

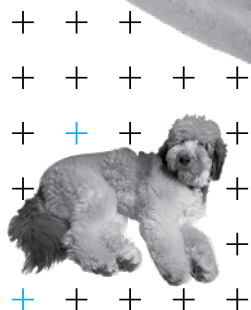
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CULTURAL FUEL FEEDS THE RETHINK MACHINE



CRC TOPPERS ON
AMBITIOUS PITCHES
AND WFH HACKS




GAME-CHANGING
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PLAYS WITH
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CMOs ON
WHAT'S SHAPING
INNOVATION AND
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Growing ever-more aware of the climate emergency, brands like IKEA are taking action to meet consumers on the sustainability frontlines.

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AToMiC

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ON THE COVER:

Yes, that's a Flight Light on top of Aaron Starkman's head. Rethink's new national CCO, and the top CD on the 2021 Creative Report Card, says his job is to grease the wheels of the #1 agency's "machine." And that means sticking to whatever is in co-founders Chris Staples and Ian Grais' secret sauce. Hint: it isn't ketchup. Collages like the one gracing the cover of our Spring 2021 issue, designed by our very own art director **Tim Davin**, are a fitting representation of agency life under lockdown – disjointed and slightly chaotic, yet filled with creative energy. Inside, you'll find the stories behind other CRC winners, as well as a pulse-check on how the WFH experiment is netting out among the year's highest-ranked creatives.

What's next is still a massive question mark

Someone in the industry recently told me in confidence that they're planning to leave ad land for "passion" pastures. It was bound to happen eventually. The pandemic was the last nudge. They explained to me that, "Once the things I loved about the job were stripped away – the social events, off-site productions and work family hang-outs – all I was left with was the work. That's when I realized that I don't actually like what I do."

This, of course, is just one person's unique experience. But their come-to-Jesus moment reminded me of a finding from *strategy*'s recent State of the Nation survey, where we asked advertisers and marketers how they were holding up.

Half of folks said that living-and-working through a pandemic inspired/motivated them to map out (or least think about) a different calling. That's not to say a mass exodus is imminent. However I do wonder if it puts a little more pressure on leaders as they map out their company's future – and eventual return to the office.

Any marketing organization or agency planning an all-body, full-week return to physical workspaces may be out of step with their employees. That same study found 85% want their employer to adopt a hybrid working model. Only 6% want things back the way they were before. And 8% advocate for permanent WFH. Let's assume majority rules and employees get the best of both worlds. But how do they handle the worst?

Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai admitted that Google – famous for its in-office perks – is experimenting with an untested hybrid working model that'll come with miserable growing pains. In the beginning, the semi-return is predicted to hit productivity, Google has stated,

and threaten the award-winning culture it spent years nurturing.

Some experts warn that optional remote-working could even create a two-class system, where the optics of those who choose to work at the office are perceived as better employees. Most tech firms are giving employees the choice of their desired location. Google, on the other hand, has mandated that every employee attend weekly in-person "collaboration days" within smaller hubs it plans to open. A solution to the corporate class conundrum? Maybe.

Regardless, most will have to rethink the office space with health and safety in mind. Larger flexible spaces and no assigned seating. Sound familiar? There were already many satellite hubs with huddle spaces for collaboration (and private nooks for concentration) before the world came to a standstill. So whether by a growing trend or nudge of the pandemic, the Silicon Valley campus vibe could go mainstream, which could be a solve for employee retention, if done right.

Either way, WFH has proven to be possible – and effective. But don't just take my word for it. This issue is armed with a years-worth of bold collaborations and creative pivots that just goes to show the industry has the agility (and ambition) to make whatever comes next work.

Jennifer Horn
Editor & Content Director
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CONTENT MEETS WELLNESS

By Andrew Jeffrey

Last year, one of the most popular apps for sleep and meditation launched a TV series, dubbed *A World of Calm*. The show hit screens via Warner Media's HBO Max with a star-studded cast providing narration over soothing visuals to relax viewers. Months later this foray by Calm was matched by a familiar competitor: wellness company Headspace, which created a TV show of its own after signing a deal with Netflix.

Above: As meditation apps, like Headspace, gain popularity during the anxiety-breeding pandemic, so too has the demand for "calmtainment."

But the trend didn't stop at streamers. Samsung-connected TVs are now hubs for Samsung Health, a platform for physical and mental wellness content; Spotify has begun to offer a personalized Daily Wellness mix of podcasts and music; and Apple launched a Fitness+ workout subscription program for customers.

That these popular platforms would be interested in offering wellness content isn't surprising. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, people were thinking more about personal health, and their interest in what's being called "calmtainment" has only grown in the past year.

Consumers have developed more of an expectation to see wellness ideas and messages in other industries whether it's in media, travel, technology or, of course, health, said Amy Laski, president of Felicity PR. "If [brands] didn't have health and wellness involved prior to the pandemic, they better have that now," says Laski.

Indigo, for one, recently took its investment in the wellness industry further with its own weekly podcast called *Well Said*. In it, CEO Heather Reisman discusses living well on the podcast, with guests ranging from scientists and entrepreneurs. According to Indigo VP of marketing Alison Lawler-Dean, the podcast was born out of positive feedback it received from customers after launching its "Feel Good" campaign, which included free yoga classes on IG, talks about empowerment with influencers, and guides on healthy eating with nutritionists.

She says the brand is noticing a larger value shift in how people want to spend their time and resources, and that they're looking for guidance from experts on how to invest in their well-being. Through 25-minute conversations, the brand breaks down health ideas into more digestible units, she says. "Canadians have had to adapt in so many ways, and we're seeing a shift to purposeful living – finding those moments of joy, big and small, and purposefully finding ways to actively engage with those ideas in order to live well," says Lawler-Dean, adding that she believes wellness will continue to be a priority as the world begins to open up again.

HOW AGENCIES ARE RETHINKING THE OFFICE

By Justin Crann

One year into lockdowns, leaders in the ad industry are shifting their focus toward what an eventual return to the office will look like. For many executives, the primary concern is uncertainty – not only related to the vaccination timeline, but also employee expectations.

"We've been living in this forced experiment for a year, and as businesses and their employees just got on with it, a lot of habits have been broken," explains Chris Dulny, chief innovation officer at PwC Canada. "Everybody has had to work in a different way, and their expectations of work have changed."

Shifting expectations aren't new for the ad industry, which was in flux prior to the pandemic as some major networks consolidated their agencies or laid out plans to bring them all into shared physical spaces.

In 2018, Publicis launched its "pool" model in Montreal, bringing its agencies under one roof to foster greater collaboration, having agencies with different capabilities working together on client assignments.



At WPP, a similar consolidation of various agencies under one roof has begun. In 2018, the network announced plans to open up an expanded campus on Toronto's waterfront, with a move-in date of late 2021. The move would include a roster of agencies, including GroupM, H&K Strategies, Tank, Taxi and Ogilvy, among others. According to Arthur Fleischmann, group CEO of WPP-owned agencies Ogilvy and John St., those plans are still in place – with some important modifications.

"We're definitely [still] going into a co-location," he says. "None of the basics have changed, but the design will reflect a modern view of safety and health."

What that modern view entails, for most agencies,



is a different use of space – as well as more flexibility when it comes to employee scheduling. WPP's Tank, according to president Marc Lanouette, is considering a hybrid model where working hours are split between the home and office, the latter of which would be "where the culture would live."

According to Dulny, the best way to foster culture is to design a physical space that will accommodate it. "I don't think the purpose of an office, especially post-pandemic, is to be a

segregated space where you're going to work in a cubicle for eight hours and then leave."

In that vein, Cossette Montreal is relocating into a WeWork space, where its new shared digs will take a hybrid approach, placing greater emphasis on the office as the space to collaborate, while more isolated work will be handled at home.

"When we look at the future of the office, we want to organize it so it's as creative and inspiring as possible [to enable] 'collaborative time'," says Louis Duchesne, president of Cossette Quebec and East.

"We really see the space as one... to meet, exchange, and share time with your colleagues."

While a precise vision of the post-pandemic office is elusive, the goal is to design something substantially different from what employees left when they shifted to working from home. Physical cubicles

and the "silos" between different departments will need to give way to a more communicative way of working, Dulny says.

To that end, unassigned seating, larger meeting spaces, greater spaces between desks and open floor designs are all frequently considered, though for many agencies, the particulars remain to be determined.

That is no less true for Publicis, which began the process of pooling its Toronto agencies similar to its Montreal headquarters before the pandemic and remains committed to that plan now. "We're in the process of a lot of discussions with our employees," said Duncan Bruce, CEO of Publicis Canada. "We want to make sure that they come back to an office that doesn't look or feel like the one they left a year and a half ago."



HOT TRENDS TO COOL EARTH

Ahead of Earth Day on April 22, here are eco trends – gleaned from Wunderman Thompson Intelligence's *The Future 100* report – that should be on every marketer's radar as they look to meet consumers on the sustainability frontlines.



CLIMATARIANS

IKEA's "ScrapsBook," a cookbook with recipes based on ingredients you would otherwise toss (from banana peels to bones), is a signpost of the next frontier in climate-friendly diets.

Food companies are working to reduce their footprints, but food production still accounts for a quarter of global carbon emissions. And many consumers are looking to take action, with brands stepping up to help "climatarian" diners better understand their choices.

Last October, Panera Bread introduced carbon footprint labelling, working with the World Resources Institute to identify earth-friendly menu items. That month, Chipotle created "The Real Foodprint," a sustainability tracker for orders to help customers calculate the environmental impact of their lunch.

DATA SUSTAINABILITY

Though eco-friendly initiatives often put physical waste in their crosshairs, humans' sprawling digital footprints have large environmental footprints of their own.

According to Bloomberg, digital information stored in data centres already accounts for 2% of global electricity consumption and could be four times that by 2030. And, by some

estimates, the computing power required to support Bitcoin uses nearly as much energy as the country of Argentina.

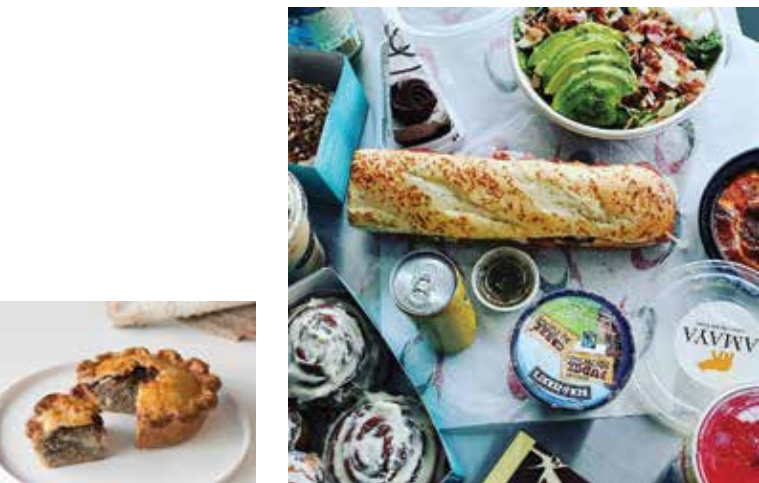
As people learn about the impacts of their digital activities, brands could leverage data sustainability in their eco goals. In Canada, early-mover Volkswagen recently made the website of its ID4 all-electric crossover carbon-neutral to support its sustainability positioning and educate consumers, too.

CIRCULAR LUXURY

The secondhand market is growing for fashion brands as environmental concerns rise and shoppers spend prudently amid a recession.

In Canada, resale, rental and subscription were the three fastest-growing segments in apparel retail (with the exception of ecommerce) last year, according to marketing intelligence firm Trendex North America. Brands and retailers are taking notice.

Gucci, for example, signed a deal with The RealReal to feature its products on the luxury resale site, which also partnered with Burberry and Stella McCartney. Closer to home, Quebec-based Simons is now offering secondhand goods, such as Louis Vuitton and Chanel handbags, in some of its stores. **JD**



Grocery and resto pairings BY MARCO VIGLIOTTI

Grocery stores are bolstering their prepared food and meal kit offerings to access restaurant-starved customers amid the pandemic.

However, industry analysts and insiders say grocery retailers may need to continue investing in e-commerce and the pick-up experience to ensure their success when the crisis eventually subsides.

Dine-in restaurants, especially independent establishments, have been hard-hit by COVID-19, with stringent public health measures and fears over the virus forcing them to close or significantly scale back operations. In Toronto, dining in has been prohibited by the provincial government since November.

Amid the crisis, restaurants have largely pivoted to serving prepared meals or meal kits to maintain revenue – and many grocery stores have followed suit, improving their takeout offerings to compete and offer an alternative to cooped up customers.

Some are even partnering with local restos or hiring high-profile chefs to stand out in the crowded culinary space. For instance, Summerhill Market recently hired

Toronto-based Ted Corrado (known for his work with The Drake properties) as executive chef, overseeing the more than 700 items prepared daily by its in-house commissary.

Over at Empire, the Sobeys parent company's Voila recently partnered with Oliver & Bonacini (O&B) to offer a "gourmet culinary experience" to its online shoppers. Meals are adapted by the upscale caterer – from Maison Selby's French Onion Soup, to Leña's Piri Piri Chicken – and prepared in Farm Boy test kitchens for home delivery in the Greater Toronto Area.

"We really believe that the meal category is one where we still need to be more innovative," says Sarah Joyce, SVP of ecommerce at Sobeys. By partnering with O&B chefs, she believes Voila is able to differentiate itself in the delivery space. Joyce says there is opportunity for those who value the ease of reheating, which takes out steps that are in other meal prep programs. "It is actually something that we think customers will really, really value," she says, adding that the proof is in the pudding – within 24 hours of launching the O&B offering, it sold out.

Meanwhile, Toronto-area grocery chain Longo's is expanding its "Longo's Takeout" meal options, rolling out a service that allows customers to order meals online for pickup or delivery. (Empire, which recently purchased a majority stake in Longo's and Grocery Gateway, says it will continue to invest in the grocer's ecommerce offerings, with plans to have the delivery platform be a standalone business from Voila.) Loblaws also expanded its meal kit offerings by 30 recipes, offering ready-to-make meals from several local restaurants to customers in the GTA.

Kevin Lund, a food industry analyst and CBO for communications firm DCM, says while customers will flock back to restaurants after the pandemic, these grocery meal offerings will continue to have an audience, namely busy families and others on-the-go. But before they become broadly popular, he says more price-sensitive customers must begin to see these products as suitable dinner options – not mere extensions of fast-food takeout.

And for this to happen, big grocery chains must position these meals as part of a "scaled offer" that maximize the advantages of their large retail footprint, making it easier for customers to not only pick up the food but also to differentiate it from the rest of the store's offerings, according to Lund.

"When we emerge from [COVID-19], our kids are going to go back to playing sports... back to taking dance classes, and the big grocers can capitalize on this grab-and-go mentality of trying to get the kids to or from practice or lessons," he explained.

"[The big chains] have the real estate... the entry and egress, the parking lot. All they have to do is enhance the current click-and-collect offer and really build the physical structures and drive-thrus."

The industry may already be headed that way. Walmart recently partnered with Ghost Kitchens to offer prepared meals from a mix of 20 QSRs and CPGs – including the Cheesecake Factory and Beyond Meat – in several of its big-box stores.

Lund says logistical and physical changes to how customers access prepared meals or kits at grocery stores – such as carving out space at the front of stores and improving click-and-collect – are crucial to creating an experience that will help reduce the stigma with fast-food. "If [grocery chains] do it with scale, and it's a value proposition that's connected to their master brand, that's when it'll be part of our ingrained behaviour. We won't see it as takeout food. We're going to see it as grocery-to-go food. We're going to call it 'meal solutions,'" he explained.

Patrick Watt, a food service expert and senior partner at J.C. Williams Group, says grocery stores offering prepared meals and kits (or home meal

replacements as they are also known) is hardly new, but changes in the sector require greater innovation.

For the most part, larger grocers who have been developing these products for the past three decades are largely reliant on their convenience to appeal to time-crunched customers, he says, creating little incentive for product differentiation.

The emergence of gourmet grocers offering higher quality prepared meals (dubbed "grocerants") has shown that the "marriage of groceries and prepared foods... is a natural fit," says Watt. Going forward, he predicts that more large grocers will "align with well-known chefs" to enhance their offerings, creating opportunities for strategic partnerships with local food and craft beverage producers.

Jessica Rodrigues, director of comms for The McEwan Group, a Toronto pioneer of the so-called "grocerant" trend, says that it's following a similar recipe across its three grocers, with all of its prepared meals made in-house from unique recipes created by the company's restaurants with products from "local purveyors."

Rodrigues believes grocery will continue investing in meal



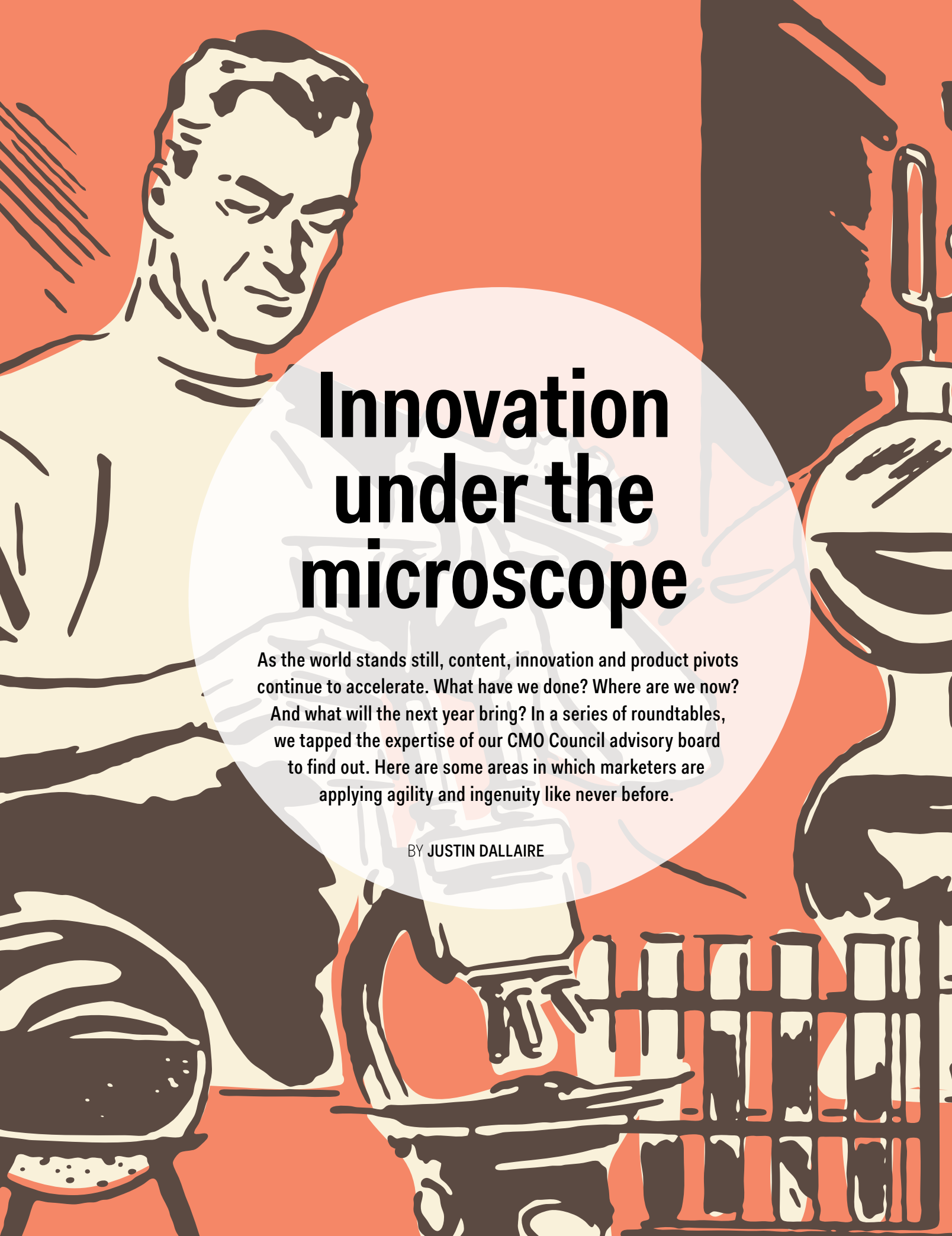
Opposite page and above: With chefs and restaurants unable to operate during lockdowns, some retailers – from the urban upscale Summerhill Market to national chains Walmart and Sobeys – are bringing the culinary chops of local resto brands to stores to help prepare their meal offerings.

offerings, as well as look for tech-driven solutions to improve the experience. "I think that every business going forward will continue to incorporate them within their business structure."

"The pandemic has accelerated a lot of the changes... [But] once you're allowed to safely reopen [and] once you know people feel that level of comfort, restaurants aren't going anywhere. This is just a complement – they'll still want to use the meal kit or do these meals."

Watt agrees that grocery stores will need to improve their convenience to maintain competitiveness in a post-pandemic landscape.

"The world will not look very different on the other end. Trends [that] were in place have been accelerated including e-commerce and prepared food delivery. The difference will be that the systems will have less kinks and friction and consumers will be more savvy to ordering and pick-up options," he says. "The market may see more crossover of restaurants and grocery-type offerings and chef endorsements... which is not really new." 🍷



Innovation under the microscope

As the world stands still, content, innovation and product pivots continue to accelerate. What have we done? Where are we now? And what will the next year bring? In a series of roundtables, we tapped the expertise of our CMO Council advisory board to find out. Here are some areas in which marketers are applying agility and ingenuity like never before.

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE



SCRAPPING OLD PLAYBOOKS AND TESTING HOW FAR BRANDS WILL STRETCH

The CMO Council members channeled Winston Churchill when discussing the pandemic's impact on innovation this past year. "Never let a good crisis go to waste," was a common retort.

Marketers and business leaders have been busy tearing up old playbooks, as the world moves quickly yet waits at a standstill. Across sectors, the pandemic unleashed business model innovation at a scale unseen in the recent past.

"In the short term, everybody had to shift and adjust," says Jeremy Oxley, VP of marketing, strategy and insights at Danone. "But in the long term, it's going to be a good opportunity for new businesses to form and new opportunities to evolve out of the crisis."

Toronto's General Assembly Pizza is a notable example of a successful business model pivot. The fast-casual pizza chain's dine-in model was severely hampered by lockdown restrictions, so it pivoted and started making frozen pies for grocery stores. Later, in September, it launched what it calls the "the world's first pizza subscription." After having earned 2,000 subscribers, it raised \$13 million from investors and plans to expand nationally.

Elsewhere in food service, QSR Freshii is ramping up category innovation, expanding its health and wellness cred outside of food and restos with the March launch of Apple Cider Vinegar Gummies, its first supplements product. And fast-casual competitor Mad Radish opened two new banners, Luisa's Burritos & Bowls and Revival Pizza, under the same physical roof as Mad Radish but with their own digital storefronts – giving customers new options and boosting sales without the operational costs and risks of opening individual physical locations.

This innovate-or-die mindset has allowed marketers to take a different seat at the table, notes Mangala D'Sa, VP of marketing, category and digital experience at Aegis Brands, former parent co. of Second Cup. "It's no longer just product innovation – it's business model innovation," she says, because the pandemic has "forced everyone to think more holistically in terms of how we meet the needs of consumers."



Top: Freshii is extending its wellness cred beyond QSR, with the launch of a supplements line. **Bottom:** When the crisis hit, Toronto's General Assembly Pizza spun out a DTC subscription service.



INNOVATING AGAINST FEAR TO CREATE NEW COMFORT ZONES

A surprising nugget to come out of Edelman's March 2021 Trust Barometer is that contracting COVID-19 ranked as the fourth-biggest concern among

Canadians, says Jill Schnarr, chief social innovation and communications officer at Telus. A year into the pandemic and consumers expressed greater concern (and outright fear) over losing their jobs, a cyber attack and climate change – in that order – than COVID by margins of 3% to 15%. Schnarr says those trends and fears “will impact a lot of what we do.”

Case in point: after 20 years of touting “The future is friendly,” this year Telus changed its brand promise to “Let’s make the future friendly.” The telco’s tag needed updating to reflect its investments in social capitalism and other sectors, like agriculture. But the new wording also captures a nuance in sentiment: the future is less

friendly and more uncertain than before, so companies must work to improve it.

“We’re evolving our mission, our values and all these things that we’ve held so dear for the last two decades,” Schnarr says. “We have to showcase how we’re evolving and changing, because

Below: Fever-Tree’s outdoor dining experience.



Above: DavidsTea’s new “Tea Tasting Club” enables at-a-distance sampling.

the whole world has changed.”

In the world of CPG, the CMOs believe consumers’ health and safety concerns will outlast the pandemic, forcing companies to rethink in-store sampling programs, whose days “are long gone,” says Oxley. “Maybe they’re not gone forever. But I don’t know if I’ll see [them again] in my lifetime as a food marketer.”

Companies are already shifting their plans. Premium mixer brand Fever-Tree, for example, has driven trial through a unique dining experience inside a heated dome outside the Fairmont Chateau Whistler. Elsewhere in CPG, companies like DavidsTea – with its newly launched “Tea Tasting Club” seasonal subscription box – are experimenting with at-a-distance sampling programs that continue to serve the purpose of building community with customers.

PLAYING CATCH-UP: DIGITAL CX ONE-UPMANSHIP

No matter the category you play in, it’s hard not to envy how Amazon transformed the retail landscape. During the pandemic, many new

entrants to the ecommerce space – and there were many – found themselves needing to match the retail giant’s bar.

“Everyone’s expecting an Amazon-type experience in whatever touchpoint they have,” Oxley says.

In the physical world, that means testing and learning Amazon-like technologies. To ensure it remains in lock-step with the retail giant, and shifting definitions of a “frictionless” experience, Quebec’s Alimentation Couche-Tard partnered with McGill University on an innovation lab. The space resembles a regular Couche-Tard store but allows customers to select items that are paid for automatically within an app – one of many new technologies that will be tested.

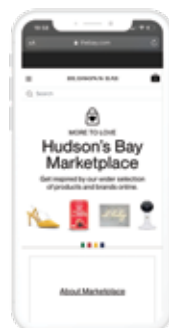
In retail as a whole, customers’ appetite for

a one-stop shop experience has grown, fueled in part by the growing number of customers buying online. It’s one of the reasons Hudson’s Bay is entering new and expanded categories – including sports, tech, pets, health and wellness – having recently launched an online marketplace that will feature 500 new sellers on its website by the end of 2021.

“It’s almost less about the product, and more about the purchase and service experience,” adds Schnarr. “If you’re making me have to put less work into getting your product or service, I’m going to... continue to buy from you.”

During lockdowns, IKEA’s network shrunk from 14 bricks-and-mortar stores to a single, digital store. “One [challenge] has been the inspiration,” says Johanna Andrén, head of marketing. In home furnishings, “You still want to be inspired... and when you cannot go to a store and get that, we need to offer that online.”

So after ending its iconic catalogue’s 70-year print run, the retailer enhanced its online presence, with a content hub focused



Right: Hudson’s Bay is expanding into other categories and will feature 500 new sellers on its digital Marketplace by the end of this year.



Left: Couche-Tard's innovation lab at McGill features Amazon-like tech.

company's luxury appliance brand, Monogram, customers typically consult with a

designer, and the service is much more personal. During COVID, "we've leaned on virtual technologies, trying to show them what their kitchen would look like without bringing them into the showroom," he says.

Automotive brands have also put more focus on digital experiences.

In December, Nissan unveiled a digital hub in which customers can

explore its latest models, speak with experts and join live-stream group and individual tours.

Acura took a similar approach to off-setting the loss of physical auto-shows with a microsite that told the brand's story through interactive features, video clips and a browser-based game.

on how to live more sustainability, for example. And to get product into people's homes, it launched click-and-collect, as well as collection lockers accessible to customers at all times without entering the store.

At GE Appliances, chief brand officer Bob Park says the trick was to meet customers' service expectations around purchasing its high-ticket items. With the

CRM AND CONTENT PLAYS ACCELERATE

As ecommerce penetration grew over the pandemic, PepsiCo used the opportunity to enhance its content strategy through

Tasty Rewards, says the CPG's CMO Ian Adler.

The marketer says the company is now bringing all of its individual brand sites under the CRM platform, which has experienced a "massive acceleration," creating new opportunities to connect consumers with its full portfolio of brands through content and recipes.

"We know consumers want to enjoy and play and go back-and-forth [between brands]," he says. "And behind the scenes, there's a whole separate story on what that means from a data standpoint, and what we can do from a mass personalization perspective."

P&G is also investing in connecting loyalty with content across its full portfolio of brands. In March, the CPG launched its Good Everyday platform in Canada. First launched in the U.S., the platform rewards customers with perks and points that are used to donate to causes, supporting the company's "force for good" strategy. It also serves as a content hub, with stories demonstrating the impact the company makes through its various initiatives. And like Tasty Rewards, it allows P&G to collect

first-party data by asking users to upload receipts and participate in quizzes.

But CPGs aren't the only companies whose content plays have accelerated during the pandemic. Banks, which Scotiabank CMO Laura Curtis Ferrera admits aren't typically grouped into the category of "agile at scale," also proved they could move fast and with scale.

Last year, Scotiabank began offering advice across three content hubs tailored to the needs of those impacted by the crisis: Bank Your Way (offering instructions for seniors and new digital customers), Advice + (for financial planning and budgeting), and a dedicated space for the Scotiabank Women Initiative (supporting women entrepreneurs). Other big banks

also launched or expanded similar content platforms. RBC added new features and information to its MyAdvisor hub, while CIBC created Advice for Today and BMO launched Financial Advice You Can Count On.

"It probably advanced [the sector] by a decade in terms of how we consider content," she says. "Now the question is, how do you stay that agile at scale? How do you keep content developed that way?"



Above and below: P&G and PepsiCo are enhancing their content strategies through upgraded and newly launched CRM and loyalty programs.



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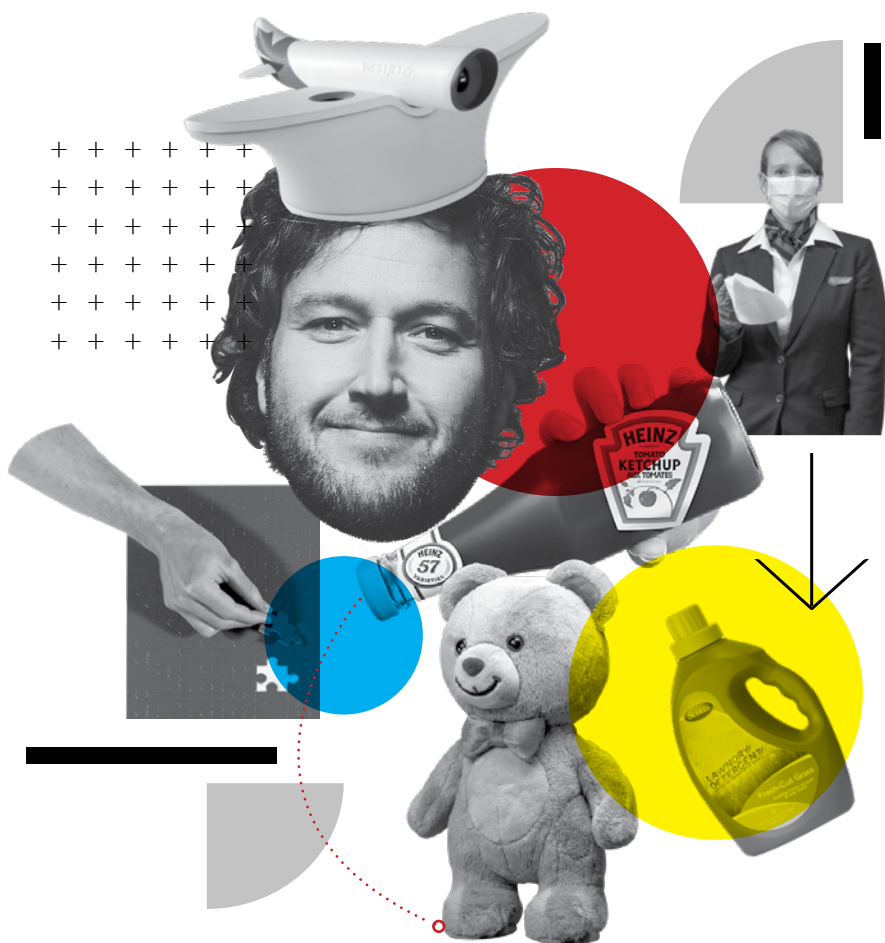
Peppered throughout this year's Creative Report Card are mementos of a year spent in lockdown: a tabletop Fender amp, a rocket, and a cat (or two). Along with the stories they accompany, these images (submitted by the creatives themselves) offer a glimpse into the world of advertising-from-home, reminding us this was no ordinary year for the industry's most-awarded talent. ● #1 Agency Rethink remains on top of its game,

with its new national CCO, Aaron Starkman, taking the title of the #1 Creative Director and Sean McDonald landing atop the Planners list. ● While many Rethink clients, including Kraft Heinz, IKEA and WestJet, made the

top-ten list of Brands, the #1 spot went to Black & Abroad, whose "Go Back to Africa" campaign by FCB/Six (#2 Agency with FCB) made international headlines. Some of the creatives involved in the campaign, which include top Copywriter Curtis Chapman and top Art Director Ramón Charles, give the industry a behind-the-scenes look at how they overcame the risk of facing hate head-on. ● Last, but certainly not least, we spoke to BBDO's Mike Nugent (#1 Designer) and several others in the CRC's top ranks about hacking it from home. ● To see the full rankings, make sure to visit [Strategyonline.ca](https://strategyonline.ca). For now, flip these pages to learn more about this year's report card toppers.

BY JUSTIN DALLAIRE





The Rethink machine

What do a Heinz Ketchup puzzle and a Valentine's Day Candy KD have in common? Aside from Rethink's involvement, they're the advertising equivalent of the "show, don't tell" writing technique.

In both cases, Kraft Heinz worked with the Creative Report Card's #1 Agency to spin out products that tap into a cultural moment, bringing brand relevance through action, not declaration. When you're building a puzzle, you're not so much consuming a piece of advertising as you are participating in its creation.

No one knows this better than Rethink. A small part of the agency's recent success can be attributed to having mastered what many in the industry are calling "acts, not ads."

Though it has been leveraged by global brands like Mars and Burger King, agency Leo Burnett dubbed and helped popularize the idea nearly a decade ago. And in 2019, it looked at the work most likely to win at Cannes that year and declared "Acts, Not Ads, Reign."

"Building brands over time is no longer about launching the big traditional ad – it's about acts along the way that make the brand relevant over time," says Nina Patel, head of brand build and

innovation at Kraft Heinz (#5 Brand). "For us, this means going after ideas that are bold, that tap into an authentic tension or insight, and ignite consumer conversation."

Looking at some of its most recent client work, it's fair to say Rethink has cracked the "acts" code and now feels comfortable applying that filter to a slew of clients across categories.

The agency applied the thinking to much of Kraft Heinz' marketing over the last two years – from "Pour Perfectly" to "Heinz on Film" and "Heinz Ketchup Puzzle" – and continues to move forward with equally shareable work, like its super slow-loading webpage (57 minutes!) or its call for people to sketch the first image of ketchup that comes to mind (the majority naturally drew pictures of Heinz).

But the formula can also be seen in work for #6 Brand IKEA – from its "Gingerbread Home" (tiny edible furniture) to a "Dog Translator" (to help customers communicate with their pets) and "The ScrapsBook" (a sustainability-focused cookbook filled with recipes that use food scraps).

There are even traces of it in #10 Brand WestJet's "Flight Light," a nightlight that used data to let kids track their parents' whereabouts in real-time. In that instance, Rethink "leaned on a mobile application, as well as this physical thing, to create this moment of meaningful connection that really ties back to the brand," says Rob Daintree, director of marketing communications. "You see that in a lot of work [Rethink does] with their clients."

At Kraft Heinz, Patel says her team evaluates ideas bearing five things in mind: is it authentic and ownable to the brand? Will the press write about it? Does it have inherent tension and a point of view

on the world? Does it offer something consumers can authentically engage in? And lastly, has it been done before? "If it smells at all like something we've seen before, then it's likely not something we're going to want to jump into," she says.

But how does Rethink develop, pitch and ultimately sell clients on so many of these ideas?

That, according to Aaron Starkman, managing partner and national CCO (as well as the #1 CD), is thanks to a fine-tuned process that "eliminates wheel spinning and helps us get to the best possible work." It's what agency co-founders Chris Staples and Ian Grais (the #2 CDs) refer to as "the Rethink machine."

Starkman says: "It works like a machine with many parts that result in reliable output. In our case, that output is work that people talk about, write about and share." No matter the client, its mechanics are the same, with only minor deviations for act-based work.

During early-stage ideation, the agency opts for breadth, not depth. Creatives are encouraged to generate as many concepts as possible under Rethink's "winner 100 rule." As Starkman explains, "Your best idea can be your first idea, or your one hundredth idea. But you won't

Featured image:
Aaron Starkman
(Rethink)

truly know until you come up with 100 ideas.”

The less-than-stellar ideas are then filtered out through an internal review process that involves presenting concepts to other agency creatives who resemble the client’s target and who help winnow down the list by applying a “CRAFTS” lens – Rethink-speak for ideas that are Clear, Relevant, Achievable, Fresh, True and Shareable. The top-ten most promising ones land on a CD’s desk.

Then, clients are called in for a “shallow holes” meeting, Starkman says. Rather than share a 100-slide deck outlining two big ideas, Rethink keeps things short and sweet, pitching six to eight ideas in brief, digestible bites – enough for the client to intuitively distinguish the potential winners (typically two) from the non-starters.

“Then we go away and we start digging deep into the selected shallow holes for our eventual big ‘Ta-da!’ meeting,” says Starkman. “In that final meeting, there are never any surprises, because the clients have been brought into the kitchen early.”

That process has helped Rethink develop award-winning campaigns that run the gamut from IKEA’s “Stuff Monster” to the Government of Ontario’s “Rowan’s Law.”

The only difference is that “acts, not ads” are also given the press release treatment, a pitch method that was frequently used by Alex Bogusky when he was at CP+B.

During the ideation stage, creatives are asked to write a headline that captures how they expect the work to be covered in the mainstream press. Real examples that appeared in the media almost word-for-word include: “Heinz creates the slowest puzzle that’s just the colour red” and “WestJet’s Flight Light projects your flight path onto your child’s ceiling.”

“The press headline, sometimes accompanied by a rough sketch, is how teams actually present ideas,” Starkman says. “It’s a great way for creatives to filter out the ideas that won’t take off or ideas that are overly complicated or don’t make any sense.”

For clients like IKEA, the “acts, not ads” budget is small, coming in at around 5% of overall spend, says head of marketing Johanna Andrén. The work is culturally relevant and typically falls on the stuntier side, but has to always be rooted in the brand and its values,

Andrén says. The “ScrapsBook,” for example, ties back to the retailer’s sustainability positioning and messaging. The ideas “are creative, but not completely crazy,” she says.

As the goal is to maintain an appropriate balance with larger campaigns, Andrén says the acts are baked into the annual planning process. The ideas can come from any of its agency partners or its own marketing team, but they must adhere to certain guidelines, such as seasonal planning, and tie back to its brand DNA. There’s also a limit on the number of concepts it pursues in any given year. “So it’s structured in a way, but it’s not the same process as for the larger brand and core business campaigns.”

Kraft Heinz, on the other hand, enjoys the flexibility of the “acts” approach, deploying work that speaks to a cultural moment, whether it

came via a formal brief or not.

“It’s them calling us on a given day saying, ‘We have a great idea; it’s not the plan, but we should do it,’” Patel says. “Ideas are fluid, and they can often happen through an informal chat or a text beyond boardroom conversations. It’s that kind of openness and agility that’s been game changing [for us].”

Patel adds that, when it comes to acts, both the client and agency recognize the inevitability of failure. “We don’t let perfection get in the

way of what could be a great idea,” she says.

In fact, the partners mutually recognize the need for a “go, then grow” mentality. That approach “allows us to jump into an idea, see if it catches fire, and then throw fuel on the fire once we see something there,” she says. “Not everything’s going to take off. So you need room to tolerate some failure that you may not have had with a larger integrated campaign.”

Moving forward, Starkman says the agency’s future success will depend on keeping the “well-oiled Rethink machine” greased.

Having officially taken over from Grais and Staples in the fall, the national CCO says he’s “never going to mess” with the founders’ process. “I’ve been part of the best work of my entire career by believing passionately in the Rethink machine. So it’s my job to make sure it’s running properly. I’ll try not to fuck it up.”



AGENCIES

1. Rethink
2. FCB Canada
3. Cossette
4. Lg2
5. Zulu Alpha Kilo
6. BBDO
7. Sid Lee
8. No Fixed Address
9. Bensimon Byrne / OneMethod / Narrative
10. Taxi

CREATIVE DIRECTORS

1. Aaron Starkman, Rethink
2. Ian Grais, Rethink
2. Chris Staples, Rethink
4. Christina Yu (Formerly Rethink)
5. Jeff Hilts (Formerly FCB)
5. Nancy Crimi-Lamana, FCB
7. Ian Mackenzie, FCB/Six
8. Mike Dubrick, Rethink
9. Carlos Moreno, BHLA (Formerly Cossette)
10. Andrew Bernardi, FCB/Six



FCB will stop at nothing

Two weeks before the launch of FCB's 2019 campaign for the Canadian Down Syndrome Society (CDSS), everything was written but it was still going to be a mad scramble to get the work done on time, says CCO Nancy Crimi-Lamanna. "It's a mad scramble every year."

Like many of FCB's campaigns, "Project Understood" had been pitched on an ambition, rather than a fully fledged idea – to make voice tech more inclusive of people with atypical speech, says Crimi-Lamanna – who, along with retired creative partner Jeff Hilts, are the #5 CDs on the 2021 CRC. The campaign would help train speech recognition models to identify voice patterns of people with Down syndrome, opening up a new world of opportunity for the community.

But the idea was presented to CDSS (#3 Brand) before FCB (#2 Agency) had found a partner in Google (#2 Brand) and before it knew people with Down syndrome shared sufficient commonality in their speech for the tech giant to train its algorithms, says Crimi-Lamanna. Once a test-run with Google proved the experiment could work, there was little time left to shoot the creative and finalize the campaign.

Luckily, the agency and client had a long-standing relationship and a track-record of quickly producing award-winning work together.

Despite the timeline, CDSS knew FCB could pull it off, says Kristen Halpen, manager of marketing communications. "Seeing a campaign that you may have wondered wasn't even possible at times go live – that definitely builds trust. The fact that they consistently exceed our expectations, that builds trust too."

CDSS chair Ed Casagrande worked with the agency at OLG prior to chairing the non-profit. As a pro bono client, Casagrande says CDSS knows that other paying brands may at times take priority. And someone new to that dynamic may think, "Oh, we're never going to pull this off – because, knock on wood, there have been some really, really tight timelines," he says. "But, I'm just amazed at what the turnaround has been. After hours, weekends – it's not like they're doing pro bono work for the sake of pro bono work."

"Project Understood" is but one example of the success FCB has had when it comes to pitching ambitious ideas to clients before fully knowing how to deliver on them. Another is the 2019 Cannes-winning "Go Back to Africa" campaign by FCB/Six, which tackled hate speech directed toward Black people online by transforming a common racial slur into a positive call-to-action in hyper-targeted ads.

FCB/Six had to find an organization as brave as CDSS to partner with when it came up with the concept for "Go Back to Africa." The agency found a match in Black & Abroad, which bills itself as a "trusted authority in Black travel," offering experiences for travelers. "As soon as we began to understand their brand, we thought they

would be an incredible fit," says CCO Ian Mackenzie (#7 CD).

Kent Johnson and Eric Martin, the co-founders of the U.S.-based travel and lifestyle company (and #1 Brand), were familiar with some of the tools needed to bring the campaign to life – including Google's Vision AI – but they recognized that FCB/Six would need to "stretch the limits" of what they thought was possible with the tech.

Plus, the idea of taking on the potentially controversial campaign – inspired by the lived experience of former FCB/Six-er (now CD at Gut) Frederick Nduna – was "super frightening," says Martin. "We didn't know if, in fact, we wanted to move forward with it, because it was just so risky."

"The thing with a campaign like this is that its purpose is to get more eyes on what your company is about," Johnson says. "So if this was someone's first brush with Black & Abroad, we wanted to make sure that messaging was very clear, because it has so much opportunity to be misconstrued."

The agency's "Destination Pride" work for PFLAG convinced the client that FCB/Six could pull it off – that global platform also had a travel dimension and was rich in data and tech, notes Mackenzie.

"When we saw the 'Destination Pride' campaign, it was a no-

Featured image:
Eric Martin, Kent
Johnson (Black
& Abroad); Ian
Mackenzie, Nancy
Crimi-Lamanna
(FCB)

BRANDS

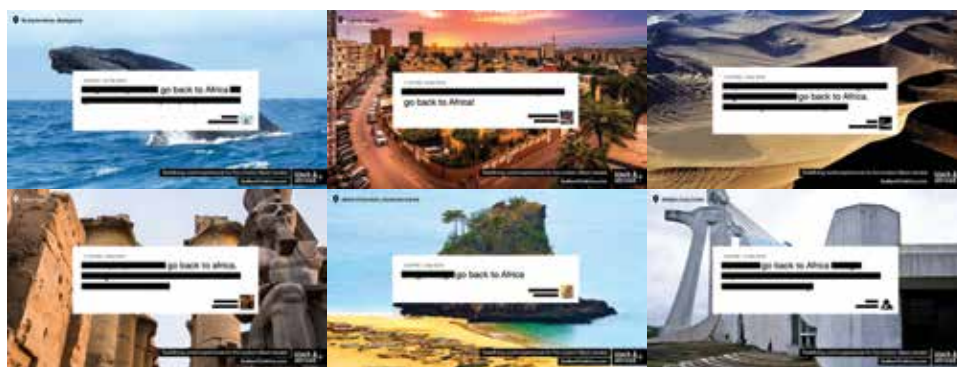
1. Black & Abroad
2. Google
3. Canadian Down Syndrome Society
4. SickKids Foundation
5. Kraft Heinz
6. IKEA
7. Regent Park School of Music
8. McDonald's Restaurants of Canada
9. Fondation Emergence
10. WestJet

brainer at that point," says Martin, noting the work took appropriate risk and a progressive stance on the issue of identity politics. The campaign "could have gone completely left. But not only did they keep on track, they also garnered quite a bit of positive press and attention from it."

The diversity of the team, which included Nduna and Ramón Charles (#1 AD and currently the senior AD at Isobar), also gave them confidence, adds Martin. "It reflected the world. [Other shops] may not have that diversity to be able to understand our concerns [and] nuances that might not translate well with our audience."

That's not to say "Go Back to Africa" didn't evolve along the way. "Although the idea never changed at the heart of this, the execution was discovered through iteration," Mackenzie says. "[It] was solving marketing challenges that were coming up through client feedback, and through the idea, intersecting with the brand, [and] with our approach as a creative data agency."

Crimi-Lamanna says that client trust is also evident in larger brands such as its six-year partner BMO, for which it created a platform that takes a stand against the gender bias that undermines women's financial confidence. "We wouldn't have been able to do that work in year one," she says. "We sell [clients] on ideas that we don't know how to do," she adds. "But they trust that we're going to figure it out. We have a track record of delivering on the ideas that we promise to put into the world."



Go behind the scenes of "Go Back to Africa"

"Go Back to Africa" almost didn't happen. For both Black & Abroad and FCB/Six, the pan-African tourism campaign – one that would hijack a racist slur and turn it into a positive call to action – was risky. Here's how three creatives who were involved – including Andrew Bernardi and Frederick Nduna (#10 and #11 CDs), and Curtis Chapman (#1 CW) – worked together to navigate hate.

On finding inspiration through lived experience

Nduna: I was born and raised in Zambia – a beautiful place – and had an amazing upbringing. Having left Africa, it was a culture shock to see how the continent was depicted on screens and in conversations. I thought, "This Western gaze is wrong," and the phrase that best articulated that was: "Go back to Africa." It's a very hurtful slur that puts Africa as the butt of the joke. But it's a beautiful continent, so I thought, "Going back to Africa should always be a great idea."

On safeguarding the campaign's positive message

Nduna: [We relied on] relentless positivity. Because we wholeheartedly believed one thing – that going back to Africa is a great idea. We made sure that existed in the interplay between the idea, [the client] and the agency approach. The execution and the redaction image – even that had to be positive.

Chapman: The copy had to give context to the idea, back it up, make it bulletproof, and be positive – paint everything in a good light, so that it couldn't be taken the wrong way – from the website to the tweets and the launch video.

Bernardi: But it's the internet, and things can go wrong. So there were a lot of calls made along the way. For example, we decided early on that we would never have anyone in the images of the tweets we hijacked, because that creates a different

meaning... This might have been the first campaign I worked on where you need the whole context. So we launched a video to set it up. We were very cognizant of the danger the entire way.

On revisiting the work after 2020's racial justice movement

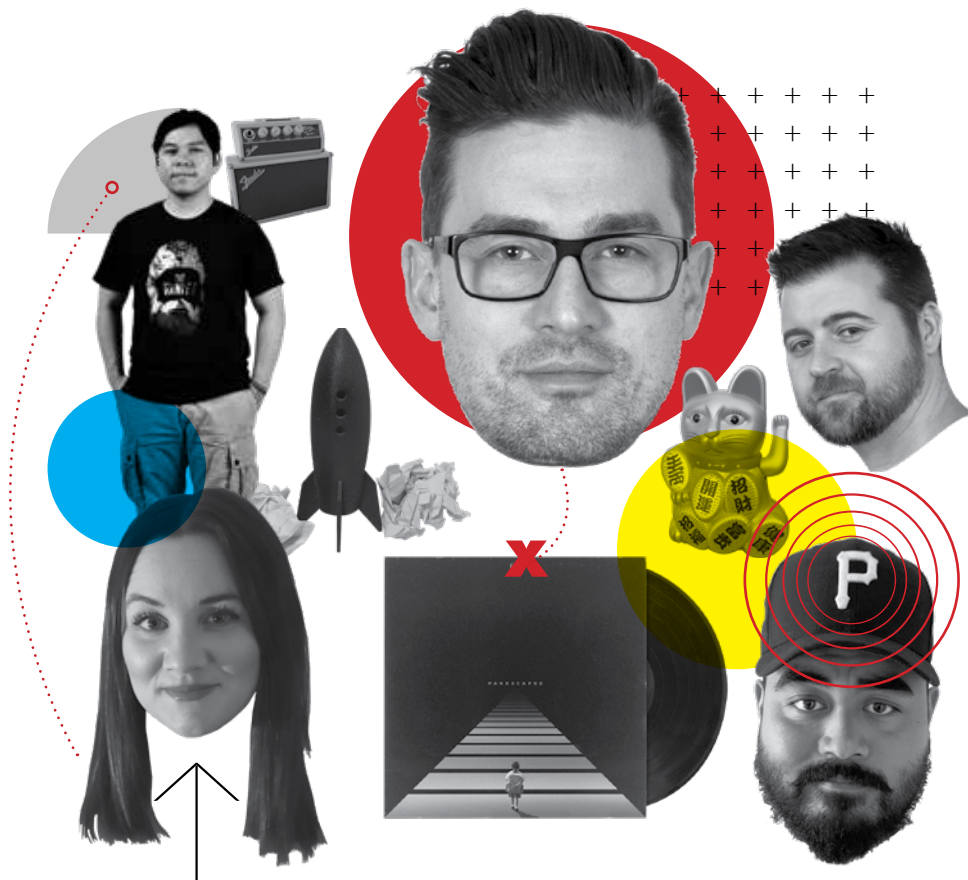
Nduna: We understand that we haven't fixed anything permanently. But we like to believe we have contributed to the conversation, and if that comes across in growing intent to travel to Africa among African Americans – among all people in this world – that's a great thing. There's still a lot of [negative] out there. But, if we can say we contributed to that social conversation, then we can walk away and say that, as advertisers, we did something.

Bernardi: I recently searched the hashtag on Instagram, and it seems to be different [than before the campaign]. I don't know if that's just the algorithm for me, but I feel there's almost a bit of a contradiction for people who use [the phrase "Go back to Africa"] in a bad sense [now].

On earning global recognition

Nduna: The results have exceeded our wildest dreams or ambitions. It's a reminder that – at risk of sounding cliché – being brave, persevering and championing an idea you believe in, the consequence of that can be great.





THE NOT-SO-SURPRISING DOWNSIDE

BBDO's Mike Nugent should feel on top of the world right now.

In January, the #1 Designer on the CRC was named design director as the agency looked to grow the department. And between wrapping up a number of multi-year, big branding assignments, Nugent and his wife have been spending much of their time at home with their children – their second, born in early 2020, is a “full pandemic baby.”

Still, the designer says he's coming off “the most challenging work year” he's ever had.

Once the office cleared out, BBDO's teams had to find new ways to collaborate. In a physical shared workspace, there are moments when “you're walking by someone's desk and you can spitball ideas and work off each other – that's been lost,” Nugent says.

Spencer Dingle, the report card's #4 Art Director and a CD at Broken Heart Love Affair (BHLA) who also became a father during the pandemic, agrees that it was “really hard at first, trying to get used to not being in the same room as people. As creatives, especially, you thrive on the energy in the room, and when that's not there, it's hard to focus and come up with good work.”

Dingle – who along with creative partner Jordan Hamer (#6 Copywriter) moved to BHLA from Cossette in December – notes he used to be able to pop into the offices of former co-CCOs Carlos Moreno and Peter Ignazi just to run a “crazy thought” by them – a habit that

would likely cause frustration among senior leaders at less flexible organizations. While BHLA's leaders (including Moreno) have made themselves very accessible, Dingle says the experience isn't the same through screens.

With less time spent shooting the breeze, longer and more frequent virtual meetings have filled the void, imposing a more structured schedule on creatives based on “intentional periods of conversation,” Nugent says. “[As a result], for a lot of people, they're needing to make up for some of the [lost] work time. And they're working more at night.”

Rethink's Zachary Bautista, the #2 Art Director, has his own take on things. He, too, has been spending more time after-hours on assignments, hoping that “when I put my head back up, we'll be out of the pandemic.” In that sense, he says, the pandemic has unwittingly turned him into the “best and worst versions of myself.”

But, unlike the others, Bautista feels the new digital environment has encouraged more informal communication between creative teams. Before, he and his creative partner would “step out to a coffee

The WFH experiment

One year into the pandemic, how has quarantine impacted creativity and relationships – for better or worse?

Agency land is in the midst of a massive group experiment. In March 2020, creatives were sent home in droves as agencies (and the world) began to grasp the severity of the evolving COVID situation.

Many believed – or hoped – that the office hiatus would be short-lived. Instead, they became the unwitting test subjects in an industry-wide pilot project that continues to unfold.

Can creativity be nurtured from the confines of kitchen tables and bedroom workstations? Do creative relationships, as the ad world knew them before the crisis, die or thrive under lockdown? What is the good, the bad and the ugly of a year stuck in place?

To gauge how industry talent has fared since the pandemic began, *Strategy* spoke to some of the top copywriters, art directors and designers on this year's Creative Report Card about their experiences.

While there's no question that many are itching to get back to some of the old ways and familiar faces, the COVID experiment has yielded mixed results.

Featured image:
Mike Nugent (BBDO); Spencer Dingle (BHLA); Zachary Bautista (Rethink); Shannon McCarroll (FCB); Jason Soy (Cossette)

shop or [somewhere] close to the office to hide from anyone hunting for us at our desk," he says. Now, you're only ever a Slack or text message away. "That's the tough part – it has blurred the lines of availability."

Bautista and Dingle agree that they remain as tied to their creative partners as ever before, only now it's through "always-on" virtual meetings that often get interrupted by conversations with roommates or partners and other mundane tasks – though some activities, such as folding laundry, can help lubricate the imagination while working, notes Bautista.

The problem is "people lose track of time, especially in the Zoom world," he says. "You're just like, 'Holy shit, it's seven [o'clock] and I didn't realize that we're still talking on the call.'"

The calls may last hours, but for Bautista, their effectiveness pales in comparison to in-person brainstorming sessions – one partner might wander down a YouTube rabbit hole or respond to an urgent email, while the other remains focused on the task at hand, he says. "The tough thing about Zoom is that I have the entire internet in front of me."

Until the pandemic is fully under control, Dingle adds that health and safety measures have sucked the joy out of some of the most enjoyable parts of agency work, such as going to shoots and pre-production meetings. "All that stuff that's part of the creative process has all been stripped away, and you're just left with ideation and writing and meetings."

THE SURPRISING UPSIDE

Despite the challenges of WFH, it's not all doom and gloom.

The #2 and #3 Copywriters – FCB's Shannon McCarroll and former FCBer Jason Soy, who recently moved to Cossette – for example, have found a bustling office is not always conducive to work requiring a lot of concentration – such as writing outstanding copy.

As McCarroll points out: it's not uncommon for copywriters to find themselves on a roll, the lines writing themselves as they hammer away at the keys, when suddenly someone (usually an accounts person) taps them on the shoulder.

"There's none of that at home," she says. "I don't face writer's block as much as I did at work. Maybe the writer's block was literally someone blocking the writer from working."

Soy agrees that copywriting from home has been "a small blessing," because "we do need to

sit down, hunker down and focus on our craft. The lack of distractions has actually made my work [easier] – I'm getting it done a lot faster, overall."

Does Soy miss the spontaneous social interactions and moments of collective inspiration that come with working in an office? Absolutely, he says. But, if you're an introvert, "this is kind of your time to shine."

He and McCarroll add that the situation has helped them break out of their "advertising bubbles" and find ideas in places they may not have previously thought to look.

"I take inspiration now from the outside world, people outside of advertising – like my roommate, who's a kindergarten teacher," McCarroll says.

The days of clocking out on a Thursday and heading to the bar, where you inevitably talk shop with colleagues and friends, are gone, she says. Instead, people like her are now spending all day with someone who is not an ad person. "You're getting more opinions, and you're watching more TV shows. So I think we're breaking out of the bubble of advertising."

"Which is ultimately better," adds Soy, "because all the best ads aren't really ads anyways... The more we are able to draw from external sources outside of advertising, the better."

During his time at home, Soy discovered another creativity hack: create a side business in which you're both the client and the creative genius behind the work. The copywriter launched Uncle Soy's Smart Rice, a parody rice brand whose purpose is to help dry smartphones and tablets, as "an outlet for me to do parody work, [to create] ads that no brand would ever buy."

Dingle is also spending more time feeling inspired by stuff outside of advertising.

"The pandemic's been a curse, obviously – for the most part. I don't want to say anything's been good about it," he says. "But it has afforded me a lot of time to focus on things I like." These include visiting art blogs and watching movies he might otherwise not have time to see, activities he believes will ultimately have a net impact on the work he produces.

"It's given me a lot of time to think about what kind of work I want to make – work that could potentially change people's perspectives or thoughts," Dingle says. "I just want to make thought-provoking work. If you turn to the art world or the film world, you'll generally find bigger ideas there that are experimental and things that stay with you."

COPYWRITERS

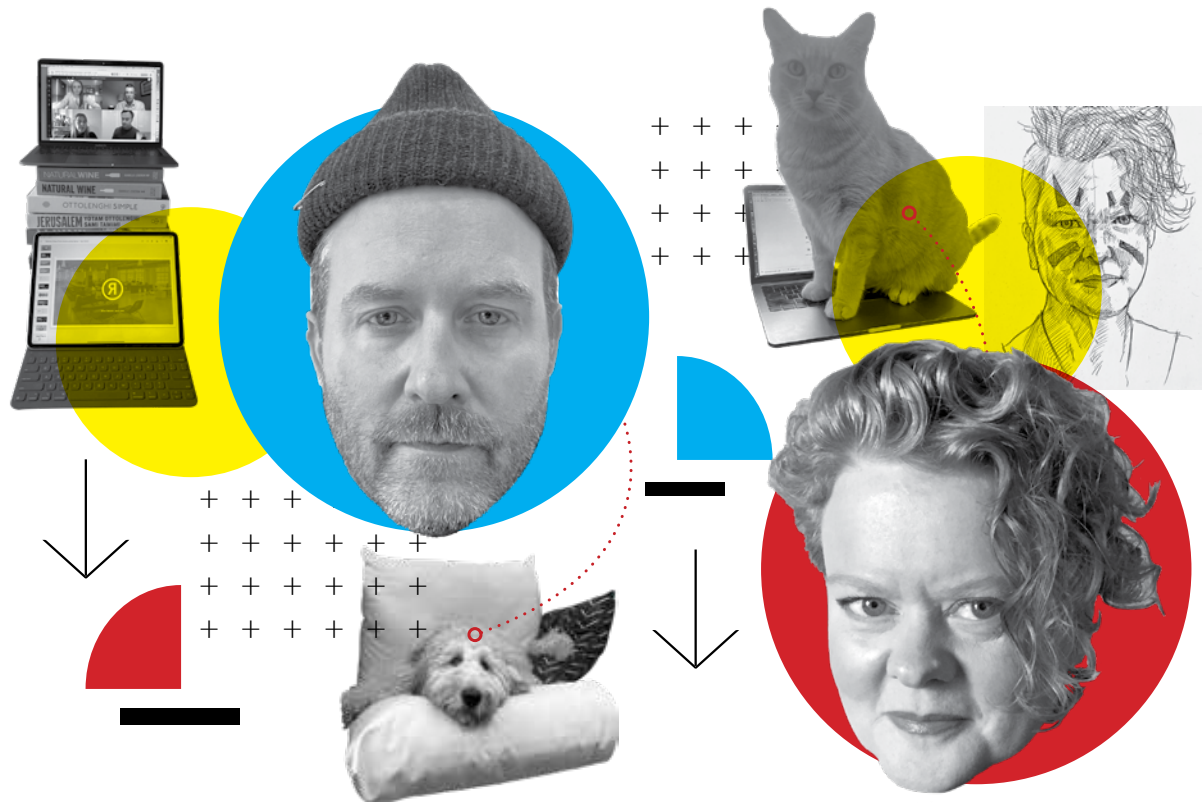
1. Curtis Chapman, Theo (Formerly FCB/Six)
2. Shannon McCarroll, FCB
3. Jason Soy, Cossette (Formerly FCB)
4. Xavier Blais, Rethink
5. Jordan Hamer, BHLA (Formerly Cossette)
6. Rana Chatterjee, Lg2 (Formerly BBDO)
7. Geoff Baillie, Rethink
8. Andrew Chhour, Wieden + Kennedy (Formerly Rethink)
9. Jacquelyn Parent, Rethink
10. Jackson Kemp, Taxi (Formerly Zulu Alpha Kilo)

ART DIRECTORS

1. Ramón Charles, Isobar (Formerly FCB/Six)
2. Zachary Bautista, Rethink
3. Maxime Sauté, Rethink
4. Spencer Dingle, BHLA (Formerly Cossette)
5. Jeff Cheung, Lg2 (Formerly BBDO)
6. Tyler Robitaille, Cossette
7. Michael Romaniuk, Zulu Alpha Kilo
8. Hayley Hinkley, Rethink
9. Alexandra McGuirk-Penedo, Cossette
10. Joel Holtby, Rethink

DESIGNERS

1. Mike Nugent, BBDO
2. Jake Lim, Rethink
3. Erin Maguire, Rethink
4. Eric Wood, Oliver (Formerly King Ursa)
5. Ryan Crouchman, Lg2
6. Jacqueline Lane, Public Address (Formerly John St.)
7. Hans Thiessen, Rethink
8. Mooren Bofill, 123W (Formerly John St.)
9. Sheldon Rennie, Rethink
9. Ryan Booth, Hudson's Bay (Formerly Zulu Alpha Kilo)



The Planners' Review

The CRC's highest-ranked strategists wax lyrical about the insights behind each other's work.

PLANNERS

1. Sean McDonald, Rethink
2. Shelley Brown, FCB
3. Paul Hanlon,
City of Edmonton
(Formerly FCB/Six)
4. Anna Percy-Dove,
Superbia (Formerly FCB/Six)
4. Simran Kaur, FCB/Six
6. Eryn LeMesurier, FCB
7. Shelagh Hartford, FCB
8. Audrey Zink, FCB
9. Tom Kenny, Ogilvy
10. Rosie Gentile, Cossette

SEAN MCDONALD, RETHINK

The #1 Planner deconstructs BMO's "Financial Fairness" campaign, which highlights the gender stereotypes facing girls and women that result in financial disempowerment.

REVERSE ENGINEER THIS CAMPAIGN. WHAT'S THE KILLER INSIGHT?

This campaign clearly demonstrates the unfortunate reality that women are treated unequally and conditioned throughout their lives to question their financial independence. I would guess the work was inspired by an insight recognizing that society pays lip service to equality, yet continually reinforces the ridiculous notion that women are in some way less independent with their finances. That's a self-fulfilling prophecy that will persist as long as we reinforce it.

SHELLEY BROWN, FCB

The #2 Planner deconstructs Molson Canadian's "Make It Canadian," whose support for local beer pride was highlighted in two-four cases that contained Canadian beer brands.

REVERSE ENGINEER THIS CAMPAIGN. WHAT'S THE KILLER INSIGHT?

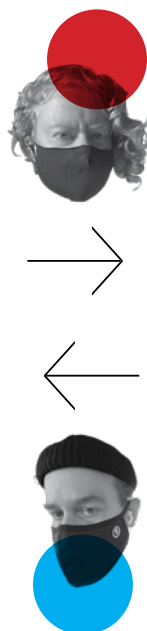
There are several layers to the insight. Molson Canadian isn't just *the* Canadian beer, it's the essence of Canadian-ness in beer. That means easy-drinking, hockey-friendly, unpretentious, and likable. Inclusive, welcoming, and, that Canadian trope, nice. But the brand is also acting as a leader, standing up for all domestic beer and pushing back against that old foe: American beer. This is Molson Canadian being unafraid of its own scale. And being generous. And so, being a true leader.

IN WHAT OTHER DIRECTION COULD THIS CAMPAIGN HAVE GONE?

The campaign creative highlights the truth at the crux of this inequality, while also strongly declaring BMO's point of view. Ultimately, it reveals a pervasive bias. Though it gives BMO the chance to demonstrate all it can and will be doing to address the issue, there's also an opportunity for the bank to showcase how everyone can do better to support women through their words and actions.

APPLY THE SAME INSIGHT TO AN IMAGINARY CLIENT. WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

Unfortunately, the bias identified exists everywhere. It's an issue that many brands could use in their own context to make a difference. For example, if you're a retailer, speak to women of any age about sport through the lens of empowerment. If a brand like Canadian Tire, with its focus on inclusion in sports, were to use its platform to demonstrate the power of language in supporting women athletes, it could make a similar impact.



IN WHAT OTHER DIRECTION COULD THIS CAMPAIGN HAVE GONE?

Molson Canadian is at its best when it taps into national pride. So it could highlight more of these moments. For Indigenous History Month, offer a mixed case of all indigenous brews (there are many, just not many available at your local beer store). Or create a campaign that measures the level of national pride in social media and responds in real-time through flexible pricing or that unlocks a special offer through an increase in sentiment.

APPLY THE INSIGHT TO AN IMAGINARY CLIENT. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

This insight requires an enemy. So, what if a regional QSR fought off a new entrant by expanding its online menu to include items from nearby restaurants? What if a Canadian coffee shop bolstered its own local credentials against a multi-national competitor by offering a local roast of the week – from a neighbourhood coffee roaster or cupcakes from bakeries? By playing the role of category protector, the brand could take a lead.

Methodology

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

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

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

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

SCORING

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

AGENCIES

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

INDIVIDUALS

Points are awarded to the individuals credited in the award show books. If a name isn't listed, the individual doesn't receive any points. In some cases, agencies have provided corrections, which have been taken into account on a case-by-case basis.

ADVERTISERS

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

THE AWARDS THAT COUNT

Regional: ACE, Ad Rodeo, IDEA Awards

National: Applied Arts, AToMiC, CMA, Marketing Awards, Shopper Innovation & Activation Awards

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



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THE 2021 ATOMIC AWARDS

THE ATOMIC AWARDS WAS BIRTHED 10 YEARS AGO with the belief that the boldest ideas are hatched in company with tech, media and innovation. That much is still true, even more so now than it was back then – especially in a world where experiences are railroaded by a pandemic.

The following report is a highlight reel of ideas that challenge our expectations of advertising and the way we consume media. One of those ideas came from Grand Prix winners Kraft Heinz and Rethink, where it took foresight to hack a work-around media strategy that guaranteed engagement for Heinz Ketchup, even if it wasn't their first-choice channel.

And the second Grand Prix – given to CDSS and FCB under the

Public Service banner – wholly altered voice tech to pave a more inclusive way forward. Because stretching the limits of what's possible is what AToMiC is all about.

Strategy developed the AToMiC Awards to identify groundbreaking ideas and programs across the mediascape. The winners, chosen by a jury of digital, agency, marketing and media execs, offer examples of how to engage audiences on multiple screens and in new environments.

Read on for the Grand Prix and Gold-winning work, and the insights that shaped them.

BY JENNIFER HORN

GRAND PRIX



Culture kings

IDEAS THAT FED INTO THE CULTURAL CONTEXT AND WON OVER CONSUMERS WITH CLEVER ENGAGEMENT PLAYS.

^ THE WINS

Kraft Heinz Canada
"Heinz on Film"
by Rethink
Grand Prix; Gold
Engagement;
Gold Idea

"S@*t, I wish that was my idea," said every creative at least half-a-dozen times in their career. It's a feeling akin to the Eureka Effect, except in reverse, sending tingles of envy to the brain of those who are only witness to – not the creator of – brilliant flashes of insight.

The well-documented outburst of regret/awe came up several times in the AToMiC jury Zoom room this year. That's why so many medals went to Rethink. Much of the agency's winning work helped embed brands into the cultural milieu and engaged with consumers on a much deeper level than most traditional campaigns.

Take the Grand Prix winner Kraft Heinz, for example. As it

turns out Hollywood had been snubbing the beloved red sauce for decades. The condiment has had cameos in hundreds of award-winning films – from *When Harry Met Sally* to *Groundhog Day* – yet not once has it received a nomination from Tinseltown's awards academies. But instead of getting even, the brand decided to get credit.

It was the winter of 2019. The public and press were gearing up for the red carpet season. And Rethink was backstage helping Heinz Ketchup finally get recognized for all that screen time. The agency spent a great deal of time sifting through iconic films to find the iconic sauce on diner tables and kitchen counters,

adding every one of its "actor" appearances in IMDB.

The open-source film and TV database didn't agree with Heinz Ketchup's thinking that inanimate objects should be credited on the platform, as evidenced by its swift removal of the brand's IMDB profile before it had the chance to tell anyone about it. It was snubbed, again.

So the agency took action to prove Heinz Ketchup's actor cred and launched a video on Facebook that called on the public to help find movies that featured the condiment and leave the film's name in the comments section. In return, commenters received free ketchup, with the agency crafting personalized responses

that mimicked the movies being posted. The brand received thousands of engagements (52 times the average) – far more on social than if the campaign lived solely on IMDB.

“Heinz on Film” made getting snubbed by the Oscars a winning strategy and the brand saw a 350% increase in brand sentiment – an affinity score that Heinz Ketchup, as a 150 year old category leader, is constantly looking to maintain as it ages and is the reason it created the “Heinz Ketchup Puzzle.”

Once again jumping on a cultural insight that brings relevance to the brand, Rethink created an all-red, slow-to-build, 570-piece puzzle (mimicking the famously slow-to-pour sauce), helping people pass the time during lockdowns last year.

The advertising landscape at the time was bleak. Most brands had paused or completely eliminated their marketing in response to the uncertainty of the health crisis. Many released messages of solidarity, creating a sea of sameness, while Heinz Ketchup was able to stand out with a culturally relevant solution to stay-at-home boredom.

It started with 57 puzzle giveaways in 17 countries, which then evolved into 7,000 sold (within one week), raising \$25,000 for Food Banks Canada and Feeding America. The product earned over 1,000 pieces of coverage, translating into 1.25 billion impressions. Most of all, it increased brand love by 5 points and sparked conversations that placed Heinz Ketchup deeper into the cultural zeitgeist.

But not every pastime like puzzling saw a resurgence during the pandemic. While streaming was up, sex among lockdowners was down. That’s where Trojan comes in with a film that

encourages people to bump uglies (and reach for the category leader in protection while they’re at it).

The cultural insight here was that for younger people – particularly the target Trojan was after, anyone under age 25 – the modern code name for sex is “Netflix & Chill.” You watch a movie and then you hook up. Knowing that the pandemic was drying up libidos as fewer people were having sex, Trojan and its agency Forsman & Bodenfors created “& Chill” – a feature-length

film made up entirely of credits.

While it began with an epic opening, the genre-diverse film quickly jumped to a scroll of post-movie credits, with humorous copy encouraging viewers to get it on. It aired on late night TV and YouTube, while a digital promotion ran on Amazon to drive sales, which it did. In a category that was declining, Trojan increased its sales by 8%, showing that even a 100-year-old brand can still be a part of the cultural conversation.



> THE WIN
Kraft Heinz Canada
“Ketchup Puzzle”
by Rethink
Gold Engagement;
Gold Idea;
Gold Experiential;
Bronze Social



< THE WINS
Trojan “Trojan & Chill” by Forsman & Bodenfors
Gold Broadcast Engagement; Silver Brand Content; Silver Digital Brand Experience

PUBLIC
SERVICE
GRAND
PRIX



Making tech accessible for all

AN IDEA THAT TRANSCENDS ADVERTISING BY SOLVING INEQUALITY ISSUES FOR THE SAKE OF THE GREATER GOOD.

While some AToMiC work highlights the application of tech to a creative idea in a fresh way, “Project Understood” completely altered nascent voice AI to improve the user experience while creating awareness of an inequality that exists in speech recognition.

It’s no surprise the work took home one of the highest accolades, the Public Service Grand Prix, and then some.

The future is bright for voice assistants, like Google Home. Some growth stats report that there will be eight billion assistants in use by the year 2023. Yet a community of people who need voice technology are sorely being underserved. Google’s voice assistant, for one, misunderstands one in every three words of a person with Down syndrome.

While adults with Down syndrome can live on their own, they thrive when there is structure and assistance. If they have access to technology that can help them set automatic reminders and schedules, build to-do lists and get direct access to help they need via a voice assistant, they can live safer

and more independent lives. But because current speech AI is missing data points, they continue to be misunderstood.

The Canadian Down Syndrome Society (CDSS) and FCB created “Project Understood” as a way to make voice tech more accessible to those with Down syndrome. The agency and non-profit worked in partnership with Google to collect data points – or human voices – to train the tech co’s AI platform to better understand the characteristics of speech disfluencies.

First, the team had to recruit the community to donate their voices to the project. During Canadian Down Syndrome Week in November, they launched social videos that shed light on the issue and empowered the tight-knit Down syndrome community to get involved.

The recruitment tool was seeded through email and organic social efforts, with only \$1,000 in paid media to drive awareness. But even with that shoestring budget the campaign went global and over 700 Down

^ THE WINS

CDSS “Project Understood” by FCB
Public Service Grand Prix; Gold Idea; Gold AI; Gold Diversity; Gold Tech Innovation; Silver PS - Collaboration; Silver PS - Engagement; Silver PS - Niche Targeting; Bronze PS - Social; Bronze PS - Digital Engagement

syndrome organizations across 30-plus countries responded to the call.

Voice donors were directed to the “Project Understood” website, where they could log into Chit Chat – a machine learning engine designed to capture speech patterns to help train Google’s AI and voice tech – and record 1,000s of pre-determined phrases with the help of speech pathologists and scientists.

Many of FCB’s campaigns for CDSS over the last few years, from “Anything But Sorry” to “Endangered Species,” have done well on the awards circuit and in the public eye, receiving impressive impressions. “Project Understood” was no exception. The program generated an organic reach on Facebook of over 800,000 – a 678% increase from CDSS’s best performing campaign. It also tracked 775 million impressions worldwide.

Google and CDSS eventually presented their research to the UN, calling on all tech companies to assist in making voice assistants more accessible and help future-proof the vulnerable community.

Quick off the mark

WORK THAT WAS FIRST (OR FAST) TO JUMP ON A CONVERSATION OR MOVEMENT WITHIN THE CULTURAL SPHERE.

Some brands have the chutzpah to jump on ideas that could – if things go awry – lead to nights of restless sleep. But if you're able to pull it off, and go from brave idea to flawless execution in record time, then you're golden.

There was nary a hesitation when Rethink pitched Molson Canadian the idea to create something out of nothing, at speed. The beer brand was up against a wall, with its biggest competitor Budweiser stealing share from Canada's once-top-selling beer. Bud had claimed the #1 spot, making Canada one of only a few countries in the world where its highest selling beer is an import.

The brand needed to create a wedge between Canadians and the American brew. So Rethink asked the seemingly unthinkable of Molson – make Canada's #1 selling beer Canadian, even if it means not selling theirs at all.

The "Make It Canadian" campaign launched nearly two weeks before Canada Day, with a call to local breweries to include one of their products in a special case of beer that would be made up of a mix of Canadian brews. In just nine days, 43 brewers signed up. It was a logistical nightmare, from confusing legal agreements to complicated supply chain logistics, but the team got it done just in time for Canada Day.

The case was sold online and via delivery apps, and supported with social posts, TV and online spots. Molson Canadian managed to take share of voice in the beer category from Budweiser, increasing from 15% to 71%. And the brand even let the brewers keep all of the revenue from cases sold, because that's the Canadian thing to do.

Another fast-acting campaign during the crisis came from Dove, which was arguably

the first brand out of the gate with a campaign that recognized doctors and nurses in masks, long before they became a ubiquitous facet of our lives.

In April, just weeks after the pandemic hit, Dove committed \$7.5 million to support frontline workers who were risking their lives around the world. Their heroism became the anchoring inspiration for the campaign that showed how "Courage is Beautiful" – an extension of the brand's long-running platform that challenges traditional notions of beauty.

As the crisis was unfolding, Ogilvy quickly collected images across the globe and created a hero film that showed a montage of healthcare workers with looks of exhaustion and determination. The spot first appeared in Canada but was picked up by the brand in the U.S. and 13 other markets worldwide.

As a result, "Courage is Beautiful" went viral and amassed two billion global earned media impressions. The campaign positively impacted how Canadians perceive the brand, with affinity scores jumping 15% as Dove re-established its place in the world.

> THE WINS:

Molson Canadian "Make It Canadian" by Rethink **Gold Collaboration; Gold Engagement; Silver Idea; Silver Social**



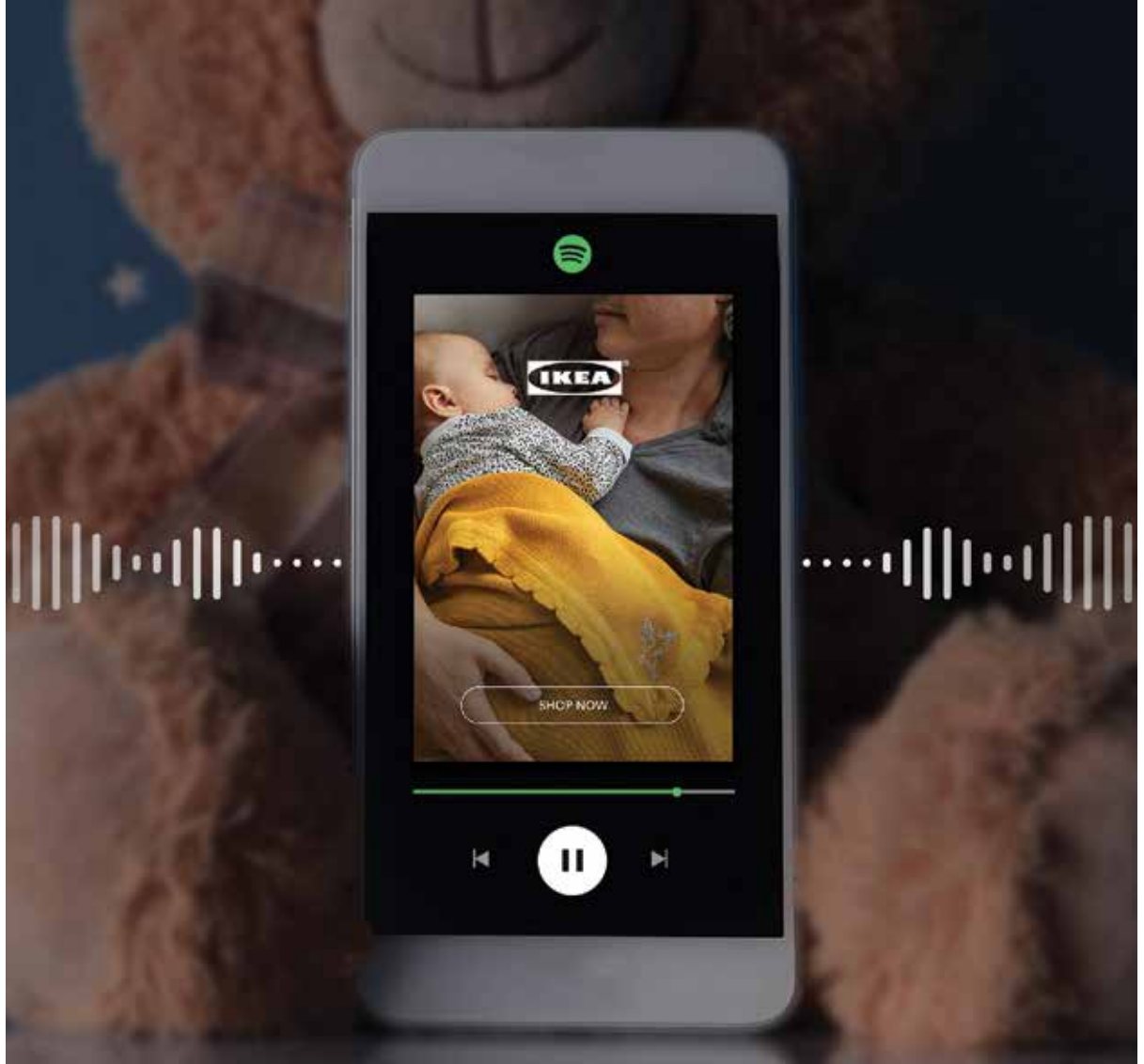
^ THE WINS:

Dove "Courage is Beautiful" by Ogilvy **Gold Global; Bronze Cause + Action**

> THE WINS

IKEA "Baby Proof Spotify Ads" by Rethink

Gold Audio
Branding; Silver
Niche Targeting



Direct attention

ATOMIC IDEAS TAILORED TO GET AUDIENCES TO THINK, ACT OR LISTEN INTENTLY.

RALLYING THE TROOPS

Since the great world wars, veterans have shared wartime stories with their kids and grandkids. Most over the age of 40 have heard a grandparent share memories of brave soldiers and, equally, the atrocities of war. Thankfully, Canada has been at peace for quite some time, but that means younger generations' only connection to war tends to come from the entertainment world.

As a sponsor of the Royal Canadian Legion, HomeEquity Bank wanted to help the non-profit educate those younger audiences about the importance of remembering the heroes who helped protect their liberties and freedoms.

Working with Zulu Alpha Kilo and gaming platforms Twitch, Mixer and YouTube, the bank conducted the first global online game cease fire. At exactly 11am on Remembrance Day, almost one million gamers from 114 countries laid down their controllers, pausing to remember that war is not a game.

The mass response was helped by high-profile gaming influencers as they rallied the troops prior to the event, which helped increase the average donation amount for digital poppies by 20%. Many of the gamers also asked how to get involved in the campaign going forward, showing the potential to become an annual tradition.

NO YELLING REQUIRED

IKEA likes to think of itself as a "sleep expert." It has the mattresses, blackout curtains and temperature-controlling linens to give anyone, even the most notoriously erratic sleepers – newborns and their exhausted parents – a restful night.

So when moms and dads took to Twitter to complain about the obnoxious ads that play during white noise playlists on Spotify (interrupting their babes' sleep while dozing off to the lullabies), IKEA decided to step in.

The retailer's agency Rethink came up with the idea to buy up all of the ad space on popular sleep playlists for babies and replace the loud ads with extra soft and

> THE WIN:

Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec "Living Radars" by Lg2
Gold Experiential Engagement

**> THE WIN:**

Interval House "ESCAPE Abuse" by Union
Gold Niche Targeting

**> THE WINS:**

HomeEquity Bank "Pause to Remember" by Zulu Alpha Kilo
Gold Digital Engagement; Silver Cause + Action; Silver Niche Targeting



shushy ones. They created 11 spots with quiet VO of IKEA's Swedish spokesperson, set to the backdrop of crashing waves and calming sounds.

The campaign ran as a lead-up to IKEA's bedroom event, and included banner ads that drove parents to its sleep solutions. The audio ads drove a click-through rate 25% higher than Spotify's average.

And while ads typically diminish the user experience, the retailer managed to enhance it by keeping babies asleep, finally giving thankful parents some much-needed peace.

SO CUSTOM IT'S COVERT

How do you get life-saving information to women in abusive relationships when their abuser is constantly looking over their shoulder? Worse, how do you reach those women when lockdowns create even more distance from those who can help? You create a secret site that hides information to help a woman escape in plain sight.

That's what Interval House and Union did during the peak of the crisis, as a way to get those isolated women to reach out for help.

The site was promoted as a fashion/lifestyle hub on women-focused sites like Elle Canada, on TV shows like *Cityline*, and through ads on Pinterest. When a person pressed the "ESC" button on their keyboard while visiting the site, it transformed from being "The Way to Live: A Style Guide for the Modern Woman" to "The Way to Leave: An Escape Plan for Abused Women."

Articles included everything a woman needs to know when considering their escape – from what to pack in an emergency bag to how to disable GPS tracking.

The site drove them to the Interval House where they could get help, which many did. In fact, it resulted in an 89% increase in women reaching out. Even in the darkest days of the lockdown, the organization found a way to reach women without alerting their partners, helping them "ESCAPE Abuse."

THE IMPACT OF THE DOUBLE-TAKE

Likely stuck in auto-pilot, many Quebec drivers forget to take it slow on the roads where young ones walk to and from school. It's a serious issue and one that the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec asked Lg2 to tackle head on.

The goal was to get drivers to stop taking risks and adhere to the 30km/h limit in school zones. The solution was to make them think before putting foot on the gas by turning child students into a living radar.

Lg2 created a backpack that displays, in real-time, drivers' speeds. Children were asked to wear the bags as they walked through the school zones. So instead of seeing their speed on a stationary sign, drivers saw their speed on a potential speeding victim – a child.

As a result, the Quebec police noticed reduced speeds in school zones and are now recommending the backpack be distributed in elementary schools across the region.

Design to the rescue

CHARTERING UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY WITH A FAMILIAR BRAND IDENTITY.



How do you convey a cannabis brand's USP while tangled in regulatory red tape? Beyond having to somehow design packaging amid restrictive government rules, how do you explain a product's purpose in a category that many are still confused by? Truss Beverages and Rethink found the answer in navigational design.

The pot category is full of competitors focused on one thing: getting people high. Few have zeroed in on the wellness aspect of cannabis, a surprising fact considering 80% of people consume weed as part of their self-care routine. So while many other cannabis companies were zigging toward THC, Truss decided to zag toward CBD.

The company launched a wellness brand with a moniker that solved consumer confusion, VeryVell, and a line of cannabis drops for beverages. Each of the drops were named for different need states: Yawn, Tingle and Exhale. To reduce user friction, Rethink developed a design system to help consumers navigate the brand's various products.

It created the brand's iconography – an aura – which was used on packaging to create a ripple and communicate inhales and exhales. The system also educated consumers on product benefits, occasions and dosage, while packaging used colours like teal, sage and copper to pull people into the brand's calm and cool aesthetic.

< **THE WINS:** Truss Beverages - VeryVell by Rethink **Gold Design; Gold Cannabis Branding**

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ANGELA SARINO
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Rethink



MO BOFILL
One Twenty Three West



SHARYN BYRNE-NEARING
Metrolinx



JASON HILL
Target Marketing & Communications



ALYSSA HUGGINS
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SAVIOR JOSEPH
Breathing Green Solutions



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The New Collaborators

content partners

The best partner is a problem solver. In fact, sometimes it feels like they work telepathically, understanding the issues you're facing and coming up with solutions before you even have to ask.

It doesn't matter if they're idea generators, tech gurus or sources of targeted data, a great collaborator makes you think about things in new ways. They know how to blend their expertise with yours so brands can begin more relevant conversations with consumers.

Because, let's face it, the complexity involved in reaching a target group and meaningfully interacting with them on multiple platforms simultaneously is getting more complicated every year. Marketers can't be experts at everything, all the time.

Fortunately, the range and scope of content partners – from hybrid shops with platform-spanning CX skills to media companies with deep audience and creative expertise – is also evolving, to meet the new consumer-connection opportunities.

Mom always said we shouldn't be afraid to ask for help. So, in the spirit of true collaboration, we've gathered together some brand partners who have mastered the art and science of resonating and connecting across multiple lanes.

(Disclaimer: Collaborators may or may not be telepathic.)

Reading the room: how to make your brand story relevant

Globe Content Studio taps newsroom skills to elevate content marketing



Passion & Persistence is a sponsored series that Globe Content Studio created for American Express Canada, which profiles Canadian entrepreneurs, like chef Nuit Regular, and their unique experiences running a business during the pandemic.



OVER THE PAST YEAR, finding new ways for brands to stand out in a crowded digital marketplace has been key. Consumers haven't really changed – they still need products and services, and expert advice to help them make purchasing decisions – but over-the-top pitches just felt tone deaf. What was required was a more honest and nuanced approach. What was needed was some great storytelling.

"Content marketing isn't the same as [traditional] marketing," observes Globe Content Studio head Sean Stanleigh. "It's not just about the client. It's not just about selling a product or service. It's about putting a positive halo around your brand. It's really more about the top and the middle of the funnel. It's about creating awareness and consideration. That's what content marketing does best."

And that's where Globe Content Studio comes in. Stanleigh describes the Studio as being guided by the principles of curiosity, diversity and honesty: the curiosity of a team raised in the newsroom; a diversity that reflects the Canadian experience; and an honesty that comes from being closely related to an historic and trusted platform. Together, the *Globe and Mail* print and digital formats reach over six million readers every week –



Created by Globe Content Studio, The Growth Effect is a new podcast sponsored by HSBC that delves into what it's really like to launch and scale a business, featuring candid conversations between host Sarah Stockdale and the leaders of some of Canada's top growing companies.



To announce the brand's industry leading commitment to sustainability, Caudalie partnered with Globe Content Studio for a print and digital feature including beautifully styled custom photography.



When MINI wanted to make inroads into the creative community, Globe Content Studio showcased four Canadians in 'fun' industries – a toy maker, escape-room designer, comedian and ski guide. The 'Business of Fun' series pushed readers to MINI's site for more.

consumer and business readers who come for content they can trust – and Globe Content Studio shares those standards.

The team's ability to tell elevated stories was clearly evident in a recent campaign for Travel Alberta called 'The Art of Winter.' As everyone knows, travel has been a category hard hit by the pandemic, and Travel Alberta understood its limitations. So, the remit to the Globe team was to tell the story of the province without it becoming a hard pitch from a tourism board.

"They recognized that travel wasn't possible," says Stanleigh. "But, at the same time, they didn't want people to stop dreaming. They didn't want people to stop considering Alberta as a place to travel in future."

With the client looking for the creative to take centre stage, Globe Content Studio commissioned nearly a dozen artists from a variety of disciplines to reflect on what winter meant to them. The end result was something unique. "It was a super-cool, creative execution," he recalls. "Highly designed, beautiful to look at and obviously engaging – because it was artists that were at the heart of it."

The campaign exploded onto social. Artists talked about the work they'd done. Stories were passed along, with hundreds of positive comments and thousands of shares. It resonated, earning high visibility and engagement, and a significant organic response. While Stanleigh is quick to point out that you can't guarantee success on social – it's called 'organic' for a reason – by being open to the possibilities of the creative and allowing the team to do what it does best, clients can go where normal advertising can't.

Currently the Globe team includes content strategists, designers, video and podcast producers, and expertise in data, social and influencer campaigns. Stanleigh says the team is always pushing into new places where audiences are congregating – and

he advises marketers to also explore where and how their brands can find new ways to engage consumers.

"As a brand, you have to be willing to be bold in those spaces," he notes, "just in the same way that you need to be bold in your creative. And that's why we're here. We know our audience."



In addition designing a print feature, Globe Content Studio created a micro-site for Tourism Alberta's 'Art of Winter' campaign, housing the 10 original artworks curated to inspire thoughts of travel, so users could explore the different pieces as if in a physical art gallery.



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For RBC InvestEase and RBC Direct Investing, Globe Content Studio created a six-part podcast series called *Money Moves* that shared investment best practices and personal finance advice from Melissa Leong and other industry experts.



Globe Content Studio played up readers' passion for food with the relaunch of the iconic *PC Insiders Report*. From a 'Next in Food' trend feature from Galen Weston, to videos on how to 'Work With What You Got,' to Spotify-inspired recipe playlists, it's a complete digital reimaging of an established brand.

Harnessing the power of fandom: It's no longer a linear conversation

Rogers Sports & Media is revising the playbook on bringing brand partnerships to life



To help start a conversation about food and the holidays for Loblaws, the team gathered together five stars: (clockwise from bottom left) retired NHL forward Paul Bissonnette, MLB shortstop Bo Bichette, former Raptor Serge Ibaka, tennis star Bianca Andreescu and Canadian Olympic swimmer Penny Oleksiak. The campaign kicked off a month before the special aired, creating a ton of traction on social.

"ROGERS SPORTS & MEDIA AND SPORTSNET have a massive megaphone," says Sam Nasrawi, senior director of original content at Rogers Sports & Media. "Our job is to fuel fandom – to inspire fans, and bring sports to life on every platform."

He notes that while sports used to be a very linear client conversation – how many spots, during what game – now it's about multiple lines of communication. It's about social, influencers, Rogers Sports & Media in-house talent and athletes. It's about bringing together opportunities on multiple channels to bring stories to life. And it's not an insignificant platform. On TV, the Sportsnet brands reach 30 million viewers a month with 38 million impressions on digital (and the full Rogers Sports & Media roster includes over 200 websites, 60 apps, seven TV and 56 radio stations).

To serve client needs, Nasrawi says his team has built what he describes as a creative content house ready to collaborate on ideas. Fans are hungry for authentic stories and Rogers Sports & Media has learned how to tell them.

"We've been very good at responding to RFPs," he says. "But, that's not good enough. Now, we're going to be more proactive. I want us to be seen as the best place for your idea to come to life." It's an ambitious goal for a team that only recently doubled in size to



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RYAN O'REILLY

CAPTAIN, ST. LOUIS BLUES



TYLER MOTTE

VANCOUVER CANUCKS FORWARD

Star athletes talk about their struggles with mental fitness and their self-care routines for 'The Mental Game', a campaign Rogers took on for Movember. The campaign wrapped with a 30-minute special hosted by Ken Reid of Sportsnet Central.

six members – but, he says, they’ve become nimble and hands-on, learning to work within the complex puzzle of league rights, sports seasons and showcase events to make partner content resonate.



Sam Nasrawi, senior director of original content at Rogers Sports & Media, says the game has changed for sports broadcasting. There are way more options for partners now than just linear broadcast.

A Loblaws partnership illustrates the approach. The grocery brand wanted to build on its connection with Canadians around food for the winter holidays, so working with the Sportsnet team, a dinner was hosted for former Raptor Serge Ibaka, tennis star Bianca Andreescu, shortstop Bo Bichette, swimmer Penny Oleksiak and hockey tough guy Paul "Biznasty" Bissonnette – five stars talking about food, the holidays and topics important to them.

A 14-minute cut of the conversation was featured during the Raptors halftime show on December 25, but two- and three-minute outtakes began appearing on social a month before. The athletes promoted it on their own channels, not mentioning the broadcaster or client, beginning a conversation that got picked up on national media outlets.

When it aired, Nasrawi says they actually gained viewers during halftime – something unheard of to that point. "One of the biggest things we look at is how we can retain audiences, and that was a prime example of being able to do it through content. It wasn't your typical halftime show. It was, 'Hey, you just saw Serge on the court and now he's going to be hosting a dinner with four big notables.' It was natural storytelling."

It was such a hit that Loblaws and Sportsnet teamed up for a follow-up show in 2020 called *Home for the Holidays*, a 30-minute special hosted by Canadian Olympian Tessa Virtue and featuring a diverse group of Canadian stars: NBAers Jamal Murray and Nick Nurse, hockey players Max Domi and Wayne Simmonds, plus musicians Jilly Black and the Arkells' Max Kerman.

Another standout content-led partnership is recent work with Movember, telling athlete stories about mental health challenges and everyday habits they've developed to cope. The Rogers team began talking to Movember more than a year ago about what could be done to tackle men's mental health issues. The focus wasn't going to be on reducing stigma. Instead, the goal would be to promote mental health fitness and self-care, an approach they knew could have an impact on men aged 18 to 34.

'The Mental Game' campaign features a number of elite athletes talking about their mental health struggles and victories, and mental health experts who explain how Canadian men can follow their lead. It airs on social, digital, broadcast and radio, a combination of ads and original content, with the goal of encouraging men to adopt their own mental fitness routines. The five-week campaign began in late February, wrapping with a 30-minute special hosted by Ken Reid of Sportsnet Central, who has himself been vocal about mental health.

A focus for Nasrawi's team is developing original content ideas – many of which they will pursue editorially if they can't find the right partner. One of those concepts is *Ice Avengers*, a series featuring hockey trick shot artists Zac Bell and Pavel Barber.

While sports was hit hard by COVID, with leagues shutting down and longstanding events postponed, the Rogers Sports & Media team forged ahead with new concepts and a new approach to brand content. "This is as busy as the team's been in years," says Nasrawi. "It's been a crazy time."



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The Rogers Sports & Media focus on more proactive creative solutions yielded *Ice Avengers*, a content play featuring hockey trick shot artists Zac Bell and Pavel Barber; regardless of brand partners the team plans to develop the concept further.

Building stronger connections: finding opportunity in moments of change

For 55 Rush, capturing a consumer's heart comes down to solving their problems



When COVID shut down plans for its annual graduation campaign, 55 Rush pivoted to '#PROMisON2020', partnering with CIBC and Kid's Help Phone to create a virtual event. It attracted a star-studded line-up, including a guest appearance by the PM.

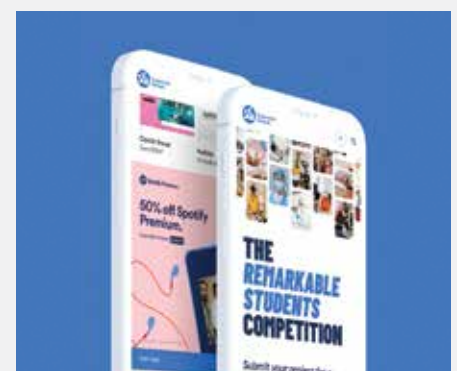
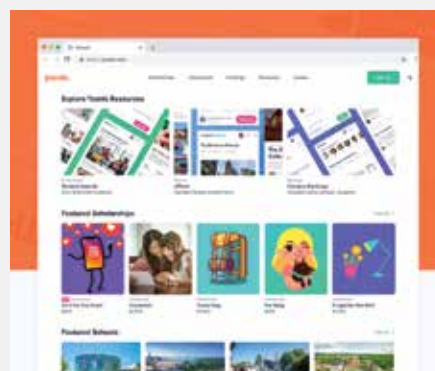
IN A LANDSCAPE that's increasingly about opt-in, being able to meaningfully motivate consumers into action is becoming ever more important. For Toronto online community building experts 55 Rush, it comes down to knowing how to offer real value at exactly the right moment.

With attributes like that, why not name an agency after it?

Launched in 2010, Toronto based 55 Rush curates four digital communities driven by custom websites and expansive social plays. Online, the Student Life Network has grown to 1.4 million Gen Zs, with half a million followers on social. The Parent Life Network comprises over a million parents and almost 400,000 on social. Canada's largest network of students and parents, yconic, sits at about 1.3 million site members (primarily aged 16 to 20), and 75,000 on social. 55 Rush has also recently added the Canadian Newcomer Network to target and help new Canadians.

For users, it's all about useful and timely information, giveaways, deals, resources and forums – and, in the case of yconic, scholarships and school rankings.

Brands like CIBC, Sobeys, Fisher-Price, CST, Huggies and Disney partner for access to awareness, data and insight tools fuelled by a coast-to-coast community that's growing at a rate of about 50,000 new users a month.



On the StudentLife Network, members have access to contests, information about schools (such as Campus Guides) and the chance to interact with 1.4 million members. yconic, meanwhile, is targeted to parents and students, and is a community of 1.3 million site members (primarily aged 16 to 20), and 75,000 followers on social.

To 55 Rush cofounder and creative director Stephen Sills, the group's success comes down to problem-solving. "The experience we've gained over the years says that the only thing that drives significant action – whether that's purchasing decisions or anything else – are moments of change," he says.

To capture those moments, 55 Rush has become expert at building communities that super-serve consumers at critical life stages. And, he notes, doing so gives clients a chance to begin a lasting dialogue. As an example, he points to the value a brand like Huggies brings when it offers new parents a complimentary first package of diapers just as they are starting baby prep.

"When people associate you with a solution, they stick around," he says. "We provide value, so that every time consumers hear from us, there's that social contract that says we're not wasting your time."

Sills says the 55 Rush philosophy comes down to four key pillars: it's about being relevant, immediate, memorable and personal – with consumers and clients.

Case in point: "We were recently in a discovery meeting and the partner asked: 'Could you identify when parents are going grocery shopping since COVID began?'" he recalls. "We said: 'Yes, we can literally start now.' We can put up a question for a brand while we're in the meeting."

Access to a vast consumer network enables fast reality checks heading into planning. Sills gives examples of starting meetings with category feedback less than an hour old. "That usually makes it way more fun because people start getting creative. They start asking questions like: 'Hey, can we ask them this?'"

55 Rush demonstrated its capability to pivot last year during their Student Life Network annual spring prom campaign. When COVID interrupted planning and proms were cancelled everywhere, 55 Rush went online for '#PromIsOn2020,' and gathered together a national prom committee made up of students from across the country.

They brought along long-time client CIBC, and turned what was a dark time into a nationwide fundraiser for Kids Help Phone and the country's first ever virtual prom. The event attracted celebrities from the Prime Minister to Finn Wolfhard from *Stranger*

Things and hockey star Mitch Marner, and featured a DJ set from Juno award-winning artists Loud Luxury. Student Life Network expected about 3,000 participants and ended up with over 16,000 – and raised \$160,000 for Kids Help Phone.

New projects include 'Campus Guides,' which allows students to offer real-time, honest feedback about schools, and the 'Remarkable Student Competition,' which finds and rewards students innovating for the future.

And Sills says they've really only begun exploring the possibilities of the Canadian Newcomer Network. That's a community full of moments of change – new jobs, homes, banks and more.

In the coming months, 55 Rush is looking to create French equivalency for its content and is considering growth into the US; big expansions for a core team of about 25.

"It's a business model that's online-driven and platform-agnostic," says Sills. "We can grow and drive value in all kinds of different ways. We have to be ready to respond to the shifting opportunities the world brings us, because those opportunities are happening constantly."



The 55 Rush team is looking at building out its community hubs to encompass French-language content as well as U.S. market expansion.



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With over one million Canadians connected on the Parent Life Network, brands can dialogue with new parents during key new life stage decisions. Huggies, for example, sent members free diapers just as they were beginning baby planning, to start a meaningful relationship even before The Big Day.

Scoring content goals: skate to where the (digital) puck is going

Thinkingbox built a global creative collective at the intersection of experiential, content, digital, and social



Thinkingbox's redesigned and developed Happy Egg website not only promotes the launch of its "Always Choose Happy" campaign, but sets it apart from its competitors. The website won FWA, CSS, Awwwards, W3, and more.

COMING OFF A YEAR of strong growth driven by the acquisition of Salt Lake City-based digital and live-action agency Welikesmall in December 2019, and New York digital management company Aarra a month later, Thinkingbox roared into 2020 with its engines in high gear.

The onset of COVID 19 did not slow things down. Instead, a lockdown-driven hunger for digital content fuelled further expansion, and the acquisition of Vancouver-based social media agency AntiSocial Solutions in March 2020. AntiSocial is currently set up as a sister company to Thinkingbox.

Having begun 2020 with 50 employees, Thinkingbox saw that number double to just over a hundred by the end of the year. With global internet ad spend doubling since 2015 and the consumption of online content doubling since the start of the pandemic, the company has cultivated the right skill set to meet the brands' new needs.

To stay ahead of the shifting dynamics of media consumption, Thinkingbox has been rethinking its brand and honing its offer. After ten years in business, CEO Amir Sahba says, "We no longer think of ourselves as just an interactive and experiential production company but as a global creative collective shaping the future of brands through craft and curiosity."



To revamp its messaging and explore new ways of connecting with its users, Intuit QuickBooks partnered with Thinkingbox to create a series of walk-through videos that focused on the brand's purpose of uplifting entrepreneurs.



Thinkingbox teamed up with Adobe to design and build an app that customizes an in-depth report based on interactions, absorption speed and personal preferences.



Earls, a thriving brand with 65 locations across North America, engaged Thinkingbox to redesign its website. Each Earls' menu is location specific, combining classic fare with local faves, so the challenge entailed designing a platform to encompass all the seasonal and ever-changing menu variations.

With repositioning comes a restructuring of its offer. Sahba explains that the capabilities gained via the acquisitions enabled Thinkingbox to inhabit a new space between production company and agency. “To reflect that, we’ve distilled our offer into four key services: digital, experiential, content, and social. What differentiates us from most digital-first agencies and digital production companies is that we are equally proficient in all four disciplines.”

And the work reflects the new toolkit. On the digital front, long-time gaming client Riot Games worked with Thinkingbox to launch the 2019, 2020 and now 2021 season of its multiplayer League of Legends series. League, which owns the biggest eSports platform in the world, with tournaments broadcast by ESPN, and attracting over 40 million viewers, is a massive franchise.

To get players excited in the six days leading up to launch, Thinkingbox created a suite of five Champion portraits (player-controlled characters gamers purchase in order to compete) along with a motion graphics package, a new design, and digital experience for the game’s digital hub, as well as a corresponding microsite and a full set of brand assets.

For experiential, Pinterest asked Thinkingbox to bring its recently launched Trends tool to life at CES 2020. The solution consisted of an interactive wall with shelves holding objects representing different themes (home, travel, health+wellness, food, beauty, and style), all linked to an iPad with a custom user interface that allowed visitors to demo the Trends tool, while a giant 4K screen displayed animated insights related to each category.

In terms of content, new client Intuit engaged Thinkingbox to develop and execute a series of digital ‘walkthrough’ videos by creating a narrative that used two actual small businesses – Orchid Dynasty in Utah and Marietta Sheet Metal in Georgia – to demonstrate the day-to-day benefits of Intuit’s QuickBooks software.

And finally, on the social media front, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of 7 Eleven’s signature ‘Slurpee’ beverage, Thinkingbox enlisted Canadian choreographer Carlo to create a dance called ‘The Slurp’ and asked the top 15 dance studios in Canada to submit interpretations of the steps. Geolocated search words were used to

detect content posted with the hashtag #DanceTheSlurp in specific communities, while hip hop influencers were sent links to videos of the dance choreo, the song, the ‘why’ behind the campaign, and all the links, hashtags and handles to help promote it.

Thinkingbox’s M.O aligns with the Canadian cliché ‘skate to where the puck is going’, unencumbered by legacy firms’ investment in a model built for where advertising needs have been. And the strategy is working for them. The past year has seen important wins, including expanding current relationships with Intuit and Adobe, and adding new relationships with online mattress vendor Purple and machine intelligence provider Primer.

Building on its expanding credentials in the marketplace, Thinkingbox hosts a thought leadership platform called ‘Talk Nerdy to Me’, a kind of masterclass in industry trends and learnings, which tellingly, is also seeing audience growth with every session.



The Thinkingbox team supported Riot Games in launching its 2021 Season Start campaign for League of Legends, working hand-in-hand with the Riot team to design the assets that brought the campaign to life.



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Dance The Slurp, an original recording produced by 7-Eleven, is a catchy retro tune from the late 60s. Thinkingbox and AntiSocial remixed the track to create a #DanceTheSlurp social media dance challenge that generated buzz across Canada.



Pinterest engaged Thinkingbox to help bring its recently launched Trends tool to life at the 2020 Consumer Electronics Show (CES). When guests selected one of the six trends (Home, Travel, Health & Wellness, Food, Beauty, and Style), the object would light up on the wall, showcasing the trend in person for the guest.

Goals-oriented content: a new marketing platform worth its weight

Salt XC was designed to turn memorable moments into content, commerce and first-party data



To launch the Xbox Series X, a four-storey gaming console replica was floated in Toronto harbour, displaying an edge-to-edge LED screen showcasing local artists' work inspired by the 'Power Your Dreams' launch theme.

SALT. Anyone who has read Mark Kurlansky's informative 2002 book of the same name knows that Roman soldiers accepted it as payment, trade routes were built around it, and wars were fought over it. With attributes like that, why not name an agency after it?

Salt XC is a hybrid marketing and tech agency based in Toronto and Chicago that opened its doors in January 2020. Its key value proposition is an approach called Experiential Commerce. "You know the saying 'I know half of my marketing budget is wasted, I just don't know which half'?", asks Salt VP Jil Lohnes. "That is partly what inspired us to form this company. We want to make sure that everything we do has a valuable transaction as its outcome. Every project here has a quantifiable goal."

Salt's output is built on three key components: customer data, memorable moments and digital connections. Salt Studios, the internal content strategy and production team at Salt XC is a key ingredient supporting the company's overall philosophy. "We are living in a platform era," says Devon Soltendieck, Head of Salt Studios, "platforms and algorithms now dictate our strategies and we can measure the strength of a connection between our partners and their consumers."



Labatt's internal agency draftLine leveraged Media Mob to produce content for Stella Artois' Stellar Dishes, a multi-platform series featuring well known chefs showcasing how to make their best known recipes at home, as well Instagram and YouTube content for the launch of Mike's Hard Blue Freeze.



Salt Studios produced RBC's SnapChat series "Building Confidence", highlighting RBC Future Launch, a ten-year \$500 million program designed to help Canadian youth with skills development, support and other services.

Part of what makes Salt Studios so unique is a technology product called Media Mob, a marketplace of vetted freelancers where partners can brief, contract and manage a database of A+ creatives in as little as 24 hours. It gives brands access to a turnkey studio without overhead.

As an example of how it works, when COVID hit a year ago and Kraft Heinz wanted to shoot a TVC in Montreal, despite provincial border closures, Salt assembled a Media Mob team there within 24 hours and directed the 30-second spot entirely over Zoom. The ad was created, shot, edited and on air in three weeks from initial inception.

Both Kraft Heinz and Labatt are now using Media Mob to provide in-house teams with a rapid content solution; and beyond solving client production needs, Salt's long-term plan is to open this resource up to the industry.

At its core, Media Mob was created to deliver better quality content for less. As part of the launch for the Microsoft Xbox Series X | S, Salt Studios and Media Mob created 87 pieces of content across nine platforms in 72 hours. The production studio in this case was a real-world set. Used to both capture content and project it, Salt created two four-storey consoles and placed them in natural locations – one on the edge of Washington State's Columbia River Gorge and another floating on a barge in the Toronto harbour.

To support Kraft Heinz Pantry Day, Canada's largest single day donation-matching food drive, Salt built a full 360° program activated across 1,200 grocery stores nationwide. Salt was responsible for naming, logo and brand guidelines, campaign strategy, timing and communication roll-out. Salt Studio's led the production of the campaigns TV spots, social and digital assets. The result was a \$4 million food donation to Food Banks Canada.

The overall campaign drove consumption up 30% over the prior year, and Pantry Day displays saw a +26.7% consumption lift at stores that executed with the programs POS tools versus stores that didn't.

RBC has been a client from the start. Recently it tapped into Salt Studios and Media Mob to create a 90-second TVC for the Grammys broadcast, as well as youth-focused social content for

the RBC Snapchat Discover Series. Salt led creative on the spot, which celebrates musicians and their achievements during COVID, and produced it in-house with support from Media Mob creatives across Canada.

For the Snapchat series, Salt Studios advised on platform strategy and key performance metrics, while producing a platform-specific format built on content completely shot on mobile devices. It resulted in 7.8 million impressions and an 806K view-through rate with the key demo.

Content has become more ubiquitous and even more fragmented. For clients like Microsoft, RBC and Kraft Heinz, it might include anything from a TikTok series, to experiential or shopper marketing. Or all of that. Salt's focus on understanding how to efficiently create across all these platforms – and get results – is proving effective for its goal of becoming an indispensable partner.



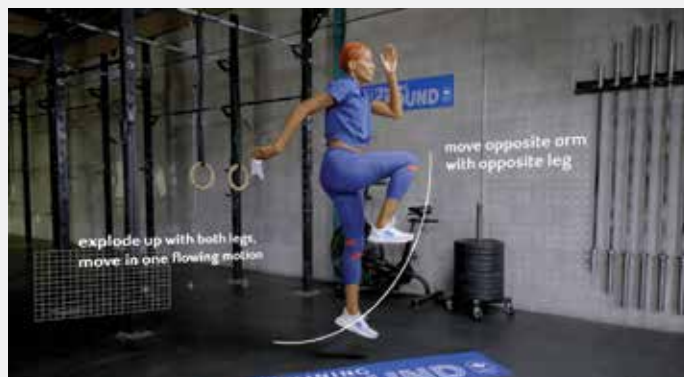
For the Grammys, Salt created a 90-second TV spot for RBC's music initiative celebrating musicians and their achievements during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was produced in-house with support from Media Mob creatives across Canada.



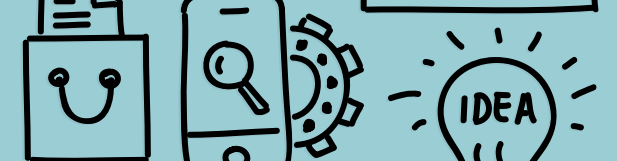
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Salt activated Kraft Heinz's Pantry Day campaign across 1,200 grocery stores nationwide, which included naming, logo and brand guidelines, campaign strategy, communication roll-out, TV spots, social and digital assets, and employee engagement.



In response to COVID-19, Salt worked with the RBC Training Ground team to move previously live program qualifier events to a digital submission system. Part of this solution involved producing five fitness videos featuring RBC Olympians.



TENNILE COOPER'S EPIC VENTURE TO FUEL STARTUPS

How the New Establishment
winner is helping to fund female
entrepreneurs.

BY WILL NOVOSEDLIK

The
new
establishment
innovators



Marketing consultant, activist, volunteer and business mentor Tennile Cooper comes by her passion for helping others honestly.

After graduating with a degree in social work in 2007, Cooper was hired by Brampton-based Well Fort Community Health Services. But five years in, she was frustrated by the fact that – after building relationships and nurturing leaders in a given community – funding would dry up and she'd need to move on to another group. For someone as committed as she was, the abruptly terminated connections proved painful.

So when a communications coordinator role came up at Well Fort in 2014, she jumped at it and discovered she had a talent for marketing. After a year in the role, she struck out on her own, launching a copywriting and business coaching company called She Is Epic.

While mostly working with women-led businesses, Cooper wondered why so many were self-funded. Some digging revealed that in the world of entrepreneurship, access to funding is often denied to women. In 2018, for instance, only 2.2% of the overall \$130 billion of venture capital raised by U.S. companies went to female founders.

After attending a talk in 2019 by venture capitalist Arlan Hamilton, founder and managing partner of Backstage Capital, an LA-based seed investment fund that backs under-represented female founders, Cooper decided to start her own, calling it the SIE Fund.

Using She Is Epic as a base, Cooper allocates 50% of the profits generated by her consulting fees and merchandise sales to the micro-fund. Clients immediately become a part of a *Shark Tank*-like investors circle who have the ability to vote on the entrepreneurs who will

receive the funds. It's early days and will take time to build up capital, but its unconventional model and focus on women-led ventures makes it feel like a disruptor in the VC landscape.

As an ecommerce business that's powered by Shopify, SIE is on the platform's internal merchant list. To launch its business channel in late 2020, TikTok partnered with Shopify and selected 40 black-owned businesses (including SIE) from its merchant list to be featured in a campaign. TikTok reprised the campaign in February 2021, this time extending it to Instagram and Twitter. That relationship is ongoing, with Cooper involved in the development of future TikTok campaigns.

Beyond running two businesses, Cooper is also a marketing and communications manager at Toronto's Artscape, where she led the creation of a Shopify-powered online marketplace for artists who struggle to remain visible during the pandemic. She provides both writing and mentorship to Toronto's talent development platform 10,000 Coffees. And for the past several years she has been a mentor to The City of Mississauga, where she helps entrepreneurs develop financial management skills, and to the York Region COVID 19 Small Business Recovery Program, where she guides brick-and-mortar businesses as they pivot to online.

For the last four years she has been chairman at Startup Peel, where she has been heavily involved in promoting Techstars Weekend, a program designed to help small businesses turn their ideas into products. "Between my [various] mentorship activities, I have helped launch 50-plus businesses."

Such determination and dedication has helped Cooper go from strength to strength, and will no doubt continue to power her on the path to success in a world where unconscious bias still keeps women out of leadership roles and away from much-needed funding. If she can overcome that then she is indeed epic.

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