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Purpose leads
planning in a
world stuck
in crisis



MARKETERS OF THE YEAR

The pivots and
new plans at
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WestJet, Subaru
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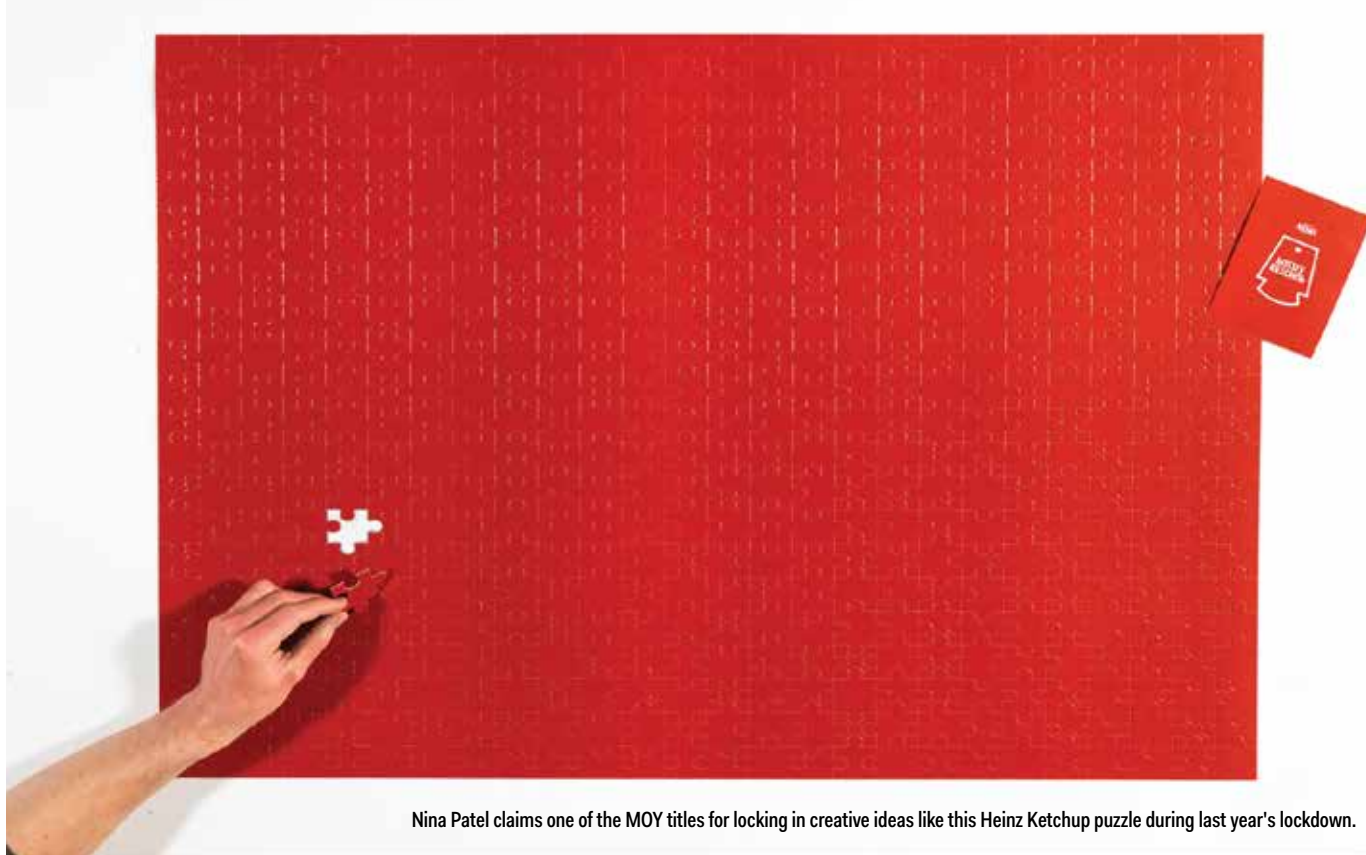
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Nina Patel claims one of the MOY titles for locking in creative ideas like this Heinz Ketchup puzzle during last year's lockdown.

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ON THE COVER:

The globe is in suspended animation. Figuratively. Literally. Anxiously. When this blizzard will end is anyone's guess, but one thing's for sure: the business world has been shaken to the core. **Brendan Stephens** is the photographer behind the cover for our aptly named Winter 2021 issue, which pays tribute (as much as we'd sometimes like to forget) to the stormy year that was. Inside, you'll find the opinions of experts and *strategy*'s CMO Council, as told to Justin Dallaire, on how brands are shaking off the rust of fringe CSR programs and blanketing their brands with purpose.

Great(er) expectations

Welcome to the 21st year of the 21st century. An era of relentless scrutiny – and placing everyone under a microscope. I don't just mean the heedless politicians and hospital chiefs seeking travel escapes during a pandemic. I mean e-v-e-r-y-o-n-e. Good or bad.

From brands circumventing the rules, to execs promising change, to big tech enabling/disabling the ability to control the narrative. No one seems to be spared by the watchful eye of the public, who grow more dubious by the day.

It's true. Consumer trust is falling, fast. Greenwashing – a shadow in the dark side of CSR – played its part in the decline. Making vague/misleading claims of eco-friendly products and processes has done the opposite of creating freedom from doubt.

It's no longer enough to make sweeping claims. Consumers are becoming more empowered by the information that's available at their fingertips. They have far more access to what's going on behind the hood of a brand – from the vendors a retailer chooses to recycle clothing donated by shoppers in their stores (will my second-hand garments be reused or will they end up in a landfill?), to the water used in manufacturing plants (are those impressive water reduction targets supported by a feasible action plan?).

In turn, expectations are becoming greater. Discerning shoppers are uncovering new layers of conduct, while learning about new issues, so the standard to which they hold brands is rising.

I won't argue that surface-level actions will fade away any time soon, but I will shine a light on the tide that's beginning to turn.

A group of CMOs and authorities on all things CSR told *strategy's* Justin Dallaire in our cover story (p.12) that purpose is being baked into the core of more and more businesses today. And so, their thinking goes, social responsibility (ever-linked to marketing) will continue to move from the fringes to the foundations of corporate strategies.

The perfect storm to test this theory is brewing. Without deep and authentic values as guideposts, brands may continue to be paralyzed by the pandemic, climate crisis, and social, political and civil unrest that rages on. Marketers, as the custodians of those values, have the unique – and growing – opportunity to hold brands accountable to their principles.

And with brands seeing the ROI that comes from creating real change, marketers – who know how to map out the baby steps needed to help consumers adopt new behaviours – can move them down that path that much faster.

Jennifer Horn
Editor & Content Director
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strategy

WINTER 2021 VOLUME 32, ISSUE 1
strategyonline.ca

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Tel: (416) 408-2448 Fax: (416) 408-0249. 8799 Highway 89, Alliston, ON L9R 1V1.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

STRATEGY IS PUBLISHED SEVEN TIMES PER YEAR BY BRUNICO COMMUNICATIONS LTD.
In Canada: One year CA\$80.00 Two years CA\$144.00
(HST included. Registration #856051396 RT)
Single copy price in Canada is CA\$6.95. Please allow four weeks for new subscriptions and address changes.

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Niagara Falls NY 14304 Printed in Canada. Canada Post Agreement No. 40050265.
ISSN: 1187-4309.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The reset & reinvention of... the collective POV

There's been a lot of reassessment during lockdown – what we actually need (trail gear), and what we're capable of (walking on ice, with a pair of creepers).

Last year the industry paused, cautiously emerged (anxious to hit the right note), and then pivoted. This year it's more about leaping ahead – plotting where all the escalated change to life as we knew it nets out.

By moving past auto-pilot instincts to force old norms onto a changed reality, companies are escaping the suspended whirling-storm mindset (as depicted on our front cover) to develop a fresh legacy-free vision of the road ahead.

To keep tabs on that progress, *strategy* has a busy winter and spring mapped out.

We're rethinking how award recognition takes shape, translating the traditional physical "show" format to give more editorial context without sacrificing a celebration factor. The AToMiC Awards will fittingly be the first iteration of a deeper insights- and impact-driven curatorial approach to framing why the ideas that won were so powerful.

AToMiCon will be the first virtual conference of our 2021 calendar, and as we re-interpret learning and connecting in a virtual space within our Xchange platform, we expect some of the new online benefits will

remain useful even when physical events return.

The suspended animation of the last year and the slo-mo progress that continues this year means two things.

THING ONE: Every accomplishment means more. I heard someone say "80% is the new 100%" to describe the challenge of managing and motivating teams through a pandemic as everyone juggles curveballs, WFH challenges, new frustrations and responsibilities. Another way to frame it is that it takes a 200% effort to pull things off to even meet an altered expectation of success.

THING TWO: The decisions we make now and next will have more meaning as new trails are blazed in the aftermath of a global reset. The process of figuring out where a brand can stretch was forced over the last year. Every company, regardless of how many decades they've been around, became entrepreneurial.

The stories in this issue's Indie List (p.41) are a great overview of accomplishments on both fronts; agencies quick response to brand challenges with Plan A-calibre solutions, and the new ways they're evolving their businesses.

The level of difficulty in

performing formerly simple tasks, let alone retooling marketing plans amid fast-shifting scenarios is also an important context for reading about what the Marketers of the Year were able to achieve this year (p.17).

It's more important than ever to celebrate wins, given how hard-fought they all are. So double kudos to everyone who raised the bar when hunkering down was a more instinctual response than bold plays.

We're into another slog where no area of decision-making is on autopilot. The impact and fallout of all the changes that were hastened by lockdowns may be the hardest to navigate yet.

The brands with the courage and conviction to make bold moves and invest in the future despite ongoing uncertainty hold one thing in common: core values were their North star.

The journey to overcome challenges and meet expectations that continue to change will require that make-it-happen-faster mindset perfected since last March, and our new take-nothing-for-granted attitude is an essential lens to hold onto for the long haul.

In all of these shifting scenarios, the role of marketing is poised for more reinvention and carries more responsibility for resetting success.

Cheers,
Mary Maddever





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WILL THAT BE CASH, CREDIT OR PAY LATER?

By Justin Dallaire

In a sign that payment flexibility is becoming more important during hard economic times, a wave of brands in Canada – from Samsung to Hudson's Bay – are beginning to partner with “buy now, pay later” (BNPL) providers. Unlike traditional installment loans for big-ticket items, which have been around for decades, these payment options are being used to finance smaller, less-expensive purchases – from jeans to makeup and electronics – and in some cases, without late fees and interest.

There are now several Canadian providers, including Flexity, Uplift and PayBright, that are facilitating payments for a growing number of retailers. Sephora, for example, uses PayBright, which SVP marketing Deborah Neff says is promoted in many of its marketing materials, because it's “important for our clients to understand the different options [and] flexibility available to them.” PayBright recently ran its own marketing blitz, working with agency Round to create the “Break Up the Cost” campaign featuring products from partners like Sephora.

Given the current economic climate and the fact that thousands of Canadians are now relying on government assistance, Armin Begic, executive director of Canadian retail at the NPD Group, says pay-later options may become increasingly important to retailers.

A 2020 report by NPD found that 20% of online shoppers and 30% of millennials prefer to shop at stores with monthly installment options. And, in a survey by payments tracker Cardify, two-third of respondents reported buying discretionary items they might have not purchased if a pay-later plan wasn't offered; nearly half said they spend between 10% to 40% more from a brand that has those options than when buying with a credit card.

Sectors beyond retail are exploring BNPL as it becomes popular among consumers. In December, Air Canada partnered with Toronto's Uplift – a travel-focused provider that also works with Air Transat, Porter and Sunwing. Keith Wallis, senior director of distribution and payments at Air Canada, says the airline is finding that BNPL helps drive premium upgrades.

In part, Wallis credits subscription services like Netflix, Apple and Spotify for helping to popularize the model. “This isn't subscription, but paying for things in smaller increments over time has become so well acceptable and almost the norm in any kind of ecommerce environment.” And while the economic crisis has made pay-later options more relevant to consumers today, it's also something Wallis believes will remain relevant “even after the pandemic is behind us.”

Above: PayBright promoted its platform (and the retailers that use it) with ads that educated consumers on how BNPL works.

SHOPPING IS COMING TO A LIVESTREAM NEAR YOU

Considered by many as a modern-day equivalent of the age-old infomercial, livestream shopping is rapidly gaining steam in some global markets.

Livestreams are essentially a democratized, digitized version of the TV world's QVC and Home Shopping Network, where celebrities, influencers and brand ambassadors promote products to customers. The chief difference is that the online versions offer a more social and interactive experience, allowing customers to interact with hosts through a chat box. In many cases, customers can seamlessly click-to-buy the products being discussed in real-time.

It's a growing phenomenon in China, and one that has been accelerated by the pandemic. Already, two-thirds of Chinese consumers report purchasing products via live online broadcasts. In 2020, sales are predicted to reach US\$125 billion, up from \$63 billion the year before.



While conditions are ripe for a similar livestream shopping boom in North America, experts and marketers say there are hurdles that must first be overcome.

“The platforms are still finding their feet [in Canada and the U.S.],” says Dan Moseley, group account director at social agency We Are Social. Brands must figure out how to build a bridge between their ecommerce sites and the social platforms on which livestreams take place, he says.

Above: Many Chinese consumers are used to shopping via livestream. **Opposite:** Livescale is a Canadian platform that allows brands to sell any kind of product, from lobsters to lipsticks.

In China, platforms like Alibaba's Taobao have successfully integrated social and transaction capabilities, says Studio RX chief strategist Carl Boutet. The model has bestowed significant sway onto influencers (known as KOLs, or "key opinion leaders") like Li Jiaqi, the Chinese "King of Lipstick," that have millions of followers. During China's biggest shopping occasion known as Singles' Day, Jiaqi generated US\$145 million in sales through livestreamed content, spending a mere

five minutes talking about each product.

In Canada, Montreal's Livescale works with brands and has partnered with Shopify to connect its platform with the company's e-commerce sites. But, platforms like



established audiences. "It's a closed environment," says Boutet. "You have to go out of your way to get them onto your platform."

In the U.S., brands like Levi's and Walmart recently experimented with the nascent livestream commerce tools on Amazon, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. However, brands don't yet have access to them in Canada. Until they do, companies like L'Oréal – whose Urban Decay and Lancôme brands held livestreams through Livescale even before the pandemic began – may be large enough to bring in customers on their own, while smaller brands continue to struggle to earn ROI, says Boutet.

Indigenous-owned beauty brand Cheekbone Beauty, for example, was part of a Livescale test last year. "It takes a lot of pre-planning, timing, space, the right people speaking – so we're not there yet," says founder Jennifer Harper, who notes there's a lot of future potential for brands in shoppable livestreams.



"We will definitely be working on [a] plan moving forward."

Beyond providing immediate sales, Moseley sees an opportunity for brands to turn their livestreams into on-demand content. Boutet says customers could then use that content to research products before going to a store, as they already do with websites.

Livestream shopping can help recover what many customers have lost during the pandemic: the opportunity to explore products, experience a brand's personality and ask questions while shopping from home, says Moseley. But that doesn't mean it will be a passing fad, he says. "Livestream shopping will become a bigger force and it will be used even when shops are back open." **JD**

WHAT'S TRENDING IN 2021?

Staying abreast of trends is a feat when faced with a global health crisis. To help, *strategy* pored over reports to uncover some trends for 2021 – many of which focus on protecting (and breaking down) the building blocks of a product's life.



ANTIMICROBIAL PACKAGING

Thanks to the pandemic, people are even more sensitive to surfaces that may contain harmful bacteria. As a result, Wunderman Thompson Intelligence sees more innovation and investment being made in antimicrobial packaging, says Emma Chiu, global director of the research firm. "We're starting to see this in the food industry, and we'll see it trickling into beauty and other sectors as well."

For example, in a recent joint venture with investment group Innova Partnerships, Unilever said it would test the self-cleaning properties of seaweed in its products beginning this year. The company claims the bacteria-blocking component could "revolutionize the [cleaning products] industry" and is currently exploring other applications in washing machines, on banknotes, within textiles and dental products.

WATERLESS BEAUTY

As beauty becomes cleaner and greener, Mintel suggests more brands will create water-free formulations that reduce their reliance on a precious resource facing future shortages. And by eliminating water as an ingredient, products often last longer, making them more sustainable.

This trend is gaining traction in skincare, which accounted for nearly half of the waterless beauty and personal care products in 2019, according to Mintel. But it also applies to hair care and spans powder, stick and bar formats.

This year, Toronto's zero-waste beauty co. Everist brought a waterless hair care line to market. It joins a growing list of brands experimenting with water-free formulations, including Vapour Beauty and Loli.

BIODEGRADABLE FURNISHINGS

As consumers become more eco-conscious, the next frontier rests with biodegradable furnishings, according to TrendHunter. In 2021, biodegradable materials will make their way into everything from beds and carpets to restaurant furniture.

In an effort to fight "throwawayism," Vancouver's Horizontal makes beds that are 99.8% biodegradable and come with replaceable parts, significantly extending the product lifecycle. And Silo, a London restaurant, has applied a zero-waste ethos to both its menu and furnishings, with pendant lamps made of mycelium (a kind of fungus), dining tables made from recycled plastic bags and an on-site composting machine. **JD**

THE 2021 NEW ESTABLISHMENT: BRAND WINNERS

Next gen marketers in food and alcohol are recognized for blazing new trails as part of *strategy's* program for fast-rising stars.

BY JENNIFER HORN

TERESA BLAKNEY FRESHENS UP FROZEN

Teresa Blakney speaks Malay, the mother-tongue of Malaysia where she grew up. She's also fluent in English and Cantonese, as well as Mandarin, which she curiously added to her repertoire by watching Chinese soap operas. But beyond languages, she's also a collector of projects.

The Conagra brand manager's main priority is to grow the company's frozen foods product pipeline. However,

she was also recently tasked to come up with a brand strategy that would triple its foodservice business over the next three years. Blakney was given the reins for the project after five years of going beyond the call of duty.

For instance, she spearheaded Conagra's first (and only) employee resource group, dedicated to empowering women professionally.

She's also a volunteer for the Network Executive of Women and a career mentor for the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. And that's all in between her

spearheading the launch of 26 frozen food SKUs in the last year alone – the most in Conagra Canada's history.

Ironically, before she was transferred from the company's grocery business to its frozen foods category in 2017, the senior brand manager of innovation had never tasted a microwave meal.

"It was never a part of my culture or upbringing. We

always cooked food from scratch. Frozen was never part of the pantry," she says.

Although Blakney grew up in Southeast Asia, her grandparents were immigrants to Malaysia from China, where she eventually relocated in her 20s and bounced between the ad world, with posts at Ogilvy & Mather and Publicis, and the brand-side at Nestle and Campbell's.

She believes those worldly experiences and cultural differences helped her innovate Conagra's frozen portfolio with international flavours to capture diverse taste preferences.

Blakney has also tried to cater to contemporary eating trends by adding clean ingredients that younger cohorts tend to seek out. Some of her recent launches include "Power Bowls" for the Healthy Choice brand, where rice has been replaced with a cauliflower or butternut squash base, a grain-free offering that was the first-to-market.

She also applied that carb swap strategy to Marie Callender's Meal to Share, with its pasta or rice base now made from 100% vegetables, another first for the category, she says.

But Conagra still caters to consumers who want convenient comfort food without worrying too much about carb or fat content. Its Hungry-Man brand, for example, carries a smorgasbord of hearty fare like beer-battered chicken, meatloaf and pulled pork to "satisfy your craving."

In 2020, the Hungry-Man legacy brand wanted to bring in new users, so Blakney gave it a different lens.

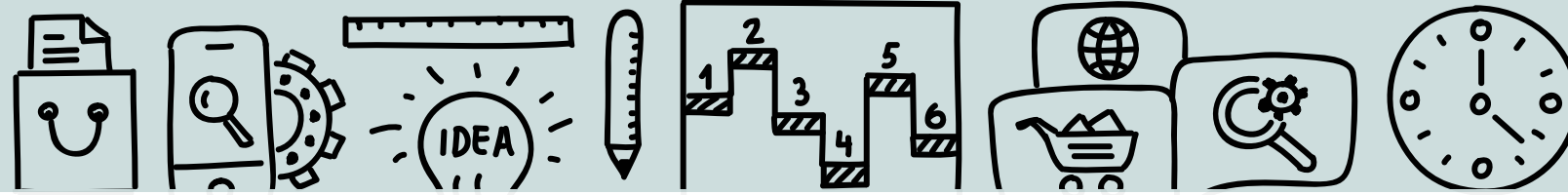
"If we look at the frozen category today, it's no longer about quick, easy meals that you just pop into the microwave. It's not just to satisfy hunger. Consumers are now making choices to fuel their energy," she says.

With that insight, she created a premium Hungry Man XL Bowl, which has higher amounts of energy-dense protein, prominently called out on pack.

Retailers aren't adding more freezer doors in their stores, she says, so there's a bigger fight for space in aisles.

"But the best result of the last year is that retailers are actually asking for more innovation from us, because they're actually proving to drive growth, even outpacing the category, and bringing new users into their franchises."





AMANDA HORN BREAKS THROUGH

Amanda Horn has an eye for design, a mind for politics, the feet for dancing and a voice for communications. The entrepreneur and brand marketer has worked in all four fields. She also briefly flirted with the tech world.

It seems each step of her 10-year career has been kismet.

If it weren't for her love of ballet, she probably wouldn't have left Parliament Hill as a Page to take a marketing post at the National Ballet of Canada in 2014. If it weren't for her language studies, she may have not been plucked from Ford by a head-hunter to work as a bilingual marketer for global distributor Treasury Wine Estates in 2016.

And if it weren't for her time at Calgary's digital subscription box co. The Wine Collective in 2017, she may have not had the knowledge to test and roll out successful virtual events right before the worldwide online pivot.

In 2019, while managing a portfolio of whiskey brands for PMA (an association that helps international alcohol co.'s market, sell and distribute their liquids in Canada), Horn created a "whole new business arm, essentially."

Months before brands in every category fathomable began hosting events online as a result of stay-at-home

orders, Horn and her team were experimenting with "Masterclasses" via Instagram Live. They called it "The Whiskey Explorer" IG series, hosted by brand ambassador Mike Brisebois, who would taste and talk about different malts, online and in real-time, every two weeks.

Once the virtual tasting series was proven a success – with up to 100 people consistently signing up to watch – her team decided to link the digital series to the retail channel and create a sales funnel. They designed shelf-topppers that contained a QR code that shoppers could use to sign up for the workshop or book a one-on-one chat with Brisebois. Consumers were also asked whiskey-related questions via a website, with the brand ambassador then sharing a list of his recos from a selection of whiskeys based on users' answers.

Ideas like the virtual tastings were met with a little resistance from some brands at first, admits Horn. "I was a bit of a rogue when it came to that. But then it took COVID for [the industry] to realize, 'Wow, we need to invest in digital marketing.' It's been a slow transition but it's great that they're starting to see the value."

The marketer also built a digital-first strategy for South African liqueur brand Amarula when it relaunched in Canada and entered Quebec for the first time. Working with content creators at the Food Bloggers of Canada, as well as Notable, Horn was able to tell the story of Amarula, its history, ingredients and what makes it unique from other liqueurs like Baileys across digital and social. The influencer program was even being considered for adaptation in other global markets – that was until South Africa's export business was hit by the pandemic and budgets were shelved, she says.

Horn believes her experience at the aforementioned wine delivery startup gave her the tools and knowledge to spearhead digital and data-led projects like these. And as she moves into a new role at Breakthru Beverages (similar to PMA in that it represents global alcohol brands in Canada), having joined as a national portfolio manager in December 2020, Horn will help build its first-ever brand marketing department with a focus on innovation.

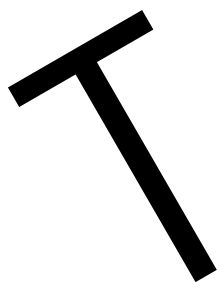
Ever since she began working in alcohol, the marketer has been designing an app in her head. She describes it as "Tinder for wine" where drinkers can swipe for the best food and drink pairings. Perhaps her new role at Breakthru will open the right doors for those types of ideas to come to life. "The industry tends to think of innovation as simply adding new flavours. So it's really exciting to see a company look at innovation in different ways – whether that's creating new proprietary apps or technology in-house, which is something I will hopefully be involved in."



Reaching a tipping point

**HOW THE WORLD-CHANGING EVENTS OF 2020 HASTENED THE RISE OF STAKEHOLDER CAPITALISM
AND RESHAPED THE MEANING OF CORPORATE PURPOSE.**

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE



he tides were turning well before the pandemic.

In August 2019, a group of nearly 200 of the most powerful CEOs in the U.S., known as the Business Roundtable, declared a new purpose for corporations. An influential lobbying group that, since 1997, had held firm to the idea that companies exist to create profit for their owners now believes that businesses should act in the “the benefit of all stakeholders” – meaning, companies no longer *only* work for shareholders but also customers, employees, suppliers and communities.

A letter sent by BlackRock’s Larry Fink, CEO of the world’s largest asset manager, in January

2020 sent further tremors across the corporate world. Fink warned other CEOs of a pending “fundamental reshaping of finance.” Moving forward, the firm with nearly \$8 trillion in managed assets would begin to redirect its clients’ dollars into sustainable companies.

Declarations like these marked a culmination of trends originating in Scandinavian countries in the ‘90s and later exported to other parts of Europe and North America, where

“consumers and activists were asking companies to start engaging with bigger issues, to drive positive change

in society,” says Scott Goodson, founder and CEO of movement marketing agency StrawberryFrog. “Up to that point, CSR was always seen as a nice way to almost atone for the sins of the corporate.”

As stakeholder capitalism grows more influential, once-modest CSR programs are evolving into far-reaching “purpose strategies” that help brands drive meaningful change across “big ticket issues,” says Goodson. “It’s no longer a fringe project with a tiny budget. It’s become the centerpiece of the [business] strategy.”

In 2020, those purpose strategies were thoroughly tested. The pandemic saw businesses focus on keeping employees and customers safe, while the police killing of George Floyd that spawned new Black Lives Matter

protests forced brands to reckon with their role in systemic racism.

These disruptions only served to accelerate the transformational change of the last few years, according to experts and members of *strategy*’s CMO Council advisory board. For one, they “exposed some significant inequities in our society that weren’t readily visible to a lot of groups and people,” such as food insecurity and racial biases, says Tim Faveri, VP of sustainability and shared value at Maple Leaf Foods. “I think, and I hope, that companies are looking at CSR in a different way.”

PRIORITIES TURNED UPSIDE-DOWN

While environmental concerns remained throughout the health crisis, “social issues and caring for people became the number one CEO priority,” says Jean-Philippe Shoiry, CSO of Republik, a CSR-focused agency. “Although it might be surprising, it wasn’t the top priority before – I’m not sure it was within their top three priorities.”

Companies found ways to show they care, from donating profits to support employees and their families, as Aritzia did, to giving temporary pandemic pay to frontline grocery staff during lockdowns. For those whose employees worked from home, the focus became combatting the mental health impacts of extended periods of isolation. Programs launched by Microsoft and Canada Goose, to name a few, helped boost staff morale, well-being and creativity. Some companies turned their attention to their customers and business partners. Unilever, for example, offered to pay struggling suppliers in advance, while the country’s largest brewers and distillers launched campaigns and donated funds to support hard-hit restaurants and bartenders.

These initiatives came in response to the realization that, even as national and global companies braced for a difficult 2020, small businesses would bear the brunt of COVID-related restrictions. To lend a hand, big brands including RBC, American Express and Kraft Heinz stepped up with initiatives or donated ad space for small shops. Meanwhile, GE Appliances diverted advertising dollars to help small restaurants, says CMO Council member and the company’s chief of brands Bob Park. “It’s the reverse of what’s good for us in the sense that the more you order from small restaurants, the less you’re using [our] appliances,” he says. “But it gave us an opportunity to give back.”

“CSR IS NO LONGER A FRINGE PROJECT WITH A TINY BUDGET. IT’S BECOME THE CENTREPIECE OF THE BUSINESS STRATEGY.”

Efforts to save local businesses coincided with another pandemic shift: an increased focus on local. According to research firm Kantar, the pandemic led 65% of consumers to prefer buying goods and services from their own country. This had an impact on the products that brands stocked – Sobeys, for example, doubled its assortment of local products in stores – and led companies to take a more localized approach to support communities.

While Telus has been doing this for years – having established local community boards in 2005 that decide where to direct the company's charitable contributions – the pandemic accelerated this trend for more businesses, says Jill Schnarr, *strategy* CMO Council member and chief social innovation and communications officer at Telus.

At Sobeys, SVP of marketing Sandra Sanderson, who also sits on the CMO Council, says research showed that consumers engaged at the community and

neighbourhood level during the pandemic. Using this insight, the grocer partnered with 13 children's hospital foundations and encouraged customers to donate to their local hospital instead of pooling all the money in one place. "We ended up doubling our target," she says.

As the need to localize grows stronger, multinationals can no longer afford to treat the entire country of Canada as the "local" market, adds the CMO Council's Jeremy Oxley, Canadian VP of marketing, strategy and insights at dairy giant Danone. "It's no longer good enough to say, 'We've got a Canadian [division] or we're made in Canada.' What are you doing to help people in B.C. if you're a company based in Ontario or have production facilities in the eastern part of the country?" As a result, Oxley says there's been a "fundamental shift within Danone to refocus and redistribute decision-making to be closer to local consumers."

Beyond addressing the impacts of the pandemic in 2020, brands soon needed to grapple with a racial justice awakening. In June, when the Black Lives Matter movement swelled, being a responsible organization also meant taking steps to address systemic racism. This time, calls for racial justice reached the highest corner offices, whose support for the movement was expressed through pledges, donations and new D&I mandates.

Open letters circulated calling on businesses to commit to change. An initial two hundred Canadian companies signed the BlackNorth Initiative, a pledge to address racism, while the 15 Percent Pledge has seen companies like Sephora and Indigo commit to allocating 15% of their shelf-space to Black-owned businesses.

In response to public outcry, CPGs promised to rebrand products whose brands were built on racist stereotypes, from PepsiCo's Aunt Jemima to Mars' Uncle Ben's and B&G Foods' Cream of Wheat. Unilever's Ben & Jerry's (which had publicly supported Black Lives Matter four years before) noted "the urgent need to take concrete steps to dismantle white supremacy" and called on the U.S. government to take action.

As more brands focus on purpose, it will become more difficult for marketers to carve out a differentiated position. "For a long time, companies always wanted to own an issue," says Phillip Haid, co-founder and CEO of Public, whose agency specializes in purpose-driven marketing. He says many clients come at it from the perspective of: "What's our Bell Let's Talk?"

That's beginning to change, says Haid. "Companies need to lean into issues in ways they couldn't even fathom three, five, 10 years ago," he says. "Because you're playing a much more active role, to own an issue is virtually impossible." Instead, he sees companies working together to advance their individual goals.

In July, for example, a number of global brands joined #StopHateForProfit, a movement to temporarily suspend or reduce advertising on Facebook after advocacy groups accused the company of not doing enough to moderate hate speech and misinformation on its platform. Later in the year, P&G Canada president Geraldine Huse called on the industry as a whole to "accurately and respectfully portray people" of all backgrounds and to eliminate hateful content across platforms, calling it "bad for people, bad for society and bad for business."

Canadian companies are also banding together on environmental sustainability, recognizing that saving the planet is too big a mandate for any one brand. In December, a coalition of companies consisting of Maple Leaf Foods, CN and Celestica released a joint letter outlining their commitment to take action against climate change – through, in part, reducing carbon emissions and setting science-based targets – and calling on other companies to do the same.

On the same day, more than twenty Canadian retailers and CPGs – including Loblaw, Kraft Heinz, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestle, Unilever and Walmart – signed a pledge organized by The Consumer Goods Forum to reduce waste by eliminating materials from their plastic packaging that are difficult to recycle.

"COMPANIES ALWAYS WANTED TO OWN AN ISSUE. [BUT] BECAUSE YOU'RE PLAYING A MORE ACTIVE ROLE, TO OWN AN ISSUE IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE."

Joint initiatives like these are gaining traction as companies recognize the risk of falling behind their competitors. As more companies get involved, there's a sense that the stakes have never been higher.

Standing out when "everyone is doing purpose" is the "challenge of yesteryear," says CMO Council board member Gina Kiroff, who is also a director of marketing at Unilever. "Now you stand out if you're *not* doing purpose. If you're in QSR and you're serving plastic straws, you stand out. If you've got managerial staff and they're not 50% women, you stand out."

Early in the pandemic, research suggested consumers were watching brands' every move. An April report by Edelman found 26% of Canadians had tried a new brand due to the "innovative or compassionate way" it had responded to the crisis – a proportion that grew nine percentage points come July. Meanwhile, 24% of respondents had convinced others to stop using a brand they "felt was not acting appropriately" (that percentage also grew over time, hitting 34% by July).

Last summer, a survey by FleishmanHillard HighRoad found Canadians held CEOs and their companies to a higher standard than other countries on COVID matters, as well as racism, the environment and employee wage gaps. For example, 69% of Canadians believed

companies should take a stand on equality and racism, compared to an average of 59% globally.

Over the last year it became apparent that companies need to live their corporate values internally as often as they state them publicly. It's important in attracting and keeping top talent, says Republik's Shoiry, especially at a time when office culture is limited to virtual happy hours. "Talent acquisition [and retention] is something every C-level is talking to me about right now. It's one of the outside forces pressuring them to move into the purpose sphere, and potentially, the main one."

"This year is causing everyone to reflect on their job, their life, their relationships," adds Telus' Schnarr. "If employees aren't working for a company that is values-driven, then they're going to leave."

Oxley says that Danone is trying to create a culture of care through employee-led initiatives like "One Person, One Voice, One Share," which gives every one of its 100,000 staff a voting share. Through an annual

consultation process, the company uses employees' views to inform strategic planning. "We reach out and ask them, 'Where do you think we should focus? Where do we want to put our energy?'" says Oxley. "It allows us to know where employees' heads are at... and where they think our help is needed most."

Danone sees this as an important step towards achieving its 2030 sustainable development goals: in June, those 100,000 shareholders voted overwhelmingly in favour of adopting the French *Entreprise à Mission* model, embedding its corporate purpose, as well social and environmental goals, into its articles of association.

Similarly, Telus ensures that every business segment it enters not only drives a financial return, but also contributes to the organization's vision for good, says Schnarr. Such was the case with the launch of Telus Agriculture, a new business unit focused on providing connected tech solutions to the agriculture industry. When it comes to marketing, Schnarr says Telus focuses on the societal problem – food production demands are expected to grow by 70% over the next 25 years – and then showcases how it's helping to address the issue.

The more brands pursue purpose and the savvier consumers become, the more companies will be asked to provide proof of their progress, according to Shoiry.

"Where most brands are going to have a lot of trouble is accountability," he says. "To all those brands that are taking a stand, are you reporting and publishing that information, even that which you don't want to publish? Or are you just pushing those one or two big numbers that you're proud of?" The CSO believes brands that are transparent about their failings, as much as they are about progress, will emerge as "the real changemakers."

It's clear that the corporate responsibility bar continues to rise and that the pandemic and racial justice movement have only pushed it higher. And although a lack of purpose hasn't yet hit all brands' bottom lines, there's reason to believe it can drive long-term profit. A 2018 global survey by DDI found companies that act with purpose outperformed financial markets by 42%. In a well-documented case of success with purpose, Unilever's "sustainable living brands" consistently grow faster than the rest of its portfolio.

"The majority of the impact [is still] to come in the longer term of people supporting the brands and companies that have shared values," Oxley says. "This is the first wave of a tidal wave that will fundamentally reshape our industries."

Brands that have developed their purpose strategies will "thrive in this new world," adds Strawberry Frog's Goodson. "Companies without that will feel like rudderless ships zigzagging, tacking back and forth trying to figure out what to do next." 

"TALENT ACQUISITION [AND RETENTION] IS ONE OF THE FORCES [C-SUITE] TO MOVE INTO THE PURPOSE SPHERE."



Susan Irving, CMO Kruger

UNAPOLOGETICALLY PROUD OF THIS HUMAN

Congratulations on being one of 2020's Marketers of the Year from your friends at Broken Heart Love Affair.



2020 MARKETERS OF THE YEAR MOY

TO BE NAMED A MARKETER OF THE YEAR DURING A PANDEMIC

is a feat worthy of high praise. Kruger's Susan Irving used the void in predictive data to rely on instincts and swung for the fences with ideas that were geared to help consumers cope. Meanwhile, in the toughest category of all, Rob Daintree shifted gears as WestJet moved from expansion to safety mode. As the architect of its people-first positioning, the marketer has been helping the airline navigate the industry-defining moment. Labatt's Todd Allen also responded to changing needs with fast-hatched efforts, from supporting small businesses, to hosting one

of the first socially-distanced concerts as everyone turned to streaming. Kraft Heinz Canada was a bright performer in the global CPG's universe, thanks in part to Nina Patel. In addition to buzzy puzzles, Patel launched Pantry Day, spawning the largest one-day food drive in Canadian history. And finally, at Subaru, Ted Lalka broke through the industry's deer-in-the-headlights phase early in the pandemic by launching one of the first response spots, and allayed safety concerns with a virtual shopping tool. While the 2020 MOYs were tested, they certainly weren't crushed. Read on to find out how they're finding a new place in the new world.

NO MESS TOO BIG FOR SUSAN IRVING

To survive the pandemic, Kruger's CMO turned CPG tropes on their head.

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

Susan Irving expected year one at Kruger Products to be “smooth sailing” when she arrived at the company in January 2020. The first twelve months of her new post had been sketched out with her predecessor, Nancy Marcus, who was retiring in March as CMO after nearly 20 years with the CPG brand.

Irving was new to the household paper business, but had spent the last fifteen years at PepsiCo, working across many of its food and beverage brands. She was familiar with the CPG category's modest yet reliable growth and had a clear view of the trends shaping the future of the industry.

But soon enough, those expectations were shattered by a pandemic that sent

panic-stricken Canadians to grocery stores and pharmacies in droves to stock up on staple products. Demand skyrocketed for certain brands in Kruger's portfolio, which includes Cashmere and Purex toilet paper, SpongeTowels paper towels and Scotties facial tissues, forcing Irving and her team to scrap their long-term plans and re-write them on the fly.

As the global CMO of a Canadian company, Irving held the decision-making power. “Every company I've worked for [in the past], I could plan to do something original, but I always had global or U.S. lift-and-shift to fall back on,” Irving says. “There's none of that with Kruger. When you work for a Canadian company, the buck stops with you.”

In the ensuing months, Irving reminded herself of Marcus' parting advice that, while the paper business is unique in its own way, “CPG marketing is CPG marketing.” Irving recognized that she could avail herself of all the usual levers – pricing, pack size, product quality, advertising – to steer the company through a period of disruption. But she also knew the circumstances called for a new, more purposeful approach. She embraced her marketing instincts and flipped category conventions on their head in the process.

Early on, Irving understood what the company needed to navigate the pandemic: insights and plenty of them. But info was scant, at least at first. She had watched as marketing departments grew more reliant on



testing and data in recent years, and now these valuable guides were being made powerless by an unknown virus that was transforming consumer behaviour by the day.

Two things helped Kruger circumvent these unusual circumstances.

Internally, leaders from marketing, finance, logistics, sales and R&D came together cross-functionally, working more closely than ever before to find solutions. Irving says that while decisions should always be based on as much fact as possible, sometimes you simply “need to hold hands and you need to move.”

Externally, Irving engaged Deloitte to help revise Kruger’s strategic priorities. Beyond offering thought leadership and insight into evolving consumer trends, the consultancy helped Kruger – a more than 100-year-old family business with a strong office and meeting culture – adapt to the new virtual work environment. Using Deloitte technology, Kruger began hosting online breakout and brainstorming sessions, which Irving says aided its transition from “a world that was very consistent to a world where you’ve got to be ready to pivot anytime.”

At the outset of the pandemic, Kruger pulled back its campaigns to avoid driving demand for already sought-after products like toilet paper. It was also concerned that existing creative no longer aligned with consumer sentiment, Irving says. But it still wanted to show support for Canadians, its employees and frontline workers, so it didn’t go silent.

“I felt like it was the first time in my life that I was actually going through and feeling what my consumers were feeling,” Irving says. “Because we all needed to move so fast without research, we were relying on our gut a little bit more... [As an industry] we’ve been so focused on data analytics and research, which is still important. But when you’re in a pandemic, you don’t have time.”

In April, Kruger CEO Dino Bianco heard of a nurse who had gone to a store only to find it was sold out of the paper products she and her family needed. But she didn’t have the time (nor the energy) to run around searching for essentials. At

that moment, Bianco and Irving resolved to find a way to get products into the hands of those who needed it most.

There was just one problem: Kruger couldn’t afford to take any trucks off the road and divert them to supply frontline workers with its products. But, as luck would have it, Irving ran into Virginie Aubert, a friend and VP of marketing at Mercedes-Benz Canada, whose company also wanted to help. “Within an hour, she called me back and had a fleet of [Mercedes-Benz] vans across Canada and drivers all set up,” says Irving.

The encounter sparked “#RollingItForward,” a partnership that helped deliver Kruger products to 30,000 healthcare workers in hospitals across Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. The effort, jointly handled by John St., Strategic Objectives and T1, was supported with

Below: When Irving and agency BHLA put themselves in consumers’ shoes, they came up with a purpose (not product) driven spot that felt more appropriate for the times.



ad buys, social and PR that generated 90 million impressions, helping the company outperform the category and nearly double its competitor’s growth during the campaign period. Irving says it’s an example of what can happen when you’re “leveraging your network [and] working on gut.”

Irving’s instinct also came to bear when Kruger was preparing to re-launch its “Pulling for Canadians” commercial for the second year in a row. With scenes featuring Canadian families, the product-heavy spot reminded viewers that the company’s Scotties, Purex and SpongeTowel products have been made locally for more than a century. “It was a beautiful... celebratory made-in-Canada ad,” she says of the John St.-created spot. “[But] given how Canadians were feeling, it did not fit with the times at all. Consumers who saw that ad would have thought we were tone deaf.”

The team decided it needed to drive trust with consumers, says Irving. So while John St. was working on 2021 planning for Kruger’s brands, it engaged Broken Heart Love Affair (BHLA) on a multi-brand campaign for Cashmere, Purex, SpongeTowels and Scotties.

Defying norms in a category that often puts product functionality first, BHLA delivered “Unapologetically Human,” a campaign that features few branded products and instead centres around consumers’ shared humanity. The work, which launched in August, celebrates the not-always-acknowledged fact that “we all cry, make a mess, step in gross stuff, have snot, bleed, use the bathroom.”

“Instead of talking about softness, instead of talking about the functional benefits of why you use these products,” Irving says the idea was to position the consumer as the hero and showcase how Kruger has always supported Canadians.

According to Kruger, the campaign exceeded benchmarks on awareness, uniqueness, brand positivity and appeal, as well as purchase motivation and engagement across English Canada and Quebec. As of October, Nielsen data showed Kruger brands trending upward across categories, with increases of 3.2 points in bathroom tissue, 1.2 points in



paper towels and 0.8 points in tissue.

The campaign has run in the U.S., where Kruger sells its White Cloud paper products, and has been adapted for South Asian and Chinese media channels here in Canada, with revised spots featuring new music and scenes that reflect the target audience.

The work didn't stop there. In September,

Kruger launched the "Big Assist," a national fundraising initiative to help families cover the costs of hockey registration, which garnered more than three million impressions within the first two weeks. A month later, it returned with its Cashmere Collection runway show in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. For the first time

Above: Irving amongst a sea of white Cashmere dresses during the program's first-ever live-streamed event last year.

in 17 years, the collection debuted during a Facebook Live event.

Without a clear view of the future, Irving says Kruger continues to work with Deloitte and its agencies on scenario planning – with plans for mild, moderate and severe COVID scenarios – so that it can respond quickly depending on how the crisis progresses.

"Prior to the pandemic, I was talking about trust and bringing more purpose into our brands. Trust and purpose will continue to be important; health and safety are going to continue to be important. I don't think that's going to go away," she says.

Kruger has updated the softness claim on its Cashmere packaging and plans to stay mum about that until the message is more relevant to consumers. But Irving expects to see brands eventually return to talking about functional benefits once COVID's arc straightens out. "Consumers are going to want this balance [between purpose and functionality] after what they've gone through."



YOU'RE ON A ROLL!



Congratulations, **Susan Irving**,
on being named one of
2020's Marketers of the Year.

john st.



ROB DAINTREE STAYS THE COURSE

When WestJet went premium, it didn't lose its personality. How the marketer is maintaining its approachable brand even amidst the crisis.

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE

Since 2018, WestJet has attempted to transform itself from a low-cost regional airline to a global player. But that path came to a screeching halt when the COVID-19 pandemic hit its industry. Rob Daintree, who leads marketing for the country's second-largest airline and spearheaded its brand transformation, was suddenly asked to help mitigate the impact.

"We were coming off a record-setting January and February and, of course, like the rest of the world, were blindsided by this pandemic," Daintree says. "It caused us to have to shift gears very rapidly."

In response, WestJet pulled back its marketing campaigns while striving to maintain a brand presence as much as circumstances would allow, says Daintree. "Wherever possible, we tried to ensure that WestJet was present in terms of doing what we needed to be doing to support Canadians during a really difficult time."

There is some risk involved, he admits, given the "tensions that exist in the marketplace," such as customers wondering whether they would receive a refund for cancelled flights. (WestJet was the first major Canadian airline to offer refunds instead of credit on COVID-19 flight cancellations.)

To demonstrate its commitment to safety and care at the onset of the crisis, the company offered repatriation flights and transported medical supplies across the country. The marketing team was brought in to support the implementation

of new policies and procedures, such as mandatory mask wearing and seat distancing, as WestJet became the first airline in North America to temporarily suspend bookings for certain seats to keep guests safe.

Daintree's team was also tasked to communicate its cleaning and sanitation practices. "You read and hear a lot about hygiene theatre," Daintree says, "and we were very intentional to not go down that road." Instead, they added a human touch with the "Safety Above All" campaign by Rethink. In digital and social videos, WestJet employees informed prospective travelers of what the company was doing to keep them safe, including wiping down surfaces at airline kiosks and check-in counters and conducting temperature checks during the onboarding process. The campaign drove a significant uptick in bookings.

"[Safety has] been one area where the brand has done what it can to be present," the marketer says. Outside of that, the focus has been on "where

we are able to support the organization and what it requires, right now. We've been able to do that reasonably well, despite all of the uncertainty and the ever-changing landscape."

The reason the company has so far been able to protect its brand during the crisis is, in part, a result of the "people-first" positioning that Daintree and his marketing team pursued when the company first revealed plans for its international expansion.

Back in October 2018, WestJet purchased three Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft – not an entirely new plane, but one that was new to WestJet – with direct flights between Calgary and London, Paris and Dublin, scheduled to start the following spring.

Those Dreamliners opened up new skies for WestJet. They enabled the introduction of a business class and cabin – to complement its existing economy and

premium economy fares – complete with lie-flat seats and in-flight entertainment screens. WestJet also added a platinum tier to its rewards program, offering a higher earn-rate for frequent flyers.

Daintree says the new "premium enhancements" allow WestJet to pursue international and business customers who were less likely to consider a low-cost, challenger brand. This was part of CEO Ed Sims' plans to make international flights account for 15% to 20% of all traffic within three years, up from 5% to 10% in 2018. But the new direction, while opening avenues of growth, meant the marketing team had to reimagine how it aligned with the company's longstanding brand pillars, says Daintree.

The team had to "carefully maintain and preserve those key

components that are true to the core of who we are around care, humanity, fairness and fun," while incorporating brand attributes required to win over a new audience, he says. So the team decided to refresh WestJet's brand and communications strategy with the help of new and expanded agency relationships.

At the time of the Dreamliner announcement, WestJet unveiled a new brand identity and "Love Where You're Going" slogan that spoke more directly to the company's global ambitions. A commercial supporting the launch described "the new WestJet" as an airline for "those who fly in the face of convention." This marked, according to Daintree, a turning point in how the company would market itself going forward.

Despite having new planes and premium features, Daintree recognized the importance of having the WestJet brand remain approachable. So it launched "Flight Light," a smart device that used real-time data to help families stay connected during international flights. Another campaign, "We Treat People Like People," showed cows being treated as, well, cattle at the airport – a reminder that WestJet is unlike the competition in that it treats people like people. These and other efforts have earned WestJet global recognition and more than a dozen industry awards in the last year alone.



Even with new planes and premium features, WestJet didn't lose sight of its culture of care and quirky personality in campaigns like "We Treat People Like People," (above), "Flyre Festival" (top right), and the "Flight Light" (bottom right).



CONGRATULATIONS

to

ROB DAINTREE

for being recognized as one of

strategy's

Marketers of the Year





Above: WestJet began crossing the pond in 2018 when it acquired a fleet of Dreamliners. Daintree and his team of agencies have been promoting the brand's people-first positioning ever since.

The aforementioned work was led by Rethink, which was selected as WestJet's new lead agency in April 2018. Not only does Rethink's "scrappy and entrepreneurial" spirit align with the airline's challenger-brand mentality, says Daintree, but it's also a part of ICOM (a global network of independent advertising agencies), which allows it to help WestJet market in other countries.

Daintree was also looking to make changes to the internal marketing team to align with the needs of a global business in a

"very structured, disciplined and cost-effective way." Partnering with U.K.-headquartered agency Oliver, which builds and runs bespoke in-house agencies for its clients and is present in more than 45 countries, "ticked a lot of those boxes," he says. Oliver was brought on to work alongside Rethink and Media Experts, helping WestJet tap into new markets and scale internal work quickly when needed.

Before the pandemic, results were strong. WestJet's creative introducing the Dreamliner fleet helped the company achieve a more than 90% load factor (an industry metric for the percentage of available seats that have been filled with passengers) on planes flying to its new European destinations.

Last year, the company considered expanding its Dreamliner fleet to 20 aircraft. If that eventually happens, Daintree says the company will have a "strong playbook to reference back to." For now, while there's some optimism with a COVID-19 vaccine being deployed, the future of the global aviation industry remains uncertain. As of July, the International Air Transport Association projected global passenger traffic would not return to pre-COVID-19 levels until 2024.

WestJet's marketing team continues to do whatever it can to support the company. But Daintree looks forward to "getting back on our strategy, on our roadmap, and on our plan around premium transformation" as soon as he can in 2021. "We're going to have to treat the year with a lot of agility, speed, and fluidity," he says. "But we'll be ready... It certainly can't be much worse than 2020."



Congratulations Rob Daintree

on being named a Marketer of the Year, from your partners at Rethink.



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I think either Wayne or Lipson that said that...but whatever the case,
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From your friends at Anomaly.





TODD ALLEN'S STRATEGY HOLDS UP

Labatt grew share last year thanks to a system of approaches the marketer set up before the pandemic.

BY WILL NOVOSEDLIK



Over the years, North Americans have shunned carb-heavy suds in favour of more interesting alternatives in the wine, spirits and ready-to-drink categories. In fact, in 2019, according to Beer Canada, domestic beer sales declined by 3.9% year-over-year, with per capita consumption down 4.6%.

Despite the beer industry's steady decline (and not to mention an economic-crushing pandemic), Labatt appears to have had a banner year, in large part thanks to Todd Allen, who recently became the global VP of marketing for Budweiser.

In 2020, Allen – who spent the last four years leading Labatt's brands in Canada – helped grow market share by 1.2%, earned media by 125% and brand power by 4%. How did he and the marketing team

do it? By putting the consumer at the heart of everything they do; building brands with purpose; innovating both in terms of products and experience; and being culturally relevant.

"We don't see ourselves as a beer company but as a total alcohol beverage company," says Allen. "We've been playing in the 'beyond beer' category for quite some time with Palm Bay and Mike's Hard Lemonade [which have a lower calorie, sugar and carb count], but in recent years it's really taken off due to two unstoppable trends, one being health and wellness, and the other being convenience."

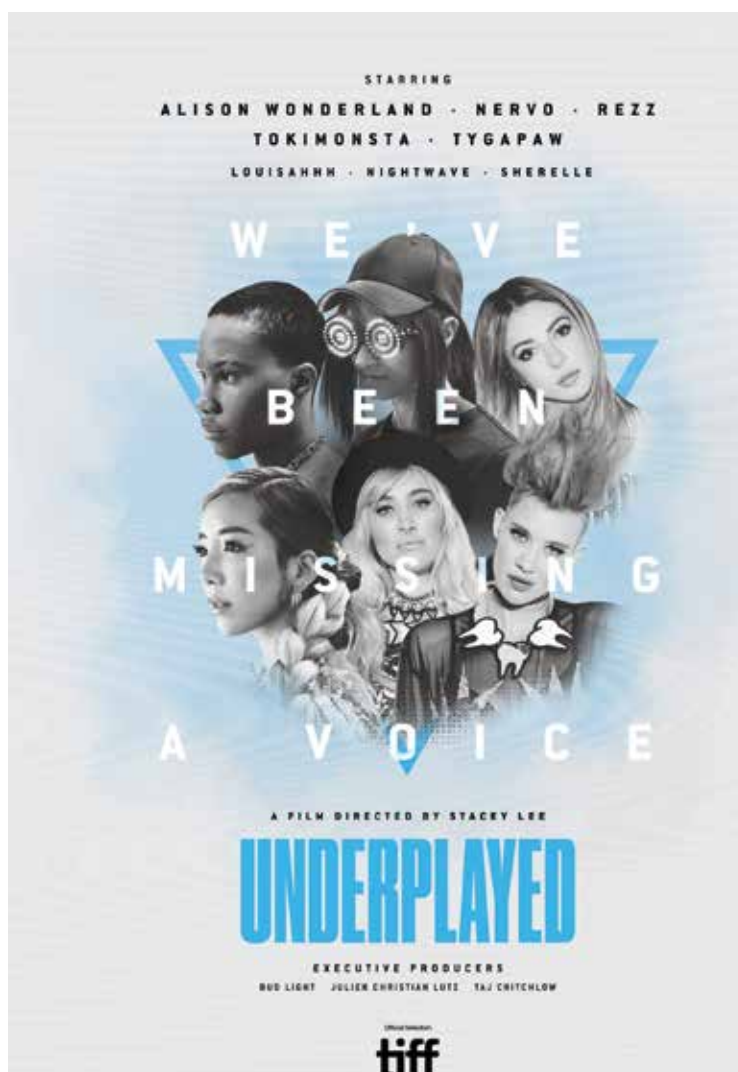
This past summer, Labatt went to market with new products including the Bud Light Strawberry Lemonade and Mike's Hard Blue Freeze (rated the #1 beer innovation of the year and the #1 RTD innovation, respectively, by Beer Canada). There was also the rollout of Babe, now the #1 selling canned wine at the LCBO.

To figure out what people want, Labatt relies on brand guidance

In 2020 Labatt grew its portfolio with the acquisition of Babe, founded by influencer Josh Ostrovsky, a.k.a. The Fat Jewish.



Right: The company is trying to move the needle on D&I by shining a light on gender inequality in a new doc and by supporting the LGBTQ+ community through a partnership with Rainbow Railroad.



tracking through Kantar every month to ethnographic deep dives and qualitative sessions with consumers. On top of that, Allen's team works with AI tech partners such as Twitter, Sparks & Honey, and Crimson Hexagon (now Brandwatch) to scrape the digital ecosystem and understand consumer trends, turning the data into insights and recommendations for the business going forward.

Then there's purpose. Labatt has been focusing on social issues, as well as sustainability through energy reduction, water access and plastic waste removal – via brands like Budweiser (which uses 100% renewable electricity to brew all of its beer); Corona (which removes plastic waste from rivers, lakes, waterways and oceans); Stella Artois (with its longstanding relationship with Water.org); and Bud Light (which recently shone a light on gender diversity in the music industry.)

As for innovation, Allen set up two tiers: the first is for experimental

products or services that are more complex and speculative, and which he hired a dedicated team to nurture and grow. “We call this our ‘venture ops,’” explains Allen. “It’s designed to help us get real-time consumer feedback through minimum viable products and services in a controlled, structured pilot environment.” The second level takes a more incremental approach to innovation that is focused on improvements to existing product rather than the creation of entirely new ones.

The fourth pillar is cultural relevance. To achieve that, Allen relies on weekly think tanks with everyone across the marketing spectrum. “We need our teams sitting together, from social listeners and community managers to our data and analytics team to our creative and production teams and our brand marketers,” says Allen. “We run an internal weekly newsroom where we get together to analyze what’s being talked about around Canada and what’s trending so we can organize ourselves around both planned and unplanned cultural moments.” As a result, earned media on digital content is up 200% and organic share of conversations is up 100%.

Allen also has DraftlineYYZ, the company's in-house agency that creates content for social and digital platforms across the full brand portfolio. It does that by being 100% digital- and mobile-first, and through direct relationships with Facebook, Twitter, Google, Spotify, Pinterest and Instagram. “We work with them to understand fit for format, creativity and audience segmentation,” says Allen. “As a result, we’ve made drastic changes to our media mix. It’s now 70% digital to 30% traditional, allowing us to use personalization and keep the content as relevant as possible.”


Labatt's ability to connect with consumers was on full display in 2020. For example, when Budweiser ran an ad during the SuperBowl, in partnership with Uber, it reprised its iconic “Whazzup?” ad from 2007 – where a group of friends exchange the ‘whazzzzzaaaap?’ greeting (which itself became a part of culture at the time) over their phones while watching the game and drinking a Bud. For the updated 2020 version, the

conversation happens between various smart devices, like a Roomba and an Alexa, technologies that didn't exist back in 2007.

One of the marks of a solid strategic foundation is how well it stands up in an economic crisis. By working closely with agency partners Anomaly, Me&Ideas, FCB, Salt XC, Vizeum and Veritas, Allen responded to the pandemic with initiatives that were clearly built around consumer needs and recognized the difficulties of the past year.

When COVID-19 hit in mid-March, just like everyone else, Allen





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your well-deserved win as
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congrats
todd!

dentsu × ABInBev

and his team had to throw out the playbook and start over. With homes becoming the new hub for consumers' social activity, the company focused on providing entertainment to help them get through the lockdown. The Budweiser Stage at Home – in partnership with CityTV and LiveNation – featured the artists who were originally scheduled to perform at the outdoor Budweiser Stage in a series of live concerts on TV and online. As one of the first socially distanced concerts to come out of the quarantine, the Budweiser Stage at Home was a #1 trending topic on Twitter every Saturday night.

Then there was Open Mike's Comedy, which used YouTube to bring to the stage some of the world's best stand-up comics. At the time of the series launch in July, Allen told *strategy* that alcohol consumption occasions had shifted when people were mandated to stay at home. "Ultimately, to become relevant with your brand in these challenging times, you've got to adapt to



Clockwise from top left: Bud's Stage At Home concert series was among the first virtual concerts to emerge from the pandemic; Labatt's new Babe is Canada's #1 selling wine in a can; 2020 saw new "beyond beer" innovations from Mike's and Bud Light; the company amused quarantiners with stand-up skits online.



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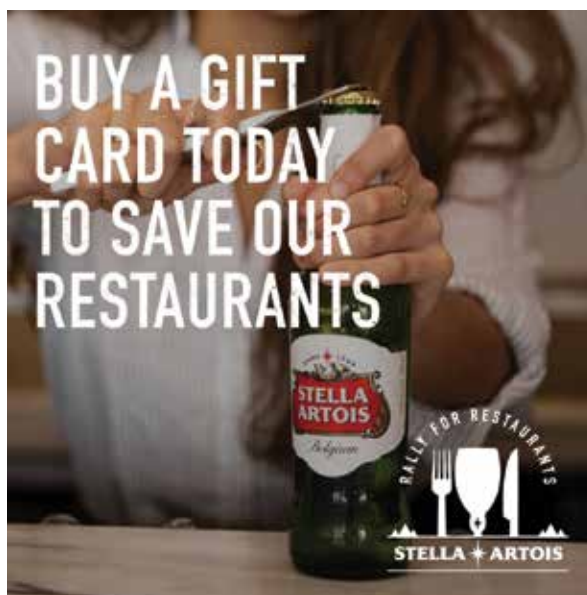
Love, your
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where the consumer occasions – and their media-viewing habits – are,” said Allen. The series was a success, driving over four million views with an average watch time of 3.6 minutes.

Having its ear to the ground also led Labatt to be among the first companies to respond to the health, economic and social impacts of the pandemic. In the first wave, Labatt produced 100,000 hand sanitizers in support of Food Banks Canada, frontline workers and partners in the restaurant and bar industry. The program was a part of Labatt's new CSR program called “Ideas for Good,” which also led to the launch of Budweiser One Team and a \$500,000 donation to the Canadian Red Cross this year.

Stella Artois threw its support behind the restaurant industry in a platform called “Rally for Restaurants,” which encouraged Canadians to purchase gift cards from more than 1,000 restaurants and bars. So far, the brand has helped inject more than \$800,000 back into the foodservice



Above: Labatt's “Rally for Restaurants” injected \$800,000 back into foodservice.

industry, with consumers purchasing more than 15,000 gift cards from the site.

And when Labatt wanted to restore public trust for the restaurant industry, it created the “POST (People Outside Safely Together) Promise” with the Retail Council of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and Restaurants Canada. The promise is a declaration that businesses can make through signage, demonstrating five steps they're taking to keep customers safe: social distancing, sanitization, self-isolation, disinfection and respiratory etiquette, such as covering one's mouth when coughing.

According to the most recent Spencer Stuart Annual CMO survey, the average tenure of a marketing executive is 41 months. Allen, who's been with Labatt for almost eight years, is easily defying those odds. He and his team have created a solid foundation for the kind of purposeful innovation, customer focus and cultural relevance needed to play the long game. “We're drawing on Labatt's 170-year history as a brand and we are trying to build a company that will last another 170 years.”

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BEHIND NINA PATEL'S CREATIVE MARCOM

How the Kraft Heinz marketer is steering the brand to grow in Canada.

BY WILL NOVOSEDIK

Global CEO of Kraft Heinz Miguel Patricio recently delivered a mandate to his troops: “We want to be much better at marketing, customer insight, innovation, and communication.” Nina Patel, head of brand build and innovation at Kraft Heinz Canada, is on board.

“For me, all those are connected,” she tells *strategy*, adding that the new ambition also meant putting consumers at the centre of Kraft Heinz’ world. The strategy is starting to pay off, and Canada is leading the way.

In April 2020, Kraft Heinz reported a net quarterly loss of US\$1.65 billion, driven by a nearly \$3 billion write-down on the value of some of its iconic brands. But here in Canada, the company tracked double-digit growth and gained share in 80% of its retail categories. Patricio noted that the Kraft Heinz Canada team delivered 2% organic growth, with “pricing turning positive for the first time in seven quarters and retail consumption growth in every category.”

The pivot to being more customer-centric required a shift in how Kraft Heinz goes about uncovering insights. It recently worked with agency Salt XC to launch a new capability within the marketing team called “The Kitchen.” The 100% internal agency is dedicated to acting at the “speed of culture, based on social insights,” as Patel puts it. Via social listening, The Kitchen tracks conversations about Kraft Heinz brands, which in turn helps drive the creation of content.

Patel also took on Patricio’s challenge to “do better at innovation” by creating a two-pronged approach. The first – full-on innovation – is for completely new products that are rooted in consumer-led insights.

One example was the launch of Kraft Hazelnut Spread in July 2020, a nut butter alternative made with no palm oil and less saturated fat. The spread was first teased out in June with an Instagram poll that asked people how they like their hazelnut spread – with or without palm oil. But even before the social poll, Kraft’s research team already knew the answer: 50% of category users would likely try the eco-friendlier spread if given the opportunity. The SKU resulted in a double-digit share position (against the likes of Nutella, which dominates the category) in less than a year, says Patel.

The second approach is a more incremental form of innovation, which Patel calls “renovation,” and is focused on future-proofing Kraft Heinz’s iconic brands. Renovations include re-positioning products, changing their formulas or modifying their packaging to better meet changing consumer needs.

For example, Heinz Baby was recently rebranded to Heinz By Nature, with a new messaging on pack: “Made from nature, close to homemade.” The brand’s baby food products, which includes an extensive selection of all-natural purees, taps into the insight that when it comes to infant food, nearly two-thirds of parents are drawn to “natural” distinctions, versus one half who were interested in “organic.”

Patel’s innovation mindset is not limited to products. If the campaigns of 2019 and 2020 are any indication, it also extends to marketing communications.

A great example is Heinz Ketchup. Still bruised by the closing of its 105-year-old Leamington, Ontario



manufacturing plant in 2013, Heinz Ketchup saw its affinity scores drop and social sentiment and loyalty soften over the years. For the first time in 150 years Canadians were asking themselves if Heinz was the brand for them. Patel and her team looked to re-ignite the emotional bond Canadians historically had with the brand and re-establish its iconic status by getting back to what they love about it.

For decades, people have been questioning

the redesigned bottle at shelf, it generated buzz well beyond Canada.

"It was like unlocking the Cadbury caramel secret," says Patel, adding that, in the first few weeks, the campaign was covered by 340 news stations globally and search for Heinz Ketchup increased 400%. The brand only spent \$15,000 on production, and yet it managed to generate 238 million earned impressions, she says. "Ultimately we

how best to get the ketchup out of the iconic bottle. Working with Rethink, they decided it was time to break the silence and officially tell people how it's done. The agency created a simple design modification by taking the Heinz Ketchup label and repositioning it to sit at a 31.578° angle to achieve the perfect pour. Perhaps the most effective part of the campaign – which saw media led by Starcom and PR by The Colony Project – was when it launched on social. Capturing consumer reactions of

ran it during the Superbowl because it was getting so much attention."

And the business results? For the first time in six years, the brand has not only slowed declines but has seen its highest profits since 2016. Heinz Ketchup is up 2.9 points for a total of 50.8% share. Best of all, sales are up 17.9% year-to-date.

In another moment of marcom creativity, Heinz Ketchup and Rethink created an IMDb page just days before the *Oscars* so that it could get credit for the countless movies its red sauce has appeared in. When IMDb shut the page down, Canadians started sharing their favourite Ketchup cameos on social. Engagement rates were 52 times the average, and the campaign earned US\$155,000 in media during potentially the buzziest weeks of the year.

The pandemic has not slowed down Patel and her team's creative momentum. When self-isolation became the norm in March, puzzles made a comeback. Famous for its slow pouring ketchup, Heinz created possibly the slowest-to-build puzzle ever – with 570 pieces in identical Heinz Ketchup red, produced in a limited edition of 57. Offering it to Kraft Heinz colleagues in other markets,



Congratulations Nina Patel

on being named a Marketer of the Year, from your partners at Rethink.



Opposite page and left: Pantry Day was born out of the pandemic, but will continue to grow over the next five years. Right: Rethink gave Heinz Ketchup another creative shot in the arm with its buzz-worthy label.



Patel's team got 17 countries to adopt the idea. All proceeds went to Food Banks Canada and the campaign received more than 1.25 billion earned impressions, and sold out in 11 countries.

This adds to other pandemic-related initiatives, including Kraft Peanut Butter Shared Space – in which the brand donated its ad space to local businesses that needed help letting customers know they're still open – as well as Project Pantry,

focused on solving food insecurity.

For the latter, on October 16 (a.k.a World Food Day), Kraft Heinz invited Canadians to join in the fight by purchasing a participating Kraft Heinz product at any grocery store in the country, which was then matched by a donation to Food Banks Canada. Pantry Day is now a five-year, \$20 million product donation program meant to help bring meals to the tables of the 4.4 million Canadians

affected by food insecurity. It's the largest one-day food donation program in Canadian history.

Kraft Heinz Canada appears to be ticking all of the boxes in CEO Patricio's call to action – thanks, in large part, to Patel and her leadership.

"I'm proud that we've made a significant step change by putting the customer at the centre of everything we do – whether that's in communication, marketing or innovation."

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TED LALKA SETS THE STAGE FOR SUBARU

How the long-time marketer leaned on messages of safety and trust during a year of reckoning.

BY WILL NOVOSEDLIK

While he's quick to point to his marketing team and agency partners as the "secret to Subaru's success," Ted Lalka has no doubt played a major role in building the brand in Canada over the years. The VP of product planning, marketing and customer experience has been with the company since 1989, when he was hired to help grow the Japanese carmaker's presence in the market.

Since he started, Subaru Canada's share has more than tripled from under 1% to 3%. And this year, despite COVID-19, the company had its best July ever, selling 3,501 vehicles. September and October were even more impressive, with over 6,000 vehicles sold each month. Market share for October grew to 4%, thanks in part to campaigns spearheaded by Lalka, alongside Toronto creative agency Zulu Alpha Kilo, Quebec-based shop Agence Rinaldi and media outfit OMD.

Back in the early days of the pandemic, brands were flummoxed. With the virus forcing everyone indoors to help "flatten the curve," advertisers had to shelve their marketing plans and figure out how to communicate to a shell-shocked populace without seeming tone deaf.

While many struggled to create appropriate messaging, Subaru was among the first brands in Canada to produce a response ad that was unencumbered by a sales pitch, instead promoting a message thanking those on the front line. Once the curve began to flatten, Subaru turned its focus



on providing tools that would help build consumer confidence back up.

"People were still very apprehensive about visiting dealerships, despite the careful protocols we took," says Lalka. So to continue engaging with buyers, it launched the Rapid RTC Live Dealer in July 2020, several months before many other auto brands rolled out their own virtual showroom tools.

"We were one of the first to come out with this feature that allowed a customer to contact a salesperson and have them use their phone for a 360-degree tour of the vehicle they're interested in," says Lalka, adding that consumers could then follow-up with an in-dealership visit, having all the information they needed so they could spend as little time in the store as possible.

Subaru's focus on safety was not difficult for Lalka and his team. Even prior to the pandemic, the wellbeing of customers had become a much bigger priority for Subaru. Over the years it had pivoted from being solely perceived as a rugged, outdoorsy all-wheel drive vehicle to being a symbol of reliability and longevity.

the launch that research showed "safety" as being one of the main reasons Subaru vehicles end up on consumers' consideration lists. "These cars last a long time," he says. "Over 96% of vehicles we've sold in the last 10 years are still on the road. What often happens is people buy one and when they

but it's not just based on what we think – it's based on authoritative third-party independent validation," says Lalka. For instance, The Insurance Institute of Highway Safety has recognized Subaru as a "Top Safety Pick" for several years, while Kelley Blue Book has rated it the most trusted



For example, it kicked off 2020 with the "As safe as a Subaru" campaign by Zulu Alpha Kilo, which showed off features like traction control, blind spot recognition and pre-collision braking systems in true-to-Subaru offbeat ads.

He explained to *strategy* at the time of

want a new one, they give the old one to a family member rather than trading it in. It's challenging to find a used Subaru because people keep them."

But even a promise of reliability needs the evidence to support it. "We have talked about safety [in our marketing] for years,

Top right and bottom left: Subaru's sense of humour is not lost in campaigns that pit its Outback against a billy goat, and claims the Impreza is a cure-all for boredom.

brand, six years running.

In September 2020, Subaru launched a campaign that leveraged those industry accolades to showcase its reliability and reputation for longevity. Also created by Zulu Alpha Kilo, the "Made to be a Subaru" campaign showed Canadians as they progressed through different stages of their lives (from being newlyweds to raising a family to retiring) alongside their trusted Subaru. Unlike many of its product launch ads – which since the "Sexy Sumo" spots of 2012 have relied on humour to build awareness – this campaign was more focused on promoting Subaru's core masterbrand attributes.

One of the things Lalka likes to hammer home is that Subaru, as a small player, has to work harder to project an image of uniqueness. Its "G.O.A.T." (Greatest Outback of All Time) campaign to support the launch of the 2020 Outback is a part of that pursuit.



Above left: Subaru was among the first to launch a pandemic response ad. **Above right:** "Made to Be a Subaru" zeroed in on its longevity, with ads that put its vehicles at every life stage.

The quirky spot features a competition between an Outback and a mountain goat to see who can make it over a mountain the fastest.

For its Impreza, Subaru also positioned itself as an alternative to mainstream brands with a campaign that spoofed pharmaceutical advertising in January 2020. Ads showed young drivers afflicted with boredom, desperately seeking excitement by sliding down staircases and balancing spoons on their noses. When they are given a ride in the "fast-acting" Impreza, their symptoms begin to vanish.

Finally, the auto brand's campaign to promote its Crosstrek comically compared the vehicle to a teenager with attitude – one that likes to leave unannounced to pursue their passions (off-roading in the wilderness) or come home with tattoos (a bumper sticker).

As to the future, Lalka says he remains focused. "If we continue to do the right things it will work out, but health and safety are definitely the top priority. The same goes for our messages of safety and trust."

Subaru's performance in the last year certainly attests to that.

Congratulations Ted Lalka

NAMED ONE OF 2020'S MARKETERS OF THE YEAR.

Ted Lalka, Senior Vice President,
Marketing & Product Management, Subaru Canada



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THE INDIE LIST

Turning chaos into creativity

Last year, when the world collectively decided it was time to go to hell in a hand basket, there was one cohort uniquely positioned to weather the storm – Canada’s independent agencies.

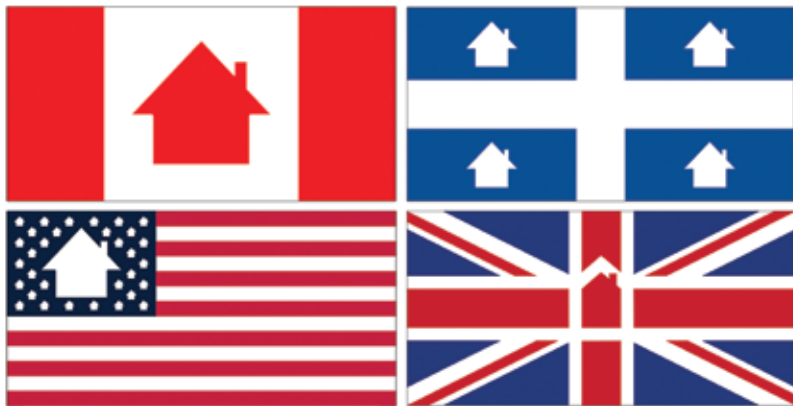
Not that it looked that way from the start. Early on, in the face of unprecedented uncertainty, it was all about battening down the hatches and preparing for what came next. But, it wasn’t long before our intrepid indies started to do what they do best, what they always do: adapt.

With smaller overheads and no global overlords, they began to morph and change, and take advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves in the market.

For some, that meant reimagining how the agency functioned, or how it dedicated its resources. For others, it meant growing and expanding to offer new capabilities that it hadn’t before.

But, for each, the response demonstrated the best attributes of the independent: flexibility, speed, adaptability and creativity. All the things you want in your team when you’re not entirely sure what you should do next, but you know you have to do something.

What follows is a list of some of the best of those indies. Though, really, it’s less a list as it is a collection of stories; stories about how some of Canada’s most creative teams looked into the heart of chaos and thought: ‘Yeah, we can work with that.’



Brave New World

Toronto's Zulu Alpha Kilo plans to lead the way to 2030... and beyond

THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC has many shops re-evaluating how they work, but indie trailblazer Zulu Alpha Kilo had already been asking these existential questions long before COVID. Over a year ago, it began an internal initiative dubbed 'Reengineering for 2030,' plotting the agency's best path forward into the future. Part of that, notes founder Zak Mroueh, was distilling its strengths and getting to the core of what makes it unique in today's complex landscape.

In the end, Zulu determined it was in the bravery business – always had been.

"Zulu was founded on being fearless and encouraging clients to take creative leaps that are grounded in a great strategy," he recalls. "When we've done our best work, it's been partnering with clients that want to do things differently and shake up their categories."

From opting out of creative spec pitches to pushing clients out of their comfort zone, Zulu has developed a reputation for being a fearless industry outlier for over a decade. And it plans to spread that nonconformist spirit globally through expansion of its 130-person team into other markets.

At the beginning of the crisis, it was one of the first agencies to get fresh creative out in the face of COVID. It worked with long-time client Subaru to scrap a planned campaign and run one of the first thank you messages to front line workers instead. An Environics research study singled out Zulu's Subaru campaign as the "gold standard" for advertising during a crisis.

Similar messages from other brands followed, but agency president Mike Sutton points out that it wasn't just the creative, it was the speed. It was working with the client to do something different, at exactly the time when it would make a difference.

"During COVID, the clients that have been decisive and moved quickly have benefited the most," he says.

"Part of our reengineering is all about moving at lightning speed. In this brave new world that we envision, what our clients

At the outset of lockdown, the agency created the in-house #StayHome campaign, designed to spread awareness of best pandemic practices – winning praise from both BuzzFeed and the United Nations.

want is breakthrough, brilliant, business-building work without the bureaucracy and dragged-out timelines. And that's what we're built for. We think it's the new reality – even when we return to the office."

You see a similarly ambitious response in Zulu's efforts to save the Advertising and Design Club of Canada – a body that was faced with shutting its doors due to COVID when it approached the agency for help. Zulu came up with the idea of a 24-hour live fundraising event.

To pull it off, the agency would have to create a full 24-hour's worth of content. "It scared the hell out of the client and our production team. It came back to bravery," Mroueh recalls. "What would it take to execute it? And then everyone started thinking: 'Okay, well, if we did this, if we did that'...suddenly, it was about what could be done versus the fear of doing it." The final live stream featured high-profile global names (including David Droga and Alex Bogusky), and successfully raised the needed funds.

Zulu worked with Cineplex on "Projecting Hope" to recapture the joy of going to the movies for those locked down by the pandemic. And it created the in-house #StayHome campaign, creating awareness of best pandemic practices – winning praise from both BuzzFeed and the United Nations.

On the new business front, the indie shop won Harry Rosen and launched "Set the Tone", a new brand platform focusing on the belief that when people dress with confidence, they feel their best – and give their best. Zulu also picked up the Campbell's Goldfish Crackers business and The Ottawa Senators account.

For HomeEquity Bank, it launched a scam-fighting digital masterclass to educate the institution's older demo about fraudsters, featuring Frank Abagnale, the charismatic con man who inspired the Hollywood film *Catch Me If You Can*.

For a third year in a row, Zulu was recognized as one of Canada's Best Managed Companies by Deloitte. At the Ad Age Small Agency Awards in 2020, it was the most awarded shop with three Golds for a diverse body of work. And the agency won Canada's only Gold at the Warc Media Awards for "The Away Game" for Tim Hortons. They topped off the year winning Best of Show at the Canadian Marketing Awards for their Subaru Outback G.O.O.A.T. campaign.

"There are a lot of good agencies that do great creative," Mroueh sums up. "But for us, it's all about having passion and rolling up our sleeves to be there for our clients – encouraging each other to be fearless, make brave choices and collectively push for greatness."



In December, the agency launched an epic video with the holiday-spirited “Carol of the Bells” instrumental brought to life with rings, dings and ping notifications featuring Bell technology through the ages.



They ‘Set the Tone’ for new client Harry Rosen with a campaign that demonstrated how we could all be better role models – connecting dressing your best with giving your best.



When the Advertising and Design Club of Canada faced hard times, Zulu conceived a 24-hour fundraiser that featured a ton of content and some of the industry’s heaviest hitters, including David Droga and Alex Bogusky. The Club raised the funds needed to survive.



With the world stuck at home, Zulu worked with Cineplex on “Projecting Hope” to recapture the joy of going to the movies – with *How to Train Your Dragon* screening outdoors on the 40-foot wall of the YMCA in downtown Toronto.



For HomeEquity Bank, Zulu launched a scam-fighting campaign to educate the institution’s older demo about fraudsters, featuring Frank Abagnale, the charismatic con man who inspired the Hollywood film *Catch Me If You Can*.



For Goldfish, the imaginations of three children were brought to life – as an illustrated book, an interactive video game, and a painting transformed into a large city mural.



Subaru recorded their greatest Outback sales of all time with the launch of the G.O.O.A.T. campaign. The unconventional idea earned four Golds and Best of Show at the CMA awards.



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Giants & Gentlemen

How a 'grow or die' philosophy, with a focus on integrity, is right for the times



HEN ALANNA NATHANSON, NATALIE ARMATA AND GINO CANTALINI came together to found Toronto-based Giants & Gentlemen, a scrappy indie agency in 2012, they set out to serve the brave ones, those who were interested in doing things differently.

That point of view is summed up by the credo "Be Brave, Be Decent," a philosophy that's been at the core of their identity since launch. It's also helped the agency flourish into a highly awarded shop, with a track record of growing their clients' businesses.

"We bring a grow-or-die attitude to make brands tower like giants, while always acting with integrity, as 'gents.' That's been key for us to win in the long term," says co-founder and CCO Alanna Nathanson. "Having open communication and earning the trust of our partners while doing things that haven't been done before has allowed us to continue to grow in size and reputation."

The value of its "Be Brave" boundary-pushing stance can be found in the agency's ability to thrive in the exceptional circumstances that came with a global pandemic. Rather than stagnating during widespread lockdowns, G&G won new business, including a project for Queen's University in March, and AOR for Clover Leaf in the Fall, for whom G&G is doing strategy, creative and media (via its integrated media partner PUSH).

Their first assignment for Cloverleaf involves creating a new brand identity and masterbrand campaign, using the agency's trademarked Outthinking methodology, which taps into outsider perspectives for competitive and meaningful insights.

Work with existing clients also continues to grow, thanks to fostering open, collaborative relationships. In July, the agency created a new integrated campaign for CIRA, Canada's Internet Registration Authority. It's an evolution of its "Don't Be a Traitor" campaign (which poked fun at "treasonous" Canadians who register

How do you tell people that Momenti Pizza from Dr.Oetker is the best of both worlds? With a centaur of course.

a .com domain) but with an even more patriotic bent. It was also one of the first remote shoots in Canada.

New campaigns include a print push for Dr. Oetker Momenti at-home pizzas, and a quietly arresting PSA for Assaulted Women's Helpline which reminds people that staying home during lockdown is not safe for everyone. The agency has also been growing its relationship with Enercare, an RFP it won last summer. This fall Enercare made G&G its official AOR for strategy and creative, and increased the mandate.

Nathanson says the pandemic also allowed the agency to practice what it preaches at home, shifting its staff to working remotely and creating a supportive environment, even at a distance.

"When the pandemic started to unfold, we adapted quickly and sent everyone home, even before stay-at-home orders were in place," Nathanson says.

Since then, the partners have been implementing ways to make WFH as optimal as possible, with input from their team. "Everyone's opinion matters here at G&G. It's important that all of our team members have a say," says cofounder and CCO Gino Cantalini.

Recognition of a supportive culture was validated again this year when the agency was named one of Canada's Top Employers for Young People for the third year in a row.

It's this culture that allows G&G to continually attract new talent. In the past year, the agency welcomed Mary Ruf as VP, business lead on RBC, who brings experience as senior client partner from roles at BBDO, Y&R and McCann. She also aids in new strategic and creative ventures.

Adam Guylas joined G&G as director of technology, and is transforming the agency's digital offering with deep expertise in everything from software engineering to website development. And Becky May just joined G&G as a highly awarded senior art director/ACD, who's worked at many of Toronto's top agencies like DDB and Rethink.

Getting back to the core philosophy of being brave, earlier leaps of faith are now paying dividends. Two years ago, the agency developed and released its own gin brand – Giants & Gentlemen Old Tom Gin – that was part holiday gift for clients, part passion project. That five-time award-winning side-hustle has now become a more robust business; the gin was accepted into the LCBO and will be available in limited stores in early 2021.

Beyond the pandemic, the founders see brighter days ahead. As Natalie Armata, cofounder and co-CCO says, "it's been a brutal year for everyone, everywhere. The world can't wait for 2020 to end. That said, we've learned a lot both as business owners and human beings, and we believe that coming out of this we will be stronger than ever, thanks to our entrepreneurial spirit and founding philosophy of being brave and decent."



As the pandemic started to unfold, choruses of "Stay Home" rang across social media. For those with a safe haven, it was good advice. A chillingly simple spot for Abused Women's Hotline reminded viewers that for others, home is the most dangerous place to be.



Working with CIRA, Canada's official domain registry, G&G created the .ca enforcement squad. This follow up to the "Don't be a Traitor" campaign sees the squad sequestered in the woods, engaging in all manner of Canadiana while encouraging people to make their website "true north strong." This was also one of the first remote shoots during the pandemic.



In a year when people are forced to remain distant from each other, the benefits of being alone might not seem obvious. When it comes to pizza, however, not having to share is a winning situation. A print campaign for Momenti personal pizzas for Dr. Oetker leans into the pleasures of eating for one.



Cleverly placed next to Ikea, this outdoor campaign for Enercare reminds you that, unlike furniture, DIY furnace repair is not a thing.



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Gino Cantalini
Co-founder & COO
g.cantalini@giantsandgents.com



The company that plays together stays together. Seen here are Bruce MacLellan (centre front) and his team enjoying the great Canadian outdoors together.

Proof Strategies

Where culture comes first

IN THIS BUSINESS, the path from start-up to exit is well worn. An agency enters the market as a scrappy independent, bootstraps its way to some initial success, grows the business and then sells to a global network. It may take ten years, it may take twenty. But that's the pattern.

Proof Strategies, however, remains firmly and happily independent. It started in 1994 leveraging the brand of research stalwart Environics, building the business over a period of 22 years, and rebranding as Proof Strategies in 2016. Now the largest wholly Canadian-owned PR and communications agency, the Proof organization has 200 team members across offices in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Washington.

According to founding CEO Bruce MacLellan, one of the best parts of this business is the challenge of change and how to stay ahead of it. "What we did in 1994 was very different from 2004 and 2014 will be different again in 2024," says MacLellan. "One of the advantages of being independent is being able to pivot quickly and make investments in the future. We can be nimble but are also large enough to have deep enough pockets to invest in change."

One thing that hasn't changed is Proof's commitment to 'ask better questions'. The firm wants to be known as a cerebral partner who challenges thinking and brings forward new perspectives on how to solve business problems. Only then will it look at the communications tools best suited to solve them.

Its offer has moved beyond traditional PR to include things like influencer marketing, paid media, stakeholder relations, government relations, digital campaigns, social media, online community management, and all the metrics that go with it. Proof has built that skill set by serving a very impressive list of clients such as Google, Loblaw's, Shoppers Drug Mart, Netflix,

eBay, Dell, Shopify, Audible, Kraft Heinz, Home Depot, Airbus and VISA.

So far in 2020, it's won 71% of its new business pitches, including Bayer, Weber Vitamins, Purina and Ontario Grape Growers.

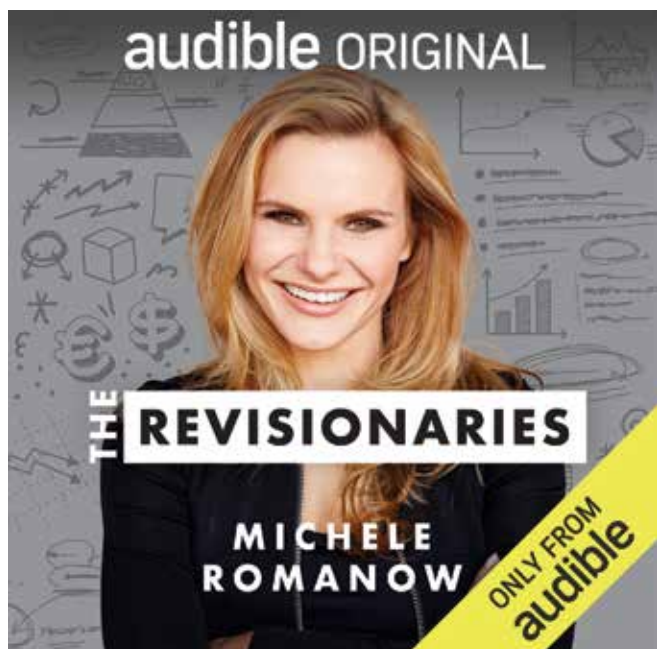
New programs this year include helping ParticipACTION launch report cards on physical activity in Canada, and providing guidance on how Canadians can add more regular exercise to their day, all adapted for the pandemic. For Kraft Heinz, Proof launched 'Project Pantry', encouraging shoppers to stock up on Kraft products, and thereby trigger in-kind donations from the brand to food banks. For audiobook brand Audible, the agency helped promote the creators and performers featured in its new slate of Canadian content.

In May of this year Proof launched TrustLab, a research consultancy focused on helping companies understand and build trust. After five years of running its annual CanTrust Index, which measures the levels of trust that Canadians have in their institutions, organizations and leaders, it became obvious that building trust in business is becoming one of the most defining challenges of our time, especially among younger cohorts. Observing that trust in CEOs has reduced from 55% in 2018 to 38%, TrustLab is using proprietary data from the CanTrust Index to provide evidence-based insights that companies can use to address this widening gap.

If one of the dimensions of trust in business is between employees and their leaders, Proof seems to have achieved it. It won the Great Places to Work award in 2020, placing highest among the listed PR firms. Says MacLellan, "When we started I was determined that we would be known as a great place to work. This year we scored high on dimensions of inclusion, mental wellness, women and youth. If you think about the agency world, we nailed all the sweet spots. It's third-party validation that we are achieving our mission and I believe culture and people are a big part of our success."

He's not the only one who feels this way. When *strategy* spoke to MacLellan, he had just met with a new recruit. "In addition to being new to us, he's a new Canadian. And he said to me, 'I'd heard about how nice Canadians are before I came here, but your people are like Canadians on steroids'."

MacLellan describes his approach as prioritizing people and wellness while still being committed to strategic, creative and service excellence. "I see no reason why an agency can't be a great place to work and do great work at the same time."



For audiobook brand Audible, Proof Strategies helped promote the creators and performers used in its new slate of Canadian content.



For the past five years, Proof Strategies has been running its CanTrust Index, which measures the levels of trust that Canadians have in their institutions, organizations and leaders.



**BUY ONE.
GIVE ONE.**



Proof launched "Project Pantry" for Kraft Heinz on World Food Day. The program invited Canadians to join in the fight against food insecurity by purchasing a Kraft product at any grocery store, thereby triggering a matching donation from the brand to Food Banks Canada.



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For the Balmoral Hall girl's school in Winnipeg, UpHouse created a video asking students what they want to be when they grew up, then flipped it to say "We think the world would be a better place if we asked our kids who they wanted to be when they grew up instead of what they wanted to do for a living." The tagline sentiment of "we see your daughter not for what she'll do but for who she'll become" resonated and drove 100% enrolment.

in its own ranks, it consults with clients like the Business Development Bank of Canada on how to tell their diversity stories and inspire diversity within their organizations.

Aside from a strong content game, UpHouse has also driven business development with a deep commitment to not-for-profit clients. Says Varricchio, "We have a don't-say-no approach to non-profit work so when a NFP aligns with our values, we'll provide them with a pay-what-you-can model to cover our overhead." Since 2017, Varricchio estimates the firm dedicated about \$350,000 worth of hours to pro-bono causes.

One of the more celebrated efforts was a guerilla campaign for the Cerebral Palsy Association of Manitoba called 'Locked Out of Life', which featured

local disabilities advocate Tyson Sylvester sitting in his wheelchair in a jail cell which was set up in the downtown Winnipeg Exchange district. "We set up a pair of headphones outside of his cell so you could listen to his story about how a lack of provincial funding means adults with physical disabilities are locked out of the community," explains Varricchio. With no promotional budget the campaign racked up over 100,000 views. It helped amplify efforts to secure government mediation and also earned Atomics and several other awards in 2019.

When Covid-19 hit, UpHouse quickly launched another push for the same client which highlighted the fact that while many of us were in isolation for the first time in our lives, because of a lack of government support, folks with disabilities are in a state of isolation all the time, not being able to see friends, work, or connect to their communities. UpHouse recorded ZOOM calls to create spots in which adults with disabilities provided words of encouragement for the rest of us. The campaign was featured on CBC National News.

A track record of producing effective campaigns and pro-bono work gaining national attention is paying off with projects for clients like Merck, agribusiness giant Cargill, TECHNATION (formerly the IT Association of Canada), the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and imagineNATIVE.

"The work that we're doing because we get to connect with clients we're passionate about is now leading to larger opportunities. We're able to compete with agencies out of Toronto and win", asserts Varricchio. "Most of our wins this summer were out of Toronto, which we feel really good about."

How UpHouse takes in-house to the next level

Doing well by doing good



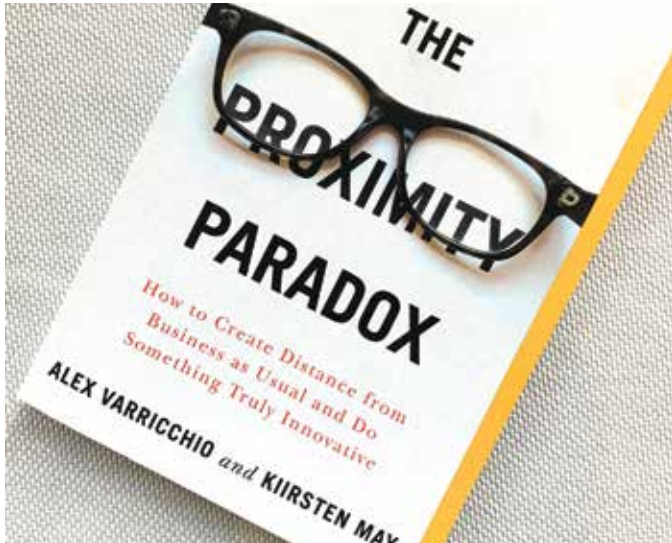
HEN ALEX VARRICCHIO AND KIIRSTEN MAY started Winnipeg-based UpHouse in 2017, they reasoned that the best way to get the word out was with a strong content strategy. So they decided to write a book.

Published in North America in March 2020 by ECW Press, *The Proximity Paradox* is a practical guide for in-house marketing teams who are challenged by the classic tension between innovation and execution. Says May, "One of the biggest misconceptions we as an agency see is this idea that agency marketers are more creative than in-house marketers. It's not true in our opinion."

The truth, according to May, is a little more nuanced than that. It's not so much that an in-house team is less creative. It's more that when they're too close to the work and under pressure to keep the marcom fires burning, it's difficult to find white space for innovation. May explains: "When you are responsible for both innovation and execution, you'll only innovate to a level at which you are able to execute. We're trying to help them create some distance from their own work and allow their teams room for creativity."

With eight staffers and a network of 30 contributing practitioners, UpHouse can also provide creative, strategic and production support.

Positioned in the gap between client organizations and external agencies, the name 'UpHouse' refers to elevating in-house marketing teams. While the name does a good job of expressing its mission, there's more to the value proposition. For one, LGBT- and woman-owned UpHouse is also a Certified Diversity Supplier. And not only does it exemplify diversity



As the world learned the concept of physical distancing, the book Alex Varricchio and Kiirsten May co-authored on "creating a distance from business as usual" was published in March.



The imagineNATIVE festival's original logo was created by prominent Indigenous artist Kent Monkman. After 20 years, the festival had evolved to include more storytelling media and had grown into an organization that supports Indigenous storytelling year round by offering training and programming for artists. UpHouse respected Monkman's work while evolving the logo to make room for other storytelling platforms: AR, VR and interactive.



UpHouse worked with TECHNATION's Career Ready team to launch a national campaign this fall encouraging employers to consider student talent and promote the Career Ready subsidy program.



The Society for Manitobans with Disabilities (SMD) has been offering support programs and services for people living with disabilities since 1950. Since then, much has changed in the disability rights landscape. The organization wanted all Manitobans to stop focusing on disabilities and instead work to remove barriers to full and equal participation for all. Collaborating with stakeholders at all levels, UpHouse developed a new name that focused on what's possible for individuals with disabilities: Manitoba Possible. The brand launch entailed a new logo, graphic standards manual and a series of videos.



UpHouse is working with Delta 9 Cannabis to develop retail-ready brands for a dozen micro-cultivators that will begin selling their cannabis in Delta 9 stores. Pictured here is the brand developed for Longhouse Cannabis, a company owned by the Hupacasath First Nation.



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Target's secret sauce to longevity

Canada's longest-running indie – 40 years on a road less travelled

THE YEAR WAS 1980. John Lennon was shot. Richard Pryor set fire to himself while free-basing cocaine. The fax machine was launched. And Terry Fox dipped his artificial leg into the North Atlantic, just outside Target's building, and started his cross-Canada Marathon of Hope.

"Could there ever have been a less auspicious time to start an ad agency," mused Noel O'Dea, Target's founder, a tenured university professor of Marketing at the time, "here on the tip of the continent, the most easterly point in North America." Forty years later, there's still nothing cookie-cutter about the irrepressible Target, one of Canada's top creative shops.

Target's longevity is clear evidence of its impressive track record in the competitive advertising business. Driven by a strategic and creative philosophy of taking 'the road less travelled,' it consistently punches well above its weight for creativity and advertising effectiveness.

On the awards side, Target was *strategy's* first Small Agency of the Year in 2019. It's a top 16 creative shop again on *strategy's* Creative Report Card. Its work has been featured in *CA*. It's one of only 20 Canadian agencies to ever win a Gold Lion at Cannes. It's been awarded multiple Gold CASSIES for advertising effectiveness, including the Grand Prix.

On the client front, Target's "Find Yourself" campaign for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism is the most successful and most awarded destination marketing and tourism campaign in North America. Since 2005, the rich cinematic TV spots and digital innovations have won close to 400 awards for creative, brand building and advertising effectiveness.

A wide range of national, international, and regional clients have been attracted by Target's blend of creativity and strategy,

Over four decades of storytelling, Target has repeatedly proven the value of avoiding cookie-cutter thinking, as evident in the impact of its Tango branding work. Launched in 2001, an era when 97% of airlines had geography-based names, "Say Hello to Tango" was a breakout success. Target created the brand positioning (freedom of movement) and personality (fresh and fun), plus the Tango brand name, aircraft livery design, and everything from napkins to national advertising. Robert Milton, who was president of Air Canada at the time, described Tango as "one of the most successful new brand launches in airline history."

including Maple Leaf and McCain, Nestlé and Unilever, PureGold and Aurora, Irving and Ultramar, Chorus and CHC, Rogers and Bell, Labatt and Molson, and Air Canada Jazz, Zip and Tango.

"Over the years, we've worked across many different customer groups and industries, everything from airlines and banks to cannabis and universities," says Catherine Kelly, director of account management and a 22-year Target veteran. "As our Target name suggests, we are always laser-focused on identifying the absolute best opportunity for our client – who we speak to, what we say, and how we say it. And it works famously."

Kelly says the "relentless search by clients for the Holy Grail of brand differentiation and competitive advantage is one thing that hasn't changed during Target's 40 years. Because if a brand is undifferentiated, it is nothing but a commodity. Differentiation has always been at the centre of our wheelhouse."

"We live outside the box, literally," says Jef Combdon, director of communications planning. "We see things differently. Newfoundland gives us a very unique perspective on how to size up a marketing problem. And that unique lens leads to unconventional and unexpected strategic solutions, 180 degree different from ordinary."

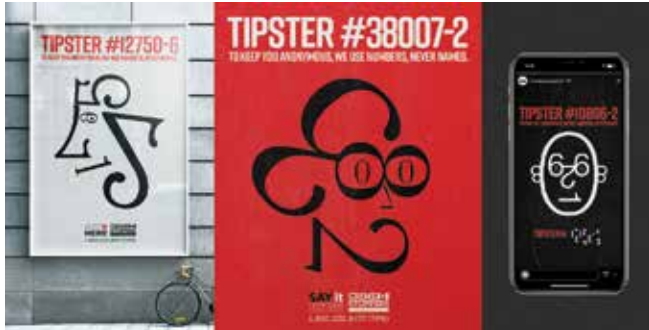
Creative director Jason Hill notes that creativity is a powerful business tool, and Target's location is an advantage on that front as well. "Newfoundland is overflowing with storytellers, musicians, artists, and a quirky sense of humour. That culture inspires our creative and design work. We love creating advertising that doesn't look or feel like advertising – like StoryExchange.com, and the *Tale Blazers* online TV series for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism."

In this over-communicated world, where people don't know who or what to believe, Target's storytelling and its time-tested philosophy and values are proving to be right on the mark. And perhaps even more relevant and differentiating than ever.

After 40 years, Target remains fiercely independent and "working hard to stay small," says O'Dea. "Our sweet spot is 40 people because there's no friction, no red tape. Our senior people love to be hands-on, making ads, and building brands. Work should never feel like a root canal."

"We're not big," adds Kelly, "but we are small. And mighty. Work is fun."

It's just like O'Dea always says. "We don't report to New York. We report to no one but our clients. And our Moms."



To overcome tipsters' fears of being outed, this integrated campaign for Crime Stoppers leveraged our "universal language of numbers". Each ad featured a 'Tipster ID Number' which animated into a 'face' created from the same ID numbers. People got it. Instantly. The 'Always a Number' anonymity campaign was a multicultural breakthrough.



Teens were media savvy and highly cynical about advertising, even 14 years ago when Target repositioned Rising Crust as a party-in-a-box. The 'Tan Lines' integrated campaign – including TV, outdoor, and guerilla – took the road less travelled. The results? Record sales volume. Huge buzz. And, before Instagram and TikTok, an irresistible crossover from advertising into pop culture.



IcebergFinder.com is the world's first mobile-optimized site that tracks icebergs. Using real-time satellite data from NASA, this fully responsive site tracks and displays icebergs drifting along the coast, providing Google Map directions for visitors, and enabling photo sharing. The results? In 2019 alone, over 8.2 million page views, and 500,000 site interactions.



This award-winning interactive website engaged visitors to create digital photo books for sharing across social media. It's a powerful third-party traveller endorsement of this place, and an innovative experiential marketing tool. In 2019, visitors created over 1,500 books. Plus, would-be travellers spent 600 hours on 40,000 page views.



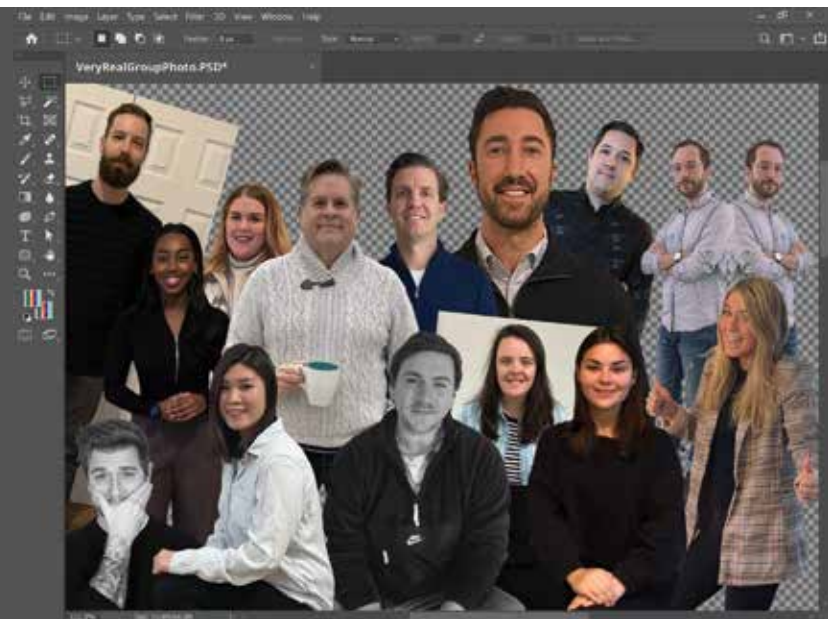
This unignorable rap video put Newfoundland's tiniest city on the map. Powered by a comprehensive digital, social media, and publicity campaign, 'Anthem' went viral in 2019. It generated notoriety and global media coverage, reaching 97 million and over \$350,000 in earned media across North America. In the first 10 days alone.



Naked Mummer leverages the seemingly absurd contradictions that make Newfoundland an enigma to the world. Avoiding stoner culture, Target developed the strategic compass, and created the memorable brand name and 360° branding design. This powerfully differentiated new brand of premium cannabis is unmistakably rooted in the wordplay of Newfoundland.



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The Elemental team, making human connections in a virtual world.

Elemental

The human connections agency

EVEN IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19 Elemental continues to find meaningful ways to connect with its own team, new ways to connect with its clients and partners, and better ways to connect those brands to their customers.

The path couldn't be clearer for this Toronto agency despite trading the office boardroom for Zoom. In this time of uncertainty, the 20-year-old agency looked inward and crystalized something they had been working towards for a long time: that the key value Elemental provides to its clients is helping them establish human connections.

Elemental's evolution to become what partner, head of strategy Dustin Brown calls "a human connections agency" didn't come overnight, even if the tipping point did. This new position is a natural progression of the agency's dedication to collaboration, fueled by its experience working on loyalty programs for clients like Starbucks and Scene.

"People have always been the central point of interest for us, that's been the driver – getting to 'why would I care about this brand, what's the connection?'," says Brown. "We're moving away from thinking about people as customers because that doesn't feel right. We're trying to create a connection with human beings that makes them feel something, say something, do something." So far, this seems to be working as Elemental was recognized as a Top Ten Small Agency of the Year by *strategy* magazine.

In practice, that means focusing more on the end-to-end customer journey, which includes adding more digital and ecommerce capabilities to the agency's offering. For Baffin, that entailed executing a full brand strategy, digital campaign and

media buy for the Canada Goose-owned footwear brand, and for Hershel, a new client Elemental won during the pandemic, the agency worked on a back-end digital strategy.

"Before the events of 2020, we had the luxury of talking to people at specific points of the customer journey," says partner, creative director Brent Wardrop. To stimulate a real human connection, it's now necessary to be highly attuned to how people are feeling when they receive a brand's message. "It's about taking an empathetic position in every step of the work. As a society, we're all going through this collective grief. Everything in life has become so transactional, so the principles of human connection have never been more important."

How that manifests for each client is different. For SCENE, Canada's largest loyalty program with over 11 million members, that required a drastic departure from last year's "No Excuses Day" messaging (which won four CMA Awards, including two golds).

"SCENE has been all about the in-person experience, so we had to pivot. Fast," says Brown. This year's "Better Together" campaign confronts the new reality brought on by the pandemic and encourages people to find moments to connect, whether in-person or virtually. "The new insight became about providing choice, which is something that has largely been taken away from us. It was an acknowledgement of people's fears and the need to stay home," Brown adds.

As Oceana Canada's agency, Elemental helps raise awareness of ocean conservation and the need to protect ocean wildlife. Single use plastics continue to be a huge problem for ocean pollution, so the agency developed a campaign to raise awareness of the issue with a goal of receiving 10,000 signatures calling for a single-use plastics ban. Brown adds that they had to pull it all off with a media budget of \$10,000 in the middle of the pandemic.

"There is no shortage of plastics campaigns so we needed to find a new way to connect with people. We looked to the biggest disasters in the world that people are outraged by for inspiration and developed the "UnNatural Disasters" campaign," says Brown. The result was a digital campaign that put everyday plastics like a water bottle or straw in the place of relatable attention-getting disasters like oil tanker and pipeline spills. Campaign targets were blown out of the water with over 1.2 million views and over 79,000 petition sign-ups.

"As we look into 2021 not knowing what the future holds in the world, we are more confident than ever in our position as an agency," says Brown. "We're going to do what we do best by continuing to dive deeper into human behaviour to make more meaningful connections."



With a focus on a back-end digital strategy, Elemental helped Herschel get its backpacks and accessories in front of e-commerce customers.



For SCENE, the “Better Together” campaign gave people new choices, from socially distanced partner restaurant visits to streaming Cineplex releases or virtual live concerts through the SCENE Music brand that was launched this year in collaboration with Elemental.



With so many problems to worry about close to home, Elemental helped international ocean conservancy Oceana bring its big global issue into focus. To do so, the agency compared the impact of single-use plastics to disasters like oil spills.



Baffin, the Canada Goose-owned footwear brand is made for our winters. And with so many people keen to get outside during the pandemic, despite the weather, Elemental leaned into the adventures that can be had outdoors with its visual and evocative “Built for the Bold” campaign.



Recycling is a thankless task. Elemental changed that with a campaign for Recycle BC that thanks people for doing their part for the planet. “The beauty of it is that right now, that’s a nice message to hear,” says partner, creative director, Brent Wardrop.



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The Agnostic approach

Balancing intuition and reflection through better thinking

SARAH CRABBE, PRESIDENT of PR shop Agnostic, likes to use the metaphor of the Trojan Horse when talking about her 18 month-old venture.

You could do worse than to borrow from Homer when describing the power of a good story. “The story we are told when we start with a client is never really the story,” explains Crabbe. “Initially everyone is clear that they want to create a narrative around their business or product, but we ask ‘What if no one wants to talk about your product or narrative?’ Our job is always to ask what the market, the media and the newsfeed are going to respond to. What is the Trojan Horse angle?”

The Trojan Horse conjures up images of wonder, surprise, ingenuity and cunning – all qualities that are required to break through the wall of noise to which marketers must lay siege every day. After ten years of bashing their heads against the walls of Troy, the Greeks had a Eureka moment: let’s just go in through the front door! Agnostic is focused on opening that door without all the head-bashing.

With the tagline ‘Better thinking. Better results.’, Crabbe and her team want the world to know that their story rests on a healthy balance of reflection and intuition – or said another way, strategy and creative execution. Crabbe elaborates: “Our tagline means taking the time to ask: is this what our client’s business really needs? Is this the best strategy, the best team, the best execution? Let’s think about this.”

In the business of PR, where speed of execution is sometimes prioritized over thoughtful consideration, thinking is often

With Canadians looking for more ways to enjoy their own backyard, 2020 was the year of the RV. Agnostic worked with GoRVing Canada to ensure the RV lifestyle was front of mind from coast to coast to coast. Adventure seekers and outdoor lifestyle enthusiasts weren’t the only focus this year, with Agnostic working with RV dealers to supply frontline workers with RVs to stay or isolate in to ensure they and their families were kept safe.

regarded as a luxury. Stepping outside the box of ‘faster’ is therefore an act of courage – and a point of difference. Crabbe is building a team of senior practitioners who are highly intuitive yet always connected to the thinking, the insight and the research. That is a powerful proposition in a world where agencies tend to either swing for the fences of creative or strategy but rarely hit both.

Clients are nodding their heads. When she started the venture in April of 2019, Agnostic had three accounts: Cisco, Boston Consulting Group and hayu. In eighteen months they’ve added another fifteen clients to the portfolio. The Trojan Horse is in the house.

It’s an interesting mix of B2B and B2C clients. Agnostic has worked with BCG’s think tank, The Centre for Canada’s Future, on themes of diversity and inclusion and the future of digital infrastructure. For Cisco, Agnostic supported the Digital Canopy project, an initiative designed to expand WiFi access in some of Toronto’s most vulnerable communities, especially during the pandemic when it has been needed most.

In the midst of the pandemic, Agnostic also helped launch five brands for Truss Beverage Co., which is Molson and HEXO’s line of cannabis infused beverages.

For Metro’s Locally Sourced program, in which the grocer sources and supports local food entrepreneurs, showcasing their products on shelf, Agnostic’s campaign of vendor-focused stories got the firm shortlisted for Creative Campaign of the Year at the Canadian PR Society Awards, also taking home a Gold award.

And for iconic Canadian brands Harvey’s and Bauer, who teamed up on a pandemic payment solution that maintained social distance by using hockey sticks to pass credit cards back and forth at drive through, Agnostic drove traction organically with earned media coverage. That particular Trojan Horse caught the attention of NHL stars Wayne Gretzky and Tie Domi on twitter.

The pandemic has presented Agnostic with both challenges and opportunities. At the beginning of the lockdown it seemed like every brand came out with its piano track and ‘we’re all in this together’ statements, followed quickly by ‘and if you buy now’ discount offers. To be able to put a spotlight on local businesses, tell stories of frontline workers, share how iconic Canadian brands like Harvey’s and Bauer came together, has been a refreshingly meaningful alternative.

Ironically, Toronto-based Agnostic’s next task is to manage growth for the 15 person-strong outfit. “The challenge we have is that as the business gets bigger, how do we make it feel smaller?” muses Crabbe. “That is where we need the discipline to remember why we set out on this journey and ask if we are staying true to the simple goals we had at the start.”



The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation's (PMCF) Quest to Conquer Cancer unites video game streamers, spectators and supporters from all over the world to raise money for cancer research through live gaming broadcasts. Quest culminates in a week-long fundraising finale in December – “Quest Together, Conquer Together” – with an ambitious goal to raise \$500,000 in its first year. Pictured is pro-gamer Stone Mountain taking part.



Truss Beverage Co. launched one of the widest cannabis beverage portfolios in Canada, with five new brands: Little Victory, House of Terpenes, Mollo, Veryvell, and XMG. The campaign, entitled “Start Wonder”, was built and launched in the middle of the pandemic, which was no small task for Agnostic and other agency partners.



Attendees of The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair visited Metro's "Spotlight on Local" to sample delicious goods from its locally sourced vendors. The program supports local producers in seven regions of Ontario, demonstrating Metro's promise of being at the heart of the community.



Popular chef and local food entrepreneur Matt Basile (top) joined forces with Metro for the last two years at The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair for its "Spotlight on Local" program, which celebrates Metro's locally sourced vendors. Matt is passionate about local small businesses and brought his culinary knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit to share with the vendors, such as one of Metro Ontario's vendor partners, Wrap it Up Raw (bottom), from the Niagara region, onsite at Metro's "Spotlight on Local" experience.



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The French Shop senior team, from left: Martin Archambault, founder & president; creative directors Valérie Forget, Joëlle Fournier and Geneviève Vincent; account directors Émilie Maranda and Isabelle Harvey; head of production Julie Lorazo; VP client service & strategy Sébastien Bergeron.

The French Shop

Making national campaigns make sense for Quebec

IT'S A LOVELY BIT OF IRONY that Montreal-based firm The French Shop, while enjoying a high profile among Toronto agencies & clients, is almost completely unknown in Quebec.

That irony is not lost on the firm's founder, Martin Archambault. "What about the French?" is a phrase that's no doubt been uttered by anyone in English Canada working on marketing for a national account. More often than not it's an afterthought in a country where only 21% of the population is francophone and 90% of them live in Quebec.

Archambault himself admits that during his years working as a marketer at Labatt Breweries in Toronto, he experienced it firsthand while working with Toronto-based agencies. "Being a Quebecois, it was obvious to me that some great ideas would not work in Quebec. But for them, translating English executions was enough to make it work in Quebec. They didn't realize that language was only one of the differences."

Upon his return to Montreal to go agency-side, he began to think about that. After conversations with agency friends and colleagues, everyone agreed there was a need for a shop focused on localization. So Archambault jumped at the opportunity and started one in 2014.

As he explains, "La belle province just isn't the same. There's the language, sure, but the culture, heritage, star system, media landscape, market reality and the advertising regulations are really different from those in the rest of Canada."

Based on filters the shop uses on all of its localization projects, there are three possible routes to take. The first is adaptation. You have strategy, creative and execution that is relevant to the Quebec market and only need to adapt to French with minimal adjustments. The second is transcreation, when there are things that won't work in Quebec, but can be tweaked for the market

while keeping the same strategy and creative platforms.

The third is when the strategy and creative are great for English Canada but not for Quebec or when the client is in need of a Quebec-specific campaign. In those scenarios, The French Shop will rewrite the brief, formulate the strategy, develop the creative and produce the final result, like a full-service agency.

With a huge unmet need, The French Shop grew rapidly, signing 20 agencies in the first two years. "Our model, based on mutual trust, was to help indie Canadian agencies that want to grow their business and be able to tackle national accounts, as well as agencies that are responsible for both English and French markets but not ready to invest in opening a full office in Montreal." The French Shop now serves a roster of over 30 clients, 80% of whom are agencies and the rest direct clients.

One of those agencies and long-time partner is Zulu Alpha Kilo. "We tapped into The French Shop's 'transcreation' expertise recently on a project for Goldfish where we needed to do things differently in Quebec because legally, you can't advertise to kids under the age of 13", says Mike Sutton, Zulu's president.

For the past three years The French Shop has also managed Tim Horton's localization projects. In an example of full-on localization, they marked St. Jean-Baptiste day by turning everything at a single Montreal location - the signage, the chairs, the coffee cups, the uniforms - from red to blue. And for that week, every single Tim's coffee cup in Quebec was also turned blue. There was no media investment, but it drove broad organic coverage across both TV and digital channels.

Coca-Cola has also been another important client for several years. It all started while collaborating with Juliet, one of Coca-Cola's lead agencies, on a Nestea campaign for the Quebec market. Coca-Cola's clients, who didn't know TFS at the time, were so impressed that they asked the firm to provide localization for Coca-Cola's entire portfolio, from retail communications to traditional advertising. Their latest achievement was an original TV spot for Coca-Cola that aired during the New Year's Eve Bye-Bye TV show, Quebec's equivalent of the Super Bowl for advertisers.

The French Shop has also enjoyed a long relationship with Grip, with whom they share the RBC account. After working with the bank on several different assignments, RBC Ventures appointed The French Shop as its Quebec AOR for a home reno app called SmartReno.

In the face of all the challenges 2020 brought, Archambault's model has proven resilient. Rather than reduce its ranks, The French Shop added to the team and produced over twenty new campaigns since March. With no signs of slowing down, it's just a question of time before TFS becomes as known in Quebec as it is in Toronto.



Campbell's Goldfish is all about nurturing children's imaginations. To do so, The French Shop and Zulu Alpha Kilo co-created a Quebec market campaign as part of the Feed Imagination platform, bringing children's stories to life via a published picture book in collaboration with well-known Quebec children's illustrator Guillaume Perrault.



Tim Hortons asked TFS to reconnect with the Quebec market, and what better way to celebrate Quebec culture than wishing Québécois a "Bonne St-Jean" with the "Je Tim en bleu" concept. Guests at one Tim Hortons restaurant were surprised on June 24th when everything had been changed from red to blue, recreating a typical St-Jean party outside.



For an RBC Personal Banking acquisition campaign, The French Shop modified creative to include local celeb Marie-Soleil Dion, as well as her husband Louis-Olivier Mauffette, who is also a well-known Quebec actor. By harnessing affinity with the homegrown star factor, RBC is managing to humanize the brand and compete with Quebec's well-rooted financial institutions.



What do you do when you have a great 30-second TV spot from your global asset pool, but can't run it in Quebec? The French Shop proposed that Coca-Cola keep the same creative platform, but work with well-known Quebec magician Luc Langevin to develop unique magic tricks, and in collaboration with lead agency The Hive, produced a new execution with French-speaking talents.



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The doug&partners senior team: (left to right, top row) Julie Haroutunian, Doug Robinson, Moxie Garrett; (middle row) Bonnie Lall, Matt Syberg-Olsen, Kristin Burnham; (bottom row) Kim Hunter, Eric Baldakin, Adam White.

Creativity for commerce

It's more than a tagline for doug & partners



YOU REALLY GET THE SENSE that culture is important to Toronto's doug & partners.

"We have core values we really take seriously," explains VP, head of digital experience, Moxie Garrett of the 40-strong agency. "Everyone shares them – always being curious, independent, entrepreneurial-minded, focused on partnership – we want to make quick decisions and be flexible."

Flexibility, after all, is a core calling card for many indies. For doug, it's even in the name – '& partners' is a nod to the group's connection to best-in-class talents (media, digital, content partners and others) that come to the table as needed.

The agency, founded in 2002, describes itself as "fiercely independent" and that's not just lip service. To live up to that ethos, the agency conducts regular reviews to make sure they're taking full advantage of their potential.

Case in point: about 18 months ago the indie agency decided it could spend money more wisely by getting out of an expensive downtown lease and buying an old garage in the Junction neighbourhood of Toronto. It's now a collaborative space designed to inspire, with big garage doors, plenty of natural light and more flexibility. It will also give doug more capability for in-house video, post and digital production.

"I like describing it as a forward-ready workspace," says founder Doug Robinson. "It works for tomorrow's new normal – a safe, creative, inspiring workplace. That's a real sort of visual testament to putting our money where our mouth is."

"Creativity isn't found just in the creative department," underlines ECD Matt Syberg-Olsen. "It's in how you approach everything, how you solve problems. I think that constant change is actually kind of exciting. And, in a way, it's a real opportunity for us."

And doug has seen plenty of new opportunities of late. Beyond the surge of clients looking to retool for COVID, the agency has taken on new business this year. Work with GoRVing on the 'Bring Back Wildhood' campaign led to a connection to the city of Sault Ste. Marie, which brought doug on for a rebrand to attract economic investment. Then the agency picked up Plan International Canada, which required an exclusively digital holiday fundraising campaign that took into consideration the constraints of the pandemic.

Doug added Rawcology – a strategic positioning and digital consultation assignment for the organic superfood brand that's gone national since its 2017 launch. They then kicked off new work for the Fox Harb'r Resort in Nova Scotia – a digital assignment to drive traffic to the upscale, coastal golf course – and jumped into Wellington Water Watchers, an Ontario non-profit dedicated to protecting local well water and eliminating single-use plastic bottles.

Then, there's been new work for the University of New Brunswick, autoTRADER, Honda, Distributel, Reliance... It's been a busy year.

It's kept the creative and digital teams focussed on reimagining each brand experience, while also revisiting fundamentals through a pragmatic lens. In the long shadow of the pandemic, Garrett says it's been about making sure everything – from websites to CRM strategies and reach-outs, those basic building blocks of great customer communications – is in place. "You're seeing different perspectives and the people at the table are solving problems differently. What does GoRVing do when, all of a sudden, there aren't trade shows anymore? How do you pivot? You have to collaborate with the client to come up with a solution."

Adds Robinson, "I think it's really about making sure you're keeping an eye on the brand's goals, constantly bring them up, so the client understands you've never lost sight of them. We need to over-communicate now."

Once aligned on how to solve brand problems, you have to be able to execute. "I think there's a certain amount of elasticity that we have as an independent which allows us to look at our clients' needs and how we can best service them," observes Syberg-Olsen. "We can stretch and reshape a little to make our service offering better."

While the year has been one long challenge for everyone, Syberg-Olsen believes the changes the agency's been making – building and adapting to respond to current market needs – also positions them well going forward. "There's a lot going on in the world right now, but there's also a lot of incredible opportunity. I think we're ready to take on some exciting projects – just roll up our sleeves and get going."

Doug's founder agrees. "We may not be the biggest agency around," Robinson says. "But boy, are we ever competitive."



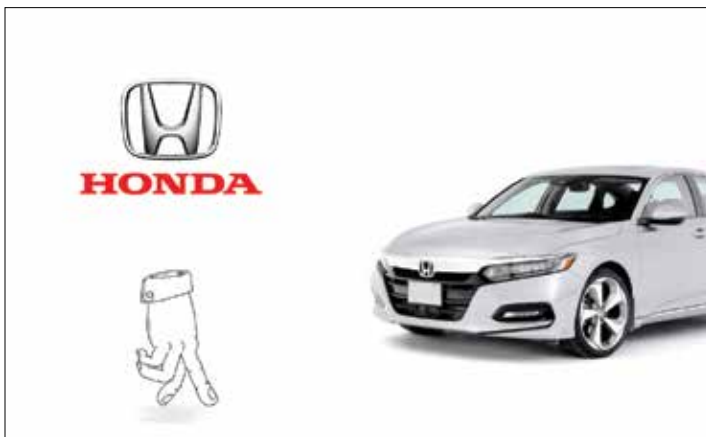
The latest instalment of the Wildhood campaign for Go RVing Canada provides a timely reminder that there are still ways to satisfy our wanderlust.



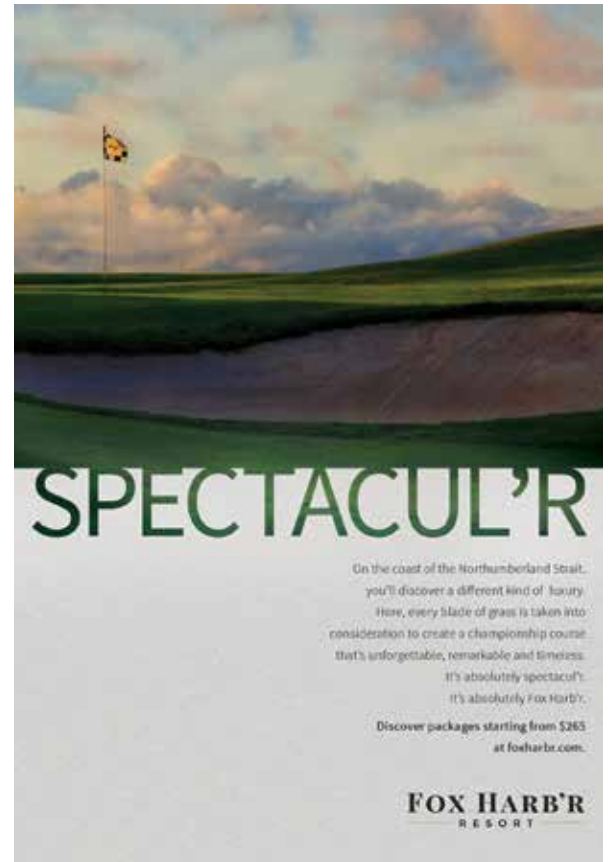
Another in a series of online videos for The Period Purse seeks to reduce the stigma surrounding menstruation. And this time the forecast calls for heavy periods.



2020 marked the launch of a new campaign for the University of New Brunswick, built on the idea that the true value of an education isn't just where you get it, but how you apply it to make the world a better place.



Online videos for the Ontario Honda Dealers demonstrate that the features in every Honda are designed to satisfy a wide variety of customers. Even if the customer is just a hand.



Fox Harb'r Resort in Nova Scotia is as unique as the spelling of its name. Which, of course, is a great creative jumping-off point.



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Vancouver Island Brewing's sales were down 25% in a packed craft beer market. With a cause-marketing approach to raise awareness of endangered killer whale populations, 123w designed special-edition four-packs. Sales bounced back over 30% and the project has become an annual event.

The ROI rule of 123w: People over place

How a low overhead, high talent model feeds a culture of business-building

MOOREN BOFILL WANTED A CHANGE. As an executive-level creative and designer, she'd spent the last five of her 13 years in the industry building the design arm of a well-respected, network-owned creative agency. The work was great but, in her words, it was "beholden to structures and hierarchies beyond my control."

Then she spoke with Scot Keith, co-founder, president and CEO of One Twenty Three West. "He asked me to join 123w and emphasized: 'We want to use thinking and creativity to build business and do things differently.'" A lot of independent agencies say things like that, but Bofill saw that this was a business built like no other. She joined the agency in October of this year.

Much has been made of the 40-person agency's humble beginnings in 2013: founders Keith, Jeff Harrison, Rob Sweetman and Bryan Collins crammed some desks into a garage in Vancouver. They soon moved into an industrial laundromat, and now have a few "b-grade buildings" in Toronto and Vancouver with plywood flooring. Where some might play up this charming origin story, the agency's pragmatic approach to business means it makes no bones about its un-flashy working spaces.

"We keep overhead low," says Jonathan Longworth, chief operating officer and partner. "We operate on a low overhead, high talent model. We've all come from big shops where you might have 25% going to overhead, whether that's money going to head office or paying for big offices. That's leaving only 75%

to build a great team. We run about 7% overhead, which leaves over 90% to build a kickass team," Longworth says.

Scanning the CVs of the agency's talent pool shows that it does kick ass. The flat structure is populated with experienced creative and account pros who could lead departments at most agencies. Here, most have CD or management titles but still do the hands-on work required to build effective campaigns.

"No one has anything to prove or needs to build a book," Longworth says. "Everyone understands that our skills are best used by solving client problems. There's no 'creativity for creativity's sake' here."

That grounded, get-the-work-done mentality extends to how the team works with brands. 123w has stripped away much of the pomp and ceremony of typical client interactions. There is no initial briefing followed by weeks of isolation and ending in a grand unveiling of three "Big Ideas" from which the client must choose one.

"Our first presentation is a working session," Longworth says. "We get our clients in to see a lot of ideas early in their development."

This actually gets work done faster. "Too often, agencies tell their clients to just give them what they need and then get out of the way," Longworth says. "That puts clients in a difficult situation. It doesn't leverage their knowledge about the business." Longworth says many agencies feel they have to shelter clients from work in progress. "The client might see stuff that sucks, but if we're all in this together, let's get feedback early and figure out how to push it forward."

"When you put experienced creatives and account people in a room with experienced marketers, it's shocking how ego-free that discussion is," Bofill says. "You toss out the ineffective ideas, nurture the good ones and turn stuff around quickly."

When Bofill saw this model in action, she knew she'd made the right career move. She enjoys the dichotomy of having the autonomy and responsibility of a business leader while getting her hands dirty on the front lines. As a creative director and partner, she does the legwork of crafting campaigns on some accounts while serving in an oversight role on others.

"Every single person in the agency – and I've spoken with them all – feels valued and truly enjoys their job, which I think speaks volumes about the culture," she says. "In an industry often criticized for prioritizing the bottom line, celebrating fame and fostering ego, 123w is a needed disruption where empathy, people and culture are the focus."



In a world where people identify as vegetarians, pescatarians and the like, 123w built the idea that if you like good food, you're a "Spotitarian," celebrating a BC-born restaurant chain with menu options for everyone. Ipsos reported 96% of those surveyed linked the word with the brand, and purchase intent increased 33%.



The CAA's most successful campaign to date was 123w's public service "Do Anything But Drive." When edibles became legal, CAA wanted roads to stay safe. The agency took the positive reinforcement route (which research showed was more effective), garnering millions of earned media impressions. Other auto clubs have since picked up the campaign.



Tourism British Columbia wanted to generate referrals for its regional partners, and the agency leveraged the province's vast wilderness spaces to get the job done. A content series in *Outside* magazine alongside short-form videos drove 770,000 referrals to regional travelers.



At first, the random words on Mt. Pleasant Mural District's OOH ads in Vancouver seem incoherent. "You'll get it when you see it," is the only clue. But the ads were placed near gorgeous works of street art that, once discovered, had pedestrians nodding in recognition. Suddenly, "romantic forest brain face" makes sense.



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The Jacknife leadership team from L-R: Kim Norwich, creative director; Mikey Richardson, co-founder, ECD; Stacey O'Connor, director of operations; Rick Amaral, director of strategy & design; Mike Kelar, co-founder, ECD

Jacknife

Holistic brand thinkers

THE HOLY GRAIL for many agencies is to reach the peak of the mountain, to be a party to the big conversations that help shape a brand's business as opposed to simply executing advertising ideas.

That's the place branding and design agency Jacknife has inhabited from the start. Since its inception in 2013, the Toronto-based studio has been creating brands and connecting them with audiences (though partners Mikey Richardson and Mike Kelar have been working together for 25 years). These days, however, that rarified space at the table is starting to get crowded with integrated agencies looking to grapple into all aspects of brand-design conversations, right down to the core of the business.

Mikey Richardson, co-founder, executive creative director credits this increased interest in all things brand to the evolution of design thinking, the line of thought that the techniques and tools of designers could be applied to business. He says that while the idea of design thinking had been around for years, it wasn't until recently that people really understood what it meant or how to benefit from it. "Now clients are starting to see they need to start at the core and instead of looking at the big idea as a communications idea, they're asking 'who are we as a brand?'" he says. "This is how we've always worked but organizations are now starting to see it."

Mike Kelar, co-founder, executive creative director adds that the most successful brands use design in a way that's meaningful for the business. "Truly evolved brands don't silo packaging, instore experience, advertising and product design. They think holistically about their brand, which is how designers approach problem solving."

The growing focus on the framework of a company's core brand is largely due to social media says director of operations Stacey

O'Connor, which has forced companies to engage their audience on a personal level and contemplate the question: 'If we're a person, who are we?' "Social has made it a relationship. You're not just seeing one piece of communication from a brand at retail; you're seeing the whole ecosystem. That's where designers are well suited."

The advantages of this approach were apparent when Jacknife brought its arsenal of skills as a key partner in helping Canada's largest wine producer develop its entire brand innovation pipeline.

For instance, when the agency worked with Arterra to identify a gap in the RTD market, their category and consumer research revealed an opportunity in the hard soda aisle, and pointed to flavour trends such as rose-pink lemonade. This provided creative fodder for developing and launching brands to fill that gap, such as Rilli Brilli (a play on "really brilliant"), a hard sparkling soda brand with a vibrant floral identity that

encourages its audience to leave things a little more brilliant than they found them, and In Good Order, a fun, irreverent low-cal hard sparkling soda with fruit and botanical flavours, that appeals to health-conscious 21- to 35-year-olds.

Kelar says the outsized impact of social means more companies are looking to be lifestyle brands, and Jacknife had the opportunity to apply that lens to an unexpected recipient: Canada's largest space technology firm, MDA. Known for delivering world-leading, iconic technologies such as the Canadarm family of space robotics and three generations of RADARSAT Earth observation satellites for the Canadian Government – Jacknife gave MDA a complete brand overhaul.

"They're up against companies like SpaceX, so we focused on their heritage in the brand narrative and created a new visual identity, yet MDA had a unique opportunity to establish broader cultural relevance by combining youthful enthusiasm with their legacy of making space dreams come true," says Richardson.

The rebrand included brand strategy, visual identity, product naming, launch communications, a website, corporate collateral, digital assets, and some pretty cool swag featuring retro-space iconography. "We were fortunate to work with an inspiring client that embraced the power of design and its impact on business," adds Kelar.

Jacknife is also finding an increased appetite for its design-thinking chops in areas beyond the shop's typical remit. Recently, they were approached by Waterloo-based free texting and calling app TextNow to do a more traditional US national ad campaign, which further cements their reputation for integrated solutions.

But that, says Richardson, is completely in line with how Jacknife works. "Our focus is on using creativity to solve the challenges of modern business, regardless of the medium."



Pomp worked with Mercedes to offer influencers a once-in-a-lifetime glamping event, escaping the city to a winter wonderland under a glass dome – safe and socially distant.

to think: 'We can do it, we want to invest in it, and we're willing to take creative chances that will pay off in big ways.'"

It's an approach that's resonating. This year, the agency added clients like Mercedes-Benz Canada, New Zealand-based Nood, Park Hyatt Toronto, mobile dating app Hinge and automobile lifestyle brand Hagerty.

"We're lucky that we have clients who want to try new things and be inventive," says Alvaro. "I don't think we would thrive with clients who aren't into big, bold thinking, because that's what we stand for."

The now 16-person shop grew to meet those needs and added more capabilities.

"We were doing much more in the digital space, the virtual space, integrated media – the intersection of where earned meets paid," she says. "Our offering has doubled in terms of the type of work – everything from video production, social media and paid media – which is the future of PR."

Alvaro adds the qualities of a small indie "scrappy, creative and fast" were a good fit for 2020. "Something comes in the door, we can turn it around quickly. That's what we're good at. That's really the advantage of working with a boutique shop like ours."

Bold PR strategies for unstable times

Pomp & Circumstance draws on its creative roots for new Plan As

TORONTO-BASED PR FIRM Pomp & Circumstance has been busier than ever as marketers adjust their mix to find new ways to connect to socially distant audiences and influencers. Reaching those targets during a pandemic has certainly taken a rethink.

With their roots in the agency world, Pomp founders Amanda Alvaro and Lindsay Mattick still consider themselves a creative shop first. So, when the world got complicated, they got creative.

When Dermalogica returned to market during COVID, Pomp sent out picnic kits so influencers could have a socially-distant picnic while learning about the latest sunscreen. When it was time to launch its Retinol Clearing Oil, Pomp hosted a paint night with an artist on Zoom so guests could get creative while learning about the product.

"Part of it is really pushing yourself to be more imaginative and more creative than you've ever been," says Alvaro, "to engage audiences who, over time, have become really fatigued with being online."

You saw that in recent work for Mercedes-Benz. With so many people missing out on fall fun, Pomp pitched the brand on a glamping event, taking influencers a few hours out of the city to a winter wonderland under a glass dome – safe and socially distant.

For client Amica Mature Lifestyles, they helped create the public-facing Smiles for Seniors campaign, all about bringing joy to the elderly isolated by COVID. It was picked up by national media and became a social movement, with weekly challenges on Facebook and Instagram garnering tens of thousands of likes.

Alvaro stresses that these efforts only happen when brands are willing to lean in. "You have to have the kind of client who's going



Pomp helped Dermalogica be first to market in its category, thanks to innovative virtual experiences like a socially-distant picnic and Zoom-based paint night.



For Amica, Pomp helped create the Smiles for Seniors campaign, bringing joy to the elderly isolated by COVID - and gaining tons of attention in media and social.



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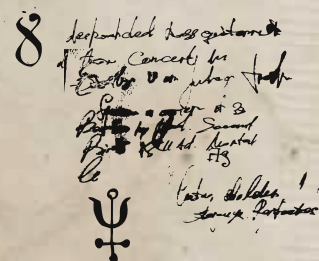


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CONSUMER TREND TO WATCH IN 2021

Witchcraft & The Occult



Handwritten notes in cursive script, partially legible, mentioning "Concert" and "the".

Handwritten symbols and letters, including a large 'D' and various smaller characters.

Coming out of a year of tremendous change and uncertainty, consumers are looking for answers to all sorts of life's questions, priming witchcraft and the occult for a renaissance in 2021.

Permanent work-from-home continues to become the norm, and time previously spent commuting can now be used for enchantments and magic. Consumer interest in homemade products and remedies is at an all-time high, so expect alchemy and potion making to be a top trend.

So how can brands be a part of this? If your brand has a mascot or spokesperson, try sacrificing them in a social media stunt. Or if your brand's sales are on the decline, try holding a seance to make contact with past consumers, and see what has changed.

2021 is shaping up to be an exciting year for witchcraft and the occult, and you definitely don't want to curse your brand by ignoring the trend.



Handwritten notes in cursive script, including the word "Witchcraft" and other illegible text.

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