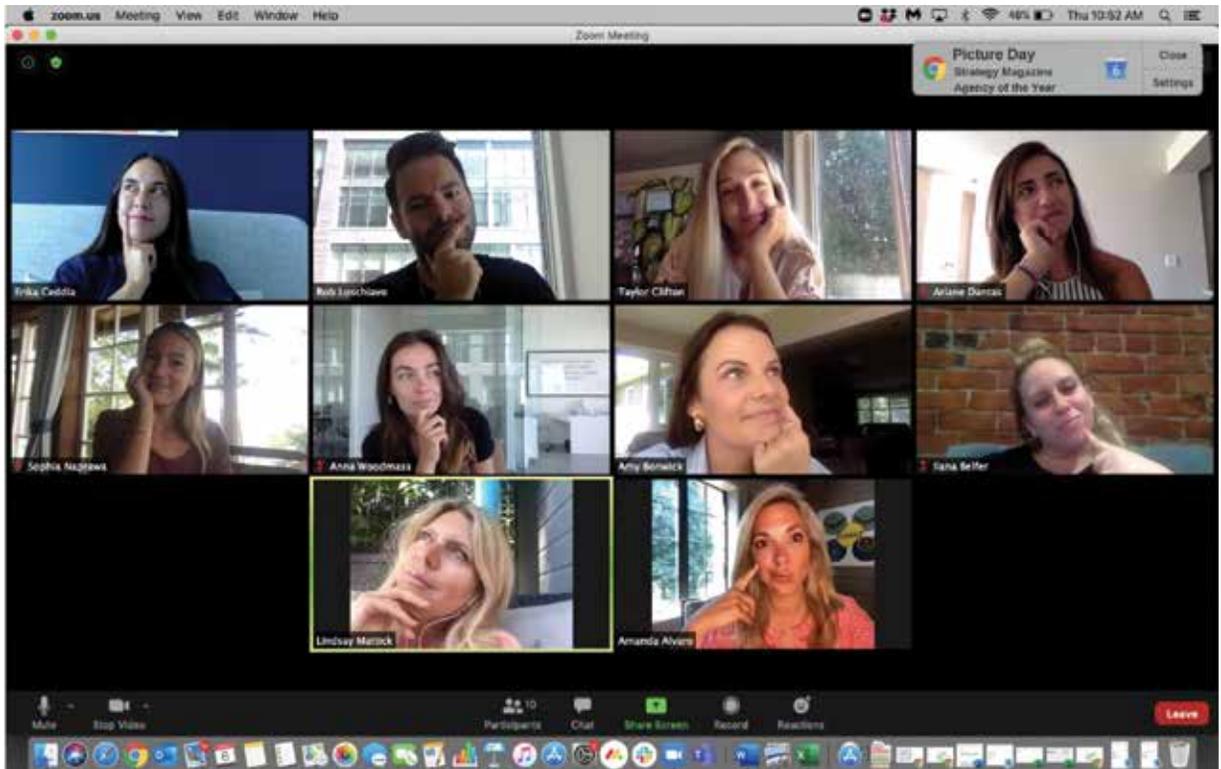


2. To give millennial moms a reason to choose Mott's Fruitsations for their kids, Craft arranged a media tour with Jason Priestley (a celebrity they grew up watching) speaking about the brand's CSR partnership with the Breakfast Club of Canada.

3. To bring the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair's exciting features (think, giant pumpkins and jumping pups) to media before the actual event, Craft cast the event's first ambassador, Lil Ben. On his media tour, the tiny pony hopped on the GO train to the Royal, opened the fair with Toronto Mayor John Tory and even paid visits to 22 influencers.



► For full cases, go to prwinners.strategyonline.ca/2020



Pomp & Circumstance marches to its own drum

BY DAN CALABRETTA

IN JUST FIVE SHORT YEARS, Pomp & Circumstance has grown at an impressive clip.

This October, the Toronto PR firm reported 107% year-over-year revenue growth. And, as such, it was recognized by both *Adweek* on its “100 Fastest Growing List,” as well as *Canadian Business*’ Startup List of the country’s fastest-growing companies (the only PR firm to be given such a title).

The agency also recently picked up half-a-dozen new clients – from Toronto luxury hotel Park Hyatt to global brands like Hagerty, an auto insurance co. for classic cars. The new business is on top of ongoing relationships it has with high-profile brands such as CIBC, Mercedes-Benz, eBay, Dermalogica and Canadian Tire.

Amanda Alvaro, president and co-founder of Pomp & Circumstance, believes its focus on creativity is behind

the agency’s success. Prior to establishing the shop in 2015, Alvaro and business partner Lindsay Mattick were the founders of Narrative PR, which was later acquired by and integrated into traditional creative agency Bensimon Byrne.

“We grew up in an advertising agency,” she says. “And then we went on to own a PR firm. And what we took from that experience was being more of a creative shop than a traditional PR agency.”

When Pomp & Circumstance first launched, Alvaro says it was focused on “true, earned PR” within social and influencer marketing. But in recent years the agency has expanded to offer a full suite of services, ranging from video production to integrated media.

The agency did well for its clients this year when the world did a virtual pivot, helping brands reach

KEY NEW BUSINESS

Mercedes-Benz; Hagerty; Hyr; SheEO; Canadian Tire; BDO; The Toronto Region Board of Trade; Park Hyatt; Anejo Restaurant

NEW HIRES

Erika Ceddia, account lead; Amy Bonwick, consultant

STAFF

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consumers on new platforms and in new ways.

For instance, it helped Simplii Financial explore digital platforms as people spent more time homebound and affixed to their devices. Working with four content creators, it helped teach consumers how to simplify their lives – ranging from fashion and food, to fitness and home improvement – through instructional IGTV videos.

And when Mercedes-Benz was forced to cancel its 2021 S-Class roadshow launch event, Pomp & Circumstance used the new virtual reality to its advantage, creating an even bigger splash in Canada than what would have been possible if the premiere happened in person. The shop created a virtual breakfast for media and VIP guests, bringing aboard the global ambassadors F1 racer Lewis Hamilton and artist Alicia Keys to give a keynote and musical performance. It even tailored swag to the occasion, providing attendees with Mercedes-Benz-branded air pods to use while watching the content.

“We’re taking the best of what creative shops have to offer in all realms – digital, video, online and earned [media] – and we’ve seamlessly put it into one offering. There aren’t a lot of PR agencies in Canada that are doing it the way we do it,” Alvaro says.

Pomp & Circumstance also likes to draw on different disciplines – like literature, history and philosophy – when it comes to its creative process.

“I love it when somebody [on our team] starts a brainstorm off with, ‘I just read this novel and it made me think of this.’ I love it when the first thing they do is Google what the root word of whatever a particular client is launching [to try to understand] what that means,” says Mattick.

“I think that we want people to sort of go beyond the surface, to evaluate, to be conscious of where ideas and influences come from, and to bring those observations to the work.”

CASES

1. Ice car, baby.

While Mercedes-Benz isn’t the quintessential “cool” car brand, it sure acted like one at an freezing-cold event among rock Gods playing music inside 88,000 pounds of ice. Mercedes performance vehicles took to windy, slippery tracks carved in ice, where festival-goers got to eat, drink and be merry among the brand’s fastest cars. Pomp & Circumstance gave a massive assist in building buzz, gaining influencer attention and media coverage in some of the biggest auto publications in Canada.



1



2



2. For Amica Senior Lifestyles, the agency created #smilesforseniors, where people were encouraged to post inspiring content for older folk in an effort to combat social isolation during the lockdown.

3



3. The shop showed off the fitness phenom that is Peloton through broadcast media coverage from *eTalk* to the *Marilyn Dennis Show*, influencer social content and in-store VIP events across the country.

► For full cases, go to prwinners.strategyonline.ca/2020

2020 AGENCY OF THE YEAR | JUDGES

AGENCY OF THE YEAR



Pete Breton
Anomaly



Jaylone Lee
Decathlon



Allen Oke
Huge



Mangala D'Sa
Second Cup



Allison Litzinger
HBC



Patrice Pollack
FUSE Create



Adrian Fuoco
Pizza Pizza



Caroline Losson
CCM



Carol Shmygol
ATB Financial



Anne-Marie Laberge
BRP



André Louis
The&Partnership



Mia Thomsett
123w

DESIGN AGENCY OF THE YEAR



Anthony Chelvanathan
Leo Burnett



Steph Hoff
Tonal (formerly Ecobee)



Doug Muir
SDI Marketing



Mark Cohen
TD



Mike Kelar
Jacknife



Warren Paisley
6Degrees



Mikaela Duberry
Freelance designer



Matt Litzinger
The Local Collective



Albert Strano
Strano + Pettigrew Design Associates



Tania Fugulin
BonLook



Paul Meehan
Goodridge & Williams Distillery



Dave Watson
Mosaic



Monique Gamache
Matter Studio



Briana Mirabelli
Walmart (formerly Indigo)

DIGITAL AGENCY OF THE YEAR



Anne De Aragon
GoDaddy



Moxie Garrett
Doug & Partners



Lynne Piette
Volkswagen



Nicolas Baldovini
Lg2



Catherine Laporte
Lowe's



Roehl Sanchez
BIMM



Jamie Garratt
Idea Rebel



Deepak Mehmi
Critical Mass



Damon Sloane
Groupe Dynamite

**MEDIA
AGENCY OF
THE YEAR**



Veronica Castillo
Freshii



Helen Galanis
Initiative



Carl Pichette
Sobeys



Doron Dinovitzer
Horizon Media



Joy Ghosh
Molson Coors



Frédéric Rondeau
Espace M



Emily Douglas
Orion Worldwide



Susan Irving
Kruger Products



Thomas Shadoff
Bensimon Byrne / OneMethod
/ Narrative



Julian Franklin
Franklin Management Group



Lisa Kittelsen
Red Bull



Hilary Zaharko
H&R Block



Sheri Metcalfe
Jungle Media

**PR
AGENCY OF
THE YEAR**



Jackie Asante
FleishmanHillard Highroad



Cam Gordon
Twitter



Adriana Lurz
Strategic Objectives



Sabrina Bhango
Manulife (formerly Marriott
International)



Sarah Krafman
Endy



Tamar Nersesian
Labatt



Yanik Deschenes
Sid Lee / YPR



Sarah Van Lange
Cineplex



Daniel Tisch
Argyle PR



Joyce Law
P&G

**SMALL
AGENCY OF
THE YEAR**



Matt Bielby
Here Be Monsters



Emmanuelle Legault
Tourisme Montreal



Paul Riss
Round



Carle Coppens
Havas



Carlos Moreno
Broken Heart Love Affair



Rob Wallace
Home Hardware



Lina Jhaveri
Kellogg's



Jeremy Oxley
Danone

AGENCY OF THE YEAR | PROCESS & SHORTLISTS



IN LIGHT OF BUSINESS PRESSURE THE PANDEMIC placed on the industry, a couple of changes were made to the competition this year.

The 2020 awards program began with an open call for Canadian agencies to submit their best campaigns from the past 13 – instead of the usual 12 – months. All eligible creative, media, digital, PR and design agencies entered with comprehensive campaign, program or project case studies (four – instead of the usual five – for AOY and three for MAOY, DAOY, PRAOY, Design AOY and Small AOY). Separate cross-industry and cross-country jury panels then marked the work online and in isolation.

Each campaign for the agency, media and digital competitions was given two marks from one to 10 based on strategy and creativity, while judges scored the PR campaigns using the same criteria, as well as a score for impact. Design was judged on creativity, technical challenge and impact.

Judges with conflicts were omitted from scoring on the applicable cases. The top-scoring agencies made up the shortlists, based on a natural drop-off point in the scoring. Scores were averaged with equal weighting, and the agency with the highest marks was the winner. One case from each category with the highest points was named a Campaign of the Year. The finalists, in winning order, are listed below.

AGENCY	SMALL AGENCY	DESIGN
Rethink	123w	Rethink
No Fixed Address	Juliet	Sid Lee
BBDO	Wunder	OneMethod
FCB	Zerotrillion	DDB
Union	Target Marketing	No Fixed Address
Mosaic	The Local Collective	Zulu Alpha Kilo
Zulu Alpha Kilo	Arrivals + Departures	Taxi
Taxi	The Mark	
The Humanise Collective	Elemental	

DIGITAL	MEDIA	PR
FCB	Touché!	The Colony Project
Rethink	PHD	Craft
Sid Lee	UM	Pomp and Circumstance
Taxi	Dentsu X	Narrative
Zulu Alpha Kilo	OMD	Edelman
	No Fixed Address	Paradigm

AGENCY OF THE YEAR | HALL OF FAME



Rethink picked up Agency of the Year Gold, Design Gold and Digital Silver trophies in 2019 (of which it repeated in 2020). To see previous winners from each of the AOY categories, visit agencyoftheyear.strategyonline.ca



1990

Gold: McKim Advertising
Silver: Cossette
Communication-Marketing
Bronze: Baker Lovick Advertising

1991

Gold: Chiat/Day/Mojo
Silver: Baker Lovick:BBDO
Bronze: MacLaren:Lintas

1992

Gold: Chiat/Day
Silver: Ogilvy & Mather
Bronze: MacLaren:Lintas

1993

Gold: Geoffrey B. Roche & Partners Advertising
Silver (tie): McKim Baker Lovick/BBDO, Taxi
Bronze: BCP

1994

Gold: MacLaren:Lintas
Silver: BBDO Canada
Bronze: Geoffrey B. Roche & Partners Advertising

1995

Gold: MacLaren McCann
Silver: BBDO Canada
Bronze: Leo Burnett

1996

Gold: Leo Burnett
Silver: Palmer Jarvis Communications
Bronze: BBDO Canada

1997

Gold: Roche Macaulay & Partners Advertising
Silver: Palmer Jarvis Communications
Bronze: Leo Burnett

1998

Gold: Roche Macaulay & Partners Advertising
Silver: BBDO Canada
Bronze: Palmer Jarvis DDB

1999

Gold: Palmer Jarvis DDB
Silver: Ammirati Puris Lintas
Bronze: Young & Rubicam

2000

Gold: Palmer Jarvis DDB
Silver: Taxi
Bronze: MacLaren McCann

2001

Gold: Palmer Jarvis DDB
Silver: Ammirati Puris
Bronze: Taxi

2002

Gold: Taxi
Silver: Bensimon-Byrne
Bronze: Zig

2003

Gold: Taxi
Silver: Palmer Jarvis DDB
Bronze: Downtown Partners DDB

2004

Gold: Taxi
Silver: Zig
Bronze: DDB

2005

Gold: Taxi
Silver: Rethink
Bronze: BBDO Canada

2006

Gold: Rethink
Silver: DDB
Bronze: Lowe Roche

2007

Gold: DDB
Silver: Ogilvy & Mather
Bronze: Taxi

2008

Gold: Taxi
Silver: BBDO Canada
Bronze: DDB

2009

Gold: DDB
Silver: Rethink
Bronze: Zig

2010

Gold: DDB
Silver: Taxi
Bronze: Sid Lee

2011

Gold: BBDO
Silver: DDB
Bronze: Taxi

2012

Gold: DDB
Silver: John St.
Bronze: Tax

2013

Gold: John St.
Silver: Taxi
Bronze: BBDO

2014

Gold: Leo Burnett
Silver: Rethink
Bronze: DDB

2015

Gold: Leo Burnett
Silver: J. Walter Thompson
Bronze: Taxi

2016

Gold: Cossette
Silver: Leo Burnett
Bronze: John St.

2017

Gold: Cossette
Silver: J. Walter Thompson
Bronze: Lg2

2018

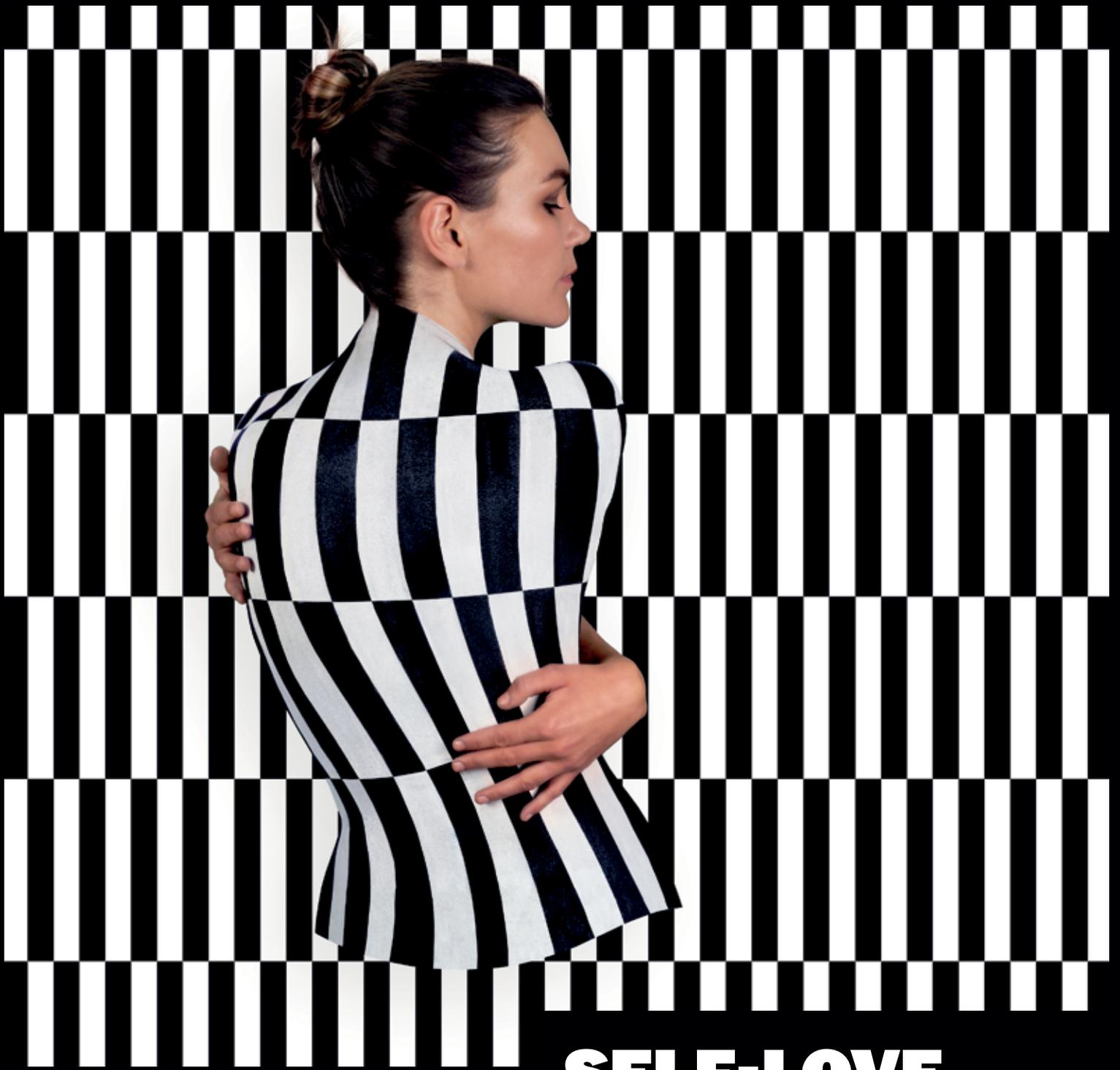
Gold: Cossette
Silver: John St.
Bronze: Zulu Alpha Kilo

2019

Gold: Rethink
Silver: BBDO Toronto
Bronze: John St.

2020

Gold: Rethink
Silver: No Fixed Address
Bronze: BBDO



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**So, it's
been a
pretty
quiet year
in pharma.
Not much
happening.
Er... Not
so much.**

This past year has been a transformative one for the pharma industry – and the agencies it partners with.

For one, it has massively accelerated the digital shift, moving communications away from empty waiting rooms and conference halls and into the virtual realm. And it's not likely going back anytime soon. This is the new norm.

But, it's even more complicated than just that. Going digital is fine and all, but now you have to deal with the fact that everyone – and we mean everyone – is talking about health right now. Your doctor. Your lawyer. Your MP. Your Aunt Martha... (Especially Aunt Martha.) Every inbox in the country is overflowing with medical information and advice – a lot of it... shall we say... dubious?

That's a lot of noise to break through. It's become that much harder to push good, solid new information into the market.

Brands understand this is not a short-term issue. COVID kicked off with a bit of panic shopping and campaign adjustment to fit the new normal. But now, clients are expecting new strategies that deliver real results in what has become a much more complicated landscape.

You have to find ways to deal with the limitations of the short term while you plan for the long.

So, how are our pharma specialists working in this brave new world? We asked a few to find out.



CloudRaker executive director, pharma Joyce Thuss and CEO Thane Calder in the agency's Montreal office.

Make it meaningful

Solving real needs with a message that resonates – that's the CloudRaker formula for break-out pharma

CLOUDRAKER MIGHT BE ONE YEAR SHY of its 20th anniversary, but it's not ever likely to rest on its laurels. Case in point: the agency's now expansive pharma practice.

The agency's roots in the category go back three years, when they were asked to join a digital AOR RFP by pharma giant Merck – specifically because they weren't a familiar face in the field at the time.

The client came to them, recalls founder/CEO Thane Calder, saying "we think the world's changing around us, and we need to engage with people – whether they're health care professionals or patients – like humans, like people."

So, while the 60-person Montreal-based agency might not have had a rolodex full of pharma clients at the time, they did have both the approach and the voice the client was looking for.

That initial work has led to the creation of an entire pharma division, rooted in creative that's informed by strategic thinking and tailored to the needs of stakeholders.

"Our whole essence as a team is 'do meaningful commerce,'" says Calder. "Make things people want. We always talk about the end user – are we adding value? Whether it's communications or digital experiences, we always try and keep that in the forefront. So, we jumped on the pitch and won."

It all comes down to the CloudRaker DNA, instilled back in the days when they were primarily a digital shop – work fast, work agile, react faster.

"Our clients want to adopt those same principles," notes executive director, Pharma Joyce Thuss. "With sprint and agile

methodology, you're always talking about how to bring incremental value to go-to-market-faster strategies. What is it that the end user really needs?"

Thuss says that, even before COVID limited channels, CloudRaker always looked for purpose-driven connection strategies. "Our customers are busy treating patients all day long, we have to be able to disseminate material when they're more likely to be highly engaged."

While CloudRaker may have begun in digital, it now offers a full 360-degree solution for clients, to deliver DTC, patient and HCP content where it will have the most impact.

Ultimately, it's less about the channel and more about the message. Resonance is key. "Let's be honest, people don't want marketing in their lives," observes Calder. "So, let's all remember that when we're crafting campaigns, we have to be very mindful that we're participating in someone's life. We have to respect that."

And it's not always during the best moments of their life, either – it might be when they're facing a new diagnosis. Consider the work CloudRaker recently did on an unbranded HPV awareness campaign for Merck. HPV is one of the leading causes of cervical cancer in Canada. To combat that, the "You don't always know" digital campaign used native, social, mobile and digital OOH in a data-fuelled program that targeted based on behaviour and interests, which delivered 154 million impressions, 500,000 clicks and 8,250,000 video completions.

Last December, CloudRaker filmed cervical cancer survivors, sharing their personal journeys. "We were using testimonials to create cervical cancer awareness," recalls Thuss, "and to highlight the fact that it could be prevented with a vaccine. It was amazing to talk to these women – and it's not just going to help sell a brand, but it's going to help change the course of the disease."

That authentic, personal approach has been key to the success of other CloudRaker pharma campaigns as well. For Keytruda, it was about creating hope-driven assets and conversation starters so doctors and patients could openly talk about cancer and immunotherapy. For AbbVie Care, CloudRaker found ways to meaningfully engage patients with chronic, long-term conditions. And to tackle a longstanding challenge, the agency came up with 'Unbranded' brand guidelines for Merck, a framework for discourse with Type 2 Diabetes patients who can be hard to engage as the condition is often brought about by personal habits.

"We treat each problem like it's unique," says Thuss. "Especially in the pharma space, consumers want brands to be authentic, and that's really giving us an opportunity to be bolder and move away from traditional approaches."



As the distributor of the most effective vaccination against HPV (Gardasil 9), Merck wanted to raise awareness of the risks to Canadian women. CloudRaker developed an unbranded campaign with custom content and tactics that delivered 154 million impressions, 500,000 clicks and 8,250,000 video completions in the process.



Gleaning from an insight that if we had a vaccine for other forms of cancers, most of us would be standing in line, CloudRaker's new branded approach moved away from a conversation about HPV as a common sexually transmitted virus, focusing on the 1,500 Canadian women diagnosed with cervical cancer every year, and how it could be prevented through a vaccine.



With sales reps not seeing customers face-to-face, how could brands connect? CloudRaker developed the Primary Care e-congress for Merck – a week-long series of live webcasts touching on issues such as treating and teaching during Covid-19, creating a multi-channel digital campaign to assemble an audience of health care professionals across Canada.



Meet the latest treatment for cancer. **YOU.**

CloudRaker needed to create honest conversations with potential patients about immuno-therapy; an advanced treatment that uses the body's own immune system to fight cancer. They delivered a relatable educational portal that was both supportive and hopeful – but also empowering, encouraging cancer patients to take an active role in their treatment and explore immuno-therapy as a treatment option.



Things that can impact your A1C or blood glucose levels:



CloudRaker made it easy for Merck to tell an empowering story to its diabetes patients. Given the fact that patient engagement in this category is traditionally low, content was developed to inform, empower and motivate the reader by making lifestyle changes as achievable as possible, outlining realistic goals for the specific audience.



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Agents of Change

bMod's key to success is understanding what's driving your customers

MONTREAL'S **bMod COMMUNICATIONS** has been on the map since 2003, but this year will likely go down as one of its busiest ever. The team has already been involved in 11 pitches in the last six months – winning nine – and has grown by almost 25%.

"I believe we are the largest independently owned healthcare agency in Canada" notes agency co-founder Kathryn Buck. "We're proud of maintaining our independence because it allows us to be truly agile, innovative, and efficient."

"People are often surprised by how large our team is and how long we've been around. I think it's the level of partnership we offer that's been a big driver of our success. It's been hugely important to us to maintain an experienced and passionate team that understands the full scope of our clients' business, as bMod has grown."

And bMod has flourished, as a full-service, healthcare marketing agency with a wealth of experience in both offline and digital strategies and offerings, including Veeva Level 4 certification. In their nearly two decades, they've collaborated with some of the biggest names in pharma to help build a more customer-centric offering, including Sanofi, Sandoz, AbbVie, Novartis, BMS, Taiho and Bayer.

While COVID may have changed the global landscape in 2020, it hasn't changed the way bMod looks at the world. In fact, says VP

bMod – it says it all in the name. The ultimate goal of this Montreal-based indie is behaviour modification. Partners Eric Frendo, Kathryn Buck and Murray Forrester have grounded their approach in good info: digging into customer insights and really understanding what's driving customers. That's the only way you change minds, they note.

of client services, Maria Dilorio, "the challenging environment has just played into the agency's strengths, placing more emphasis on the need to meaningfully partner with clients and identify how to move customers regardless of the channel."

"I feel like our conversations haven't changed, they're just appreciated more now" she notes. "At the beginning, our clients were talking about the short term – 'Okay, in the next three months, how are we going to fill the gap? What are we going to do while the reps are not in the field?'. We approached it from a long-term viewpoint right from the beginning. COVID is going through 2021 and beyond; this is the reality. We need to get even more customer-centric now and for the long haul."

bMod believes the pandemic accelerated an evolution that was already underway, forcing the industry to be more innovative and nimbler – and changing the dynamic between agency and client. "It's not just about being in tune with the latest technology" says VP of operations, Robyn Schwartz. "It's about already being out in front of that technology so you can proactively help your clients manage what they're going through."

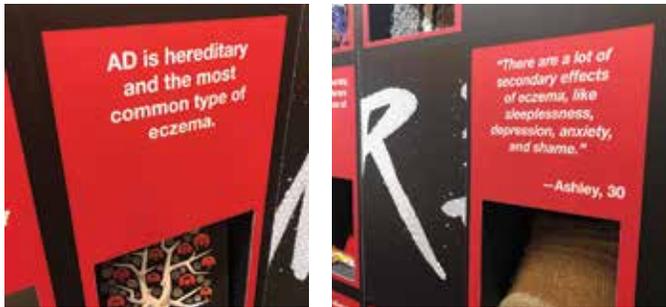
Case in point, bMod recently remotely launched a global campaign in Italy, doing all the work virtually from Canada.

"There was a point in time where the project was put on hold because the client wasn't sure they wanted to go ahead," recalls Schwartz. "But we reassured them that it could be done, and exceptionally well – and it really was. We were able to get 400 employees on the line at the same time and really transcend the technology. We found new ways to engage the audience. COVID has just pushed everyone to embrace innovation."

In a time when remote work is the new norm, being able to collaborate with brands regardless of where they are in the world creates a market advantage for Canadian agencies like bMod. Says Buck, "I like to say that we've been training at altitude here in Canada – because of our strict regulatory environment, we have to be extremely clever. We've had to be creative problem solvers to produce effective communications."

The bMod focus distils down to helping organizations evolve to become more customer-centric and dial in the messaging. "If you aren't meeting a need with your communication, you're not going to cut through," says the bMod co-founder. "They have to do the hard work of really digging into customer insights, understanding what's driving customers, or they're going to get lost in the clutter. And, this is the way we've been talking since we started in 2003."

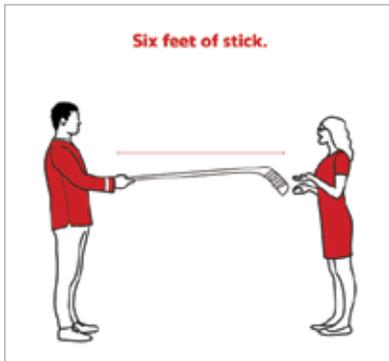
bMod stands for behaviour modification Buck explains. "We've always taken a behavioural change approach to the work we do, which means we've always been in all channels. When you want behaviour change, it's about meeting your customers where they are."



Working with Sanofi Genzyme, bMod created an educational advent calendar installation during Eczema awareness month. Each day the calendar uncovered challenges sufferers of Atopic Dermatitis face to change perceptions and #changeAD.



VPs Robyn Schwartz and Maria Dilorio led their team through a flurry of lockdown pitches, winning nine new accounts and growing the business 25%.



As part of the U.N.'s COVID-19 Creative Response, bMod drew on national pride and Canadian identity to encourage everyone to follow the rules.



COVID has placed more emphasis on connections, says VP Maria Dilorio, whether that's digging deeper into client needs or internal work with teams now remote. Case in point: bMod's Thirsty Thursday happy hour on Zoom designed to keep lines of collaboration open.



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the Measure of me



Truth well told

To really solve the problem, you need to get to the heart of it, according to McCann Health Canada

IF ONE THING IS CERTAIN, 2020 was a year of change and upheaval, with unprecedented shifts in both the market and consumer behaviour. Not only did the playbook get thrown out the window, but you may have noticed a few scorch marks as it flew by.

Turns out, the team at McCann Health Canada just took it all in stride. “We never do the same thing twice,” is how McCann Health MD Neill Brown explains the practice’s M.O. “So, the fact that we can’t rely on an old playbook is totally in line with our approach.”

McCann’s 40-person, dedicated healthcare team is based out of offices in Toronto and Montreal, and is part of the world’s largest healthcare agency network, with more than 1,900 employees in 60 offices across 20 countries, all with one goal: to help client brands and businesses play a meaningful role in people’s lives. In 2019, McCann Health was awarded Health Network of the year by Cannes Lions Health and McCann Canada was the most awarded Canadian agency at Cannes Lions.

So, despite the uncertainty of the last few months, the McCann Health team just followed the approach that has always proven successful for them in the past: look to the core needs of the client and the consumer.

“Before rushing ahead with a solution, you have to take the time to fully understand the problem,” Brown observes. “There’s

McCann Health worked with one of Canada’s leading healthcare companies to build the Weight Loss Options website and launched ‘The Measure of Me’ platform to fundamentally change the narrative surrounding obesity.

an adage that ‘a problem well stated is a problem half solved.’ We rally around the notion of ‘Truth Well Told.’ The problems always change. Unpacking and fully understanding them to ensure that we’re solving the right problem is the beginning of what we call our truth. That approach doesn’t change.”

And McCann Health has had a busy year in 2020. The agency attracted new clients – including Roche and Allergan Aesthetics (an Abbvie Company) – and expanded existing relationships with Alcon, Novartis, GSK and ViiV. Brown says clients quickly came to terms with the new norms facing the industry – empty waiting rooms, virtual conferences and a busy digital landscape – and wanted solutions. Now, please.

“We’ve had clients reinvest in their brands,” he says. “We’ve seen dramatic shifts from one channel to another. We’ve found new ways to reach physicians. We found new ways to empower patients with credible information that supports the lives they’re living while we’re all under lockdown.”

He says there are now clear opportunities for brands to play a more meaningful role than ever in people’s lives – with empathy, positivity and pragmatism. “Adapting to the changing norms will help brands come out of this as strong as possible.”

One key change Brown points to is the tonal shift caused by COVID. He sees a move away from uninformed influencers and shiny celebrities towards expert sources people can trust – especially as the digital landscape gets more crowded. It’s much more about evidence-based medicine now.

“We need to operate on an even higher level of responsibility,” he notes. “In the face of restricted lifestyles and information overload, there have been clear shifts towards the practicality of marketing content, the trustworthiness and credibility of its source, and the respect we show for people’s time.”

How does that ethos inform the work? For example, McCann Health ECD Sean Riley says, “we’ve helped clients provide consumers with useful ways to maintain proper eye health and hygiene – beyond just selling product [Alcon]. And we’ve partnered with accredited influencers to offer guidance on the nutrient density of foods – helping consumers eat smarter [Dairy Farmers of Ontario]. And amidst all the challenges, we’ve worked on pharmaceutical launches in high-science areas including new oncology and HIV treatments [Novartis, Roche, ViiV].”

In order for creative solutions to connect with people, it begins with a core understanding of the real challenges they are facing.

“The approach today is to keep a steady hand on the tiller, helping brands keep their eye on the long-term opportunities while also navigating some of these short-term realities,” posits Brown. “But you have to go deep, and because healthcare is a constantly changing marketplace, every time it takes you to a different place. Nothing ever ends up in the same place.”

“And we love it that way. We don’t sell widgets.”



As the AOR for Abbott Diabetes Care, Brightworks conceptualized and executed the “FreeStyle Freedom” campaign which spans TV, OLV, CRM and experiential, and won three national marketing awards in the last two years.

How transparency and asking the right questions are key in 2020

Brightworks brings cross-category digital acumen – and a frank reality check – to pharma

BRIGHTWORKS BEGAN LIFE 15 years ago as a digital shop in Toronto and those digital roots have been a strong foundation for growth ever since, positioning the agency particularly well to deal with the challenges of 2020, even adding five staff and four new clients since the start of COVID.

Now more than 80 people strong – about half in-house and half an extension of the team who are brought in to meet specific project requirements – Brightworks delivered over 500 business solutions in the last year through channels like TV, print, digital, social and experiential.

While Brightworks president Neil Follett describes healthcare as foundational to the business, “we’re not a pure play healthcare agency,” he notes. “Probably 30% of our business is outside the space. We work in financial services and beauty, and in other categories which are often a cycle or two ahead in terms of what they’re looking for digitally. We’re able to bring that experience over to healthcare to provide a different perspective.”

And that perspective is crucial when it comes to breaking through in a digital landscape that’s become much more of a focus for pharma due to COVID. Really, he says, it’s about asking clients the right questions so that you’re not just contributing to the noise.

“When clients are saying ‘I need to be digital,’ the goal isn’t to embark on a digital land grab,” notes Follett. “It’s about doing it in a way that is strategic, and lives at the intersection between what the brand needs and what the audience needs. What is the value proposition for the target audience? How is this helping them, or reducing the friction in their life? Historically, I’ve found that asking those questions is refreshing for clients.”

Sounds simple enough. But, as anyone knows, simple is the hardest thing to do well. Follett says that it begins with open, honest conversations. “I think the barriers between clients and agencies are some of the biggest limiting factors for success,” he adds. “Transparency is a key ingredient to success.”

Case in point: Brightworks just launched a national branded DTC campaign for a healthcare client, with TV being shot during COVID, the first DTC the brand has ever done. They took a unique approach to the creative; they assigned four independent creative teams for campaign development, each coming to the table in turn to pitch ideas. Follett

says they have pulled back the curtain for the client, starting at the concept development phase, and truly partnered through the process.

“The clients sat through a full day of back-to-back creative presentations,” he recalls. “I think we pitched 27 different concepts. Some of them were great, some not so much. But, I wasn’t anxious because the client bought into the process, start to finish. They were unbelievably engaged. I think both the process and the work were radically better because of it.”

While that isn’t the norm, it wasn’t far off. “It was a super-charged version of how we like to work,” he describes. “We want to take the lid off the black box that is the agency creative process.”

Follett describes transparency as one of the foundational pillars of the agency. “This is essentially a people business,” he notes. “We don’t have some secret, patented process. It’s about how our people work together – what freedoms, support and tools are they given to work together more effectively. Really, our business plan has not fundamentally changed in 15 years. Being open and honest with our clients and focusing on doing awesome work that delivers results. Working in that way, year over year, makes your clients want to come back.”

As a testament to that approach, one of the newest US AOR relationships Brightworks signed during COVID, NeoGenomics, came through a CMO with whom they had worked years before. He reached out to ask them to pitch, and they won the account against eight other agencies. “As an independent agency, we need to earn every single one of our clients. We need to be scrappier and smarter.”



Managing blood glucose can feel like a full-time job. To show diabetes patients that Abbott's new FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring system can change that, Brightworks let consumers experience the technology hands-on, which sparked word of mouth, increased online traffic and impacted conversions.



Increasingly healthcare clients are exploring digital channels, such as social, for both branded and unbranded content; Brightworks helps clients "sell in" these programs to leadership and regulatory and has worked with brands to grow their communities.



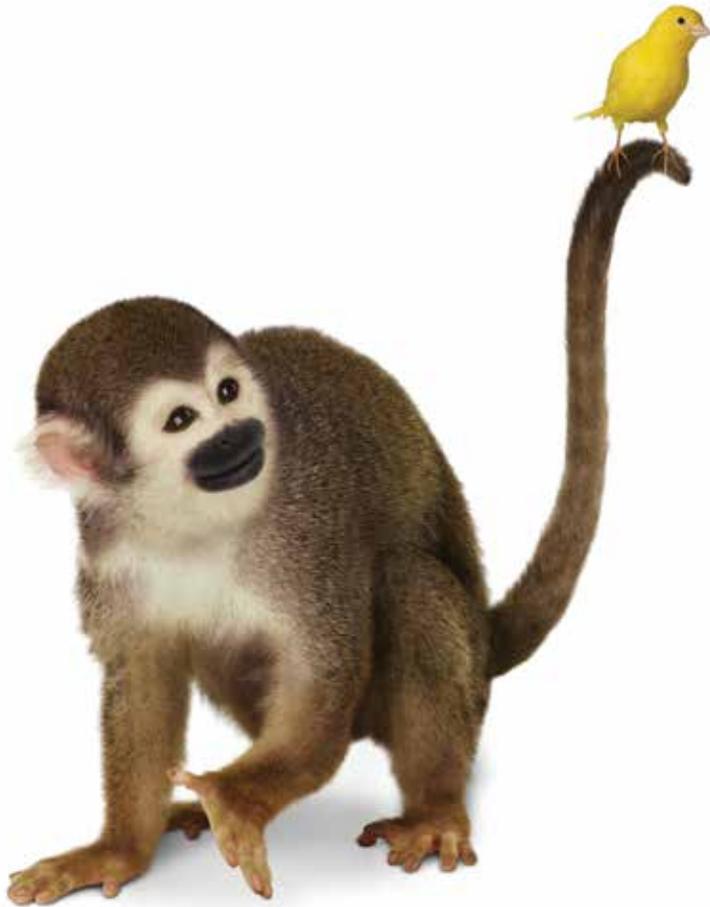
To prove Schwarzkopf Professional's new IGORA VIBRANCE hair colour range made the cut, Brightworks had Instagram's top hairstyling influencers share authentic "first use" content to get their followers talking – and trying. A boost in awareness, earned media and social proof of switch from competitors, proved the program resonated.



Brightworks experience outside the healthcare space – like this unscripted testimonial campaign for Provident Bank using real clients and employees – enables the team to bring a refreshed perspective to the more regulated environment.



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LONG LIVE TELUS AND ITS CRITTERS

BY WILL NOVOSEDLIK

HOW STANDING BY ITS BRAND FOR TWO DECADES PAID OFF IN ROI AND BUILT A FUTURE-FRIENDLY FOUNDATION FOR THE COMPANY'S TECH EVOLUTION.

It's not unusual for brands to reposition and rebrand. What's more unusual is for a brand to remain true to its original promise, personality and visual language over 20 years – while remaining fresh and inviting. This is the story of how one of Canada's most enduringly beloved brands is still as relevant and appealing as it was two decades ago.

In 1998, Alberta-based Telus merged with British Columbia's BCTel to become what was then the second largest telecom in Canada, with a market share of 22%

compared to Bell's 42%. Two years later, Darren Entwistle became its president and CEO, titles he still holds today. That makes him the longest-serving CEO amongst incumbent telecom companies in the world.

One of his first big decisions was to grow the Telus wireless business by purchasing Ontario-based cellular provider Clearnet in 2000. That decision earned him a lot of criticism from the industry because of the landmark purchase price of \$6.6 billion. Critics considered that far too much money for a plucky little regional mobility player. But Entwistle saw something else, something far more valuable than just a network. He saw a brand.

Telecoms and tech companies have, at their core, engineering cultures. With all due respect to engineers, brand is not generally a high priority for them. Focused as they are on keeping up with the hard math and science of rapidly evolving network technologies, many communications providers are not as comfortable in the soft, fuzzy world of customers and marketing.

While his MBA and diploma in network engineering suggest that Entwistle squarely fits the traditional profile of a telecom executive, his instincts tell another story. What Entwistle saw in Clearnet was a highly differentiated brand proposition based not on the strength of its network and mobile devices, but on the human experience.

THE BIRTH OF A BELOVED BRAND

When it first launched in the mid-nineties, Clearnet knew it couldn't win on network quality. It needed another way to stand out. So the brand crafted a creative strategy with the help of its original agency of record, Taxi Advertising.

The shop was only a few years old and not much bigger than its three partners (Jane Hope, Paul Lavoie and Heather Fraser) when it was approached by Clearnet at the time. As Fraser tells it, "Clearnet had a long list of over 20 agencies under consideration. In pitch, the other agencies came forward with fully formed strategies and spec creative. We came in with nothing but empty notepads and lots of questions. As it turned out, that worked perfectly for Clearnet because it was interested in a much more open-minded, co-created approach to brand-making."

Identifying the customer was the next part of the task.



Knowing that Bell and Rogers were focused on business customers who tended to be locked in with long-term contracts, Clearnet and Taxi decided to target the untapped market of youth, new Canadians and women with a no-contract offer. But how do you address such a diverse set of customers? That would require a visual language that everyone could respond to.

By happenstance Hope and Lavoie had watched *Microcosmos*, a 1996 documentary film that takes an up-close look at insect life. The arresting images of tiny critters negotiating their way through a leafy underworld struck a chord. Using nature as a creative platform would provide an endless diversity of flora and fauna that would appeal to customers of every demographic stripe – because, who doesn't love nature? To make it even more distinctive, Hope, inspired by a Japanese aesthetic, set everything against a white background. Taxi hired *Microcosmos* director Claude Nuridsany to shoot the launch spots and SNL's Norm Macdonald to deliver the voiceover. Thus was born one of the most memorable and recognizable visual platforms in Canadian branding.

It was a bold departure from the norm. "The whole notion of using flora and fauna in our messaging was unique at a time when most mobile brands relied on lifestyle photos of people using devices," says Lise Doucet, who was Clearnet's director of marketing communications at the time and is now director of strategic programs at Telus. Supported by the tagline "The Future is Friendly," Clearnet and Taxi tapped into a fundamental human insight: our unspoken fear of technology.

As Entwistle tells it, "the comforting iconography and vocabulary of nature served to assuage the anxiety many feel about the complexities and pace of change in today's technology-driven world. From the landmark successes of tree frogs reaching out to make a connection to improbable flying pigs, blazing-fast cheetahs, socialising fish, child-like monkeys, curious meerkats, playful pygmy goats, rock star rabbits and irresistible pandas, we have analogised the personalities of the world's animals to achieve a more human connection – a connection that has stood the test of time."

So in a very unusual move, one that almost never happens in the world of branding, Entwistle executed a kind of reverse brand take-over by abandoning most of the assets of the Telus brand and replacing them with the look, feel, personality, tagline and "nature as a canvas" communications strategy of Clearnet. The only assets he retained were the Telus name and logo. "The juxtaposition of nature and technology turned out to be a winning formula," says Doucet. "Darren saw how it had resonated with Canadians. And he had the vision

to realize that, if adopted, it could keep Telus elevated above the pack for a long time to come."

That it was the right move is partly justified by the 549% return Telus has delivered to its investors since 2000.

Recognizing the value of a unique brand was just the first step. What Entwistle added to that uniqueness was a strong commitment to consistency, which is what it takes to nurture and build a brand over the long term.

Denise Bombier, director of brand marketing for Telus points out that this 20-year commitment has been key to the brand's success. "The beauty of consistency means that your customers already know you when you show up," says Bombier. "We don't have to re-introduce ourselves every time. That gives us more time to talk about what's different about Telus."

Entwistle agrees: "Early on – when pundits wondered what on earth a leaping lizard had to do with technology and doubted that a telecommunications company coming out of Western Canada could realise brand resonance across the country – our team built a brand that is so prevalent and adored that people recognise a Telus ad without even seeing our logo. In the past two decades, the Telus brand increased in value from a few hundred million dollars to \$8.6 billion, and has been voted one of the most trusted and resonant brands in the country."

Indeed, according to the 2019 University of Victoria's Gustavson School of Business Brand Trust Index, Telus was voted the most trusted brand in a category that's traditionally struggled with consumer trust.



CAPTURING BOTH ENDS OF THE MARKET

By 2008 Telus Mobility was well established as a premium provider of wireless services. While that is a sign of great success, it does have its drawbacks.

Being perceived as premium is a plus for power users who like to have more comprehensive plans and don't mind paying for them, but it can be a turn-off for users who want a more basic offering. They are essentially priced out of the market.

This then creates a dilemma: you don't want to lose the lower end of the market, but you don't want to discount the high end either. To use a retail metaphor, you can't be Walmart and Nordstrom at the same time.

So what do you do? You create another brand, one that looks and sounds nothing like its parent.

"Initially we knew that if we were to be successful, we would need these brands to be distinct from each other," says Doucet. "While that has changed over time, initially it was 'never the twain shall meet.' We wanted to play off the quality of the Telus network while keeping the brands themselves apart."

The new brand, named Koodo, would target 18- to

30-year-olds who were likely coming off their parents' plans. "All of a sudden they're on their own, with multiple bills to pay, looking for a more basic wireless service," says Doucet.

"So if Telus was more for more, Koodo was less for less: limited options, low touch customer service, more of a curated choice," she adds. "This value proposition allowed Koodo to address customers who wanted to be considered savvy but not cheap. We wanted to be like Ikea or Target, where you are making a smart, conscious decision to buy something that is less expensive without giving up great design."

The beauty of this approach was that it gave Doucet and Taxi the creative freedom to develop a whole new brand platform. Given the 18-30 target, Koodo could afford to be cheekier with its brand imagery. So to capture the stripped-down, bare-bones nature of a talk-and-text, one device-only brand, they came up with the concept of "Fat-Free Koodocizers," which Doucet says was "a spoof on the '80s fitness craze, playing on the whole notion of a basic, skinny offer."

One of the products that figured prominently in its

offer was the "Tab," which provided customers with a zero-dollar phone that they could pay off over time by adding it to their monthly tab. To launch this product, Taxi created an animated character called El Tabador. As a spoof on mask-wearing Mexican wrestlers, El Tabador quickly resonated with consumers and became the mascot that personified this challenger brand. "It was so much fun," recalls Doucet. "Those were some of the best ads I ever made."

As highly entertaining as El Tabador became, the fun didn't last. Over time, there was quite a significant message comprehension issue. People loved the Koodo character but did not always understand what he stood for or what the message was. Research revealed what Doucet refers to as "the Koodo dichotomy": strong brand affinity with customers but not with non-customers.

"The challenge for us was to close that perception gap. So we really leaned into what we have today, which is 'Choose Happy,'" says Doucette. "It gives us the opportunity to balance our communications so that it is as much about the value that we offer customers as it is about the values we have as an organization. Over the last few years we have been focused on things like 'shock-free data.' We have been able to provide more reasons why Koodo makes its customers happy."

Telus had successfully pulled off the high-wire balancing act of capturing both ends of the market without diluting the power of the original brand. And while the two brands couldn't be more different, they somehow manage to share the essence that lies behind the concept of "The Future is Friendly:"

CREATING BETTER HUMAN OUTCOMES

While the Telus brand has remained true to its original principles both externally and internally, the enterprise it now represents is a lot different. What was once a telecom is now a diversified data technology company with major investments in sectors like healthcare and agriculture. It has evolved into a company whose purpose is to "put its world leading technology to work creating meaningful change, giving back to help communities thrive and to help those who need it the most."

Jill Schnarr, chief communications officer at Telus, explains: "We've always been in the business of connecting people, but we are now layering on more advanced



Above: Koodo, the legitimate child of parent Telus, is a cheeky brand, the kind that spoofs '80s fitness ads in the name of skinny mobile offers.

Opposite page, top left: While most telecom companies were buying up networks, Telus was investing in the healthcare space as part of its higher-power social mission.





technological solutions.”

For example, some years ago, while other telecoms were busy investing in content by acquiring TV and radio stations, Telus invested in healthcare.

“More people are coming to appreciate remote consultation with their doctors,” says Schnarr. “We

connect people in their homes through the Telus Home Health Monitoring Solution. This long-distance care allows them to stay home and not be exposed to diseases like COVID at the hospital. It takes the pressure off the hospital and saves doctors’ time. We’ve enabled 27,000 physicians to do this kind of remote care, reducing the risks for them and their patients and costs to the health system.”

Another example is a technology called Babylon by Telus, a virtual healthcare solution that allows people without a family doctor to access one in minutes.

In the agricultural space, Telus saw an opportunity to work with farmers to digitally transform their operations with better soil utilization, crop production and tracking inputs. Telus has built digital products and tools that farmers can use on their iPads to get up-to-date data analytics on their crops, how long they take to mature, how much space they need to grow, how to better understand supply chain, and much more.

It’s all part of Telus’ ambition for leadership in social capitalism. “It’s about leveraging our technology and compassion to enable better human outcomes,” explains Schnarr. “We are interested in a better world because we know that when people and communities and ecosystems thrive, then businesses – including our own – can sustainably grow.”

At a time when people are increasingly demanding a higher sense of purpose from business, Telus has risen to the challenge. In another example, it created “All Connected for Good” where it offers programs like “Internet for Good” that works with governments to determine which low-income families qualify for internet service at \$10 per month, low cost refurbished computers and digital literacy lessons.

“Mobility for Good” provides free plans and phones to thousands of youth when they leave foster care each year. These young adults view it as a lifeline that keeps them connected to friends and job opportunities.

“Health for Good” is focused on the 36,000 Canadians who are homeless, who feel cut off, who aren’t comfortable going to a doctor’s office, and who are in the

midst of an opioid crisis. The program provides them with mobile health clinics staffed by doctors and nurses to provide in-situ, on-the-street healthcare.

And “Tech for Good” provides disabled people with assistive tools that make it easier to access technology.

While the phrase “The Future is Friendly” was originally created to make consumers more comfortable about embracing mobile technology – it’s also reflective of the company’s culture, which is focused on positive human outcomes and an inspiration to create a better future, whether that means getting involved with community-giving or developing products and services with a positive social and financial impact.



Many studies have shown that purpose-driven brands don’t just deliver positive social and environmental impacts, but also outperform other brands financially. Telus is no exception. Over the last two decades, its enterprise value has quadrupled to approximately \$51 billion, EBITDA has more than doubled to \$5.7 billion and earnings per share have increased more than threefold to \$2.89.

As Entwistle puts it, “Over the course of two decades, our brand promise has exemplified Telus’ unique culture, our longstanding values and our passionate social purpose, which is to drive better social, economic and health outcomes for our customers, our team members and the communities where we live, work and serve.” If Telus can continue on that mission, the future it creates will indeed be friendly. 



Reflections on 2020

Directions: Let's face it, it's been a tough year. But it's not all doom and gloom. Find a mirror and recite these positive affirmations to feel (a bit) better about things.

(Tip: It works even better if you say them out loud!)

I look like a million bucks.
I am up to date on every single show in the universe.
I can literally mute my coworkers now.
I didn't get stung by a murder hornet.
I control the temperature in the office.
I haven't had to set an alarm for months.
I still enjoy reading magazines, clearly.
I own a mirror.
I know the grocery store like the back of my hand.
I learned that cereal is for lunch and dinner too.
I do NOT live in America.
I can nap at work, and it's totally normal.
I work in advertising, the greatest industry on earth.
Things can only get better from here.

Congratulations to the winners at this year's AOY.
And for those of you who came up short remember;

We're all winners.





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