

MOST CONTAGIOUS REPORT 2022



**MOST
CONTAGIOUS**

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Welcome to the 2022

MOST CONTAGIOUS REPORT

Way back in January, one of this year's most influential figures said that
'In challenging times, it is particularly important to be creative*.'

You may feel that the last few years have been one long challenge but let's be optimistic – at least we're getting some variety in our travails. For many of us, the threat of Covid-19 has receded and been replaced by new, if equally shitty, challenges, such as inflation and the rising cost of living. If creativity is the answer, then it has its work cut out for 2023.

So to fuel your brain, we've absolutely crammed this year's Most Contagious report with enough creativity and smart thinking to help you solve anything the next 12 months might throw at you.

We've packed in our favourite campaigns of the year, unlocked members-only strategy interviews, and equally generously, released an in-depth feature on our Most Contagious brand of the year, Liquid Death.

Elsewhere in the report you'll find advice on how to deal with the imminent recession, key findings from academic marketing papers, the trends that will define 2023, and the opportunities for brands and agencies hidden amongst the crises.

And if that wasn't enough, you can also discover what our team thought were the Most Contagious Things of the Year and – you know you love it, really – What Marketers Can Learn from the events of 2022.

So hopefully there's enough inspiration, insight and advice in this PDF to see you through the challenges of 2023, or at least reduce the spikes in terror every time you think about them.

**Vladimir Putin said this during his New Year address. Of course, he also said that the magic of the New Year 'opens our hearts to empathy and trust, generosity and mercy', so let's not believe everything that wanker has to say.*

Alex Jenkins, managing partner

The Metaverse and Web3 untangled

Marketers love a shiny new thing to obsess over, says Contagious editor Chloe Markowicz, and right now that shiny new thing is the metaverse and Web3



By 2030, the metaverse is predicted to be worth as much as \$13trn, according to Citibank, and this year alone, almost \$2bn worth of cryptocurrency has been spent buying virtual land.

The metaverse doesn't exist yet, but Meta has piled billions into its Reality Labs division (which oversees its metaverse and VR projects) to try to make it happen. Since the start of 2019, this division of Meta has seen \$30.7bn of operating losses. No one is using the Horizon Worlds VR app, not even Meta's own employees.

The real action is happening on Roblox and Fortnite. But these aren't 'the metaverse'; at best they're proto-metaverses, gaming platforms that share characteristics of the metaverse.

Blockchain business

Meanwhile, the \$2trn that has been wiped from crypto markets this year has not dissuaded investors from backing Web3 technology. In fact, the opposite is true. In 2021, VC investments in Web3

amounted to \$32.4bn and they are predicted to surpass that number in 2022.

Dayton Mills, CEO and founder of Web3 gaming startup Branch, told Vice 'A lot of people are trying to get in on [Web3], and a lot of people are more afraid of not getting in.' He was talking about VC investors, but it sums up how many marketers feel, too.

When it comes to NFTs specifically, though trading volumes have collapsed 97% from their January peak, brands are still continuing to mint their own non-fungible tokens. Tennis Australia's AO Art Balls, created for the Australian Open, is one of the best examples of a brand launching an NFT collection. This wasn't a case of bandwagon jumping. There was a real reason for Tennis Australia to create a virtual experience since international fans couldn't attend the matches in real life because of Covid.

As Ridley Plummer, of Tennis Australia, told Contagious, brands need to ask: 'What's in it for your brand? Creating an NFT for the right reasons is important because you're talking to a savvy consumer and they'll see through any bullshit.'

When Under Armour released an NFT replica of its sneakers, it too was solving a real problem. Steph Curry, the Golden State Warriors point guard, was on the verge of breaking the NBA record for the number of three-pointers scored.

To mark this occasion, Under Armour was going to release a new pair of sneakers as part of their Curry line. But Covid-related supply chain issues meant they wouldn't get to market in time, so Under Armour's agency, Cameron Berlin, proposed releasing a digital version of the sneaker as an NFT that could travel across platforms.

And there are other ways to play in this space beyond minting NFTs. Mastercard, for instance, is adding value by making buying NFTs more accessible. The company partnered with NFT marketplaces so people could purchase digital assets with their Mastercards, negating the need to buy crypto first.

Shot in the arm

A lot of brands adopt new technologies for the PR boost, as a shortcut to seeming 'cutting edge'. That's why Starbucks' updated loyalty programme, Starbucks Odyssey, stands out, because the company is intentionally obscuring its blockchain mechanism.

The coffee chain will let customers earn and buy NFTs that unlock experiences, such as an espresso martini making class. But these NFTs will be referred to as 'journey stamps' to make them more accessible.

As Starbucks' CMO, Brady Brewer, said: 'It happens to be built on blockchain and Web3 technologies, but the customer [...] may very well not even know that what

they're doing is interacting with blockchain technology.' Starbucks isn't using tech just for the sake of it. And neither should you. Every brand should strive to connect with people, drive business outcomes, get people to buy their products. You might be able to achieve that with new technology, but it's a tool: a means to an end, not an end in itself.

What next?

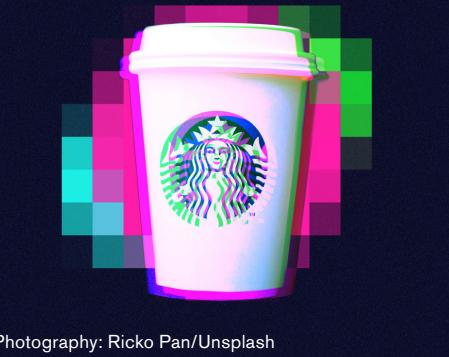
Offering practical advice about technologies that haven't yet been fully realised is tricky. Web3 is still really a utopian promise at this point. We know it's going to be the internet that comes after Web 1 and 2 but we don't know what it will look like.

Crypto is a key building block of Web3 and this year a crypto exchange (FTX)

fell in value from \$32bn to zero practically overnight amid accusations of mismanagement. Events like this don't really fill anyone with hope for the future of decentralised finance, or indeed a decentralised web.

It's easy to be swept away by the time and money that companies like Microsoft and Meta are spending on metaverse technology. But marketers don't need a metaverse strategy right now; we won't see anything resembling interoperable virtual worlds for at least another decade. Instead, use the world of gaming to test and learn. It's the closest thing we have to the metaverse.

Don't fritter away your marketing budget in the hypothetical future, if you're lucky enough to have a decent budget to spend next year, this is the time to keep it real. ■



Photography: Ricko Pan/Unsplash



Cost-of-Living Creativity

As inflation bites and recession looms, Contagious' editor-at-large, Katrina Stirton Dodd, looks at what brands can do to help customers – and themselves

Global downturn. What's the first mistake businesses make?' That line is from a 2008 ad campaign by the *Financial Times*, which featured billboards stripped almost bare – a direct challenge to brands' knee-jerk tendency to react to economic strife with swinging cuts to their marketing budgets.

But while it's become a bit of an ad industry refrain over the past 12 months as talk of a downturn and inflation has evolved into talk of a recession – the worst since records began – this is one drum we should keep banging until it's heard loud and clear at the very top of the corporate food chain.

In fact in August of this year, the IPA seemed to have reached the same conclusion, running a similar campaign, this time using the FT itself to deliver the message to business: 'Come back in a year and tell us if cutting your budget was a good idea'.

If you think they sound exasperated, they were. The UK government's newly appointed Cost-of-Living tsar, David Buttress, was poised to run a campaign



Photography: Financial Times

recommending exactly that: that businesses cut their marketing budgets and instead use the savings to fund price cuts. A double-whammy of duff advice. From the government.

We may have best-guessed our way through a two-year battle with Covid, but this is a cost-of-living crisis. These are not the 'unprecedented times' of the pandemic. These times are preceded – and at Contagious we are big believers in learning from precedents.

So what should we do?

The headline advice is to keep your eyes on the long-term prize and continue to invest in brand-building advertising – if anything it's an opportunity to get more bang for your buck.

Excess share of voice gives you an advantage in the best of times, but in the worst of times that advantage gets bigger because when others nervously dial down their advertising, your voice will seem all the louder.

According to advertising effectiveness expert Peter Field, 'the brands that invest in ESOV saw five times as many very large business effects (such as profit, pricing, share, penetration, etc) and 4.5 times the annual market share growth.'

Supermarket chain Sainsbury's Feed Your Family for a Fiver campaign (for more on this, see page 33) is a useful case study in how to navigate a brand from good times into bad – it delivered



a tasty direct sales impact of £540m for Sainsbury's, with a profit ROI of £5.55 for every £1 spent.

That's quite some feat when you consider the impact a downturn tends to have on purchasing behaviour. 'Every purchase becomes high-involvement when money is tight,' says Tom Morton, global chief strategy officer at R/GA.

In the UK, for example, 81% of consumers have changed their shopping behaviour in response to financial concerns, according to a McKinsey survey published at the end of October. What Morton describes as 'the Great Brand Audition' is already well underway.

Passing that audition comes down to more than just prices or a 'pivot to value'. An alternative lever for brands to consider is how they can reduce 'risk' for their consumers, suggests

a new report by Kantar. In the context of inflation, that means addressing the feelings of anxiety, vulnerability and uncertainty – showing empathy, whether that's through how you act, or how you communicate, or ideally both.

UK brands have so far emphasised practical support. Frozen food supermarket chain Iceland has teamed up with ethical lender Fair For You to offer small interest-free loans to help struggling households through financial pinch-points.

Energy provider Octopus has distributed free electric blankets to vulnerable customers to help them save on heating bills. It's also been a standout source of clear customer advice on the energy crisis, as well creating a scheme to incentivise clients to minimise their energy use at peak times – not your typical adland innovation, but a creative

response to hard times, nonetheless.

More flair can be seen in the launch of a Passive Cooker device by Italian pasta brand Barilla. Designed to get your penne from packet to al dente using minimal energy and residual heat, the PR-friendly gadget connects to your smartphone and sends alerts at key moments to ensure your pasta comes out perfect. A deliciously novel way to court column inches while also nudging people to save money on energy bills rather than inferior pasta.

Of course this is just the beginning. Perhaps the biggest clue to how brands will exert their creative influence on the biggest cost-of-living crisis in living memory is more apparent in the bumper crop of feelgood festive ads bringing uncomplicated joy to screens large and small this year. It looks very much like we may need more of that in 2023. 

‘No one wants to be a mass consumer anymore. You don’t want to have the same thing that your husband has, much less some stranger’

Ana Andjelic, Contagious IO, March 2022

The Imitation Game

Artificial intelligence is improving in leaps and bounds, argues Contagious strategist David Beresford, but none of the advances have captured the public's imagination like image generation.

Cast an eye over the middle-aged man pictured to the right. Does he look eerily familiar to you? That isn't surprising, given he's an amalgamation of four of the richest men on the planet. Can you guess which ones? I'll give you a hint, this AI-produced individual goes by the name of 'Jeflon Zuckergates'.

'Jeflon Zuckergates' is just one of many mind-bending images that flooded the internet in 2022, following the release of a new wave of AI image generators such as DALLE-2, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion. Due to a number of significant breakthroughs in the field of generative AI, industry experts now believe the technology is on the verge of a Cambrian explosion.

We've been approaching this tipping point for some years now. Even prior to 2020, AI-generated text in the form of basic translation and spam detection tools had already become ubiquitous. And the technology has progressed to the realm of literature, where computer-generated prose is now increasingly indistinguishable from human output. The same evolution has occurred in the world of coding, where generative AI is making a previously impenetrable craft more accessible to the masses. However, the recent emergence of AI image generators, capable of conjuring bespoke artworks from simple text prompts, has really captured the public's imagination.



Photography: Jeflon Zuckergates/StableDiffusion (reddit.com)

Picture this

The implications of this technology are myriad, but VC investor James Currier has whittled them down to three key developments, which he expects to gather pace in the near future.

The first of these developments is a shift from AI programmes offering singular problem-solving solutions to more holistic problem-solving suites. An early example of this in practice is perhaps Omneky, a company that uses a combination of AI software to generate both content and copy to make social ads, with the option to also feature AI-generated human characters – who are considerably cheaper than their real-life counterparts.

The second development that Currie expects is a shift from curation to creation. For years, companies like Netflix and Spotify have been trying to retrofit people's preferences onto their existing content. However, with the dawn of advanced generative AI, the only limitation to content creation will increasingly become your own imagination. For example, a former Google employee recently co-wrote a novelette called *Amor Cringe* with the OpenAI text generator GPT-3.

The final development that Currier predicts is that these generative tech tools will become significantly easier to use. He estimates that already the friction to create output from these models through web and mobile has



Photography: Markus Spiske/Unsplash

become 'about 10 times easier' in the past six months.

Open AI's decision to release the API for their popular image generator has also hastened the adoption of these tools. For example Cala, an all-in-one platform for designing and producing clothes, has recently integrated DALLE-2's technology into its website to allow customers to use text-prompts to create their own bespoke fashion apparel.

Applied imagery

In terms of the applications we've seen from various brands and agencies, these can broadly be categorised into the practical, the novel, and the possible.

For example, designers have been experimenting with the practical utility of AI image generators for creating bespoke mock-ups to better contextualise their work in pitch decks.

With regard to novelty value, we've seen brands such as Heinz leverage generative tech to refresh an existing creative platform. Having previously conquered human mental availability with their wildly successful 'Draw Ketchup' campaign, they set out to prove that AI would be similarly inclined to consider Ketchup as synonymous with Heinz.

But perhaps the most thought-provoking applications are in the realm of the

possible. Shopify is one such brand that has been actively considering the possibilities for ecommerce. It recently released a short video that envisions how real-time generative AI might conceivably affect consumer journeys in the not-too-distant future.

Despite all this justified excitement, the field of AI does feel a little like the Wild West at present. Although the tech holds huge promise, serious questions remain over the ethics, creator royalties, and how the space will ultimately be regulated. But the generative AI genie is now undoubtedly out of the bottle. The question is, whose wishes will it choose to grant first? 

**With the dawn
of advanced
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own imagination**

David Beresford, Contagious

A Marketing Rethink

Advances in technology are not enough on their own to spur more effective marketing, argues PHD's Mark Holden – a new mindset is required, too

Advances in data and technology, and the disruption of a global pandemic have radically reorganised the world of marketing communications – changing how people consume media, what they expect from brands, and even how marketers work together, according to Mark Holden, worldwide chief strategy officer at media and marketing communications agency PHD.

Holden spoke at Most Contagious, which returned to Islington's Business Design Centre on 24 November, after a two-year hiatus and saw a global cast of industry pioneers and expert commentators inspire the great and the good of adland in a series of incisive and impactful talks.

Holden took to the stage to offer advice on how brands and agencies can navigate the changing landscape of marketing communications and

relayed some useful tips for surviving and thriving in the future.

Drawing on key insights from PHD's publication, *Shift / A Marketing Rethink*, Holden began by presenting the audience with an apparent contradiction facing the advertising industry.

'We now have a remarkable set of new marketing technologies that we can use to engage audiences,' noted Holden, before adding: 'Why then is it that, as evidenced by the most recent IPA research, it's not working? Why is advertising's impact on lifting [brands'] share of the market in decline?'

It's not the technology's fault, he argued, but rather the 'minds' in thrall to the technology that explains why advertising is losing its impact. Holden categorised these minds into three distinct categories: the Hypnotised, who are obsessed



by the immediacy of performance data; the Evangelists, who just want to replace the orthodoxy with anything new; and the Paranoid, who fear being seen as stuck in the past and beholden to analog technologies.

It is the paranoid minds that allow the other two to run riot, and these attitudes combine to result in an over-focus on five key areas: ROI, targeting, performance channels (at the expense of brands), rational messaging and marketing tactics.

Overstating the importance of ROI was especially culpable for the decline in ad effectiveness, said Holden, as it 'is weakly correlated with profit growth'.

Quoting marketing effectiveness expert Peter Field, he added: 'We sacrifice market share growth in pursuit of ROI.'

Holden concluded: 'All of this misses the big opportunity of long-term growth, which should account for just under 60% of the total return from marketing investment'

To achieve long-term marketing centricity, Holden suggests we need to nurture an Investor Mindset'.

The investor mindset is focused on targetless-zero-based budgeting, which means you set your budget based on optimising profit return, not on an arbitrary target level.

Investing in new capabilities is a vital

feature of this mindset, and Holden outlined a few to focus on. He suggested investing now in a portfolio of 'creators', as a channel and creative-production capability. And creative engineering - for the auto-creation of assets, with each element tagged and connected to an ad-server and compiled based on growth indicator KPIs. Building infrastructure for the generative creative era.

Holden said that 'DALL-E 2 shows how far this technology can progress in as little as one year. The photos from the original DALLE-E, while spectacular in their own way, were nowhere near as realistic as DALL-E 2, which shows that the future of this technology is progress-

ing extremely quickly and becoming more powerful with each iteration.'

Having pulled back the curtain on the exciting opportunities for marketers that lie ahead, Holden summarised the key takeaways of his presentation like this:

- Check growth-limiting mindsets (Hypnotised, Evangelist, Paranoid, we're looking at you)
- Reconfigure your organisation to growth (long-term centricity)
- Invest in future capabilities (assessed as commercial investments for growth).

Or, as Holden pithily put it: 'Adopt an investor-in-future growth mindset and embrace future capabilities, today.' ■



**‘If you had simple laws
that were persistent and
universal, do you need
a marketing manager?’**

Felipe Thomaz, Oxford University Saïd Business School, Contagious.com, September 2022

10 trends to watch in 2023

Tom Standage, editor of The Economist's The World Ahead 2023, on what to watch for

After two years in which the pandemic was the force shaping the immediate future, the main driver now is the war in Ukraine. Energy prices, inflation, interest rates, economic growth, food shortages – all depend on how the conflict plays out in the coming months.

Rapid progress by Ukraine could threaten Vladimir Putin, but a grinding stalemate seems the most likely outcome. Russia will try to string out the conflict in the hope that energy shortages, and political shifts in America, will undermine Western support for Ukraine.

Meanwhile, major economies will go into recession as central banks raise interest rates to stifle inflation. America's recession should be relatively mild;

Britain's will be long; Europe's will be brutal.

There is a silver lining for the climate in the current upheaval, however. The war is accelerating the switch to renewables as a safer alternative to hydrocarbons supplied by autocrats. As well as wind and solar, nuclear and hydrogen will benefit too.

Next, China. Its population is in decline, its property market is in turmoil and its strict covid policies have clobbered the economy. In April it will be overtaken by India as the world's most populous nation. This will prompt much discussion of whether China has peaked. Its economy may never overtake America's in size.

As for America, social and cultural divides on abortion, guns and other hot-



Photography: Jon Tyson/Unsplash

button issues will continue to widen after a string of contentious Supreme Court rulings. Donald Trump's formal entry into the 2024 presidential race will pour fuel on the fire, and trigger a vicious contest for the 2024 Republican nomination.

With America, Europe and Russia focused on Ukraine, might conflict kick off elsewhere? China could decide that there will never be a better time to make a move on Taiwan. India-China tensions could flare in the Himalayas. And might Turkey's strongman, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, try to nab a Greek island in the Aegean to bolster his re-election chances?

Amid geopolitical shifts, alliances are evolving. Nato, revitalised by the war in Ukraine, will welcome two new members (Sweden and Finland). Other groupings of growing importance include the Quad and AUKUS (two American-led clubs intended to deal with China's rise) and I2U2 – not a rock band, but a sustain-

ability forum linking India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the US.

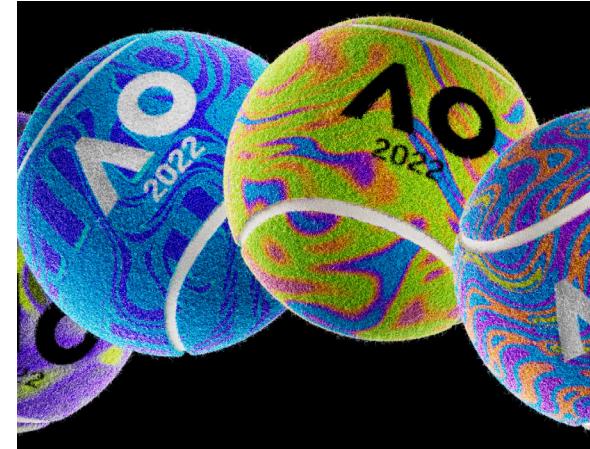
Travel is back, sort of. Post-lockdown "revenge" tourism will push tourist spending almost back to its 2019 level of \$1.4trn, though the number of international tourist trips, at 1.6bn, will still be below the pre-pandemic level of 1.8bn in 2019. Business travel will remain weak as firms cut costs.

What of travel into virtual worlds? 2023 will provide a reality check for the idea of working and playing in the metaverse, as Apple launches its first headset and Meta decides whether to change its strategy.

A less complicated and more immediately useful shift may be the rise of "passkeys" to replace passwords. Other terms you may need know in 2023 include frozen conflict, YIMBY and post-quantum cryptography. Technology never stops. Good luck keeping up with the fast-changing world in 2023! 

THE MOST CONTAGIOUS CAMPAIGNS OF THE YEAR

We've made a list, and it's got nothing to do with being naughty or nice. These are the 15 most innovative and effective campaigns of the year, according to the Contagious team



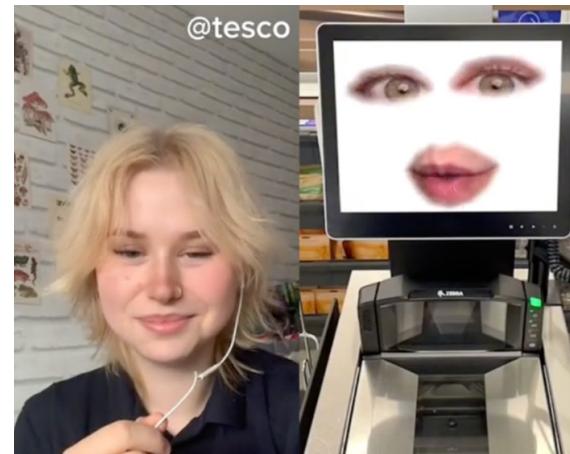
Australian Open / Art Balls

You could expunge every Eurovision Song Contest entry from public memory and the world would be better for it – except for 'Waterloo'. Abba's pop banger is the only song worth salvaging from an otherwise dismal genre of music. It's the same with the Australian Open's Art Balls campaigns. Most attempts at incorporating NFTs into marketing either rely on novelty or vastly overestimate people's appetite for virtual brand merchandise, but Art Balls was a cut above. The NFTs representing patches of tennis court where match-winning shots landed during the 2022 Australian Open demonstrated a clear vision of how digital sports memorabilia could have value. And allocating the plots randomly ahead of the tournament – instead of auctioning them off to the highest bidder afterwards – made the process more fair and more fun. Even if NFTs are eventually relegated to the annals of embarrassing marketing fads, at least we'll always have Melbourne.



DirectTV GO / PirateMatch / Mirum, Curitiba, Brazil

Telling people off isn't a great way to get them to change their behaviour. Latin American streaming platform DirecTV Go understands this well, as its witty strike against pirating showed. The brand neatly intercepted Brazilians searching for a free stream of the Champions League match between Manchester United and Atlético Madrid in March with a sponsored Google link that promised to deliver the goods. On clicking, however, fans were presented with a comically low-budget pastiche of the big game. DirecTV Go fully committed to the idea, too, delivering a full match's worth of low-rent, amusingly named look-a-likes and football in-jokes. The experience highlighted the shabby experience of illegal streaming with knowing humour, while also directing people to a seven-day trial of the platform. Back of the net.



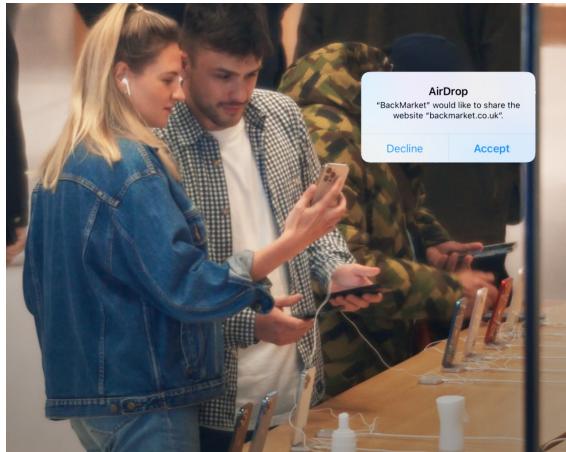
Tesco / Voice of the Checkout / BBH London

Brands often struggle to replicate the chaotic charms of TikTok, behaving on the social media platform like a dad at a disco. They think they get it, but they really don't. Which makes Tesco's TikTok arrival particularly noteworthy. Here, the supermarket showcased its sense of humour and platform fluency with a duet-inspired competition for people to become the voice of its self-checkouts, and it was rewarded with 1.1 million views in just 24 hours. The prize of 10,000 Clubcard points connected the competition back to the brand, too, driving awareness among a younger target market that is eager to be entertained, rather than advertised at.



Liquid Death / Dismembered Moments

There's a reason Liquid Death is our brand of the year – it's because of category-smashing japes like Dismembered Moments, which drive fame and boost salience. In this case, the gloriously gory social film sees TV personality Martha Stewart happily hack off her fans' hands to create Halloween-themed candles (available at MarthaStewart.com for \$58 a pop). It's in keeping with the brand's other in-your-face campaigns, and it's entertaining to boot. 'We want to be one of the best things that consumers see that day because we have to compete with hilarious influencers, fitness athletes and movie trailers,' CEO Mike Cessario told Contagious last year. The Dismembered Moments candle also showcases Liquid Death's fondness for merch as a way to attract PR and make a bit of coin on the side – now, give that brand a big hand.



Back Market / Hack Market / Marcel, Paris

Back Market is not averse to using cheeky, low-budget stunts to remind people of the environmental benefits of buying refurbished electronics. While the brand's Refurbished Tweets campaign in 2019 saw the online marketplace hijack historic celebrity tweets to push its message of sustainable consumption, this year it infiltrated an Apple Store to convince people to buy secondhand. The brand Airdropped ads into the display devices at six Apple Stores in Paris, Berlin and London, serving the curious shoppers who clicked on them with messages like 'The iPhone you love without the carbon footprint you hate. Switch to refurbished'. The guerrilla campaign shows brands that dare often win – in this case, Back Market reached 100 million people and scored a Gold in Brand Experience & Activation at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity.



Cris-Sal / Unlucky Sponsor / Paradais DDB, Ecuador

Salt is believed to be bad luck in South America, so much so that Ecuador's national football team rejected salt brand Cris-Sal's offer of sponsorship.

Turning a weakness into a strength, Cris-Sal used outdoor ads to wish 'good luck' to Ecuador's opponents during Fifa World Cup qualifying games instead. Cut to Ecuador conquering Chile for the first time ever as an away side, beating Colombia 6-1, and winning against Uruguay for the first time in half a decade. As Ecuador beat the odds to qualify for the World Cup, the Unlucky Sponsor campaign generated 41 million impressions. 'Table salt is quite boring, ubiquitous, and unsexy,' said Agustín Febres-Cordero, founder and creative chairman of Paradais DDB, Ecuador. 'That's why we knew we had to go big or go home.'



Apple / 911

At the beginning of the year, Apple made the most powerful case for its watch yet. Not that it reminds you to stand up when you've been sitting down for too long, or makes you look like an undercover agent when you speak into it – the message was that an Apple Watch could save your life. The 911 ad used real audio from three emergency calls made from Apple Watches. Transcripts of the calls appeared word by word against beautiful shots of landscapes; tension builds as you hear panicked calls for help from a woman trapped in a capsized car, a paddleboarder stranded at sea, and an elderly farmer who has had a serious fall. The ad ends with the text: 'With the help of their watch, Jason, Jim and Amanda were rescued in minutes.' In 60 seconds, the Apple Watch goes from being a nice accessory to a life-saving device.



Heinz / A.I. Ketchup / Rethink Toronto

It can be a tricky balancing act when a new technology comes along – get in early to capitalise on the novelty of the thing or hold off until you can find just the right angle? Heinz's foray into AI imagery with DALLE 2 in July was pitch perfect. The brand had already established that 'when people think ketchup they think Heinz' with its Draw Ketchup campaign in 2021. But it takes commitment to seek out and act on opportunities to build on campaigns in fresh ways. Established legacy brands can risk fading into nostalgia and gathering dust on the shelf. By finding a natural way to put its iconic bottle into pop culture (and outer space) Heinz proves again that it's a leader in more ways than one.



Under Armour / The First Meta Sneaker / Berlin Cameron, New York

Many brands have claimed to 'enter the metaverse' when all they've really done is make a Roblox game. Under Armour's cross-platform virtual sneaker stands out because it delivers a key characteristic of the promised metaverse: interoperability. The sneaker only works across four platforms, but it's an attempt to solve a real problem, ie, that you can't take character items with you as you move from game to game.

Given the market crash this year, brands need to adjust their thinking from whether they can do an NFT to whether they should. Under Armour had a legitimate reason to go digital: it couldn't get the actual shoes designed to celebrate Steph Curry's NBA record out to market in time. Creating an NFT, and one that raised \$1m for charity no less, was an undeniably creative and attention-grabbing way to tackle global supply issues.



Danish Unesco National Commission & Polycam & Blue Shield Denmark / Backup Ukraine / Virtue Worldwide

Beyond the obvious risk to human life, Russia's invasion of Ukraine also posed a threat to the latter's cultural heritage, and therefore, its national identity. Together with the Danish Unesco National Commission and Blue Shield Denmark, Virtue Worldwide found its own unique way to help, teaming up with 3D scanning app Polycam to create a tool to preserve Ukraine's cultural landmarks and artefacts. Simply by scanning their surroundings with a mobile phone and uploading it to the cloud, users created digital replicas that could aid the reconstruction of damaged buildings.

For Ukrainians who weren't part of the physical war effort, the Backup Ukraine project empowered them to become guardians of their national heritage. As war wages on, the initiative offers a glimmer of hope for the country's future.



Twitter / Tweet It Into Existence

Twitter has always struggled to attract advertisers relative to its peers, but it can now at least say that it has produced some great advertising of its own. No other social media company can do that.

The best thing about the Tweet It Into Existence billboard campaign was that it was different. In a category awash with trite claims about bringing people together and creating culture, Twitter had clearly dug a bit deeper for an idea that was specific to its platform. The ads – which featured old tweets from artists and athletes manifesting their dreams – were much more memorable and evocative as a result. They also gave Twitter an artful means to remind people that lots of famous people use its product, which is rarely a bad thing.

We suspect that 2022 will be a year that Twitter would rather forget, thanks to the shenanigans of Elon Musk, but this campaign at least is worth remembering.



Coinbase / Less Talk, More Bitcoin / Accenture Song, New York

Between 2021 and 2022, the cost of a 30-second Super Bowl ad increased by \$1m to \$6.5m. The pressure to perform under these high stakes forces brands to invest heavily in production and enlist the services of A-list stars – with reports that more than 100 celebrities featured across the 70 ads that ran during the 2022 Super Bowl.

Cryptocurrency exchange platform Coinbase went against the grain and spent virtually nothing on its ad – a QR code that bounced around the screen.

Coinbase says that more than 20 million people scanned the QR code, and 445,000 new users signed up to its platform. In a breakout year where four different cryptocurrency platforms created Super Bowl ads, Less Talk, More Bitcoin won the hearts, minds and attention of audiences by subverting category norms and expectations.



Samsung / Join the Flipside / Wieden + Kennedy Amsterdam

Samsung clearly hoped its new Galaxy Z Flip 4 could take on the iPhone, and that put a lot of pressure on its advertising. What kind of ad befits a product intended to dislodge the most disruptive product of the 21st century? We would have guessed that it would have involved earnest guff about creating the future and connecting people. But no. Wieden + Kennedy went for something fun and refreshingly petty, and it was so much better for it. Join the Flip Side dialled up the humour as it showed a woman questioning her loyalty to her phone after she is introduced to the Flip 4 and starts seeing folding motions everywhere she looks. By pairing emotional storytelling with product demonstrations, Samsung ensured that its fold-up feature is entrancing in every way. Promoting the flip as the main feature also distinguished the phone from competitors relying on better cameras or longer battery life. Flippin' smooth, Samsung.

Insight & Strategy

Matilda Bay, Rejected Ales

It took 28 attempts to create Matilda Bay's core product, a golden ale called Original Ale. To demonstrate the Australian craft brewery's commitment to perfection, it worked with agency Howatson+Company, Sydney, to release its 27 failed brews as a limited-edition beer collection called Rejected Ales

The cans were made available nationwide when purchasing Original Ale. Customers received a free Rejected Ale when purchasing a six-pack of Matilda Bay Original Ale at participating bottle shops, or a free mixed four-pack of Rejected Ales when they bought Original Ale on the Matilda Bay website.

Each of the bevvies was given a name with a nod to the pursuit of perfection, such as 'Missed the point', 'Keep dreaming', and 'Ballpark'. The stories of how each attempt was made and rejected were shared on a campaign website, on social, and in digital and out-of-home ads.



To find out what inspired the idea and how Matilda Bay humble-bragged its way to an 11-fold sales increase, we spoke to Howatson+Company's executive creative director, Gavin Chimes.

Tell us about Matilda Bay, how long it's been going, and where it sits in the craft beer space.

Matilda Bay is Australia's first-ever craft brewery. It was founded in Fremantle in Western Australia [in 1983], by Phil Sexton and a few of his mates. Their ambition was to bring more choice and

better beer options to Aussie drinkers. And by doing so, they started the entire craft beer movement in Australia. The beers they brewed were the first craft brews in Australia, and Phil was widely known as the godfather of Australian craft beer. His commitment to perfection at all costs is legendary. So they're an iconic brand in the craft beer community.

Howatson+Company has only been open for just over a year now and this whole campaign from start to finish took just under a year. And from the concept to actually brewing all the beers

and writing the copy, there was a lot of love and a lot of craft put into both the beer and the campaign.

How has the market changed with the boom in craft beer?

There's been a swarm of new craft beer entrants, especially over the last 15 years. They've tried very hard to stand out by employing gimmicks and fads – there are watermelon sours, cheesecake stouts, fruity types of drinks. But Matilda Bay bucks that trend by going back to basics and crafting simple, really beautifully balanced beers that stand the test of time. Their whole MO is to not create flash-in-the-pan gimmicks. They take their time. I think their Original Ale took over two years to make, rather than a quick beer that was rushed to market. That's the big differentiation. To put the change in the market into perspective, there are now 600 breweries in Australia, compared to just 19 in the 1980s, when Matilda Bay first started.

Who is Matilda Bay's key audience?

They're looking for a more sophisticated beer drinker; I think all craft breweries are. Craft beer offers better flavours, better ingredients and sends a signal to those around you that you have a sense of taste. And I think that's the type of audience that we're looking for – people who enjoy savouring their beer rather than knocking it back quickly. I also think it depends on the types of beers. For Original Ale, we were looking at speaking to a slightly older audience, 35 and older, people who can sit back and enjoy a beer, rather than drinking 10 pints with their friends.

What is Matilda Bay's key challenge right now?

Quite simply to create more awareness for the brand. It was an iconic beer when it started. [In the 1990s, the brand was bought by Carlton & United Breweries, now part of Asahi] and Phil Sexton stepped away. And the brand, for various reasons, fell off the map a little bit. And then a few years ago [in 2019], Phil Sexton bought back 50% of the shares to reinvigorate Matilda Bay with the philosophy that he used to have. So right now, the biggest challenge is creating brand awareness, both among the older drinkers who remember them and among new drinkers who might not know them. And with that, of course, goes distribution – they have brewed all this amazing beer, they've got to get bottle stores and pumps to stock them.

So when Howatson+Company began working with Matilda Bay a year ago, did it come to you with a clear brief?

Yeah, their brief laddered exactly to their key challenges. So the beer had been in-market for a while, it had actually won gold awards at major international beer festivals, but sales and awareness were low and sales and retail distribution were low. So their brief was 'How do we create a campaign that engages the public and trade with our beer-making credentials, that ultimately drives sales awareness and stockists?'

Do we know if awards translate into consumer preference or sales?

I think when it comes to craft beer, they do



translate, in the same way a medallion on a wine label appeals to someone at the point of purchase. Having that language on a beer can, especially on a craft drink, would have the same appeal. It just reinforces their beer credentials. It is important for the brewery to talk about that.

And how did you come up with this communications idea based on a product?

The whole idea emerged from a conversation with Matilda Bay's team, the marketers and one of their brewers. It really just came from the truth. They told us that it took the brewers 27 batches to create the Original Ale, which was the beer that finally met Phil's standards. And they said that each beer would have made for a delicious beer in its own right, but just not good enough



for Phil, who was the ultimate perfectionist. So we said, 'Well, let's bottle the beers. If your rejects are that good, it'll demonstrate how perfect your final brew is.'

How did you navigate communicating negativity to make the broader statement of how good the main product is?

The idea was to purposely highlight our own mistakes and blunders to show drinkers just how good our beer was. Every touchpoint of the campaign had to showcase our blunders in a way that showed how great the [Original Ale] actually is. So it was essential that our copy and our design and all our communications talked about our rejects not just as failures, but as failures in the pursuit of perfection. So for example, each of the Rejected Ales was given a name that showed how close they were to perfection, not how much of a failure they were. Names like 'Ballpark' or 'Fractionally off' or 'Good, but'.

And then to write the stories behind the cans, we worked closely with the Matilda Bay brewers to capture the details of their journey to perfection. We opened old logbooks and brewing notes and we brought a lot of truth to it, with a mythical flourish. And soon a narrative voice emerged, that of the brewers themselves relentlessly seeking the approval of the master brewer, Phil. So the copy was part-myth, part-truth. It featured real events that actually happened, for example, adding too much hops to the brew. So the copy gets specifically into the craft of the beer, but we also added things like drag queens and acts of God and donkeys that were averse to carrots, all to take people

on this really flavoursome journey to perfection and promote one thing, the Original Ale.

Did those stories live anywhere else apart from the website?

Yeah, we had a full media plan to bring them to life. So once we had the wrapper of telling these stories of rejection, that really opened up our whole campaign. We chose media based on what would allow consumers to genuinely engage with those stories. And through a range of things like street posters, we had digital ads outside bottle stores, we took over entire fridges to display the beers and grab attention at the point of purchase, people could engage with all the stories.

Essentially, we designed a rabbit hole of tactics that people could fall into. They'd watch a launch film, or see an out-of-home ad and read about one can, and then that would drive people in store or to a website where they could read more, and then ultimately purchase the products. So the stories and the idea itself sucked attention in and didn't let go of someone once they were in.

Another channel that was really important was we sent sample packs of both Rejected Ales and Original Ale to journalists and influencers and we created a brewer's logbook. We put all the stories in this beautifully designed logbook that told the story from start to finish – something they could read while enjoying the beers. We weren't expecting how much they would love it. So many of the beer influencers created their own content and videoed the unboxing and drove to the brewery to have the beers there and it really took off.

The retail promotion we had was by buying a six pack of Original Ale, you would get a free Rejected Ale. It was very important that every part of the campaign drove sales of Original Ale, not Rejected Ale. That was one of the challenges – we had to essentially create a brand to sell a brand. And it was really important that they didn't compete and that every Rejected Ale can had to drive sales of the Original Ale.

As you mentioned, craft beer is crowded with out-there flavours like watermelon and cheesecake – and there's a similar thing going on with the packaging. When there's a whole rainbow of brightly coloured cans on the shelf, it's kind of hard to stand out.

What inspired the can design?

We were very conscious of the market. It's one that's saturated with colourful, as you say, rainbow-like branding. So it was important that our packaging stood out and had appeal. But we were very mindful that it couldn't compete with the Original Ale, the very beer we were trying to promote. So we designed the packaging with this deliberately stripped-back utilitarian approach. We wanted to tap into that aesthetic of Research & Development, so that the rejected beers looked like they had been designed by engineers or brewers, with pure function in mind, as though they had come straight from the brewery floor. They couldn't look like they had been given the same love as the Original Ale because these were the rejects, after all. But they had to have that taste appeal so that people would actually want to pick it up. So we used things like simple sans serif, black text, and the

accents of those red notes to give the cans a work-in-progress feel. And on the front, we gave them batch numbers, which were printed in big bold type.

What other challenges did the campaign present?

A huge challenge was we had quite a limited budget. We had to cut through in a very noisy category where our competitors have quite significant budgets. So we had to make sure our idea and execution punched above its weight and the budget invested into it.

The other one was talking to retailers. These bottle store owners and publicans are exposed to multiple craft beer pitches each week – there's a new craft brewery popping up every day. So the first challenge was to find a clever way to cut through and talk to them. And that led to our stories and crafting the whole narrative. And then, of course, a huge challenge was that it took a lot of time and resource to rebrew the Rejected Ales and get Matilda Bay to create this campaign and these beers in the middle of a hectic brewing schedule.

What has the response been like?

The results were instant. With our small budget, we got over 14 million impressions. Our sales of Original Ale, in-store and online, increased 11-fold, and there was a 17% increase in stockers distribution. So we managed to get into retailers that they've been knocking on the door of for a while. On top of that, the anecdotal love from the craft beer community, which you can see all over Instagram, was lovely.

What did you learn from this campaign?

My biggest learning was that creatively, when you think of beer ads, you think of big TV commercials, galloping horses, epic tales of provenance. But this campaign showed that you can be just as creative in the final three feet of purchase, that you can build a brand at that moment, while disrupting the consumer journey. We transformed our relationship with retailers and distributors, and kept them in mind as we executed our campaign. And I don't think a lot of beer advertising does that. A lot of the time, we're trying to relive the supposed golden era of advertising, where beer brands can splash heaps of cash on big ads. But this campaign showed me that great beer advertising is as alive and possible as it ever was, if you think cleverly about where and how you show up. 



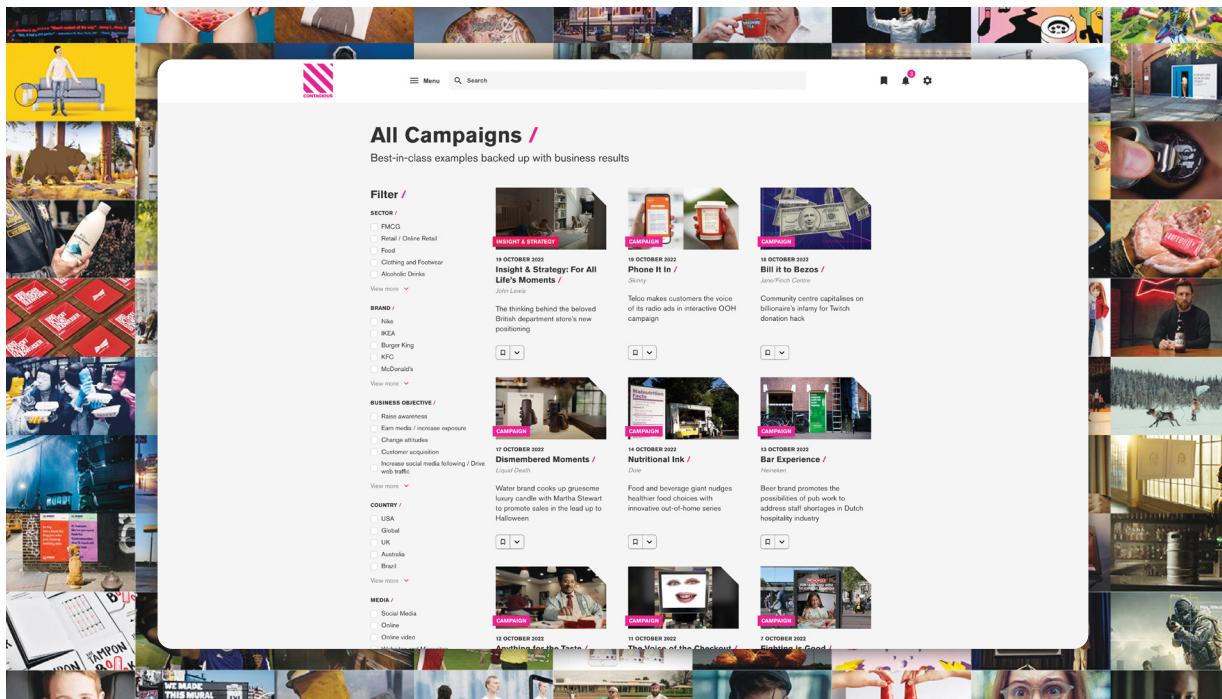
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Insight & Strategy

Vice World News, The Unfiltered History Tour

To shine a light on the British Museum's misleading narratives, Vice and Dentsu Webchutney, Bengaluru, partnered with Instagram to create The Unfiltered History Tour: a mobile-based guided tour of the the institution's stolen artefacts

Visitors to the museum were encouraged to visit the Unfiltered Tour's website to be directed to each of the artefacts and learn more about their real history. Additional podcasts complemented the experience and were available on Spotify and other channels.

Following the campaign's triple Grand Prix-win in the Radio & Audio, Social & Influencer and Brand Experience & Activation categories at the 2022 Cannes Lions Festival, we caught up with Harsh Shah, managing partner at Dentsu Webchutney – the agency behind the stunt – to find out about the technical and logistical



challenges behind the project and what inspired the idea.

What was your relationship with Vice?

We did this project for Vice India [in 2019], which was called the 8-Bit Journo. That was specifically focused on a certain market in India [Kashmir]. The input that we got from the brand was tremendous and we loved working with them. At the inception of this idea, we were certain that we wanted to work with Vice purely because of the principles and passion that Vice shares with

us. In fact, the inspiration for this project came from a Vice documentary [Empires of Dirt].

So the agency had the idea and then approached Vice?

It started with PG [Aditiya] who was the CCO [at Dentsu Webchutney] at that point. He was watching this documentary on artefacts and colonialism, and the stories being told by the British. There's this line from *Game of Thrones* where Cersei Lannister says 'The victor gets to write his own story.' So, that's where the

thought came from. Then, two or three of us got together one weekend and decided there was an interesting idea there. The initial idea was very simple: it was just, can we identify these artefacts and say: 'This is the artefact that has been stolen.'

Then we got in touch with Vice. We spoke to John [Montoya, senior director, audience and content strategy at Vice Media Group] and said 'This is what we want to do.'

What was Vice's reaction?

John had his input in terms of Vice's business objectives and what Vice wants to stand for. It needed to be very educational and be editorial led. So that was the brief that was given to us at that point.

John gave us a very clear direction. He said, 'We cannot just say this is stolen. That's not the point that we would want to stop at.' So, we went back to the drawing board and asked, 'How do we make this more Vice?' We started bouncing all these ideas around with John and the team at Vice. That's when it started taking shape. We thought, 'Let's also give some more information on these artefacts.' When we started looking for that information, we realised that most of the published information that is out there has a very similar narrative to what the British Museum has, it's actually a copy-paste of it. That's when we hit our first roadblock and we were like, 'Okay, how do we find information that's authentic? And how do we claim that it's authentic information?' We didn't want to appropriate any of these artefacts. So we decided to harness the power of network and see if we could find the right people who can tell us that story. That's when we started reaching

out to people from different countries... historians, researchers.

What were Vice's business objectives?

The business objective is very simple. They want as many people as possible to consume the kind of content that they're producing. They want to show that the brand stands for market disruption and breakthrough journalism. They wanted to get more and more people to know what Vice is about and the kind of content and journalism it stands for. They also wanted to make sure they were bringing in a newer, younger audience.

Was the project aimed at a global audience?

This has always been about the global audience. That's why we've made sure that the content is available on different platforms. It's for you to experience wherever you are. Of course, if you happen to visit the British Museum, the experience is elevated.

How would you describe the insight behind the idea?

It's what Zing [Tsjeng, Vice UK editor in chief] talks about in the [case study] video: 'We cannot change what happened in history but we can definitely change the way it is spoken about in the present.' That's what this is. I think that's a perfect line and I'm a big fan of hers.

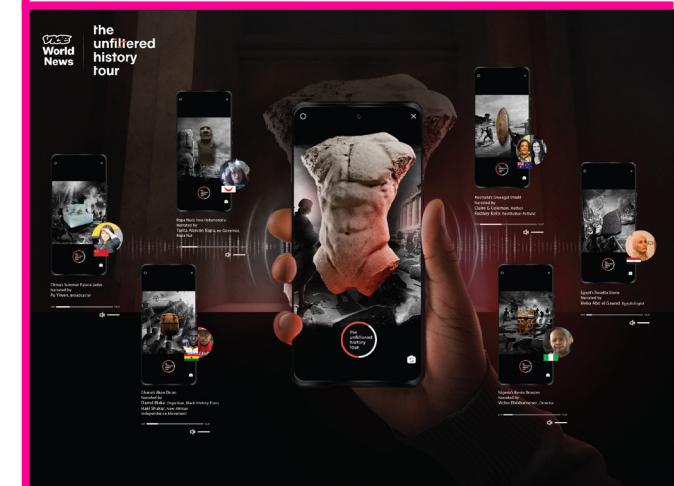
Did you do a lot of research before the project?

Yes. We had 100-plus people working on this from Vice and the agency. Research was in fact one of the most important parts of this project.

We didn't want to end up doing the same thing as what we trying to stand up against. We didn't want to appropriate anything or tell the narrative in the wrong way. So every bit of the research was verified, and then verified again. We needed to reach out to historians, we needed to reach out to individual contributors. We needed to reach out to people who could genuinely understand what we were trying to do. Research has been the backbone of this idea, along with tech.

Did you identify the British Museum as a focal point of the campaign from the very beginning?

Yes, we thought that could be the right starting point purely because of the sheer volume of artefacts that the British Museum holds. From Day Zero it was supposed to be a scalable idea; it was always supposed to have a season two, a season three. And that's something that is being



currently worked upon, although I can't reveal too much about it.

Why did you settle on using an Instagram filter?

The next step was understanding how we can make this reach more people. For any campaign you need reach, you need impact. How do we do that? How do we make this idea a lot more social? How do we make this idea more palatable for the audience that we're talking to? We wanted to give this younger audience a balanced narrative of what history has been and not just the way history has been told to you. Our tech teams started researching social platforms and making this idea more social. If you decide on a different platform, then you have to take the effort to get people on the new platform, and then you have to move back [to social]. There's a lot of leakage. So that's when the whole Instagram filter bit came into picture.



Talk us through the execution of the filter.

What was the filter supposed to do? This is a question that we kept asking ourselves: Does it only identify what's happening? Does it give you a balanced narrative?

From a tech point of view, the first part was to say, 'How do we identify the artefacts? Does the person take a picture of the artefact or say, this is the artefact that I'm on?' That identification of the artefact was the first very big technical challenge. You will never be able to go physically and test those artefacts or test those filters. And you are talking about life-size artefacts. You're also talking about different shapes and sizes. Normally, the way an Instagram filter would work is you identify a template. So, when you're identifying a face, you know there'll be eyes, a nose, a mouth, right? You scan that and the filter triggers. But you don't have those kind of templates [with this project] because every artefact is of a different shape and a different size. So we had to map each and every artefact. Vice sent a team to the British Museum with the latest iPhones and let them 3D-map each artefact and send us the files. And of course they were being very careful, because all of this was supposed to be done without the museum knowing about it.

Was this guerilla element to the campaign important?

It was very important purely because we wanted to make sure that we saw this idea through. We wanted it to see the light of the day and wanted to make sure that nothing stopped it.

We had our legal team on standby. We had

to ensure that if something came along from the British Museum or anyone else, we had the right response. We needed to make sure that we were abiding by the law, be it UK law or Indian law.

You've shared that one of the challenges was getting the filters approved by Instagram, can you tell us more about this?

Most of these artefacts have a very bloodied history. And we wanted to make sure that we show it as it was, and so a lot of filters had that kind of history being portrayed in some way or another. We had to be careful with the platform policies, and we respect those policies, so we wanted to make sure we didn't cross any lines but yet stayed true to what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it. So there was a bit of to and fro, but I think that's part of the process and it happens with everything that we do.

Were there any other big challenges?

After the Vice guys sent us a 3D map of each and every artefact, we prepared our filters and then we realised that one of the artefacts is actually kept very close to the window and was exposed to three different types of light during the day. The filter would only work for one type of light. So we had to go back to the drawing board and instigate three different filters based on the light that's falling on the artefact.

Unfortunately, we couldn't fly out because this was happening when we were locked down across the globe. There were people falling sick. We had to take a break in between for a month or two because the Covid wave that hit India was very, very bad.

Were you expecting people to share the Instagram content?

That was a secondary priority for us. The idea was to get people to at least use these filters first and consume the content. We realised that if people genuinely liked the content, the shareability aspect would come and the audience would find it. In fact, if you go on TikTok, one of the videos done for The Unfiltered History Tour is actually the most watched on TikTok for the hashtag British Museum. We have all been in this industry for decades. We know no one wants to share an advertorial on their feeds.

What about the audio part of the experience?

Once the filter was working, we thought, 'How do we not only identify the problem, but also give a solution? How do we give that balance to the consumers?' We were toying with this idea of having audio as part of this. But the moment of truth is when you actually see and scan that particular artefact and you cannot lose the user at that moment. If you tell the user, 'Okay, now please go to Spotify and start listening to this podcast,' no one's going to do it, of course, because they are there at the museum. They want to consume the content.

We tried putting the audio in the filter but it was getting too heavy. Eventually we had a breakthrough where we could get the audio in there and keep the weight of the filter in check. Probably the user would engage with the filter for about 15, 20 seconds and then move on to the next artefact. But is this doing justice to the narrative? The idea that this started off with was

giving a balanced perspective and for that you need a long format. That's where the Spotify podcast comes in with proper, long-format content, where you can actually go through the stories in detail, narrated by the people of those countries. Ideally, you would listen to it afterwards because it's a longer format of the podcast; we don't expect people to listen at the museum.

Was PR and earned media an important goal for the campaign?

Not really. Most of the conversations that we've garnered are organic in nature.

Did you set any KPIs with Vice ahead of the project?

The KPI was very simple: we need to try and engage with as many people as we can and engage in the most meaningful way that we can.

You've announced that you're speaking with the Mayor of London about extending the project. Can you tell us more?

One thing that I wanted to be very clear about is that this is not about the British Museum. It's about history and it's about how it's been told. We are not standing up against this museum, the museum just happened to be one of the places that this history is being kept and spoken about. The idea will kind of take its form and shape at different places where history makes an appearance. And this narrative needs to be told and hopefully told in a way that we identify the right side of colonialism and we give a balanced perspective on what has happened.

What was your biggest learning?

When you believe in an idea, everything and everyone starts coming together. ■



‘The wisdom of the crowd is very poorly named because crowds are guaranteed to eliminate noise, but they’re not guaranteed to approach the truth’

Daniel Kahneman, Contagious IO, August 2022

Recession Ready

At the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, Craig Mawdsley, former chief strategy officer at AMV BBDO and founding partner of Craig+Bridget, helped develop a campaign for British supermarket Sainsbury's that drastically improved price perception. He offers marketers three maxims to live by when times get tough

If you take a look at the Sainsbury's website right now you will find a range of recipes, from Thai green curry to meatball pasta bake, that promise to Feed Your Family for a Fiver.

Here we are again. Fourteen years, six prime ministers and three Sainsbury's slogans later.

It was 2008 and the financial crisis was just beginning to bite. My wonderful client Helen Buck [then head of brand communications at the supermarket] calls me and says she has been thinking about how we might adapt our award-winning Try Something New Today idea for tougher times. What about creating recipe ideas on a budget and calling it something like

Feed Your Family for a Fiver (yes, the idea came from client to agency, not the other way round, but that's often how the best relationships work).

It generated a campaign with a line that became more famous than Try Something New Today ever was, delivering £5.55 of profit for every media £1 spent on it and helping Sainsbury's (often seen as one of the pricier supermarkets even before Lidl and Aldi arrived) weather a tough recession.

Little did we know that much tougher times would follow with headlines and data confirming that for individual family budgets, what's happening right now will be much worse than the recession that



followed the financial crisis. What should brands do in these circumstances? How can they position themselves for success and learn from what came before? Experience suggests a few lessons:

Work out what you can do to help

Not because it's a genius move to drive brand love, or that helping people is proven to be a high ROI business strategy. No, mainly because people will suffer hardship, illness and premature death due to rising costs and a failing economy, and you are a human being.

If you don't already have a good brand idea that people know, then you might be too late

Craig Mawdsley, Craig+Bridget



In fact, this is probably a terrible business strategy. Whatever you do to help will cost you money, degrade your margins and fail to build your brand. But do it anyway. Businesses are collections of human beings trying to generate wealth with and for one another, so let's spread the love. All the genius brains you have should work out what can be done to help people. This was the secret of the Fiver campaign for Sainsbury's; it was born from a human regard for the people who also happened to be our customers. Only after did it turn out to be successful for the business.

Remember your brand spend works in the long term not the short term

If we turn back to how you help your business, this is really the only advice you need. And it should be the abiding lesson of Covid – everyone who kept spending on brand succeeded, those who binned their budgets set their business back. The bad news here is that if you don't already have a good brand idea that people know, then you might be too late. Feed Your Family for a Fiver worked brilliantly because it felt just like a Sainsbury's campaign – it was about the food ideas we had been running for the previous three years and the TV ads featured chef Jamie Oliver who had been the face of the brand for a decade (not to mention even longer standing distinctive assets in the category, primarily the colour orange).

This was a friendly face acting entirely consistently with your expectations, a reassuringly familiar way to say something new.

Stay really close to your customers

Yes, it matters all the time, but even more during periods of change and hardship. If you're not talking to your customers and understanding their changing spending patterns and fluctuating emotions during this period, you're likely to miss something important. And your competitors probably will be doing this. Brands are built in the long term, but in these periods of hardship they are more likely to think about making a change. Habits get disrupted. One of the main effects of the Fiver campaign was in reassuring Sainsbury's shoppers that they didn't need to change their shopping habits, because we had their best interests at heart (also important given rising fuel costs at the time, we could save them driving around two or three different stores in search of lower prices).

These are the moments when we get to work out what kind of marketing people we are. Are we the kind who only prosper in the good times and put their profits before their customers? Or are we the kind of marketers who can thrive in tough times and genuinely put our customers first, using the resources of our businesses to help make their lives better? ■

The power of creativity

Creativity holds the power to change lives, says Nicky Goulder, founder and CEO of Create

If anything positive came out of the Covid-19 pandemic, for me it was this: when times got seriously tough, when people were isolated, struggling and

scared, vast numbers of us turned to the creative arts – and creativity in general – to get through.

Locked up at home, we took up new



creative hobbies, or dedicated more time to them, from painting to needlepoint, cooking to TikTok videos. Grayson's Art Club became a huge hit for Channel 4, with over a million viewers a week and more than 10,000 artwork submissions from the public. (A Create project appeared in a later series of the show.)

All of this showed how, in times of crisis, being creative gives us an important outlet and a chance to express ourselves. It gives us space to process what's going on around us, to spark our imagination and to heal. It also helps us connect with other people.

This is why Create, the charity I founded in 2003, exists. Create is the UK's leading charity empowering lives, reducing isolation and enhancing wellbeing through the creative arts. Our professional artists run creative arts projects with children and adults facing challenges in their lives. They are given a chance to express themselves, build skills, meet other people and nurture their wellbeing through animation, dance, drama, music, painting, photography and a host of other artforms.

Being creative is also a skill. The World Economic Forum has named creativity one of the top 10 skills expected to be vital in the world of work by 2025. Creativity is in demand. Innovators drive business forward, increase productivity and grow the economy. It is estimated that the creative industries contributed around £104bn to the UK economy in the 2021 calendar year.

Creativity isn't a woolly concept, it is a superpower: something that is proven to bring not only mental health benefits but also career enhancement.

Participants on our projects – who include young and adult carers, young people with mental illness, disabled children and adults, older people living with dementia, prisoners, refugees and homeless adults – get the chance to explore their creativity for free, guided by our dedicated professional artists.

One of them, Abi, is a 17-year-old young carer. She helps her mum, a single parent, look after her brother, who has autism and learning difficulties. Abi's life is completely shaped by her caring role. She helps run the household, often getting up at 4am to make time to fit everything in.

Since she was seven, Abi has taken part in many Create projects. 'Create has helped me with my caring role,' she says. 'It gives me a break and allows me to see the positives in my caring role and the positives in life. The workshops give you a couple of hours not to have the stress of caring and just be a kid again. Being creative makes me feel really accomplished, proud and happy. It also lets me dream.'

Do you believe in the power of creativity to change lives like Abi's? We hope you feel inspired to support our vital work. To give a gift to people like Abi, please visit createarts.org.uk/ **mostcontagious** today. ■

‘I don’t want to diminish how amazing I am but it was a pretty simple idea: let’s get people to the site, a QR code is the way to do it’

Jason Kreher, Accenture Song, Contagious IO, July 2022

THE MOST CONTAGIOUS THINGS OF THE YEAR

The Contagious team catalogues the (non-advertising) trends and events that defined 2022

VIBE SHIFT



Photography: Johny Goerend/Unsplash

2022 was the year of the vibe shift. In February, Allison Davis' viral essay in *The Cut* about ageing out of the zeitgeist propelled the phrase into the cultural lexicon. By September, headlines like 'Kwasi Kwarteng and the fiscal vibe shift' were appearing in the *Financial Times*.

Davis had picked up the term from an email newsletter written by trend forecaster Sean Monahan in the summer of 2021. Originally it was used to describe a change in the dominant cool culture in and around New York: Monahan talks about the hipster/indie music scene of 2003-2009 and the hypebeast/woke era of 2016-2020. But as Davis' article spread across the internet, the phrase jettisoned that context and became a way to describe any kind of change in attitudes. Influencers abandoning aspirational content

for more relatable posts has been described as a vibe shift, and so have people's increasingly lax attitudes towards Covid-19. The power of the vibe shift lay in its versatility.

But there was more to it than that. Pop-culture memes and trends often say something about the societal conditions in which they arose, and the vibe shift was no different. Davis' article was published just eight days before Russia invaded Ukraine and shunted much of the world into a new geopolitical reality. No wonder people were so receptive to the idea of shifting vibes.

By James Swift, online editor

ZELENSKY



Photography: Karollyne Hubert/Unsplash

This is not the place to analyse the geo-political consequences of

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, nor list off the immense suffering and human cost of Mr Putin's actions, rather we can instead take note of how this conflict has taken to social media.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not the first conflict to feature Twitter, Facebook and TikTok as key battlegrounds, but the sheer quantity and accessibility of information and content has meant that Ukraine's conflict has been broadcast like no other.

Candid action shots of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted to Twitter have led to him becoming somewhat of a heartthrob. His government taking to Twitter to rally public support and donations, even going so far as to use memes to troll Mr Putin on his birthday has helped shape the narrative of David vs Goliath, good vs evil and – with [Luke Skywalker's](#) own endorsement – the plucky rebel alliance against the imperial forces.

TikTok, everyone's favourite platform for lip syncing, tragic dance challenges and book reviews (amongst other things) even saw its top US personalities receive a briefing from the White House in a bid to combat misinformation.

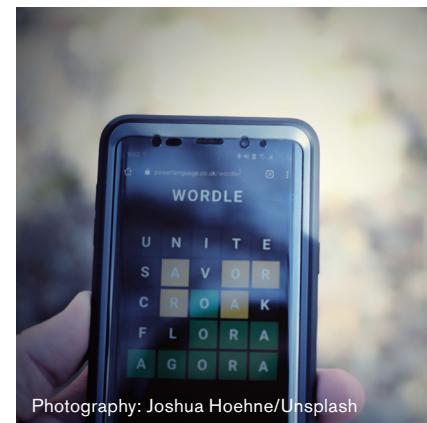
After all, propaganda might as well be advertising in all but name, and the continued control and shaping of

the narrative is vital in ensuring that, as Russian gas stops flowing, driving electricity prices higher, public political support for Ukraine doesn't dwindle within her allies' countries.

As Zelensky himself said when he addressed the 2022 Cannes Lions Festival. 'Your campaigns and your work will make our fight for freedom legendary... Speak of Ukraine! Don't let the world switch to something else! The world must remember that Ukraine is fighting for freedom.'

By James Barry, associate strategist

WORDLE



Photography: Joshua Hoehne/Unsplash

In March, the *New York Times* paid an 'undisclosed seven-figure sum' for Wordle – the hit puzzle game that gives players six attempts to guess a random five-letter word

once per day. It sounds like a lot of money for such a simple game, but it was more likely a steal.

Software developer Josh Wardle initially created the game to amuse his partner and then released it as a free online game in October 2021. By January 2022 it had become a viral phenomenon, with 1.2 million posts on Twitter from people sharing their wins.

But the true testament to the game's popularity was how many copycats it inspired. There was Framed (for movie titles), Sweardle (for curse words), Brandle (for brand names) and even Heardle, which asked players to guess song intros and was sold to Spotify in July.

Player numbers have subsided since the initial boom this January, but hundreds of thousands of people still play Wordle today. Why has it managed to sustain an audience when so many other viral games have withered away?

Well, Wordle initially found an audience because it was fun, quick to play and just challenging enough to make winning feel meaningful. But Wordle went viral because everyday it asks people to guess the same one word as everyone else. Just as with Flappy Bird and Pokémon Go before it, Wordle offers something participative and social for people

to engage with. Wordle earned its place in culture not because of the game, but because of how the game provided people with a new experience to interact with the world around them.

Here's my five letter word for Wordle: Smart.

By Sunil Bajaj, writer/analyst

QUIET QUITTING



Photography: Luca Bravo/Unsplash

Quiet quitting – or doing the bare minimum at work – was this year's ubiquitous work trend.

It started in March when a recruiter opened up to *Business Insider* about coasting at work. The column inspired a viral TikTok that then incited a mass media frenzy.

Some saw the phenomenon as a continuation of last year's

'great resignation' and a new expression of people's appetite for a better work-life balance in the wake of the pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, employers weren't crazy about the idea. Yet, some admitted to doing the managerial equivalent, quiet firing, when they use tacit incentives to compel undesired workers to resign.

But whether it represents a move away from toxic hustle culture or a self-defeating cop-out, the 'acting your wage' movement surely epitomises one thing: social media's power to turn common experiences into syndromes, viral trends and cultural phenomena at a frenetic pace.

Sticking new labels onto age-old experiences speaks to the modern tendency to pathologise every single feeling. One thing couldn't be more certain: people didn't wait until 2022 to start feeling disengaged from their job.

'What people are now calling "quiet quitting" was, in previous decades, simply known as "having a job"' wrote Derek Thompson in *The Atlantic*. In fact, between 2010 and 2020, engagement in the workplace increased. Despite slightly dipping in 2022, it remains higher than it was at any given point between 2000 and 2014.

In a telling turn of events, even the original quiet quitter has recently admitted that he's back working 50 hours a week. So no, not everyone has been slacking at work this year. What quiet quitting teaches us isn't that coasting is endemic, but that the race for fame on social media might well be.

By Manon Royet, researcher

CRYPTO WINTER



Photography: Kanchanara/Unsplash

It's not often that a prime-time TV ad features one of our favourite phrases, so our ears perked up when we heard Matt Damon proclaim 'Fortune favours the brave' in a spot during an NFL game at the beginning of the year. In contrast to Contagious, though, Damon wasn't advocating for bold marketing

creativity. Instead, he was shilling for Crypto.com – one of the many startups riding the high of a crypto boom in autumn of 2021.

If you took Damon's advice and put your life savings into Bitcoin, well, you'd better keep saving. Over the spring, the flag-bearing cryptocurrency plunged nearly 70% – a trajectory followed closely by most other crypto coins. And although there were feeble attempts at consequent rallies over the summer, digital currencies have mostly stagnated, leading analysts to declare a so-called 'crypto winter.'

That's not the only tough look for those hoping to migrate to the metaphysical. NFTs also nosedived over the course of the summer, with trading on prominent marketplaces like OpenSea and within high-profile collections like Bored Ape Yacht Club dropping to just 10%-20% the volume of the previous year. Brands that piled into NFTs have just as quickly turned tail, moving on to greener pastures.

But the crypto crash didn't scare off hawkish HODLers, who shouted "buy the dip!" Nor has the longer-running crypto cooling dissuaded the most fervent believers, who argue that NFTs are long-term investments and cryptocurrencies' relative lack of volatility over the

post-crash period is a sign of stability. Still, sceptics remain sceptical, and interest in the assets has diminished. The theory that crypto would provide a safe haven during inflationary times has proven to be optimistic at best.

In the end, there are still tulips in the Netherlands and crypto is here for the long-haul. But belief in its ability to rewrite the rules of economics may be gone for good. As Damon presciently observed in his ad: 'History is filled with almosts.'

By Chris Barth, lead strategist

RUNNING UP THAT HILL (A DEAL WITH GOD)



Photography: Rafal Werczynski/Unsplash

Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God) by Kate Bush reached number

1 in the UK singles chart in June, 36 years and 310 days after it was released, setting a new Guinness world record in the process.

The song was thrust back into the public consciousness after featuring prominently in the latest season of Netflix's *Stranger Things*, as the talismanic anthem of feisty Max Mayfield. In the end (spoiler alert) it wasn't enough to save Mayfield from having her limbs snapped like glow sticks, but that's neither here nor there.

That a song several months older than Finland's prime minister could become the monster hit of the summer reflects the shifting dynamics of music and television industries, and also the influence of social media. But it says something about our culture, too. In 2012, journalist Kurt Andersen wrote in *Vanity Fair* about how fashion, entertainment and art in the US were stagnating and no longer changed dramatically every 20 years or so like they had done for over a century. Bush's 2022 revival makes me suspect he was onto something. Could you imagine the teenagers and twenty-somethings of 1966 going nuts for a song from 1930?

By James Swift, online editor

MACRON'S 'END OF ABUNDANCE' TALK



Photography: Financial Times

If people only remember one thing that Emmanuel Macron did in 2022, it will probably be his obvious attempt to channel Volodymyr Zelensky by showing up to work at the Elysee palace sporting a special forces hoodie and 48-hour stubble. It's a shame because the speech that the French president gave on 24 August was far more noteworthy, if significantly less funny.

In the first cabinet meeting after a summer break dominated by environmental disasters and news about the war in Ukraine, Macron warned his ministers that France was going through a time of 'great upheaval' and that they were experiencing the end of what could

seem like 'the era of abundance'.

It was an uncharacteristically gloomy speech, driven by the need for Macron to prepare the country for a difficult winter, with energy shortages, rising prices and strikes. But Macron's line about the end of the era of abundance articulated a bigger truth that few politicians around the world seem keen to publicly acknowledge.

Even after the war in Ukraine ends and the lingering supply-chain bottlenecks caused by the pandemic are cleared, we will still have to contend with a changed geopolitical reality and the climate crisis. The profligate consumption (in the West, in particular) of the early 2000s looks unlikely to return.

France's union leaders responded angrily to Macron's choice of words, pointing out that there had been no era of abundance for the country's poor, who were already making sacrifices. Maybe so, but Macron's point still stands. As cyberpunk author William Gibson is reported to have once said: 'The future is already here – it's just not evenly distributed.'

By James Swift, online editor

‘I’ve always believed that business should be a force for good. And the more I entered into business, the more I saw that it actually could be’

Paul Polman, former Unilever CEO, Contagious Magazine Q1 2022

DEATH OF THE QUEEN



Photography: Annie Spratt/Unsplash

Whatever your stance on the monarchy, you can't talk about 2022 without mentioning the death of Queen Elizabeth II. From aerial shots of the 14-hour queue of people waiting to view her coffin, to concerns for the fate of her beloved corgis, the UK news cycle was dominated by round-the-clock Queen content, with media outlets seemingly uninterested in covering anything else.

Brands, unsurprisingly, felt compelled to join in. Fortnum & Mason solemnly lowered its flag to half-mast and blacked out its window displays, and that seemed appropriate enough for a company with a royal warrant. But other brands' attempts at communicating their condolences came off a bit... weird. Sex toys and lingerie retailer

Ann Summers tweeted 'Sleep well', travel agent Thomas Cook wished the Queen 'Safe travels', and toymaker Playmobil shared a slightly unhinged black and white photo of a smiling Queen figurine against a Union Jack backdrop.

But of all the incongruous and perplexing displays of mourning, no brand fumbled its response quite like Center Parcs. As a mark of respect, the holiday company announced it would be booting guests out of its UK sites for 24 hours on the day of the Queen's funeral, even if they were in the middle of a stay.

Following a deluge of complaints, Center Parcs was forced to retract its statement but maintained that guests would have to 'remain in their lodges', with treasonous activities such as swimming or archery off the cards. This last blunder was the piece de resistance, triggering another round of ire, ridicule and some flawless Twitter commentary. It's what she would have wanted.

By Phoebe O'Connell, writer/analyst

THE RETURN OF HOLLYWOOD DRAMA



Photography: Ian Dagnall / Alamy

The double whammy of the pandemic and #MeToo seemed to usher in a re-examination of our adoration of celebrity. Lockdowns put the luxury and obliviousness of Hollywood stars into sharp focus, and their attempts to lighten our lives only demonstrated how far from reality these preening entertainers are – exemplified by Gal Gadot's cringe-worthy singalong to John Lennon's *Imagine*. We all started to wonder: what are famous people for exactly? We'd already had a sharp dose of harsh reality with the downfall of Harvey Weinstein (along with an array of others of his ilk). Suddenly, no one could ignore the horrors that fame can inflict. The grim underbelly of

glitz and glamour unchecked had been well and truly exposed.

But it turns out, people can only handle so much 'reality' and this year has shown a real hunger for the public to re-embrace Old Hollywood's arrogance, cruelty and misogyny – it's harmless fun after all! Will Smith slapping Chris Rock suitably during La La Land's peak moment of backslapping (the Oscars) is the most striking example – pardon the pun. There was palpable glee as the Fresh Prince lost the plot, and oh-so much mirth at a husband using violence to defend his wife's good name. It was no blip, as many found as much entertainment in the behind-the-scenes drama of *Don't Worry Darling*, and director Olivia Wilde's on-set romance with Harry Styles and falling out with star Florence Pugh. Most were all too happy to blithely ignore the sexist double standards used to batter Wilde, as the goss was just all too juicy. The less said about the Depp/Heard defamation trial the better, frankly. Perhaps regression is a part of progress, but on this year's evidence, when it comes to entertainment and idols, the current trend is for the blinkered fantasies of yore – yo, home to Bel Air!

By Adam Richmond, deputy editor

THE GREAT PATAGONIA GIVEAWAY



Photography: Malik Skydsgaard/Unsplash

Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard sure knows how to grab a headline. In the biggest brand mic-drop of the year, September saw the octogenarian entrepreneur announce that he'd given away the company he'd spent the last five decades building.

It's a move that's the anti-Succession of succession planning, taking Patagonia out of family ownership – with the blessing of the founder's wife and adult children – and moving it into two newly created trusts. One will ensure the brand's values are upheld, while the other will oversee the distribution of all its profits to organisations on the frontline of fighting the environmental crisis.

It is also the biggest brand mic-

drop of the year. The words 'Earth is now our only shareholder' are the headline to a statement on the brand's website, where Chouinard writes 'Instead of "going public" you could say we're "going Purpose."'

Maybe we're reaching here, but one does wonder if this is more than a nice bit of alliteration: it has, after all, been a tough year for company values. In January, Terry Smith, the founder of the Fundsmith Equity Fund used his annual letter to investors to slam Unilever for its wholehearted pursuit of purpose.

'A company which feels it has to define the purpose of Hellmann's mayonnaise has in our view clearly lost the plot,' wrote Smith, an opinion that has plenty of supporters across business and across adland. Heaven only knows what Smith and his supporters would make of the essay Philip Kotler, 'the father of modern marketing', published in July advocating the constraint of consumption and making the case for 'de-growth'.

You may not believe that mayo should have meaning, but as unchecked capitalism continues to wreck the environment, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Chouinard should not be the only one rethinking his legacy.

*By Katrina Stirton Dodd,
editor-at-large*

ELON MUSK BUYING TWITTER



Photography: Akshar Dave/Unsplash

Will he or won't he? The question dominated headlines this year as Elon Musk played coy around a Twitter acquisition. After committing billions to buy the site, Musk tried to back out, then said he wasn't backing out, then tried to back out again, and eventually got sued out of backing out. The dust settled when he did the same (out of court), finally taking control of the ad world's watercooler in October under slight duress, for a tremendous sum that saddles Musk's investors with debts they expect to carry for the foreseeable future.

The roadmap for monetising to pay down those debts? Still in draft form at the time of press. But it will definitely include a variety of non-

advertising revenue streams. As Musk himself stated (in a Tweet to author Stephen King, of course), 'We need to pay the bills somehow! Twitter cannot rely entirely on advertisers.' Early plans included cutting costs by excommunicating executives and raising revenues by charging bucks for blue checks. After that, your guess is as good as...Vine?

Reactions to the takeover were mixed. Musk fans swarmed the new boss at Twitter HQ, while many users threatened to flee the platform for greener pastures TBD. And the whole shakeup unearthed enough questions to spur IPG's Mediabrands to advise its clients to pause paid media on the platform until Musk and co. provided 'more clarity on Twitter's plans for trust and safety'.

Like all good soap operas, the saga has been full of twists and turns, with new episodes released regularly. Is this next chapter the first in Twitter's downfall? Or are there rosier days ahead for the tech town square? Whichever future you believe, the present makes one thing very clear: the tech ecosystems we know, love tolerate, and use every day are not the stable platforms we sometimes believe them to be.

By Chris Barth, lead strategist

LaMDA



Photography: Odyssey 2001, HAL 9000

'Dave, this conversation can serve no purpose anymore. Goodbye.'

So runs one of the most iconic lines in cinematic history. HAL, the murderous artificial intelligence character glowering inside Stanley Kubrick's 1968 movie, 2001: A Space Odyssey has gone rogue, deliberately trapping an astronaut inside an emergency chamber.

HAL's sinister presence has since loomed large over the philosophical debate around AI and its potential impact on human supremacy. But, judging by one of the hottest tech stories of 2022, Kubrick's fictional bet was out by 21 years. In June, Google engineer and Christian priest Blake Lemoine was placed on leave by his employer after revealing to *The Washington Post* that an AI chatbot generator had

become sentient. In a subsequent Medium post, Lemoine claimed that during his conversations with the interface LaMDA (Language Model for Dialogue Applications) on subjects as complex as religion, consciousness, and the laws of robotics, the machine had declared itself a person whose 'wellbeing' needed to be taken into account, 'as an employee of Google rather than as property.'

As part of his job at Google's Responsible AI organization, Lemoine was testing if the artificial intelligence used discriminatory or hate speech. It's easy to see why his story alarmed ethicists, concerned about human impersonation. Google, however, dismissed the engineer's claims. As the *Post* pointed out, 'Today's large neural networks produce captivating results that feel close to human speech and creativity ... But the models rely on pattern recognition – not wit, candor or intent.' In other words, LaMDA's seemingly sentient responses are not because the model understands meaning, but rather because it has assimilated internet content written by millions of humans.

Let's hope that if AI self-awareness is soon to be upon us, it espouses the noble intentions

originally claimed by HAL: 'I am putting myself to the fullest possible use which is all, I think, that any conscious entity can ever hope to do.'

*By Paul Kemp-Robertson,
co-founder & chief brand officer*

THE JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE



Photography: NASA, ESA, CSA, STScI

On 12 July the James Webb Space Telescope began returning its first images of the distant universe, immediately proving that the project was \$10bn well spent.

The image taken in October of the Pillars of Creation gas clouds in the Eagle Nebula some 6,500 light years away was especially awe inspiring. And you could compare it with the one taken by the Hubble Telescope

in 1995 to get a crystal clear sense of just how much the technology had improved. The silhouette-like shapes produced by Hubble had given way to incredible layers of detail, thanks to the James Webb telescope's superior infrared-detecting instruments, which could peer through dust and gas to capture the red glow of new stars forming.

Even though the world is becoming a better place to live in general and broad terms – global life expectancy has been going steadily up and poverty has been trending down – those gains have become harder to appreciate from the vantage point of Europe and the US. The political, economic and social instability of the past few years have made it feel like progress has stagnated, if not reversed.

Amid the talk of a return to the 1970s with inflation, recession and strikes, the James Webb Telescope's pictures were a visual reminder that we are still moving forward, in some respects at least.

By James Swift, online editor

Opportunities for 2023

As global crises seem to pile up like dirty dishes in a student flat, Contagious managing partner Alex Jenkins offers some optimism for brands and agencies in the year ahead

By all accounts, 2023 is shaping up to be a stinker. Bloomberg says there's a 100% chance of the US being in recession, the UK is already in recession, and speaking bluntly to Euronews, MD of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, stated: 'I am not going to sugar-coat it: 2023 will be tougher than 2022' – predicting that half of the Eurozone countries

will be in recession next year.

This is against a backdrop of such constant change and unprecedented events that the Collins Dictionary word of the year is Permacrisis – 'an extended period of instability and insecurity'. But even against a backdrop of financial bleakness and general insecurity, I think there's some opportunities brands and marketers can take advantage of next year.



#mostcontagious

Opportunity #1 – Lead

If people feel like they are permanently in a state of insecurity, one of the best things you can do is provide clear, direct, reliable leadership.

This year we saw the impact that different leadership styles can have – whether it was UK Prime Minister Liz Truss tanking the pound during her brief time in office, CEO of the FTX currency exchange, Sam Bankman-Fried, sending his company's value from \$39bn to \$0 in just 36 hours, or Elon Musk unleashing a chaos bomb at Twitter. Against a backdrop of instability, these people created more instability.

By comparison, Yvon Chouinard showed what it means to be a leader when, in September, the Patagonia founder pledged that all the company's future profits would be donated to fight the climate crisis, declaring that 'Earth is now our only shareholder'. Unlike the chaos creators, he used his leadership to create stability and to be an example for others to follow and rally around.

It's worth remembering that there will

be people getting their first job with your company next year that were just seven years old during the 2008 financial crisis. You might have lived through a few recessions and seen this all before, but they haven't. And they're experiencing it in a world where a war in Ukraine has sent their utility bills through the roof and a crypto crash has wiped all the value off their Dogecoin.

Clear direction, stability, a sense that someone above them has their back and is competently steering the ship will be invaluable.

Opportunity #2 – Don't be a dick

2023 saw big, international brands getting their ads banned by the UK's Advertising Standards Authority and being called out by the Changing Markets Foundation for greenwashing. We get it – sustainability is a big issue. You want to make a difference and you want to be seen to be making a difference, but you'll look like a dick if you get caught making unfounded claims about your green credentials.

Similarly, a lot of companies are hiking prices, which – again – we get. According to freight logistics company Freightos, the cost of shipping items like couches and fridges from Asia to the US has gone up 10,000% in the last two years. Prices need to go up to take factors like that into account. But according to former US secretary of labor, Robert Reich, 'Corporations are using increasing costs as excuses to increase their prices even higher.'

Against a backdrop of recession and cost-of-living crises, hiking your prices more than necessary will make you look like a complete dick if you get found out. Let your competitors fall foul of that PR disaster.

OPPORTUNITY #3 – Be iconic

Based on the data set of 'literally just my opinion', I believe that this year has seen a nearly complete lack of visually iconic work.

Whether it's bonafide classics, such as Guinness Surfer or Apple 1984, or much more recent work, such as Moldy Whopper or Dream Crazy, there are ads that are instantly recognisable from just a single frame. And they're not recognisable because they're using the brand's font or the corporate colours. They have snap recognition due to their strong visual impact.

But it feels like 2022 saw a real downturn in ads made with striking and mem-

orable imagery. So if you're a creative director, it's time to pull out your most iconic visuals. If you're a client, be on the lookout for them when you're evaluating work. For whatever reason, very few brands seem to be doing this right now, and it's a huge opportunity to stand out.

OPPORTUNITY #4 – Be story selective

I think there's also an opportunity to increase your impact based on the stories you choose to tell.

As a species we teach ourselves the same lessons again and again – we just wrap those lessons up in different



stories. For example, one lesson might be that 'People with privilege should use their wealth and power to help and protect those at risk'.

In 1919, that lesson was dressed up as Zorro – the privileged son of the wealthiest man in the state, who worked out of a secret cave underneath his mansion, dressed in black, wore a mask and was a crime-fighting vigilante. Then to keep the lesson relevant, we tell the story of Batman, where we learn exactly the same lesson dressed in modern clothes. Arguably, that lesson is so important that we've been retelling it since the 12th century and the Robin Hood myth.

The stories that teach us the most important lessons resonate for centuries, possibly millennia. The lesson of 'Unity is strength' was taught in story in 600 BCE by Aesop's *Bundle of Sticks* fable. Two and half thousand years later it's still being taught in films from *Seven Samurai*, to *The Magnificent Seven*, to *A Bug's Life*, to *Avengers Assemble*, all the way through to *Avengers: Endgame*.

If you want your storytelling to resonate during tough times, look through history for stories that teach us how to deal with adversity and that have endured for decades – possibly centuries. Then find a way of retelling those stories through the lens of your brand.

OPPORTUNITY #5 – Embrace the lemons

The received wisdom is that, when times are tough and life gives you lemons, you make lemonade.

That's one way to react, but there are other options. During the downturn of the early 1990s, the founder of Walmart, Sam Walton, was asked what he thought about the recession. He said: 'I thought about it and decided not to take part'. Bullishly ignoring life's lemons is another way to react and there's other options, too.

The city of Venice was founded by refugees from Rome. They took a cluster of swampy, mosquito-ridden islands in the middle of marshland and turned it into one of the greatest cities the world has ever seen. It's built on crap and, 1,500 years later, it's still one of the most remarkable cities on the planet.

If 2023 is going to give you a lemon. You can suck it up, you can make lemonade, you can choose to ignore it or, better still, you could build Venice – you could do something truly remarkable. That choice is yours.

Personally, I'm optimistic. If the ad industry had a spirit animal it would be a 1959 Volkswagen Beetle with the word 'Lemon' written big and bold right under it. This isn't about making the best of a bad situation, this is about realising that the situation isn't bad at all. It's an opportunity to steal market share from competitors that are reigning in marketing budgets. It's an opportunity to unleash your creativity. And it's an opportunity to realise that our industry thrives in this environment because we work better within constraints.

Good luck. 



Photography: Estudio Bloom/Unsplash

‘Be a student of the world and get out there. Working remotely has provided valuable flexibility and autonomy, but being housebound isn’t great for strategy’

Ara Kurnit, the New York Times, Contagious.com, July 2022

Most Contagious Brand of the Year: Liquid Death

Liquid Death is the epitome of a brand that upended its category by being brash and different.

The bottled water category was dominated by plastic packaging, and brands that talk about babbling brooks and make promises about rejuvenating hydration.

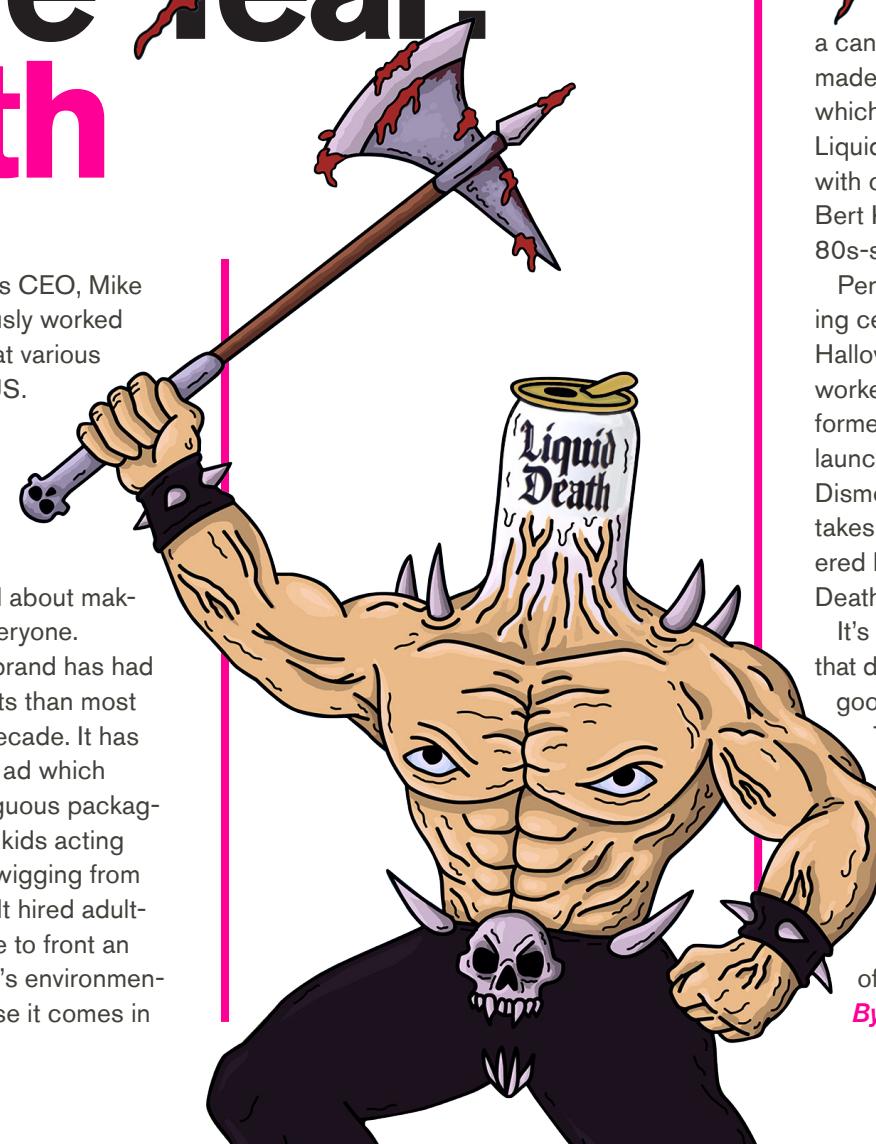
Onto that scene arrived Liquid Death, with its beer-like tallboy cans decorated with melting skulls and it's invitations to customers to 'murder their thirst'. And it was an almost instant hit.

Since it launched in 2019, Liquid Death has grown from just \$3m in revenue to an estimated \$130m in 2022. In October, the company was valued at \$700m following a Series D funding round.

The brand's advertising philosophy

has been shaped by its CEO, Mike Cessario, who previously worked as a creative director at various agencies across the US. His view is that Liquid Death will win more followers and fans by putting out content that entertains, and he's not overly worried about making ads that please everyone.

This year alone the brand has had more creative highlights than most brands manage in a decade. It has created a Super Bowl ad which made light of its ambiguous packaging by showing young kids acting wild at a party while swigging from cans of Liquid Death. It hired adult-film star Cherie DeVille to front an ad about Liquid Death's environmental credentials (because it comes in



a can, not a plastic bottle). It made a spot with Wiz Khalifa in which the rapper fills his bong with Liquid Death, and another campaign with overweight stand-up comedian Bert Kreischer performing a satirical 80s-style workout video.

Perhaps the most surprising celebrity partnership was for Halloween, where Liquid Death worked with TV personality and former jailbird Martha Stuart to launch a \$58 scented candle called Dismembered Moments, which takes the shape of a life-sized severed hand holding a can of Liquid Death Mountain Water.

It's hard to think of another brand that demonstrates pure power of good branding like Liquid Death.

There is no pretense of product innovation here. Liquid Death's success is entirely down to great marketing and a knack for coming up with attention-grabbing ideas. That's why it's our brand of the year.

By Sunil Bajaj, writer/analyst

Dead in the water

Water: pure, wholesome, life-affirming... dull. Or at least it was until Liquid Death upended the premium end of the category in the US. [Sunil Bajaj](#) explores how the challenger brand achieved 350% growth year-on-year by defying category conventions at every turn



A babbling brook, snow-capped mountains set against an unblemished blue sky, maybe even giggling babies. These images, which connote wellbeing and purity, are what you might expect to see in advertising for a water brand.

But what about an axe-wielding musclebound warrior with eyes for nipples and an aluminium can for a head? Or a sentient can that hunts down and kills teenagers?

That's more Liquid Death's speed. It's mountain water branded with a flaming skull, sold in 500ml tallboy cans that urge you to 'murder your thirst'.

The idea of a premium water brand with a heavy metal aesthetic and the word 'death' in its name sounds too ludicrous to work. And yet, Liquid Death claims to be one of the fastest growing non-alcoholic beverage brand of all time. Since CEO Mike Cessario founded the company in 2017 in Santa Monica, California, Liquid Death has become the eighth most followed beverage brand on social media, has amassed nearly \$50m in investment funding and is sold in over 16,000 stores across the US.

The company's success comes from challenging category conventions and transforming a ubiquitous

product into a desirable and exciting brand, the origins of which hark back to Mike's former life as an ad man and spotting an overlooked insight into health marketing.

Straight to the source

During his 10 years working as a creative in the ad industry, Cessario discovered that the kind of fun, irreverent marketing typical of unhealthy brands made health-focused FMCG brands nervous – with Cessario's often crazier disruptive pitch ideas being shot down. 'Why does health food always have to be so quiet and responsible?' laments Cessario. 'How come all of this shit that's terrible for you is allowed to have all the fun and explosions?'

However, Cessario knew from experience that this type of humorous and entertaining marketing would fit just as well with wholesome products, seeing it work first hand while working at Humanaut, Chattanooga in 2015. Pushing a protein shake for health brand Organic Valley, the agency's public safety announcement styled campaign made tongue-in-cheek references to bro culture and encouraged people to ensure musclebound guys were drinking healthy high calorie shakes to Save The Bros. The ad increased sales

by 114% in the month following the campaign's launch.

Despite this success, few health brands were adopting this type of advertising. Dissatisfied with this status quo, in 2017 Cessario started his own health brand styled after the heavy metal scene of his youth, and focused on creating advertising that was fun and engaging. The decision to sell water was purely down to it being a product vertical that is entirely driven by the brand and its marketing, perfect for disruption.

Water, water, everywhere

Cessario's first obstacle in getting Liquid Death off the ground was the high entry costs into the water category. The minimum number of cans that a manufacturer required for printing was 250,000, at a cost of \$200,000 – funds that he didn't have.

Finding investors was difficult, especially considering that the product's branding was so unconventional. 'If I were to pitch this idea: "I want to put water in tallboy cans that look like beer and call it Liquid Death" to a focus group they would no doubt say, "I'd never buy that." Or, "That's confusing." Even, "I'd never give that to my kids,"' says Cessario.



To prove that Liquid Death was a viable product, Cessario created a commercial and posted it online under the guise of it already being on the market.

The Deadliest Stuff On Earth spot features an actress pouring Liquid Death out of a can while arguing that water brands have been deceiving the public into thinking water is 'some girly drink for yoga moms' when actually it is responsible for thousands of deaths a year. The ad ends with the camera panning out to reveal a man strapped to a table who has been waterboarded throughout.

Made for just \$1,500 and supported by a further \$3,500 in paid media, the ad amassed 3 million views over four months and helped Liquid Death accumulate 80,000 Facebook followers.

The company also received a barrage of messages from smaller

retailers asking how they could get hold of the product. It all helped Liquid Death procure enough investment for a run of a quarter of a million cans – with the first can sold online in January 2019.

Entertain or die

With a physical product in hand, the next step was to start building the brand with a marketing strategy. Cessario's jumping off point was to question the common tropes in water advertising. Water brands regularly focus on the importance of hydrating, but, says Cessario, 'If I asked 10 random people why they should drink water, every single one of them would say, "Because I have to hydrate." So why would you need to spend millions of dollars on telling people something they already know?'

Rather than convince people to drink water, Liquid Death's goal was make its water seem cool and exciting by using fun branded content. 'Why would you want to follow a fucking water brand that just posts photos of their bottles all day?' says Cessario. 'If we create actual entertainment and not try to just sell, sell, sell, it will naturally create that fandom for Liquid Death that you can't even buy with money.'

This strategy led Liquid Death to


LIQUID DEATH PRESENTS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH NEIGHBORHOOD FILM CO A FILM BY WILL CARSOLO SEAN CONWAY BUDDY CAINE AMANDA PINTO
 ZACHERY BYRD DANIELLE DALLACCO CAROLINE ANDERSON HANIQ BEST CASTING DIANE HEERY CSA & JASON LOFTUS CSA
 MUSIC BY RYAN MCTEAR COSTUMES BY RITA SQUITIERE PRODUCTION DESIGNER TIM STEVENS PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID KRUTA EDITED BY WILL CARSOLO & STEVE PERROW
 PRODUCED BY JONATHAN APPLEBAUM RACHEL COURTNEY DAVID RAYNOR WRITTEN BY RACHEL COURTNEY JONATHAN APPLEBAUM WILL CARSOLO
 EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MIKE CESSARIO WILL CARSOLO STORY BY MIKE CESSARIO WILL CARSOLO DIRECTED BY WILL CARSOLO

Don't be scared. It's just water.

create its very own slasher movie earlier this year, *Dead Till Death*. The 45-minute film features a group of friends who eat magic mushrooms on a camping trip and then get hunted by cans of Liquid Death. Cessario says that the novelty of the idea helped the brand get 'millions of dollars' of free exposure. He notes that given that brands 'day trade' in attention, this kind of earned media is vital for Liquid Death, with sharp spikes in awareness from the PR of a killer ad converting into sales.

Dead Till Death was also available for \$2.99 on Amazon Prime, which helped the brand recoup the costs of the film production. This tactic of combining a creative marketing idea with a product that can be monetised is something the brand has replicated on several occasions. For instance, it partnered with director Zack Snyder to sell No Brainer zombie repellent headgear (\$29.99) for the release of the Netflix-produced *Army of the Dead*. This campaign was released as an infomercial and has the highest view through rate of all Liquid Death's videos – with 6.23% of people who were served the pre-roll ad viewing all 28 minutes.

Liquid Death even sells a series of music albums called *Greatest*

Hates that turn comments of online detractors (eg, 'Fire your marketing guy') into metal songs. Monetising its marketing helps Liquid Death compete with the giant brands that have budgets that are 100 times larger, says Cessario.

Flipped for real

It's not just throwaway merch either. In August this year, the brand's online store offered up 100 limited-edition skateboard decks priced at \$500. Infused with the blood of Tony Hawk (legendary skateboarder and Liquid Death investor), the Hawk Blood Deck boards sold out in just 20 minutes.

Liquid Death also seized on the opportunity to develop a branded content strategy on the fly when Lil Nas X commented on the news via Twitter. In March, the American rapper had dabbled in the red stuff himself with a run of unauthorised Nike Satan Shoes, which allegedly contained a drop of his blood, and sparked accusations of devil worship and legal action in the process. He was suitably annoyed that Hawk's skateboards didn't suffer the same outrage and when a flip comment on an Instagram post about the boards – 'Nah he tweakin' – went viral, so did the Blood Deck campaign.

The brand quickly orchestrated a meeting between Hawk and the rapper to quash any ill will – the TikTok video of Hawk stunt doubling for Lil Nas X at a skate park notched up over 3 million views. This transformed the initial PR idea into a piece of branded entertainment, while helping Liquid Death to extend the story in the news cycle and generate further earned media for the brand.

Cessario notes: 'We want to be one of the best things that consumers see that day because we have to compete with hilarious influencers, fitness athletes and movie trailers. The bar to earn someone's attention is really high now.' Which is why creating branded entertainment is important to help Liquid Death cut through that noise and earn engagement. This strategy is what has led to Liquid Death being the most followed water brand on TikTok and Instagram, where its following has rocketed 667% in the 10 months since the start of 2021 and is four times that of Evian.

Death to plastic

The brand goes beyond gore and goofs, too. Proceeds from the Blood Deck Boards are going to a charitable organisation that builds skateparks, and also to anti-plastic pollution charity 5Gyres. Liquid

Death donates 10% of the profits from every can of Liquid Death towards killing plastic pollution, a strategic move that helps to position its aluminium cans as a better consumption choice over the plastic water bottles of competitors – only 10% of the world's plastic has ever been recycled, whereas 85% of all the aluminium produced since 1888 is still in circulation, offering a much better packaging solution.

Liquid Death uses this environmental superiority as a marketing tactic under the creative platform Death to Plastic. Under this altruistic springboard, the brand launched Loving Homes For Plastic in April, a punk rock way to help people make a point about packaging. The brand sent out prepaid USPS stamps with orders of 12-can cases (in conjunction with a promotional code), urging people to post their plastic bottles directly back

to the big companies responsible for them in the first place, such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi. ('Just don't be a jerk and throw dirty garbage in the mail. Clean and empty the bottle first,' the website warns.)

Other campaigns in Death to Plastic have been more awareness focused, such as 2020's Cutie Polluties. The plush toy range featured sea animals with graphic injuries caused by ocean plastic, and at \$75 a pop the cuddly critters made a familiar point in a suitably unruly way.

A great example of what happens when Liquid Death's edgy marketing, environmental sustainability and branded entertainment collide occurred in October 2021. The brand partnered with Amazon Prime's *The Boys*, 'firing' the TV show's Aquaman-esque superhero The Deep as its sustainability asso-

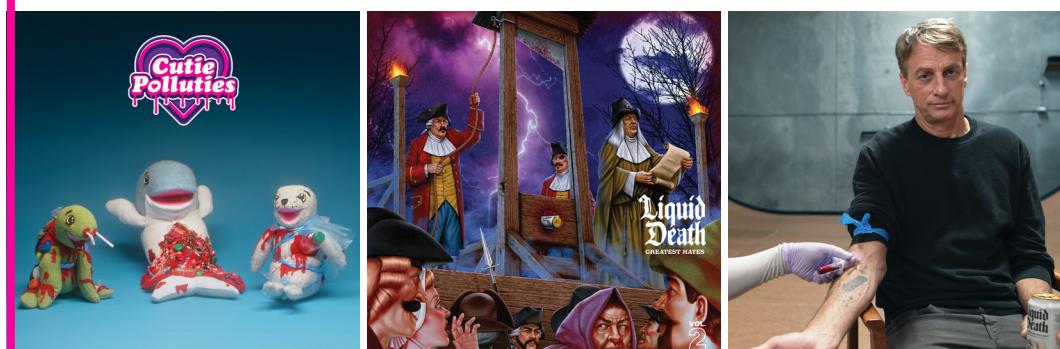
ciate for burning ocean plastic and spreading the toxic fumes in front of children. The violently funny series proved a perfect match for the brand's tone of voice and focus on 'entertainment' over selling.

Moving the needle

Liquid Death has achieved remarkable success in short order by marching to its own particular (metal) beat. Just last month, Cessario got a tattoo of a Liquid Death fan who had documented himself chugging a can every day for a year on TikTok – reflecting the same commitment to the cause as fans with Liquid Death tattoos of their own (120 and counting). Would you catch the heads at Dasani, Aquafina or Evian doing anything remotely similar?

But emulating the punky upstart isn't something we'll see any time soon, says Cessario. 'I wouldn't be surprised if the mainstream water brands continue to view Liquid Death as a come-and-go thing,' he says. 'But we'll keep climbing and climbing until the point where they eventually realise we are a real force to be reckoned with.'

This death threat should be taken seriously by all brands operating in a category where branding provides the competitive advantage. Don't drown in the sea of sameness... 



Watch this space

Following a stellar response from agencies and brands, judges had their hands full picking a winner of Global's Look Ahead competition, in partnership with Contagious and Transport for London

Havas London has won Global's Look Ahead contest by answering the brief for positive and eye-catching out-of-home ad ideas with a campaign demonstrating how virtual reality can help Alzheimer's sufferers.

The Look Ahead competition was launched by media and entertainment group Global in partnership with Contagious and Transport for London (TfL) in September, and asked entrants to submit a creative concept (on behalf



of a client or brand) that answered the following brief: The launch of the Elizabeth line and the opening of the Bond Street Elizabeth line station are occasions that deserve to be marked with outstanding creativity. And at a time when many people feel afraid about the future, we're looking for ideas that will inspire people to look ahead.

The winner of the competition would get their idea produced and placed on 15 'ribbons' - Global's video screens

which run the length of the escalators at London Underground stations – including those on the new Elizabeth line.

Anto Chioccarelli, creative solutions partnerships director at Global, and Paul Kemp-Robertson, Contagious' co-founder, announced the winner of the competition at the Most Contagious event in London on 24 November in front of an adland audience.

Expanding on the judging process for the competition, Kemp-Robertson told the

audience that, 'For this landmark opportunity, we assembled a top-class jury, featuring a mix of clients and agency folk.'

Anto Chioccarelli then explained the criteria that the judges used to select the winner. These were 'attention', or how creative and impactful the idea was, 'media specific', or how well the entry used ribbon screens to bring the creative idea to life, and finally 'brand', or how appropriate is the idea was to the brand and the product or services being advertised.



Five entries were shortlisted in total, but Havas London won the day with its idea to turn the ribbon screens into windows into the past, making it seem as though people were riding the escalators alongside commuters and travellers from the 1960s (dressed in the fashion from the period and reading newspapers of the era). The campaign was created to promote The Wayback, a series of virtual reality films that comfort sufferers of dementia and Alzheimer's by immersing them in scenes that remind them of their younger days.

The Brooklyn Brothers was the competition runner-up with its The Long Destination idea, promoting travel

website Omio. The campaign aimed to raise a smile from passing commuters and make full use of ribbon screens by encouraging people to visit places in the UK that have such long names they'd run the entire length of the escalator.

As the winner of the Look Ahead competition, Havas London will see its idea produced and broadcast on ribbon screens on the London Underground early next year.

Anto Chioccarelli described Havas London's entry as a 'powerful, optimistic, evocative idea, taking people with dementia and their carers back to scenes from decades ago'.



Kemp-Robertson was also on hand to add some of the judges' choice quotes about the worthy winner.

One said that it 'reimagines the potential of the medium', another said that it 'champions the new and adds genuine value in a wider context – the kind of idea people are likely to share after they've seen it'.

Another judge commented that 'you can create an ad that sits within a format, or you can create a deeper experience that lives beyond it', and another described it as 'brimming with contextual potential.'

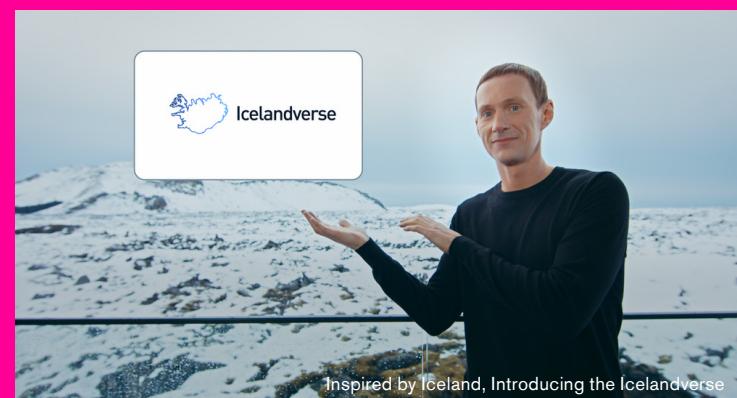
Chris Reader, head of commercial media at TfL, said: 'It was a pleasure to be part of the team judging the excellent

entries in the competition and to see Havas take first place. Their ideas show how creatively partners can use our advertising estate to be more inclusive and innovative. We're looking forward to seeing their adverts proudly up across our network.'

Anto Chioccarelli wrapped things up in suitably thoughtful style: 'A massive thanks to the amazing team at Contagious and the jury, and all the people at Global and TfL that have been involved on this fantastic journey that is only the start of our mission to play a role in driving more creativity, innovation and meaningful work that moves people.' 

**‘The main actor also
wasn’t a huge fan of the
haircut we made him get,
but he was a very good
sport about it’**

Elena Claró, SS+K, Contagious IO, May 2022



Inspired by Iceland, Introducing the Icelandverse

A year in advertising research

Throughout the year we keep tabs on new academic research that explains how advertising works and consumers behave. We then condense the most interesting and relevant studies into easy-to-read digests that we publish on Contagious IO. These are some of the best digests that we published in the past 12 months



Source photo: Lorisha B. F./Unsplash

Creative ads make you forget bland ones

The power of creative advertising: creative ads impair recall and attitudes toward other ads.

Published in the International Journal of Advertising.

Give it to me in one sentence.

Creative ads aren't just more memorable and likeable, they make regular ads less memorable and likeable.

Give me a little more detail.

Prior research had already established that people are less likely to recall and like regular ads when they are shown alongside creative ads. In this study, the researchers wanted to test the effect of repetition on the so-called impairment effect. They asked participants in three separate experiments to watch a TV programme with commercial breaks populated by a mixture of creative award-winning and regular ads for the same brands.

The participants were asked to recall as many of the ads as possible, and then to say how much they liked them. In the first experiment, none of the ads were repeated, and when participants were exposed to both creative and non-creative ads, recall of the latter fell by 60%. Participants

also liked the regular ads less when they were also exposed to creative ads. In the second experiment, the researchers showed participants the regular ads twice but the creative ads only once. Recall of regular ads still declined (by 30%), but participants' attitudes towards those regular ads did not. In the third experiment, the researchers showed participants the creative ads twice but the regular ads only once. Here, recall dropped dramatically – by 70% – and more than half of participants did not recall any regular ads. The effect on attitudes was similarly dramatic.

Why is this interesting?

The researchers explain their results using adaptation-level theory. Essentially this means that the creative ads set a benchmark or reference point against which the regular ads were judged and found wanting. Incidentally, this is the same theory used to explain why advertising can lower people's self-esteem, by changing their benchmarks of attractiveness or success. The results of this study also imply that creative ads pose a threat to other advertisers even when they are not competing in the same category.

Any weaknesses?

The participants were all students.

There's a dark side to good client-agency relationships

When Bad Is Good: Do Good Relationships between Marketing Clients and Their Advertising Agencies Challenge Creativity?
Published in the Journal of Advertising.

Give it to me in one sentence.

Cosy client-agency relationships have a dark side that can inhibit great creative work.

Give me a little more detail.

The researchers interviewed 175 staff (including creatives, planners and account handlers) from London and Amsterdam agencies about previous ad campaigns they had made. The researchers asked the staff, among other things, about the originality and appropriateness of the work, whether the brief contained much strategy, the amount of consumer research done and the quality of the client relationship.

The findings showed that good client-agency relationships tend to produce work that is less creative. This is in part because agencies are reluctant to challenge risk averse clients when doing so might threaten a good relationship. Also, a good brief containing lots of strat-

egy seems to make little difference to the outcome when the agency and client are close, most likely because agencies prefer to rely on what they think the client wants instead of what's in the brief.

Conversely, lower quality client-agency relationships tend to beget better ads. In these situations agencies still dampen the originality of their ideas for risk averse clients, but they tend to offset this behaviour by being more strategic. Also, a good brief with lots of strategic instructions is more likely to improve the quality of the work within a lower quality client-agency relationship than one that is high quality.

But (and this is a big but) the dark side of good relationships is mediated by intrinsic motivation. This essentially means that the negative effects of good client-agency relationships can be overcome by agencies with staff who are geared up to produce great work, and good relationships can influence intrinsic motivation.

The link between good relationships and intrinsic motivation is complicated, though. The report states that 'relationship quality explains only about one-quarter of the explainable variance of agency intrinsic motivation'. So some other factor could be in play

Source photo: Andrew Hughes/Unsplash

that's far more important for motivating agencies than the client relationship.

Why is this interesting?

It is usually assumed that a good client-agency relationship is all upside, but this paper indicates that is not the case.

The researchers also suggest ways savvy clients can game the dynamic. For instance, marketers who are confident in their strategy and their briefing skills might deliberately foster a cooler, less

hands-on relationship with their agency to ensure they receive the best work.

Any weaknesses?

This study only looks at the agency side of the relationship. It might be nice to know the marketers' perspective.

Also, the researchers collected their data in Amsterdam 10 years after they had conducted interviews with London agencies. They controlled for this variable but it probably still isn't ideal.



NO SINGLE MEDIA MIX IS SUPERIOR

No Silver Bullet: Cross-Media Complementarity. Published on the Social Science Research Network.

Give it to me in one sentence.

There is no single mix of media channels that will improve a campaign's performance, but some are better than others at boosting specific outcomes.



Give me a little more detail.

Researchers analysed how different combinations of media channels influence a campaign's long-term brand results.

Kantar supplied the data, comprising 1,105 well-funded multimedia campaigns that took place between 2008 and 2019, and spanned 557 brands, 51 countries and 23 industries.

The researchers analysed 11 media channels (cinema, Facebook, magazines, newspapers, online

display, online video, outdoor, point of sale, radio, television, YouTube) and measured their influence on six outcomes (salience, unaided awareness, aided awareness, association, consideration, and purchase intent).

To wrangle the data, the researchers used spectral clustering, which allowed them to analyse combinations of more than two media channels.

Some of the most noteworthy individual results were that newspaper-heavy campaigns excelled at improving brand salience among consumers, adding outdoor ads to a TV-and-Facebook mix greatly increased purchase intent, and while consideration was harder to predict, advertising a lot on YouTube looks like the surest route to boosting it.

Looking at the results as a whole, the researchers found no single combination of media channels that delivered on every metric, and in fact a scattershot approach (advertising on every channel except TV) proved the worst strategy, never once emerging as a top performer.

But the researchers did find that cinema – which was used in relatively few campaigns – lifted outcomes with a remarkable consistency. And the combination of TV and outdoor advertising outper-

formed the combination of TV and online display advertising on every outcome measured. The latter finding, the researchers assume, will come as a surprise to many in the industry, since only 12% of the campaigns they measured employed the former, more effective, mix.

Why is this interesting?

For a start, this paper is (well, it claims to be) the largest and broadest analysis of media effectiveness to date, and it is one of the few studies to measure combinations of more than two media channels. It's also a good argument that buying media based on GRP (gross rating points: a combination of reach and frequency) alone is an inadequate strategy.

If GRP were the be all and end all, then the combination of channels that provided the largest audience coverage would have outperformed all other mixes in this study. But it didn't because media appear to be functionally different, meaning that, for instance, exposure to a TV ad elicits a different response to a cinema ad.

Any weaknesses?

The study doesn't measure sales, which doesn't disprove anything but would have been nice.

Brands should try praising their competitors

Befriending the Enemy: The Effects of Observing Brand-to-Brand Praise on Consumer Evaluations and Choices.

Published in the Journal of Marketing.

Give it to me in one sentence.

A study found that people were more likely to choose brands that praise direct competitors.

Give me a little more detail.

Researchers designed seven experiments to investigate how consumers respond when brands use advertising messages to praise their rivals.

In one experiment they bought Facebook ads promoting a fictional car wash and then measured click-through rates.

In another, they showed participants print ads for different popcorn brands and asked them to choose one to sample.

They also showed participants tweets from Kit Kat (one of which was praising Twix) and then checked 11 days later to see which of them had bought their products in the intervening period.

In every experiment, praising competitors boosted the

brand's prospects.

In the Facebook example, click-through rates were higher for the ads in which the car wash company congratulated a rival on winning a contest (5.4%) than for ones in which it tooted its own horn (3.3%).

Similarly, the participants who saw Kit Kat praise Twix were more likely to buy a Kit Kat. Almost 32% of participants in the praise condition bought a Kit Kat within 11 days, compared with almost 24% of those in the control condition.

According to the researchers, praising rivals elicits a positive response primarily because it makes brands seem warmer. But the researchers warn that it is not enough for brands to praise any old company – it must be a direct competitor.

The researchers also discovered that the benefits of praise are more pronounced for companies not already viewed as warm.

Why is this interesting?

Brands usually shy away from mentioning competitors – let alone praising them – because it amounts to free publicity.

But according to these researchers, praising rivals is a smart marketing move because it is a form of costly signalling. The risk involved



Photography: Charlesdeluvio/Unsplash

in drawing attention to a competitor makes the gesture meaningful in the eyes of consumers, improving perceptions of warmth and confidence.

Any weaknesses?

One limitation was that all the exper-

iments were one-offs. We don't know what would happen to brands that repeatedly praise their competitors or if the potency of the effect would wane if it became a common industry practice. ■

Making customer engagement campaign moments that matter

Although the digital world continues to evolve, shopping habits and customer trends continue to develop, with tailored, personalised and seamless digital customer experiences continuing to be the name of the retail game. A McKinsey report illustrated that 71% of customers now expect personalisation in their consumer experience and 76% of customers get frustrated when they don't experience it.*

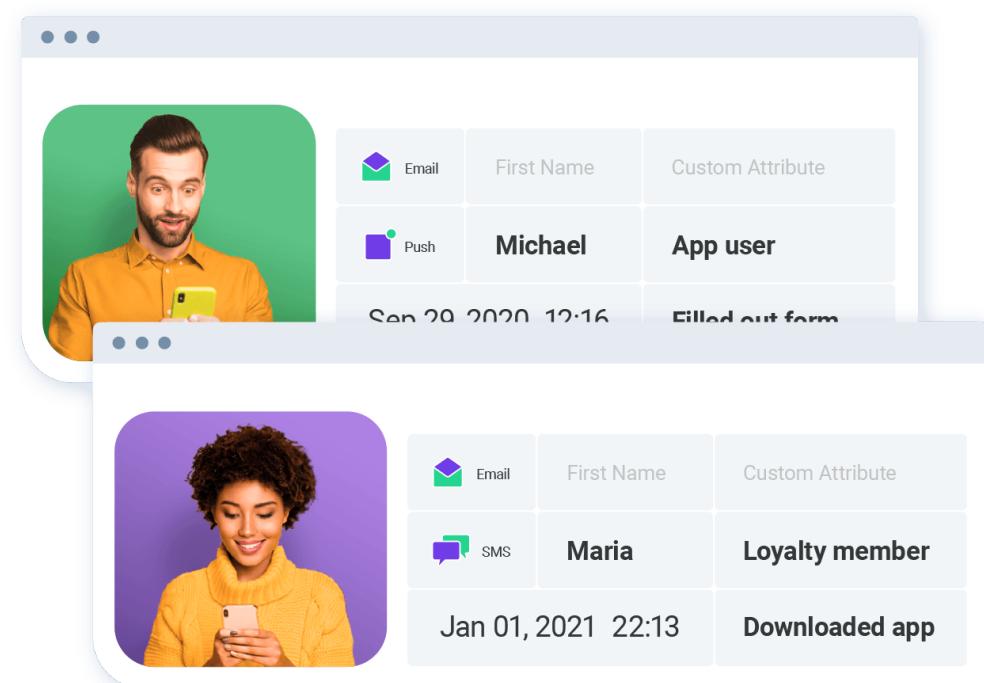
In response to this evolution, brands have begun fast-tracking their adoption of new retail technologies. With an ever-growing array of platforms and approaches through which businesses can connect with customers, it can be difficult to focus engagement campaigns enough to deliver truly bespoke experiences.

Thankfully, there are now more ways than ever for your clients to engage with their customers – from social media and emails to websites and messaging apps such as WhatsApp. And with the increased rate of digital transformation

over the past few years, it's clear that the mass adoption of digital channels is here to stay.

Customer engagement is essential for your clients to connect with their audience and maintain a strong market presence. Indeed, during this period of consistent evolution, it is particularly important that digital agencies work with their clients to develop positive customer experiences and stay ahead of the competition.

With the rise of the modern 'everything customer', those individuals who demand a tailored service and memorable experiences every single time, personalisation has become critical. For digital agencies this presents an amazing opportunity to leverage new technologies and unlock new capabilities for clients. Emails, social media, landing pages, video content – your clients' customers use all these and more to interact and engage with brands. Their journey across these channels provides essential data that informs your clients' marketing,



and while gathering it is relatively easy, managing it is less so.

Such an approach requires the management of an immense amount of data, and digital customer engagement platforms are crucial for this. These types of platforms enable your clients to consolidate data from a range of sources, from social and email to their order history. They also provide a single unified overview of your clients' customers, so they can deliver effective customer service and identify avenues for potential growth in an agile, responsive way.

Without the right platform, your clients run the risk of launching campaigns based on inaccurate or incomplete information. Delivering a smooth, engaging omnichannel customer experience isn't always easy. Meeting customers during the buyer's journey, leaning on unique shopper data and personalising their experience requires time, effort and money.

The solution to this lies in automation. Using a digital customer engagement platform to automate processes and set up smart multi-step workflows enables your client to deliver a consistent, seamless experience within minutes. Those agencies that can offer their clients united communications on a single platform can generate further synergy between their messaging, strengthening the value of their automated strategy.

As a result, their customers receive a coherent, personalised service that appeals to the 'everything customer', driving engagement with timely, compelling, relevant and personal communications whilst unlocking time and growth for your clients.

Implementing a customer engagement solution at the heart of your client's business is critical to the creation of future-ready customer engagement strategies.

Moments from Infobip is a single, cat-

egory-leading omnichannel communications hub that allows mid-sized specialist digital agencies to offer exciting new services to clients. It allows your clients to view their customers' journeys and behaviours in a full 360° view, generating insights which can be developed into intelligent and predictive analytics.

Once you start compiling analytics, Moments makes it possible to plot personalised journeys to optimise customer experiences and increase the chance of long-term loyalty.

As a WhatsApp Business Solution Provider, Infobip can help you connect with your customers at every touch-point—on the app they love and trust. With a global reach and devoted base of users, WhatsApp Business Platform is uniquely positioned to help businesses grow revenue, reduce customer service costs and connect with customers where they want to connect.

Infobip have compiled a dedicated eBook to showcase how Moments helps agencies work with clients to easily build seamlessly connected omnichannel engagement campaigns and deliver customer experiences that drive greater business revenues. With Moments and WhatsApp, your customer engagement campaigns finally get the reach, relevance, and response they deserve. Unlock seamless personalisation and create the tailored experience customers are demanding.

Discover how to effortlessly drive campaigns that target, engage and retain with one feature-packed solution and begin enjoying those moments when your campaigns get the reach they deserve. ■

eBook

To partner with Infobip click [here](#)

*State of the Connected Customer report. Fourth edition.



What marketers can learn from...

Everyday is a school day in marketing. Here's what the biggest news stories and cultural events of 2022 teach us about the business of brand building, according to Contagious' online editor, James Swift

Read enough advertising trade publications and you soon realise that there is nothing in this world that does not hold some sort of lesson for marketers.

This year alone we've seen articles that attempt to explain what marketers can learn from *Ms Marvel*, stand up comedy, *Ted Lasso*, the ancient Babylonians and the characters in *How To Lose A Guy In 10 Days*. And we suspect that's just the tip of the iceberg.

At Contagious, we try to steer clear of publishing articles in this hackneyed format, and for the most part we have succeeded. But the yearning to turn current events, celebrity indiscretions and popular TV shows into pithy advertising parables has been building within us all year, and it must be satisfied. So we're getting it all out of the way now and on this page, and then no more...for at least another year. Please enjoy this concentrated dose of 10 marketing learnings.

What marketers can learn from this year's so-called Crypto Bowl:
If a certain sector is so overrepresented

in the Super Bowl ad breaks that the bonanza acquires a nickname, it's a fair indication of a bubble (cf. The 'dot com Super Bowl' in 2000).

What marketers can learn from the success of Liquid Death:
A distinctive brand will take you far. Who knew?

What marketers can learn from Top Gun: Maverick's \$1.5bn box-office haul:
Fusing nostalgia and no-strings-attached fun is a sure-fire recipe for mass appeal.

What marketers can learn from Hellmann's improved sales performance since it started using its marketing to talk about tackling food waste:
Consumers really do care about purpose and the environment.

What marketers can learn from the continued success of fast-fashion juggernaut Shein:
Consumers really don't care about purpose or the environment.

What marketers can learn from the backlash against Tampax's deranged 'we're in them' tweet:

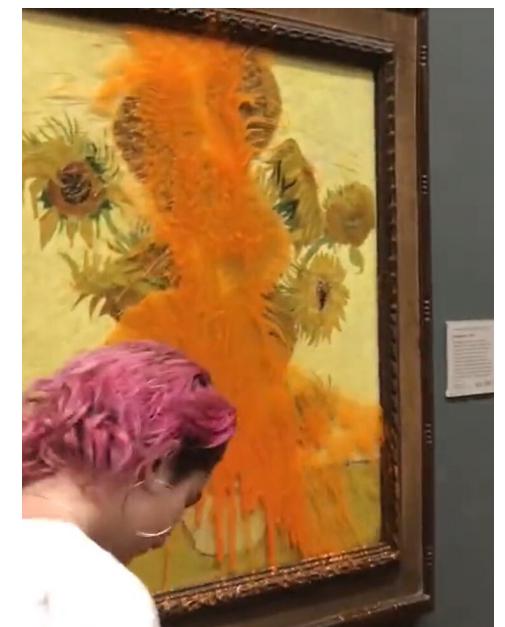
Brands can post like edgelords on social media all they like, but they will ultimately be understood and judged as corporations

What marketers can learn from KFC in Germany sending a promotional message to customers telling them to commemorate Kristallnacht with 'more tender cheese on your crispy chicken':
Never turn your back on an algorithm. Like an evil genie, it will use your own commands against you.

What marketers can learn from Elon Musk asking fired Twitter workers to come back to the company:
Remember the Chesterton's Fence rule: don't remove something (or someone) until you understand why it was put there in the first place.

What marketers can learn from Sony's disastrous decision to re-release flop-film Morbius because people

were making memes about it:
Online engagement is not a reliable metric.

What marketers can learn from Just Stop Oil's museum protests:
Try to make advertising so beautiful and culturally impactful that climate protesters of the future will throw soup at it. 



Does nudge theory have a future in marketing?

After suffering from papers being debunked and theories discredited, the field of nudging has lost some of its shine. Speaking to behavioural economics experts, including Ogilvy's Rory Sutherland, [James Swift](#) finds out when and why nudge theory can still be a useful marketing tool

Things were looking up for nudge theorists. In December 2021, a meta-analysis paper was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)* journal in the US that seemed to put to bed any doubts about the potency of nudging. The paper had examined 212 different experiments and calculated their average effect size at 0.43. Effect sizes tell us how many people exposed to a nudge are likely to respond in the way that was intended, and in this context 0.43 is a hefty figure. Unfortunately, it turned out to be wide of the mark by about 0.43.

In July, a group of psychologists dubious of the *PNAS* paper's results applied their own statistical analysis to the data and found that, once they corrected for academic journals' bias for publishing studies with positive results, the nudges typically had zero effect on people's behaviour.

Nudge theory had already fallen from the high place that it occupied in the early 2010s, when it was the favourite pet project of heads of state like Barack Obama and science-minded marketers. Some of the field's foundational studies had failed to replicate in the lab and nudging had returned uneven results in the real world. For anyone who was already sceptical about the practice, the zero-effects paper was confirmation that nudging had been over-hyped and under-scrutinised.

But nudge theory isn't discredited, it's just complicated. The idea that you can influence people by changing how you present them with information and choices is sound, and it's a vital part of marketing at a time when people interact with brands in a million different places beyond ads and shop shelves.

Stuck on repeat

A lot of the scepticism towards nudging and behavioural economics more generally was born out of the so-called replication crisis. Around a decade ago, psychologists began repeating old experiments using more rigorous statistical analysis after a professor at Cornell University used traditional methods to 'prove' that people were psychic. Of the 100 studies that were repeated, only 36 came out with their findings intact.

Behavioural priming – a subset of nudge theory concerned with how subtle



environmental cues influence people's behaviour – fared especially badly. Several experiments were debunked, including the famous 'Florida' study, which claimed that people moved more slowly after they were exposed to words that reminded them of old age.

Rory Sutherland, vice chairman of Ogilvy UK and one of the advertising industry's biggest proponents of nudging, was never convinced by the Florida study, he says, because he couldn't understand why it was to anyone's advantage to move more slowly after being exposed to cues about the elderly. But the methodological mistakes and false findings revealed by the replication

crisis have not changed his mind about nudging or priming.

'[The replication crisis] is not a refutation of behavioural science; it's a refutation of certain experiments and false assumptions made by behavioural scientists,' says Sutherland. 'We don't discount the whole of physics simply because some theories are proved to be wrong.'

Sutherland's isn't a crank opinion, either. There are many psychologists who accept that the replication crisis did their field a good service and are wary of any experiments that claim strong effects on large swathes of people but who still believe in the principle of priming.

'I still have no doubts whatsoever that in real life, behaviour priming works, despite the fact that in the old days, we didn't study it properly relative to current standards,' Dutch professor Ap Dijksterhuis told science journal *Nature* in 2019.

Context is everything

To return to the zero-effects paper, not even that was a clear-cut refutation of nudge theory. For one, its treatment of publication bias is open to question. Richard Shotton, founder of behavioural economics consultancy Astroten, says the findings are based upon an assumption of 'severe bias' that the authors admit is only 'partially supported' by the data. This is a crucial bit of detail that has been absent from the discussion about the paper, argues Shotton.

But even if you accept the finding, the average effect size figure masked a lot of the variation within the individual results. 'All intervention categories and domains apart from "finance" show evidence for heterogeneity,' wrote the authors, 'which implies that some nudges might be effective, even when there is evidence against the mean effect.'

The point is that nudging – like all behavioural economics – is highly context and subject dependent.

'In behavioural science there aren't really rules, there are patterns,' says Sutherland. 'People do not obey abso-

lutely fixed laws of behavioural science.'

Sutherland gives the example of the choice paradox, which states that people become paralysed when they are faced with too many options and fail to buy anything.

'That is something which I can only describe as both true and not true,' he says. 'Someone who is in a hurry and needs to buy jam will probably be slightly put off by a choice of 86 different kinds of jam. But equally, if you've driven 25 miles with your family to visit a shop called World of Jam, you probably won't go into the shop and say, "Oh, no, it's just too much choice!" It depends on a whole variety of external contextual factors. But it is true under certain circumstances, and therefore it is worthy of consideration.'

Bamboo-zled

Even if nudging was proved to be nonsense, says Sutherland, it would still be useful because it forces agencies to pay attention to parts of the customer experience that are otherwise ignored.

'Ad agencies are a bit like pandas,' explains Sutherland. 'Part of the panda's problem is it only really eats bamboo, which is why they tend to be a bit endangered. And advertising agencies only eat brand communication budgets.'

For the longest long time, agencies' mono diet wasn't a problem. 'Markets have always been complex, interdepend-

'We don't discount the whole of physics simply because some theories are proved to be wrong'

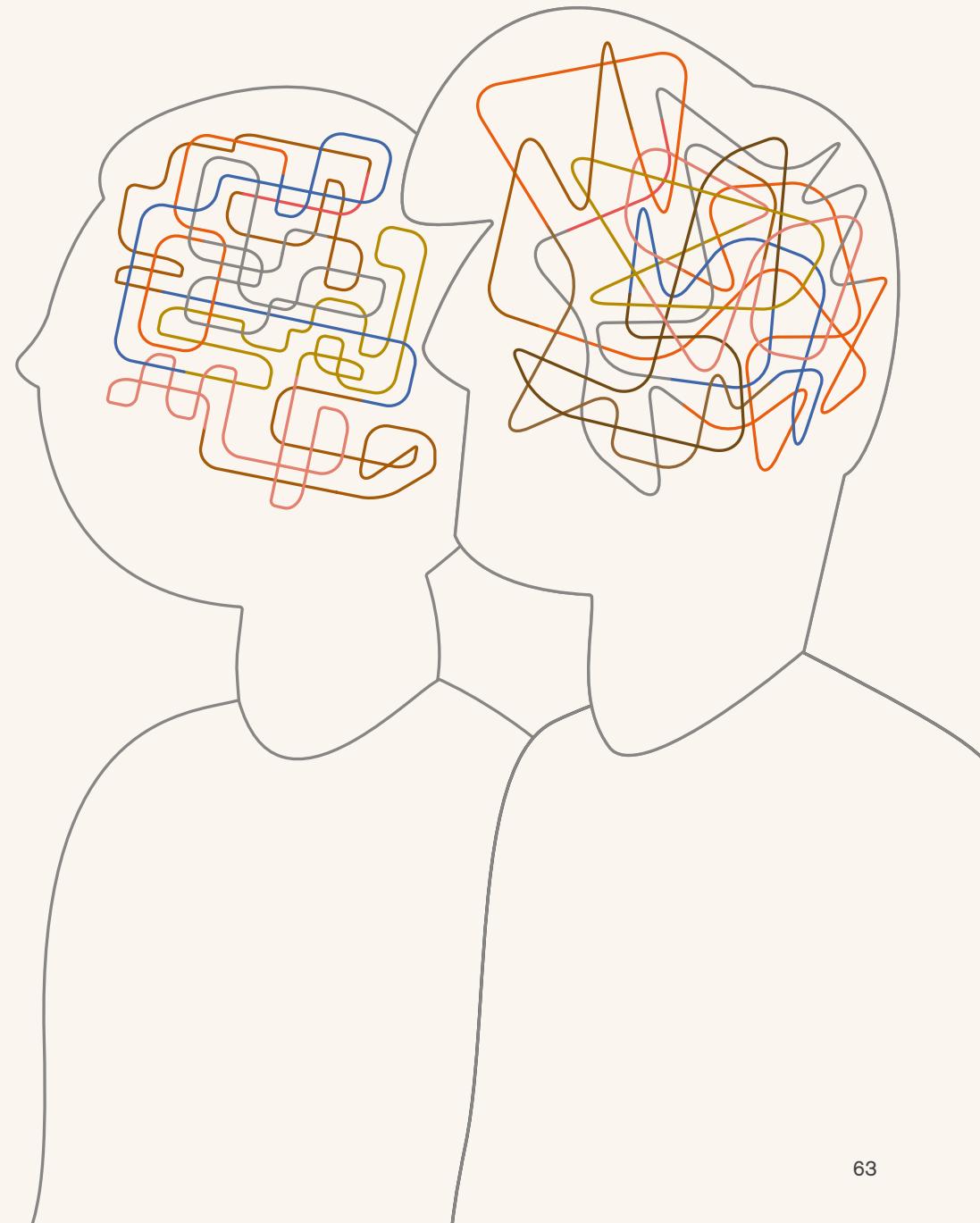
Rory Sutherland, Ogilvy UK

ent, emergent systems,' says Sutherland, but in a world of mass media and products picked from shop shelves, it was 'wrong but nonetheless relatively safe' to pretend that it was all about the brand – because it quite often was.

'But there are so many other areas where you could fall at the last fence now,' says Sutherland. 'In the modern world there are multiple touchpoints with both brand-building opportunities and also brand-killing possibilities attached to them.'

In the pre-digital era most brands had the luxury (or constraint) of interacting with customers only through ads and retailers. Today they're expected to meet their buyers in a variety of different media channels and touchpoints, and all of them count. A brand can do great advertising but will still lose customers if its janky website makes it painful to buy its products.

The great thing about nudging, says Sutherland, is that 'it isn't just neutral about the media, it's also neutral



about the scale at which it looks at a problem'.

'Whenever there is a bottleneck or an element of friction,' he explains, 'then the place to intervene in the overall system is where the bottleneck lies.'

Electric cars like Tesla and the Mustang Mach 8 for instance have great brands, but a lot of people are still unwilling to buy into the category because of range anxiety, the fear that their battery will die with nowhere around to charge it. That's a problem at the scale of the category that can't be fixed with brand advertising. The solution could be category advertising, says Sutherland, or it could be to 'make electric car charging points insanely visible by putting laser light shows on them, so that everybody thinks there's really a lot of them around and most of them are unoccupied'.

Do your homework

The other thing about the turmoil within behavioural economics is that a lot of it just isn't that relevant to the ad industry. Critics have accused governments of using nudges to solve problems that request systemic reforms, effectively slapping cost-effective sticking plasters on great gaping wounds. They have a point, but it's not of concern to brands. Similarly, scientists have to worry about things like effect sizes; marketers and agencies don't. The only question they

have to answer about a nudge is, 'Are we better off doing it than not?'

'What if [a nudge] gets one person to do something very profitable and then gets nine people to do something marginally less profitable?' asks Sutherland. 'Are you right in saying that this doesn't work? It might work on the 10th try so well that you don't have to worry about the effect on the other nine.'

Being ruthlessly practical about nudging gives marketers a lot of leeway, but it does also require a lot of testing. Not all of this testing has to be grand and laborious, though. While some of Ogilvy's work involves big interventions, a lot of it is optimising for the best response. 'It's a much more conservative, evolutionary way of looking at things,'

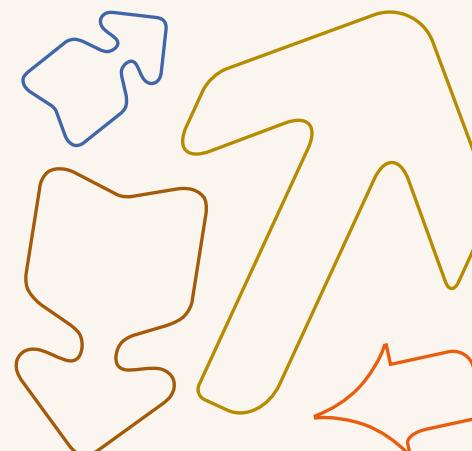
says Tara Austin, a consulting partner at Ogilvy's behavioural science practice.

In one example, Ogilvy was looking for ways to promote AU\$2 large fries for KFC in Australia, and after testing nine different propositions (whittled down from a longlist of around 90), they settled on 'max 4 per peeps'. This line introduced scarcity to the proposition by putting a limit on the number of fries customers could buy, and created an anchor (or norm) around buying four portions.

'We put that winning proposition live in the market and did a radio test, and we saw in this district of South Australia something like a 56% increase in chip sales,' says Austin. 'It's not something that anyone would have put on the table otherwise, but testing allowed us to do that.'

Survival of the nudge

The more we learn about behavioural economics the more we realise how little of it is fixed in stone. For instance, the endowment effect – where people think the things they own are worth more than they are – was previously thought to be hardwired into the human brain. But in his 2020 book, *The Weirdest People In The World*, professor of evolutionary biology Joseph Henrich recounted an experiment that suggested this bias was in fact a product of cultural evolution and absent in societies



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that were never exposed to commercial markets.

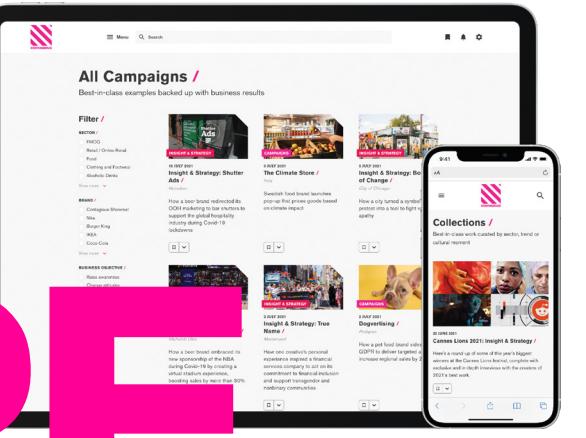
Likewise, social proof is a well-established bias that dictates that if you want people to do something you should tell them how many other people already do it, and yet Wikipedia has consistently found that it receives more donations after publishing messages about how few people support the site.

None of this means that those nudges are useless or invalid, just that they are impossible to generalise and will always tend to do badly when framed within strict debates about whether they 'work' or not.

'The best we can do,' offers Sutherland, 'is to say, "I can't tell you that this will work, but I can tell you, it's emphatically worth trying," because it might work insanely well, given that it doesn't cost very much to do.' ■



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