CONTAGIOUS PIONEERS 2023

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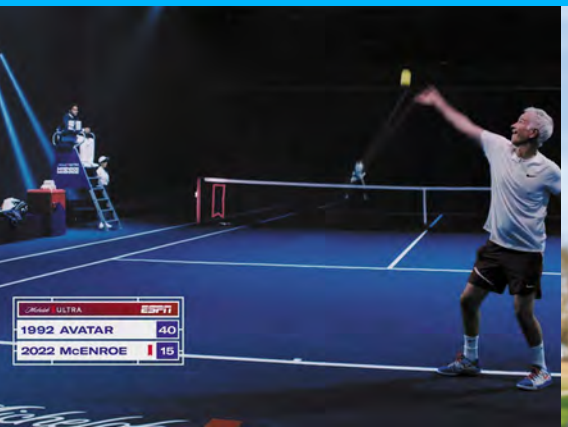
The best and bravest agencies on the planet



Introducing the CONTAGIOUS PIONEERS 2023 /

Our managing partner Alex Jenkins wrote in December that there was 'a nearly complete lack of visually iconic work' in 2022 and we stand by that assessment.

You may think that's an uncharitable way to introduce a report about creative agencies, but what good are we as a source of creative intelligence if we can't be honest when we notice a slump?

And talking about a downturn in memorable ads does nothing to diminish this year's crop of Pioneer agencies. We didn't drop our standards in 2022 to accommodate lesser work. We still subjected every campaign to the same rigorous editorial filter before putting them on our Contagious IQ intelligence platform.

And our Pioneer agencies still had to outperform their peers against a range of metrics, including the number of campaigns featured, whether their work was selected for more in-depth coverage or made an Editor's Pick, and whether an agency produced outstanding ads for multiple clients or just one.

The only difference is that this year the agencies had to clear our hurdles while also dealing with whatever economic malaise, societal angst or media disruption contributed to the dearth of iconic work. Good for them.

Read on to discover campaigns by what we believe are the best and bravest agencies on the planet – created under truly pioneering conditions.

CONTAGIOUS PIONEERS 2023 /

- AMV BBDO, London
- BETC Paris
- Colenso BBDO, Auckland
- Edelman, New York
- FCB New York
- Gut Miami
- Mother, London
- Ogilvy India, Mumbai

Contents

04 **Brothers: Bringing The Game To Life / Guinness Africa**
AMV BBDO, London

08 **#TattooDuoOver / Duolingo**
BETC Paris

10 **Beyond Binary Code / Spark**
Colenso BBDO, Auckland

12 **Wear 'Em Out / eBay**
Edelman, New York

14 **McEnroe Vs McEnroe / Michelob Ultra**
FCB, New York

16 **Real Tone / Google**
Gut Miami

20 **Here For It / H&M**
Mother, London

22 **Valentine's Day Alibi / Cadbury 5 Star**
Ogilvy India, Mumbai

Brothers: Bringing the Game to Life

AMV BBDO helped Guinness capture the spirit of African football fans to capitalise on World Cup fever and deepen the brand's emotional connection with the continent

In the run up to the 2022 Fifa World Cup in Qatar, Diageo's Guinness aired a 30-second ad highlighting the passion and community spirit of African football fans.

The spot, called Brothers: Bringing the Game to Life, was the latest creative from Guinness's Black Shines Brightest brand platform that was introduced in 2021. The ad follows the relationship between Nigerian brothers, Abidemi and Miracle, with Abidemi explaining how his brother helps to bring football to life when they watch a game. It's only at the end of the ad that its revealed Miracle is blind, with Abidemi noting that 'Football is not just about what we see. But what we feel'. The ad was released on 1 November and ran on social, TV and OOH across various African markets over the last two months of 2022. To discover more about Guinness's links to football and its Black Shines Brightest brand platform, Contagious caught up with the global marketing manager at Guinness, Olawale Adetula, and AMV BBDO's strategy partner, Joe Smith.

How popular is Guinness in Africa and what's the history of the Irish stout on the continent?

Olawale Adetula: The first record of Guinness on the continent was from Sierra Leone in 1827, meaning we have been in Africa for almost 200 years. Guinness is a truly pan-African brand, present in over 50 countries [and] is more than a beer in the mind of consumers – it's an iconic brand that is hugely trusted and respected. We opened our first brewery in Lagos in 1962 (the first outside of the UK and Ireland), with several more hot on the heels across Africa. We are therefore seen as a brand that is part of the fabric of local African communities.

Who is Guinness's target audience in Africa?

Adetula: [Guinness is] an extremely distinctive brand with a unique offering, so [identifying] opportunities for us to offer unrivalled experiences and stand out [from]

the crowd will always be there. Not only that, but we also need to make sure our brand consistently appeals to a wide range of consumers. Historically, Guinness has perhaps been seen as traditionally a male drink but the launch of Guinness Smooth and our Black Shines Brightest platform over the last few years has seen us attract a new generation of diverse Guinness fans.

Why did Guinness create the Black Shines Brightest brand platform for the African market and what was the insight that inspired this creative direction?

Adetula: We wanted to be more colourful, more creative and more contemporary to reflect the power of the emerging generation in Africa, while ensuring we still appealed to audiences as a whole. [To do this], we unapologetically shifted the tone, look and feel of Guinness, while keeping true to our core values of power, goodness and communion. At the core of Black Shines Brightest is a deep cultural insight [that reflects] the role that Guinness can play within that context. We know that younger generations across Africa, in particular, are coming together to create their own future, in their own way, and carving their own path. The boldness of our execution against that insight has been a real shift for the brand.

What were the key challenges and business objectives set in the brief?

Joe Smith: The objectives were to increase brand love among football fans and to help the Black Shines Brightest campaign

continue to recruit new consumers for Guinness in Africa. Guinness already has a strong connection with football in Africa – similar to the brand's connection with rugby in Great Britain and Ireland – largely due to the brand sponsoring DSTV's [Digital Satellite Television] coverage of the Premier League across the continent. Guinness is the number one beer brand associated with football in Africa and we have been working in and around football for well over a decade. Guinness is the English Premier League broadcast sponsor in Africa and we have delighted our consumers with unique football events and experiences that include engagement with top ex-EPL stars such as Rio Ferdinand and Thierry Henry. We needed to come up with an idea that could give Guinness a clearer point of view and voice. [In essence], what's [Guinness's] take on the beautiful game and what makes it special?

Did you conduct any research to help inform the direction of the Brothers campaign? What were the key insights?

Smith: We drew upon extensive consumer research from last year and consulted with our creative council throughout the process. The Guinness Creative Council is a diverse group of influencers, all based in Africa, who help to guide our approach across major campaigns. One of the key insights behind the campaign was the relationship between individuals and groups [in sport]. Football is a collective obsession, it bonds you with both friends and strangers. Those you grew up with and those you've never met. But [people can] still make a difference [on an individual level by] starting the singing, sharing their infectious passion [or] bringing people with them. Guinness wanted to celebrate these people, who make the beautiful game brighter for all.

We needed to come up with an idea that could give Guinness a clearer point of view and voice

Joe Smith, AMV BBDO

How did the Brothers concept originate?

Smith: We briefed the [creative] team using real stories as inspiration, [including] examples of individuals in different African

Everything matters. The wardrobe, the music, the cameo from the goat. Being memorable always wins

Joe Smith, AMV BBDO

countries who've made football brighter in some way. We reviewed four or five ideas, but the Brothers script really stood out and brought the strategy to life in a really powerful way. We set about finding our brothers and it was very important to everyone that the lead character was genuinely blind or visually impaired, as well as living in Nigeria or having Nigerian heritage. Once we saw Miracle's casting tape, we knew we had our hero.

Although this ad stars two Nigerian brothers, did you want this story to transcend one specific country and feel targeted to people across all African countries?

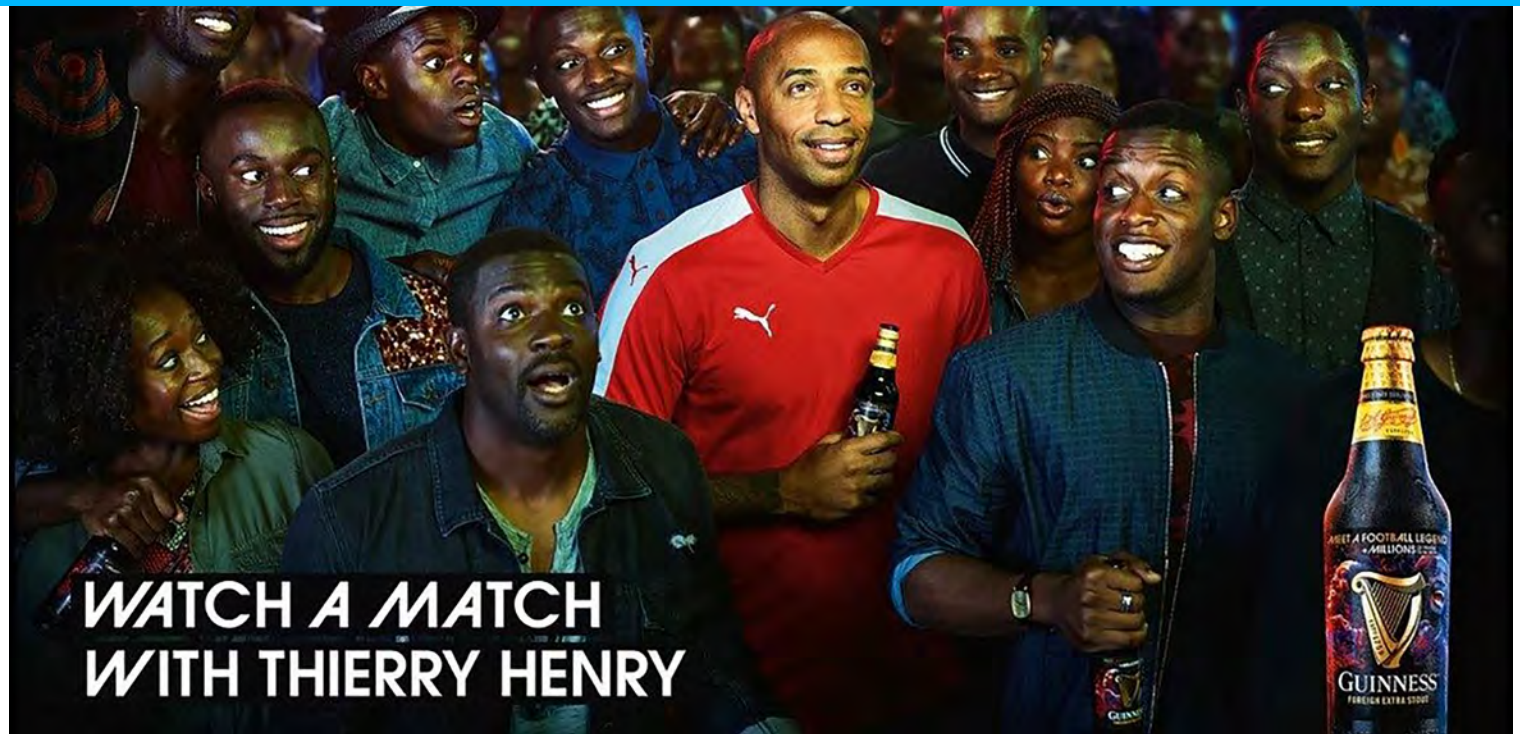
Smith: Yes, absolutely. Nigeria is a key market and has been since the 1820s, when Guinness first arrived there, but this campaign had to work across Africa. Football is the continent's biggest obsession and we wanted to capture that energy in the work. We avoided showing specific team shirts or locations. Instead, we wanted to celebrate Africa's passion for football and the prominent role it plays in culture.

Did you consult people from the blind and visually impaired community for the spot?

Smith: Throughout this process we worked with people from the blind and VI [visually impaired] community to make sure that we were representing an authentic experience in everything we did. It was important to us to understand the blind experience and portray it in a way that was positive, empowering and inclusive. With our AMV x Open Inclusion partnership, we undertook research of the script and concept with members of the blind and VI communities in Kenya. We heard directly from them that this ad was important to help change people's perceptions in Africa for what it means to be blind or visually impaired. Focusing on a blind football fan who is likeable, self-assured and a leader – even among sighted people – was liked as a positive example of inclusion in Africa.

How did Guinness map out success for the campaign?

Adetula: Following the launch of Black Shines Brightest, we wanted to show how the platform connects with the work that we do within football. We wanted to expand Guinness' appeal in culture through the lens of football and position the brand at the centre of football culture while generating brand awareness and improving meaning.



How does a brand like Guinness stand out and earn attention during a noisy event like the World Cup, especially when your brand isn't an official partner?

Smith: It's true that there is no shortage of football content that we are competing with at the moment. [But], this wasn't a World Cup brief [and] this campaign will run into 2023 and is deliberately not limited to international football. [However, to] stand out means having an original story to tell and doing so with craft and care. Everything matters. The wardrobe, the music, the cameo from the goat. Being memorable always wins.

Tell us about the media plan in place – how did you ensure this would create noise?

Smith: The campaign includes a significant pan-African TV presence across general entertainment channels in November and December. In some markets this is supported by local TV channels [to] extend the reach, [while] also including outdoor and social formats, such as short-form video, reels and stories. The work is part of a broader football plan in Africa, which includes collaborations with influencers and creators, around the theme of making football brighter for all.

What early results can you share from the campaign?

Adetula: The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive from consumers and customers in our markets and we have already seen an increase in online share of voice for Guinness. It's a very fresh and unique piece of work that is helping us to engage both existing and new consumers in a different way.

How does this campaign fit into the long-term strategy and brand building of Guinness?

Adetula: Black Shines Brightest represents a significant shift for Guinness in Africa, a long-term platform to underpin everything the brand does, from product to football to sustainability. We believe it is a rich platform for creativity that has the ability to build long-term memory structures and positive associations. This football campaign is a perfect expression of Black Shines Brightest. It has the energy, ingenuity and swagger that we want Guinness to represent. The TV execution also fits our creative strategy, moving away from the brand's linear storytelling past to a richer and more immersive approach, where the viewer is invited in to be part of the world we were creating.

What have been your greatest learnings from the previous Black Shines Brightest work that you've brought forward into this latest campaign?

Smith: I'd sum it up with three words: Authenticity, energy and character. Authenticity, because the work is better when we showcase real people, expressing their true selves. Energy, because the brand is at its best when we manage to bottle the dynamism and optimism of our audience. This energy influences everything from the pacing of the TV ad to the imagery chosen for outdoor. And character, because compelling characters will always be at the heart of Black Shines Brightest. Ultimately, [those are] the people who pull you in and make you want to be part of our world.

#TattooDuoOver

BETC Paris was behind Duolingo's offer to fix foreign-language tattoos gone wrong

For 2022's World Tattoo Day, Duolingo invited people to share their foreign-language tattoos on social media for the chance to win a trip to Paris. The submitted ink was checked by the brand's team of translators to see if the lettering spelled out something different than was intended.

For two weeks, starting from 21 March, users from all over the world were encouraged to share photos of their tattoo on Twitter or Instagram to @duolingofrance and @ duolingouk using the hashtag #tattooduoover.

Those who shared their disastrous designs were in with the chance of winning a free trip to Paris to get them fixed at tattoo parlour Abraxas. Anyone sharing a tattoo for inspection was offered a month's free subscription to Duolingo Plus.

Created by BETC Paris, the campaign launched with a promotional film featuring a mischievous tattoo artist poking fun at overzealous tourists getting ill-advised ink.

According to the agency, the campaign gained over 500 million impressions overall, with 6 million organic views on the launch video. Duolingo's social media following increased by 167% across channels.

CONTAGIOUS INSIGHT /

Having a fiesta / Duolingo's raison d'être is to create language-learning habits by making the experience fun. Its brand personality is 'inspiring, inclusive, can-do and curious' – 'Knowing even a little bit of another language makes your life better. More interesting, more worldly, and more rich with possibility'. The brand invariably delivers on a silly sense of fun, notably on its TikTok account, which has built up over 3.4 million followers. #TattooDuoOver continues this established playful tone and is right in line with its brand purpose 'to make language learning a joy, not a chore'. To grab attention in an age when potential audiences are overwhelmed with content, focusing on fun and entertainment makes perfect sense. Speaking to us about showmanship, former global brand planning director at DDB Worldwide Paul Feldwick said, 'Giving the public ways to engage actively with the brand, talk about it, wear it, share it, argue about it [creates] social diffusion.' Here, Duolingo's light-hearted, silly campaign does just that.

En masse / Bad tattoos are a perennial source of amusement, as shown by the popularity of shows like E4's *Tattoo Fixers* and the social media buzz around prominent celebrity fails, such as Ariana Grande's 'small charcoal grill'. This campaign allows the brand to insert itself into an existing conversation, in a relevant way that showcases the value of using its product. Furthermore, by prompting interaction between brand and consumer on social media and inducing users to trial its product, it increases the likelihood of new customer relationships. It also gives people a reason to keep coming back to their social pages – enjoying the schadenfreude of people's bad choices. Duolingo's recent campaign Calling All Emilys similarly hijacked an existing social media conversation, jumping on the success of Netflix show *Emily in Paris*. In response to online mockery of the show's lead character for her unwillingness to learn the language of her host city, Duolingo offered anyone called Emily a free month of Duolingo Plus. Both campaigns speak to Duolingo having fun when it comes to demonstrating the value of learning a new language and its ability to engagingly tap into culture.

Beyond Binary Code

Spark launched a tool to make businesses more inclusive for those identifying beyond male or female, with help from Colenso BBDO

Spark, New Zealand's largest telecommunications and digital services provider, developed a piece of code and some tools to help businesses be inclusive and sensitive to those identifying beyond the binary gender labels of male and female.

Beyond Binary Code was created by Colenso BBDO, Auckland, with input from OutLine Aotearoa (a mental health organisation) and people from non-binary communities.

The crux of the campaign was a single piece of HTML code that could be added to company websites to make data forms and fields gender inclusive, as well as ensuring that companies only ask for information that is needed. The project was reportedly two years in the making and launched on 21 February.

Simon Vicars, chief creative officer for Colenso BBDO, said in a press release: 'For lots of people, filling in an online form is a simple box-ticking exercise. But for people who identify beyond male or female, it can reinforce the feeling that society doesn't acknowledge them. Beyond Binary Code has the power to rectify this – to help rewrite the internet to see more than two genders. We're proud to finally see the idea out in the world, and excited to see the difference it can make.'

According to the campaign website, the base code instantly creates an inclusive form that's right for most businesses. The best practice code can be added or adjusted to fit the backend of a company's website, ensuring that the site is using terminology co-created by non-binary communities.

There are also supporting materials to help businesses apply good data privacy practices, get stakeholder buy-in and create change within the organisation, including how to create safer spaces both online and offline for customers and employees.

Spark New Zealand marketing director Matt Bain stated in a press release: 'Beyond Binary Code intersects two key ambitions at Spark – helping Kiwis have a better relationship with their data, and to champion diversity and inclusion within Spark and Aotearoa.'

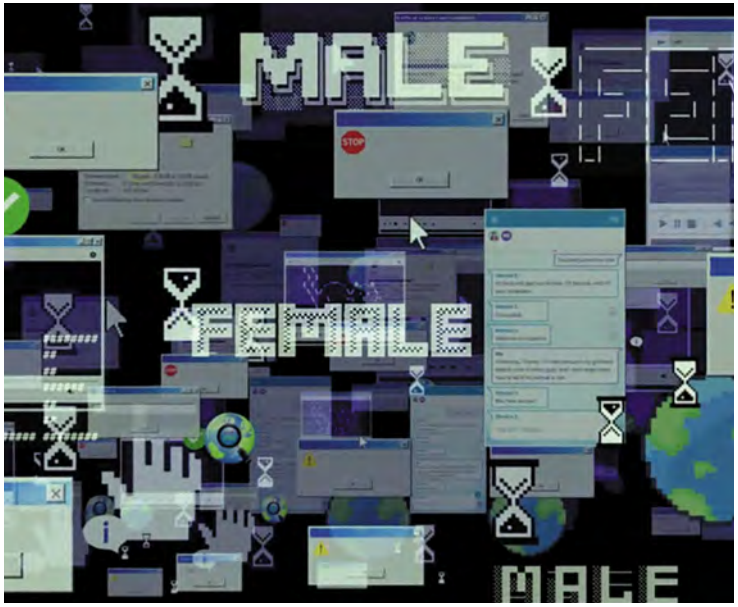
CONTAGIOUS INSIGHT /

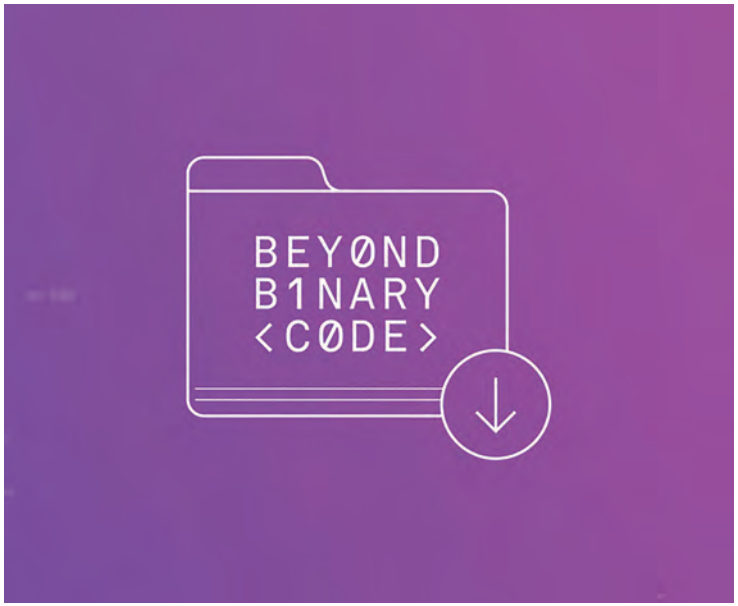
Sharing is caring / When it comes to brands and social responsibility, generosity is key. Spark has a history of empowering marginalised groups and taking a stand on social issues – for another example, look no further than its Māori translation app. Instead of simply making the Beyond Binary Code for its own use, the brand has decided to make it open to all. Leading by example and showing other brands how it's done means that the brand is positioning itself as forward thinking and socially aware. By not gatekeeping its technology, but rather using it to do good, Spark strengthens its commitment to social equality in the eyes of the consumer. It's a sound choice, considering how social responsibility is becoming increasingly important for brands: according to Fox Business, more than 90% of shoppers worldwide are likely to switch to brands that

support a good cause, given similar price and quality. Creating an emotional connection to a utilitarian market such as telecom is no easy feat, but it evidently pays off.

Make yourself useful / In a new gender data survey of non-binary participants conducted by Spark, it is revealed that 84% of respondents felt often or always misrepresented when sharing their gender information online with a business or organisation. What's more, 89% said that they would be more likely to repurchase from businesses who offer a positive experience when collecting gender data. Statistics like these showcase how important it is for brands to strive to be as inclusive as possible.

Beyond Binary Code brings to mind Mastercard's True Name campaign. Instead of simply virtue signalling and plastering a rainbow flag across its website, Spark is providing a resource that constructively improves the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. Like True Name, the campaign was developed alongside non-binary communities, ensuring that they were heard every step of the way – giving the brand an authentic way to show its support. As Pierre Lipton, EVP global executive creative director at McCann New York, told Contagious when discussing Mastercard's campaign: 'I believe firmly, for any client, that the most effective and important way you can support a cause is through your core competency. It's examining how what you do every day can affect the world at large if you make adjustments.





Wear 'Em Out

EBay's pop-up shop offering discounts on sneakers worn out of the store – the brainchild of Edelman – earned 740 million media impressions

Sneaker retailers are constantly battling sneaker bots and resellers who snap up stock within seconds of a launch, only for the in-demand designs to then be resold at an extortionate markup. During Memorial Day weekend 2022 (28-30 May), online marketplace eBay opened a sneaker pop-up shop in Los Angeles to make waves addressing the issue.

At the Wear 'Em Out store, sneakerheads could either pay full price and keep their sneakers in mint condition (and so retain their value for resale), or they could get a 70% discount by wearing the shoes out of the store. Customers who chose the latter option walked on a custom-built path of grass, gravel, and concrete on their way out to guarantee that the sneakers could not be resold as new. The experience was filmed and immediately sent to the shoppers to share on their social platforms.

EBay collaborated on the pop-up with rapper Offset, who is known for his high-value sneaker collection. The musician curated the display, which featured sneakers from Nike, Jordan, Yeezy and New Balance. Shoppers could get their hands on coveted models like the Jordan 1 Retro High OG Patent Bred and the Yeezy Boost 700 Wave Runner.

The store was created with Edelman, New York, and drew a lengthy line of customers over the weekend, with some camping out overnight to get the best possible spot in line.

In a comment to Contagious, Edelman's EVP and executive creative director, Jeremy Bernstein, and its EVP and head of strategy, Jeremy Busch, said: 'The community behind eBay is the true differentiator for the brand. As the largest and oldest sneaker marketplace, we saw this as a moment for eBay to remind people that there's more to sneakers than making a quick buck and bring a bit of the "culture" back to "sneaker culture".'

In December 2022, eBay followed this up with a similar experience in Portland, Oregon, to honour the late founder of Nike SB, Sandy Bodecker. The Skate 'Em Out pop-up featured some of the most popular Nike SB releases for the original 2022 retail price of $65. But there was a catch: to ensure that real skateboarders bought the shoes, customer had to skate the shoes out of the store.

According to the agency, the campaign generated over 280 million earned impressions and more than 152 million social interactions. Also, shortly after the activation sneaker sales on eBay were up 25% over the previous year.

We saw this as a moment for eBay to remind people that there's more to sneakers than making a quick buck

Jeremy Busch, Edelman

Ultimately, the campaign is a way for eBay to connect with both the sneaker buyer and seller community and showcase that it truly understands sneakerhead culture

CONTAGIOUS INSIGHT /

Back to your roots / EBay is known for selling items across a wide array of categories, so this campaign is a way for the brand to cement itself as a reputable shopping destination for sneakerheads specifically. It's no surprise that sneakers are one of the categories that eBay is putting its marketing spend behind, given that the used sneaker market is expected to be worth $30bn by 2030, according to Cowen Research. As Jamie Iannone, chief executive of eBay, told the *Financial Times* in October 2022, eBay's hope is that these customers who make high end purchases in one category, such as sneakers, will then spend in others, increasing the retailer's market share among its resale competitors.

But eBay has its work cut out for it when it comes to sneakers, with stiff competition from newer fashion and streetwear-focused resale marketplaces such as StockX, Goat, The RealReal and Poshmark. As a 2021 HighSnobiety article notes, the retailer's challenge is that it is 'home to a mishmash of, well, pretty much everything… it's a platform based on quantity, not quality'. However, as Jeremy Bernstein, EVP, executive creative director and Jeremy Busch, EVP, head of strategy from Edelman told Contagious, 'While newer platforms like StockX arguably make it easier to buy and sell unworn sneakers, only eBay enables sneakerheads to buy and sell new and pre-worn sneakers.' So how does eBay stand out, and show it really understands sneakerheads? By...

… supporting the seller community / According to a recent eBay survey, more than 1,000 sneaker lovers wear less than half of their collections. The Wear 'Em Out campaign acknowledges that sneaker sellers are torn between wanting to sell their shoes at a markup and wanting to wear them. As Garry Thaniel, general manager of sneakers at eBay, told Essence, 'You have this subset of people […] who are our sellers that sometimes will be able to get releases and may not sell them because the sneakers are alternative forms of investment now, where the price appreciates and people feel like wearing them will diminish the value.'

In a context where sellers are buyers and vice versa, this campaign does not tell people that they shouldn't resell their sneakers. Instead, it turns the shopping experience into an event by rewarding customers for wearing their shoes, celebrating them for wearing them out of the store. By framing the discount as a choice (and an opportunity for a social flex too), eBay shows that it understands how lucrative never-worn sneakers can be, while encouraging customers to enjoy their purchases and live in the moment. The novelty of the discount mechanism also helped drive PR and positions eBay as a destination for both new and pre-owned sneakers. Meanwhile, Offset's stamp of approval as a major sneaker collector (he has more than 3,000 pairs) gives the campaign an added air of authenticity among sneaker fans. Ultimately, the campaign is a way for eBay to connect with both the sneaker buyer and seller community and showcase that it truly understands sneakerhead culture.

McEnroe vs McEnroe

FCB New York used augmented reality tech to pitch tennis legend John McEnroe against his younger self for Michelob Ultra

Michelob Ultra served up a ground-breaking activation in May 2022 with what was billed as the world's first hybrid tennis match – McEnroe vs McEnroe. The event, which involved a surreal blend of physical and virtual action, saw 1980s tennis icon John McEnroe take on what was so often his Achilles' heel – youthful exuberance. Leveraging augmented reality and machine learning technology, Michelob created a bespoke tennis court that allowed the former Superbrat to play against five versions of himself over the course of 45 minutes.

Each avatar was shaped and informed by myriad set data points gleaned from game footage taken from different stages of McEnroe's storied career. His eerily familiar opponents were then conjured to life through the combined magic of Unreal Engine simulations and robotic ball return machines. This remarkably complex stunt represented an extension of the brand's creative platform 'It's Only Worth It If You Enjoy It'. The core idea was that McEnroe would have the opportunity to reflect on his mercurial playing career and finally appreciate the achievements of his youth.

Developed in collaboration with Michelob Ultra's creative partners FCB New York, the match was broadcast on ESPN in May 2022 and promoted via 30-second ads on YouTube, the campaign also encompassed a multifaceted mix of media channels and production elements. These included 360 social coverage, sophisticated ecommerce integration, gamified engagement, and various cross-portfolio promotions.

This campaign picked up Gold Lions in both the Digital Craft and Innovation categories at the 2022 Cannes International Festival of Creativity. And according to the agency, the campaign attracted circa 10 million viewers during a one-hour free media slot on sports channel ESPN. The stunt was also covered by more than 120 media outlets in over 30 different countries. The AB InBev-owned brand also achieved a 95% increase in organic search while managing to return a 99% rate of positive social sentiment.

CONTAGIOUS INSIGHT /

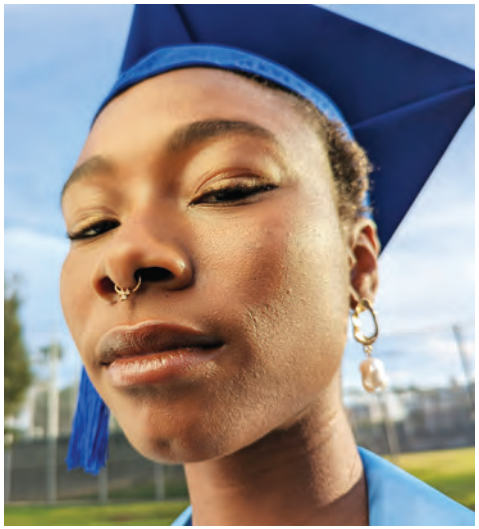
Competitive fixture / The campaign aims to build upon the brand's pandemic-inspired work that saw it win Gold at the 2021 Cannes Lions festival for the much vaunted Courtside activation. This latest instalment continues the brand's ongoing endeavour to position itself as a champion of an 'active enjoyment' lifestyle, a key battleground within the light beer category. One of Michelob's competitors in this low-calorie beer category is the Heineken owned brand Amstel Ultra. In 2021, Amstel Ultra signed up tennis player Rafael Nadal to be its global ambassador. While having a high-profile star associated with your brand has clear advantages, there are also certain alcohol related codes restricting the use of active athletes in a sporting context. However, with this particular approach, Michelob has subtly managed to circumvent any such concerns by using a highly recognisable ex-pro as their campaign figurehead.

Courting controversy / McEnroe is a controversial figure in comparison to Rafael Nadal's more clean-cut persona. The explosive on-court tirades that chequered the former world number one's career have been followed in retirement by some divisive observations on the ability of female tennis players. Incidentally, Michelob Ultra has featured Serena Williams in its 2022 Super Bowl campaign. But the decision to eschew her services on this occasion likely reflects a refined targeting strategy that aimed to attract an older demographic – a cohort among whom John McEnroe would potentially have greater resonance.

Game, set, machine / While many brands are currently experimenting with the burgeoning metaverse, this campaign illustrates how Michelob is instead electing to focus its efforts on the hybrid realm of mixed reality. This territory offers the brand scope for innovation while also better aligning with its overarching drive to facilitate and support active lifestyles. Furthermore, the activation highlights how machine learning and gaming technology can be leveraged to produce branded content that people are willing to consume through traditional broadcast channels. This execution wasn't just confined to a small streaming corner of the internet, it was designed for mass appeal and was sufficiently compelling to earn a primetime slot on ESPN.

Real Tone

Gut Miami helped Google promote its latest smartphones by highlighting its inclusive imaging tech during the 2022 Super Bowl



In October 2021, Google unveiled its flagship Pixel 6 and Pixel 6 Pro smartphones to rival those by competitors Apple and Samsung. One of their distinguishing capabilities is the Real Tone feature, a software that ensures the cameras can accurately capture different skin tones.

To drum up awareness about the issue of image equity and draw attention to Google's solution, the tech giant launched a 60-second spot that aired during the 2022 Super Bowl. The ad, which premiered during the third quarter of the game, begins with poorly shot images of people of colour while various narrators explain the issues that they have had with poor camera technology.

One man explains how every yearbook photo of himself has been terribly shot since he was a child. Another woman comments on how every photo of herself shows up too dark or shiny. Following this, the words 'Until now' appear and a song by US singer Lizzo titled 'If You Love Me' begins to play, teeing up a collection of visually stunning images of people of colour – all taken using the Pixel 6 or Pixel 6 Pro.

The ad, which was created by Miami-based agency Gut, ends with the statement 'Everyone deserves to be seen as they truly are' and the hashtag #SeenOnPixel.

The campaign won a Grand Prix for Mobile at the 2022 Cannes Lions Festival for Creativity. Contagious caught up with Daryl Butler, vice president of marketing, devices and services at Google, as well as Monique Beauchamp, group account director at Gut, and Paulo Damasceno, senior art director at the agency, about the campaign.

What is Google's strategy to get ahead of the smartphone competition?
Daryl Butler: It doesn't start or stop with just the phone. If someone is going to be interested in Google as a product proposition, they will be thinking about the entire Google offering. It starts with an affinity they might have towards the brand, whether that's through Mail, Maps, Photos, and the like. Often, the services we offer actually work on a multitude of different platforms. What we're looking at now is if Google is in someone's life already based on the things they use every day, then how can we use that affinity to envelop them in the brand even more. And for us, that's bundling everything up in the Pixel device.

In some regards, the basic functionality of a smartphone is pretty similar from carrier to carrier. What we try to do to make Google stand out is to create technology that simplifies and facilitates the lives of consumers. When you think about Real Tone, what we are attempting is to give the user the ability to truly capture and chronicle their lives and reflect the reality of what they see. We haven't seen anybody else do that, so I think we can say that we are creating a point of differentiation.

Can you tell us more about how the Real Tone project began?
Butler: Camera technology is probably one of the most innovative things that our world has ever known. You could go as far as to say that we can only see into history because of this technology. But, it's also safe to say that it wasn't developed with multiple skin tones in mind – the baseline was primarily white and that's well acknowledged and documented. As we took a look at where we wanted to advance, we realised that not everybody was being seen as they wanted to be – literally and figuratively. That's what set things in motion for our team to start looking at the algorithms, the entire environment and so on to make sure that each photo is a true reflection of what's in front of the camera. This is a beginning of introducing the right ways for multiple skin tones to be reflected through camera technology, it's not the end.

Inclusivity has been on the agenda for brands for a while, why was now the right time to launch the Real Tone capability?
Butler: This has been a long-time coming, but Real Tone has been years in the making. This wasn't something that we took off the shelf, we've been working on building a more inclusive smartphone for around four or five years. The smartphone is a constant companion to most people, it's vital and it needs to truly serve the user rather than the user having to orbit around the technology. That was one of the things that we wanted to make sure we were thinking about, not only with Real Tone, but in general with the Google Pixel products; it has to adapt to the consumer's needs, wants, interests and purposes.

Where does this land between being a tech innovation and brand building initiative?
Butler: We didn't set out to create Real Tone because we wanted to reinforce the brand's point of view when it comes to diversity and inclusion. We set out to create technology that is a true reflection of the brand's existing point of view. We realise that there's still a lot of work for us to do in that regard, but we want to continue to reinforce that we are about being helpful at every turn. And this product is one of the ways that we can demonstrate that..

How important was collaboration to this process?
Butler: It was essential; technology can't advance in a vacuum. There's a reciprocating relationship that exists between technology and culture, they need each other; culture demands technology in order to advance and vice versa. When we set out to address this challenge, we needed to make sure that we had the right people in the room to speak with the right points of view. There were experts who understood all the nuances when it comes to image quality, but we also needed the cultural input of what matters to the people we were developing it for.

Were you concerned that Real Tone might get lost among all the other marketing noise around the Super Bowl?
Butler: If you look at the creative landscape of the Super Bowl, most of it is laden with high-profile celebrities and quirky humour. There's a sea of sameness in a lot of regards and we didn't want to be there; we wanted to land this story with a degree of gravity. Our goal was to make people stop, provoke thought and inspire people to investigate the conversation. Clearly, we're not going to completely solve the social issue of image equity with technology. But we wanted to take to the stage to point out the problem and talk about the ways we could address it with technology. We were confident we were going to stand out because we knew we would be different from the rest of the creative landscape.

Monique Beauchamp: The challenge for us was how to portray such an important and resonant message on a stage where people are having fun. Most spots show puppies, famous musicians, celebrities or what not. We had to find the balance to communicate the importance of Real Tone for diversity and the seriousness of the technological advance in a way people could connect with that didn't feel too jarring.

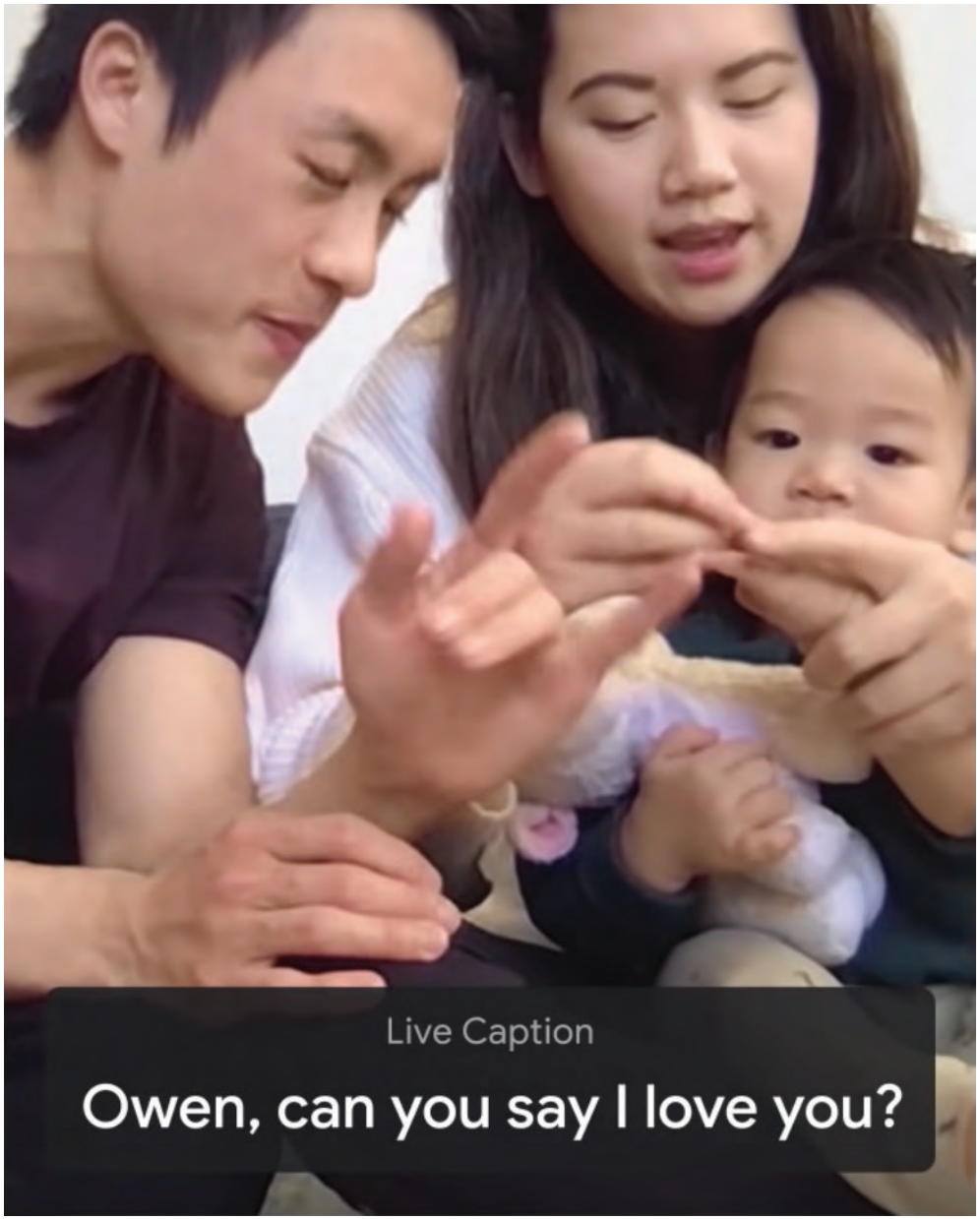
Tell me about the brief that you gave the agency for the spot.
Butler: A lot went into the brief. Firstly, we had to make sure that something as innovative as Real Tone could be understood in 60 seconds. Secondly, we told the agency that we have a great piece of technology, but it is designed to address a problem that some acknowledge and some don't even realise is an issue. We needed to land our solution in a meaningful and impactful way on the cluttered stage that is the Super Bowl.

Did you set any business objectives or KPIs?
Butler: We wanted reach, attention and conversation more than anything else. We knew we were stepping into a place that was going to be divisive because it hits home for a lot of people. But, other people were probably going to accuse us of calling cameras racist. Our view is that this is about skin tone, it's not even about race. What we really wanted to do was start a conversation because this isn't something that is going to stop with a 60-second Super Bowl spot. This is an opportunity for people to be seen as they really are and one way of doing that is through smartphone camera technology.

People were probably going to accuse us of calling cameras racist

Daryl Butler, Google

Paulo, what was your initial response when you heard the brief?
Paulo Damasceno: When a brief like this lands in front of you, all you can think is, 'Holy shit, this is amazing.' It's not every day that you get a brief that starts with, 'This is the most inclusive camera on Earth.' We realised the impact that this feature could have, but it was also a chance to celebrate innovation rather than ruminate on all the pain and suffering caused by a lack of representation in camera technology.



Did you do any research to inform the direction of the Super Bowl spot?
Butler: Quite a bit. It was crucial to represent people's real experiences and in order to get the final visually stunning piece, we had to hear about people's different life experiences. That's what started this whole thing in the first place. We didn't come up with the spot in the lab, we used real testimonies from real people who don't feel like they've been seen or who have had challenges with image quality from smartphone technology. People even chimed in and supported us by sharing imagery that reinforces this. We had to capture real challenges and show the power of technology.

Tell us a bit about the tone that you were hoping to strike.
Butler: The tone needed to be serious and emotionally charged, but we also wanted it to be celebratory. We wanted everyone to be able to see themselves on the other side of the camera and have a visceral reaction when they saw the spot. Whether that visceral reaction was positive or negative isn't really important because we just wanted the conversation to happen and folks to feel something, whatever side of the coin they might be on.

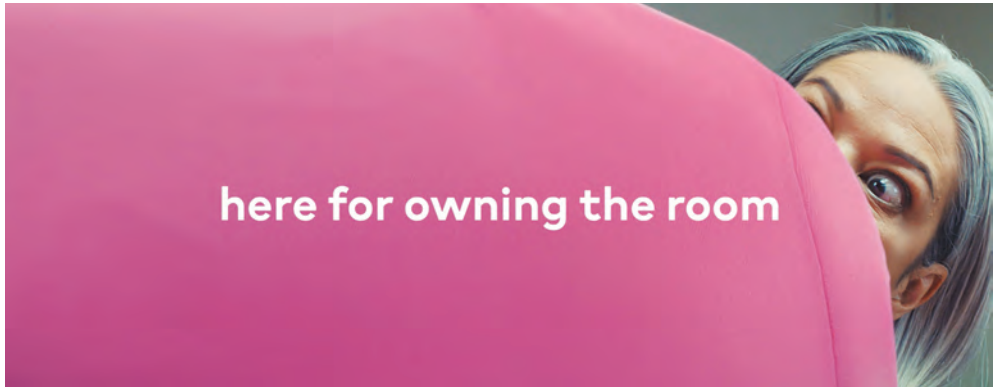
Did you do anything prior to the Super Bowl to drum up excitement?
Beauchamp: We released a teaser ahead of the Super Bowl, which was a sneak peak of Lizzo and her new song. Of course, we've had plenty of extensions since across media platforms like YouTube and social, as well as TV. We're trying to hit as many touchpoints as possible so it doesn't seem like a single Super Bowl moment, but as an extended message.

What results have you seen so far?
Beauchamp: At the moment, we can share that there was an 86% increase in searches for the Google Pixel 6 and a 400% increase in Google Store traffic. It was also the number one Super Bowl spot on News Week, there were over 1,000 publications writing about it worldwide and it was one of the top 20 Super Bowl spots on *USA Today*.

How does this campaign benefit the brand's long-term strategy?
Butler: Technology isn't going to solve a social issue, but it will start a conversation. Having planted the seed, Google's challenge is how to continue to innovate over the coming weeks, months and years. Technology has an impact on how we see ourselves because it's a mirror and it has to be a true reflection of who we are. There's an emotional and a psychological connection that comes with it, our long-term strategy is to continue to educate and democratise access to technology and this is the first step in that journey.

Here For It

H&M celebrated the relationship between young women and their wardrobes in an insight-rich campaign from Mother, London



In its debut work for fashion retailer H&M, agency Mother, London created a campaign that captures the influence of what we wear on how we feel.

In five 10-second spots we see the interplay between young women's fashion choices and moments in their lives. In one, a girl goes to a university lecture feeling naked without her earrings in, while in another ad we see a girl in an office setting, finding confidence in her choice of blazer.

Launched on 1 September 2022, as the target audience returned from summer breaks to school, university or into new jobs, the Here For It campaign aims to shine an honest light on how young women feel about fashion during formative experiences in their lives.

The films will be seeded on social, supported by an out-of-home campaign that builds on the Here For It platform: the slogans 'Here for shoes that make you feel tall', 'Here for whatever smart casual means' and 'Here for being the party' are placed over shots of young women wearing H&M outfits in different settings.

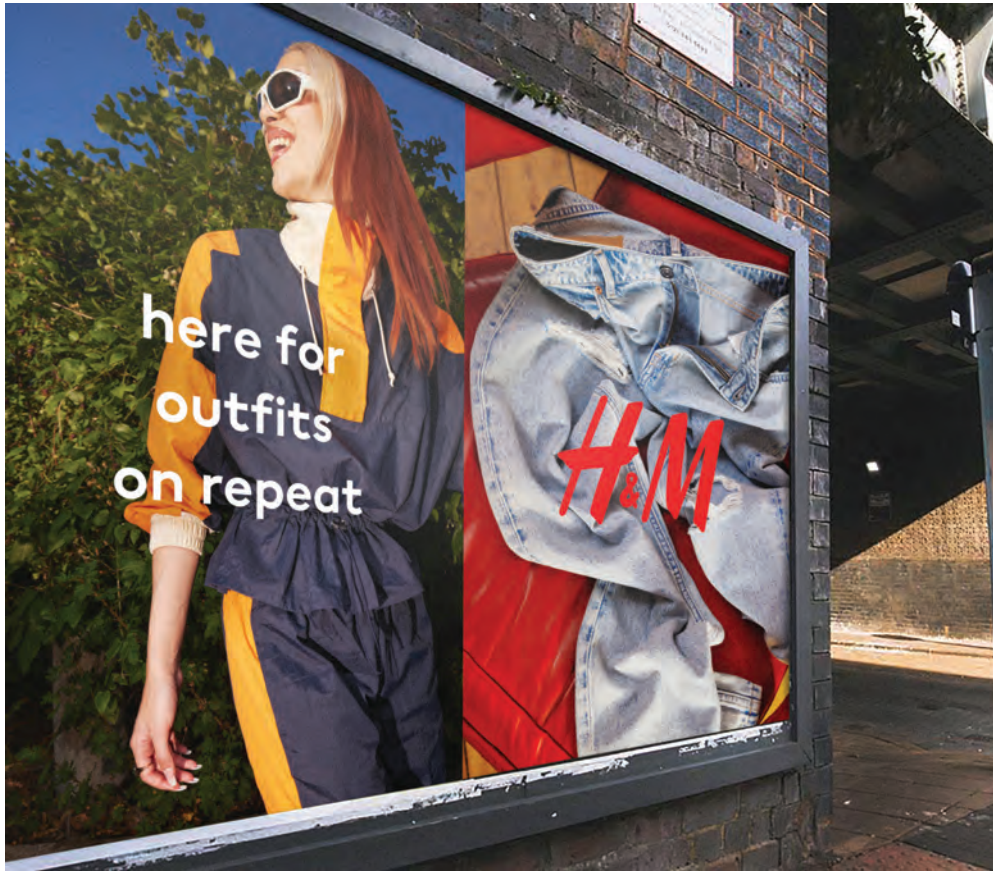
'The relationship between what we wear and how we feel runs deep,' said Paulina Kårelius, head of customer activation and marketing H&M UK&I, in a press release. 'We wanted this work to be an honest window into young womanhood. The Here for It platform talks truthfully about young women's relationship with fashion in all its complexity. Fashion can be the signaller of who we are, and something we want to hide behind. It can be where we find our confidence, and how we find our friends… It can improve how we feel about an entire day, and it can ruin an entire night.'

Throughout the rest of the year, H&M will work with content creators to continue adding to the Here For It platform, to add new and authentic perspectives on fashion that bring the concept to life. 'We stayed away from showing stereotypical "boss babes" or an overly perfect glossy aesthetic, instead presenting them in a way that was actually relatable and authentic for our audience,' added Jess Reynolds, creative director at Mother, London.

CONTAGIOUS INSIGHT /

Just right / There is no complex mechanism or hi-tech gimmick here – this social-first campaign is just an excellent example of how to communicate a human insight in a humorous and honest way. The short-form content is tailored for social media, and those 10 seconds convey perfectly the impact our clothing and accessories have on our mood. The spots are tender, truthful and funny, and wouldn't feel out of place among the kind of entertainment that the target audience is watching on TikTok and Instagram. By representing an array of common experiences and feelings among young women – going out, not wanting to go out, having nerves at work, dressing for a lecture at university, being complimented on your outfit in the women's toilets on a night out – the campaign is sure to resonate across the board. It's not overly sentimental, nor mired in clichés or unfashionable terms (eg, boss babes) that would age the creative; the social and out-of-home ads are relatable, likeable and reassuringly realistic.

Fast fashion feels / Last year we covered a campaign by Uncommon for H&M that similarly recognises the brand's role in young people's lives. The One/Second/Suit service offered free suit hire to support young men – for whom buying or renting a suit can be an unaffordable expense – going to job interviews. As well as encouraging trial and generating some goodwill, the idea reflected and reinforced the brand's positioning as a destination for aspirational young people looking for affordable clothing for every life occasion.



We stayed away from showing stereotypical 'boss babes'

Jess Reynolds, Mother

Campaigns like these challenge the negative perceptions people may have of a fast fashion brand like H&M; aligning specific looks and outfits with life occasions imbues them with emotion and significance, and tells the audience that the brand's clothes aren't disposable, they're meaningful parts of key experiences. As a brand of low-cost clothing, this is a clever way to add a layer of value.

Valentine's Day Alibi

Ogilvy India in Mumbai devised an ingenious way for Cadbury 5 Star to appeal to singles on Valentine's Day

To give singles something to say when asked about their plans for the most romantic day of the year, chocolate brand Cadbury 5 Star stepped in with its Valentine's Day Alibi campaign.

Working with the Mumbai-based Ogilvy India and Wavemaker India, the Mondelēz India-owned brand occupied an entire island off the coast of Karnataka and temporarily renamed it 'My Cousin's Wedding'. Singletons could win a holiday to the island by scanning the special edition Valentine's Cadbury 5 Star packet. A QR code led people to a website (for mobile devices only) where they could mine 'NothingCoins' (a digital coin recently launched by the brand) to use to bid for the island. If asked what they were doing for the occasion, lucky winners could (truthfully) avoid the issue by saying: 'I'm going to my cousin's wedding!'

Other prizes were available, and visitors to the island were given free 5 Star bars. For those who didn't make it, the brand created a fake My Cousin's Wedding embassy, located in Mumbai, which was also a Valentine-free zone. For example, the colour red was prohibited within the embassy and on the island, while a 'mush detector' kept the embassy free of 'cheesy' Valentine's objects.

The embassy featured a sand-filled 'transit visa' room that gave visitors a taste of what it's like to 'do nothing' on the island ('Do Nothing, eat a 5 Star' is Cadbury 5 Star's brand platform). The embassy also hosted a VR experience, which offered a glimpse of the island, and visitors could also apply at the immigration desk for a visa to the island.

The campaign launched with a film and across Cadbury 5 Star's social channels, using the hashtags #MyCousinsWedding and #5StarVDayAlibi.

On a day dedicated to love, 5 Star steps up for singles in India, offering them a way out of answering a potentially shaming question: What are you doing for Valentine's Day?

CONTAGIOUS INSIGHT /

Consumption occasions / Cadbury 5 Star's laissez-faire tagline 'Do nothing' doesn't quite align with the sentiment of Valentine's Day, and it's certainly not the kind of chocolate you'd gift a partner – so the brand has to find unique and rebellious ways to activate on this day. It's worth noting that Mondelēz India also released a campaign for its special Valentine's Day-themed Dairy Milk Silk bars, which include a QR code that leads to a microsite where users can create and share custom messages with loved ones on social media. But 5 Star is no Dairy Milk Silk, and so the brand had to find its own way of capitalising on this major consumption occasion for chocolate. The anti-Valentine's Day backlash is nothing new – US series *Parks & Recreation* gave us 'Galentine's' (women celebrate the day with their female friends) back in 2010, while brands and venues that have caught onto the distaste for the consumerism and cheesiness of the day have responded with anti-Valentine's events, cards, and merchandise.

Stigma-busting / This campaign takes on significance in the context of India's specific cultural norms around marriage. In a country where marriage is not only normative, but sometimes compulsory (in a 2018 survey of more than 160,000 households, 93% of married Indians said that theirs was an arranged marriage), and where being single can carry a stigma, an Anti-Valentine's Day campaign feels slightly subversive. On a day dedicated to love, 5 Star steps up for singles in India, offering them a way out of answering a potentially shaming question: What are you doing for Valentine's Day? Further, in a sea of red hearts and loving messages, 5 Star's campaign cuts through, earning the brand some attention on a day saturated with marketing messages.

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