

# FUTURE OF MARKETING & CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

05	SEARCH Getting ready for Google's 'page experience' update	06	THIRD-PARTY COOKIES What comes next for digital advertising?	06	ACTIVIST IN CHIEF Patagonia's new CEO on brand purpose	08	DIRECT TO CONSUMER What the big brands have learnt
----	---	----	---	----	---	----	---

STRATEGY

## The short and the long of it

The pandemic forced many companies to shift their focus from strategic planning to self-preservation. But some apparently hasty survival tactics could prove their worth in longer-term brand-building efforts

MaryLou Costa

Julian Metcalfe, the co-founder and owner of Itsu, has described the pandemic's effect on the fast-food chain's 77 outlets as "decimating", but at least he has made a good bet for long-term growth in the shape of Itsu Grocery, a spin-off brand of goods to cook and eat at home.

"We're opening more restaurants now, but not at the same rate at which people are discovering what they can do at home with a bao bun or chicken gyoza," Metcalfe says.

Itsu is one of many brands, in industries including hospitality, travel and fashion, that have needed to adopt new tactics to survive the pandemic. So what does flicking the switch back to longer-term planning and brand-building look like – and will key performance indicators shift from being sales driven and digitally oriented?

Metcalfe is, of course, investing in recovery for his business, which is also trialling a new store concept, complete with a sushi-churning robot, to attract the quick-bite-after-work dinner market. But his ambitions for the grocery business to inspire consumers when cooking at home mean that innovation will be the main objective he's attaching to long-term brand-building.

"For a brand, nothing matters nearly as much as the value of the products. We're looking at launching 20 to 30 in the next year," says Metcalfe, who also co-founded and owned Pret A Manger until his exit in 2018. "Having key performance indicators

is hard for us, because it's all about innovation. Our KPIs will probably be more about doing everything humanly possible to make these ranges remarkable. For instance, we want to make the best broth in the world for ramen at home for £2.50."

“We spent a lot of time and effort improving our digital channels. This is definitely part of our longer-term strategy. It’s definitely part of our longer-term strategy”

For Itsu Grocery's managing director, Claudia Santagada, this means reviewing the digital investments that have been made over the past year and assessing what becomes a lasting part of the firm's marketing mix. She also plans to restart spending on traditional tactics, such as in-store sampling and out-of-home advertising, to build on the 59% sales growth that Itsu's super-market range has seen over the past year.

"We spent a lot of time and effort improving our digital channels. This is definitely part of our longer-term strategy," says Santagada, who used the shopfronts of closed Itsu outlets as billboards to promote the grocery range during the lockdowns. "We did a lot of work to set up our own Amazon shop, for instance, which is the first time all our ranges have come together visibly as a brand."

She continues: "We have since noticed much higher engagement with respect to user-generated recipes on our website. We've also started to go back to a more traditional approach – activations in store are fundamental to introducing new ranges and improving their visibility. But there is also a commitment to increasing and improving our digital presence."

Perhaps most crucially, Itsu Grocery and Itsu restaurants are run as separate entities, meaning that the two don't have to compete for marketing and operational budget. This also liberates Santagada to plan for the longer term.

"Our brand has enormous potential. But, as Julian says, it ultimately depends on the quality of the products we bring into the market," she says.

Lyre's, a brand of low-alcohol spirits founded by two Australians in the UK in 2019, has had to invest heavily in the direct-to-consumer online channel to work its way through the Covid crisis. Although its

vice-president of European marketing, Jayne O'Keeffe, is planning to reactivate venue engagement and sampling, as well as a traditional seasonal campaign, maintaining its D2C presence will be vital in building what is still a new brand.

"When the pandemic hit and many of our potential customers closed their doors, we moved to a digital-first strategy that has proved exceptionally successful. In the UK, we would have expected that 15% of our sales would have been via D2C, but it's now more than half," O'Keeffe says.

Although she will be targeting newly reopened pubs and bars once again, O'Keeffe also plans to continue marketing to at-home drinkers, given that health-conscious consumers are increasingly embracing a low-alcohol lifestyle. She notes that aligning the brand with wellness and "mindful drinking" will be key to balancing sales-driven revenue growth with long-term brand-building.

"Last year we worked with the Mindful Drinking Festival in the US, serving 10,000 drinks to people over two days. That was phenomenally successful," O'Keeffe says. "We've also worked with some great sober influencers, such as Fat Tony and Emily from Sober and Social. Partnerships work well for us. We've partnered with brands such as Benefit and Weight Watchers, which has given us access to a wider audience who want to have fun and relax with an alternative to alcohol."

Partnerships have also been important to Fly Now Pay Later, a finance start-up offering consumers ways to spread the cost of overseas travel. The customer-service element of the business may have ground to a halt during the pandemic, but a lot of work was done behind the scenes to develop long-term partnerships to help it prepare for the travel industry's big comeback and start winning the loyalty of travel-starved consumers.

In March, for instance, Fly Now Pay Later signed a deal with Malaysia Airlines. That, coupled with a new injection of venture capital, will mean a launch for the business in the US.

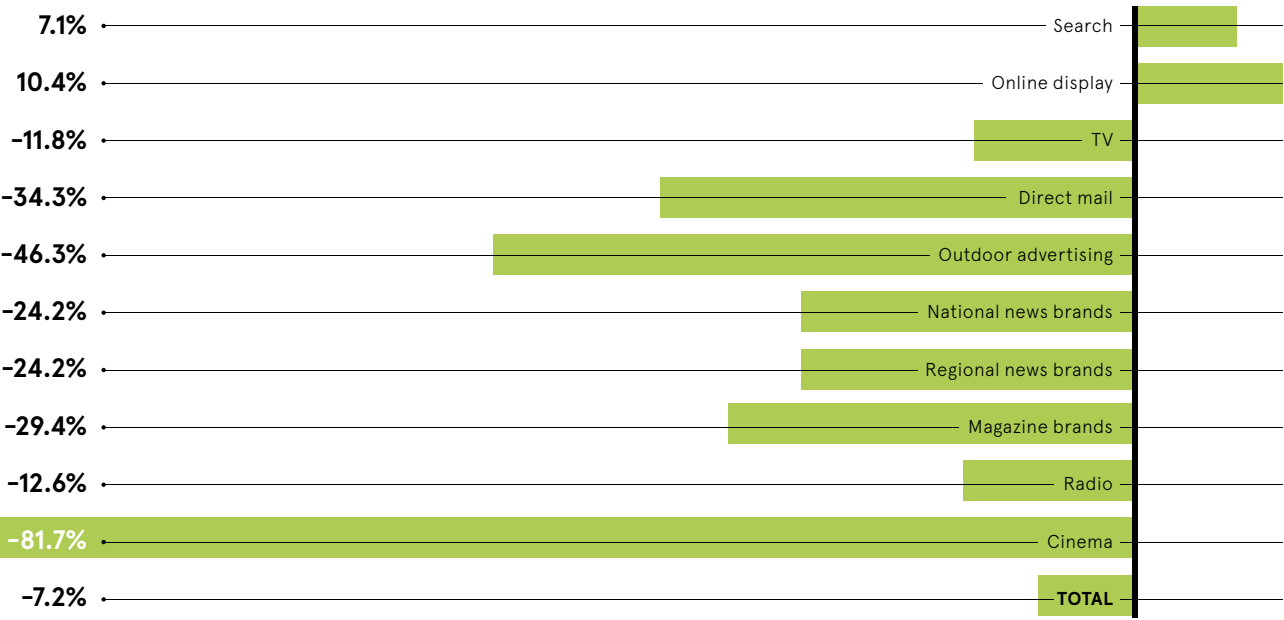
"Large enterprise travel brands are being much more forward than they usually would be in implementing alternative payments such as ours," says the company's founder and CEO, Jasper Dykes. "They're anticipating that holiday prices will rise and that consumers will need alternative financing to deal with this."

Alternative approaches with long-term brand-building potential are also taking off in the fashion industry. Online brand This is Unfolded started trading this year with a unique proposition: customers must wait up to six weeks to receive their items,



MANY BRANDS TOOK A SHORTER-TERM VIEW LAST YEAR, FOCUSING ON DIGITAL ADVERTISING

Year-on-year growth/decline in UK advertising expenditure in 2020



Advertising Association/WARC, 2021

which are made to order. This approach reduces waste and better supports workers in the supply chain. But the brand's founder and CEO, Cally Russell, believes that an investment in building an online community, rather than in traditional marketing methods, will give This is Unfolded longevity. That's why it has the following three main KPIs: repeat customers, return rate and cost per customer acquisition.

"It's still hard for us to plan for the long term, but we do expect a strong consumer bounce-back in the coming months," he says. "From a brand strategy position, we need to take a more positive and aggressive approach to growth."

Whether they're focusing on innovation, partnerships or community-building, brands have had to use creative tactics to preserve their sales in the toughest of conditions. As the Covid-related restrictions on trading are loosened, it's clear that marketers intend to take the best of the past year with them into the post-pandemic era. ●

Distributed in

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Published in association with

LIONS

CIM  
The Chartered Institute of Marketing

THE MARKETING SOCIETY

Contributors

**Oliver Balch**  
Business journalist specialising in sustainability and travel.

**MaryLou Costa**  
Writer covering the future of work, technology, sustainability, innovation and marketing.

**Cath Everett**  
Journalist specialising in the workplace, leadership and organisational culture.

**Lucy Handley**  
Journalist writing about marketing, tech, healthcare and the future of work.

**Sean Hargrave**  
Freelance journalist specialising in technology and digital marketing.

**Magda Ibrahim**  
Award-winning HR, workplace and marketing journalist.

**Oliver Pickup**  
Award-winning journalist specialising in technology, business and sport.

**Chris Stokel-Walker**  
Technology and culture journalist and author.

raconteur reports

Publishing manager  
**Libby Owen-Jones**

Managing editor  
**Sarah Vizard**

Deputy editor  
**Francesca Cassidy**

Sub-editor  
**Neil Cole**

Head of production  
**Hannah Smallman**

Design  
**Pip Burrows**  
**Kellie Jerrard**  
**Colm McDermott**  
**Nita Saroglou**  
**Jack Woolrich**  
**Sean Wyatt-Livesley**

Illustration  
**Samuele Motta**  
**Sara Gelfgren**

Art director  
**Joanna Bird**

Design director  
**Tim Whitlock**

Although this publication is funded through advertising and sponsorship, all editorial is without bias and sponsored features are clearly labelled. For an upcoming schedule, partnership inquiries or feedback, please call +44 (0)20 8616 7400 or e-mail [info@raconteur.net](mailto:info@raconteur.net). Raconteur is a leading publisher of special-interest content and research. Its publications and articles cover a wide range of topics, including business, finance, sustainability, healthcare, lifestyle and technology. Raconteur special reports are published exclusively in The Times and The Sunday Times as well as online at [raconteur.net](http://raconteur.net). The information contained in this publication has been obtained from sources the Proprietors believe to be correct. However, no legal liability can be accepted for any errors. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior consent of the Publisher. © Raconteur Media

/raconteur.net

@raconteur

@raconteur\_london

raconteur.net

/future-marketing-cx

The world is watching.

CANNES LIONS  
LIVE

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY TO JOIN US FOR THE FIRST EVER BROADCAST OF THE CANNES LIONS AWARDS.

JUNE 21 - 25 2021

LIVE.CANNESLIONS.COM

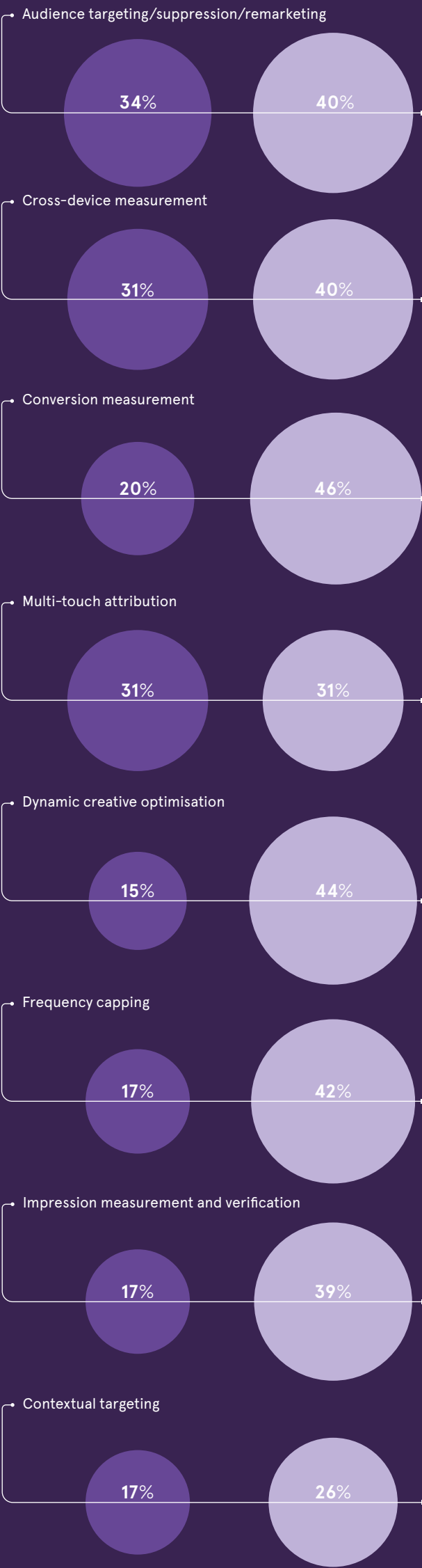
# CONSUMERS' CHANGING ATTITUDES TO DATA

Internet users are creating more data than ever before, but they are becoming increasingly sceptical about how that information will be used. Yet, with a cookie-free future just around the corner, marketers are still struggling with the fallout, despite knowing that they have to come up with a new strategy

## MARKETERS EXPECT A COOKIE-LESS FUTURE TO HAVE A BIG IMPACT ON DIGITAL MARKETING CAPABILITIES

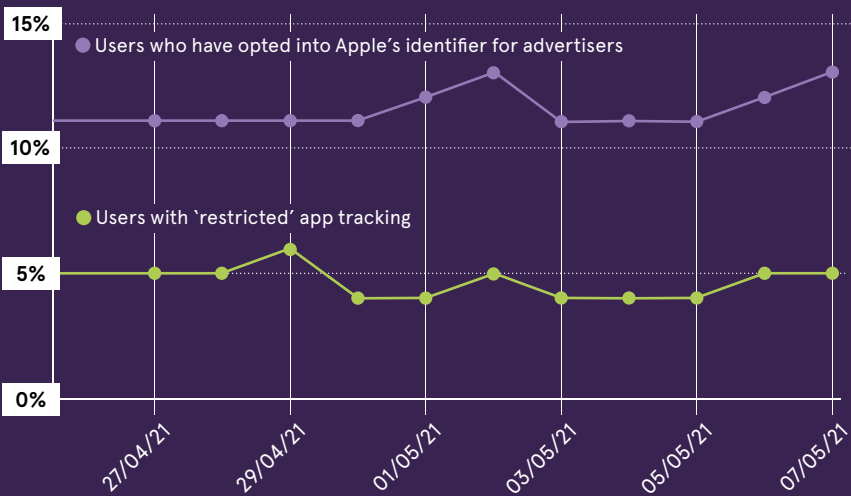
% of marketers who expect the disappearance of the cookie to have a negative impact on the following abilities

Very negative   Somewhat negative   Appsflyer, 2021



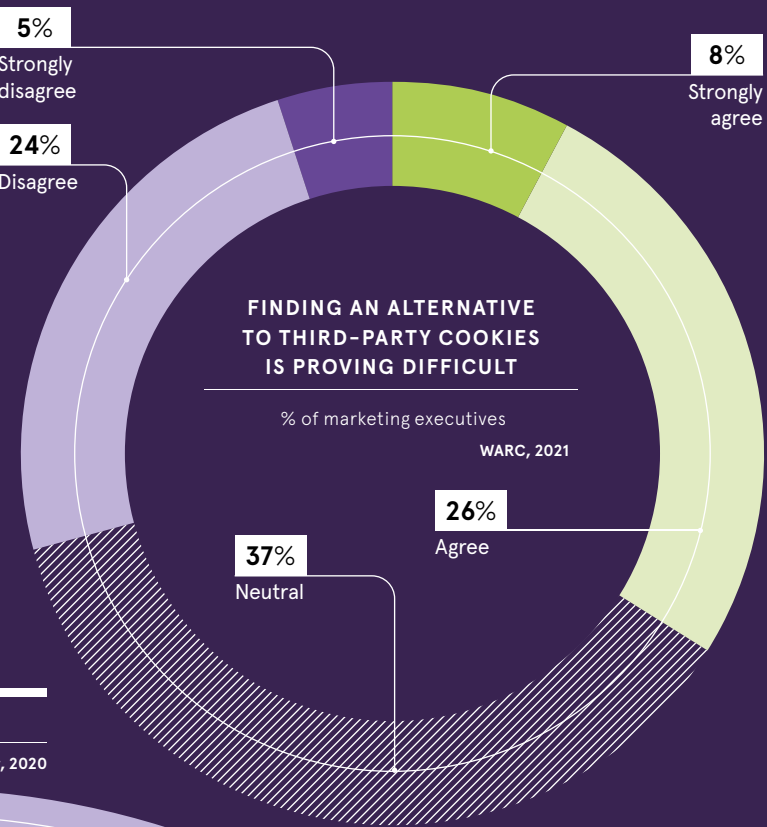
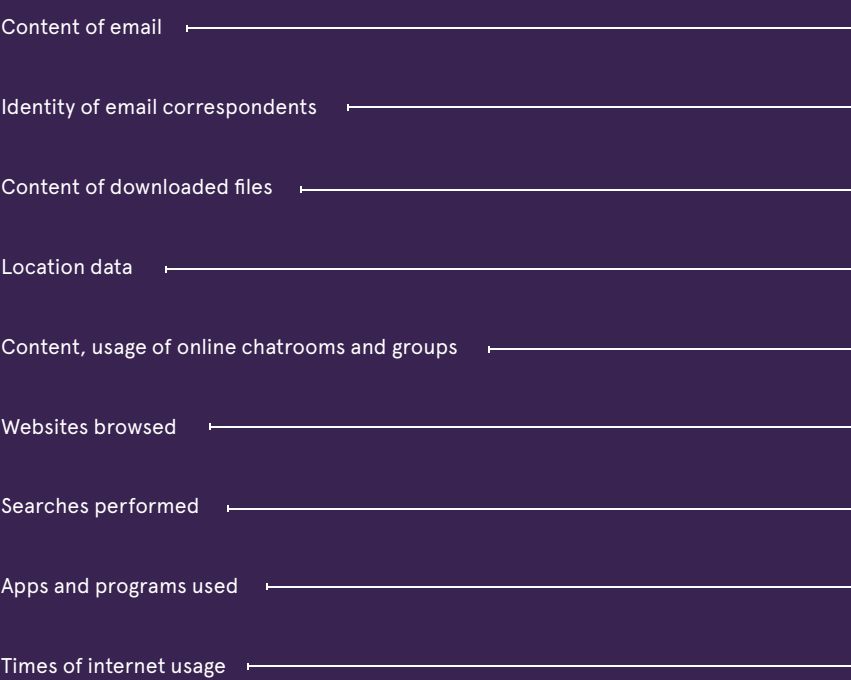
## APPLE HAS RECOGNISED THE NEED FOR MORE DATA PROTECTION, ROLLING OUT NEW OPTIONS IN ITS LATEST MOBILE OPERATING SYSTEM

% of global daily active mobile users



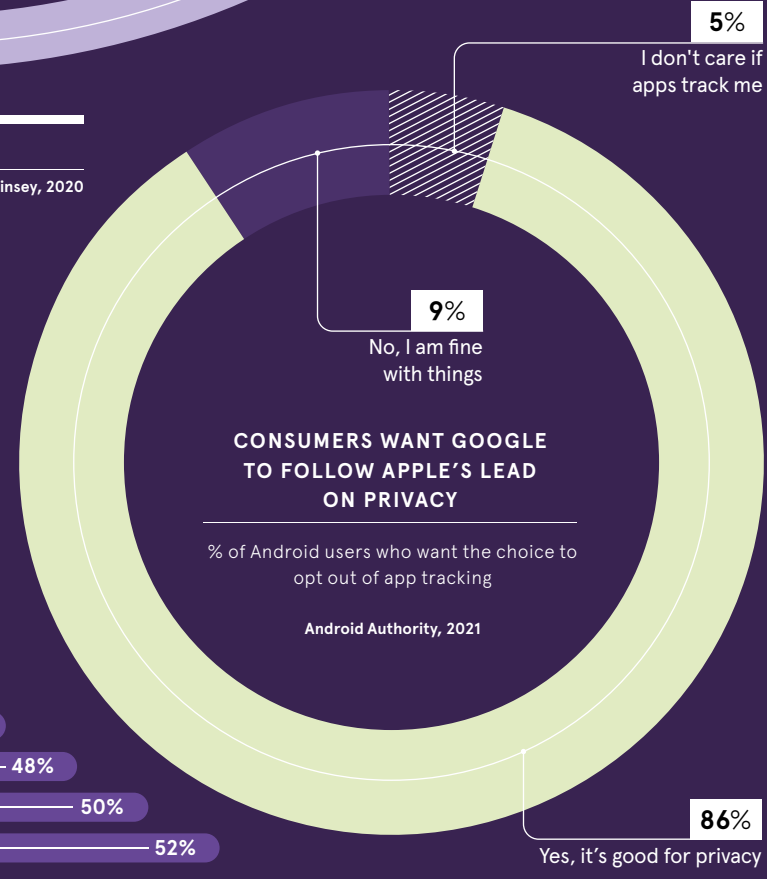
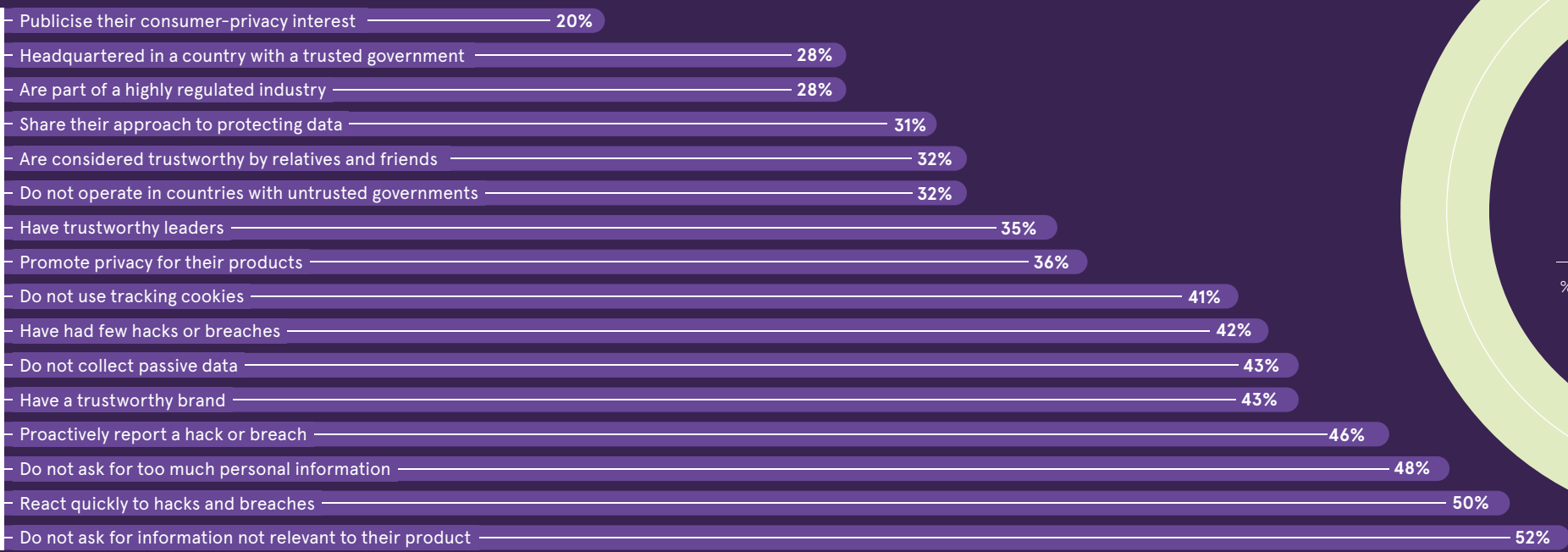
## CONSUMERS ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT DATA PROTECTION

% of US consumers who say the following are important



## CONSUMERS TRUST COMPANIES THAT LIMIT THE USE OF PERSONAL DATA

% of consumers who trust companies that do the following





LEAD GENERATION

# Next-gen lead gen

Rapid changes in B2B customers’ digital consumption habits require marketers to adopt more creative lead-generation methods. High-value content that fosters emotional engagement will be key to their success

Magda Ibrahim

If you ask the owner of any business to name the most crucial factor in ensuring its long-term survival, their response will inevitably include the word “growth”.

Lead generation can help B2B companies to grow. It has the potential to boost brand awareness and sales revenue, making the difference between success and failure in increasingly competitive markets.

As the pandemic has hit businesses hard, the perennial challenges facing marketers have been compounded by new factors, meaning that they must adopt more innovative approaches to lead generation. The consensus among marketing experts is that creativity has taken a back seat too often in B2B lead generation. Developing an emotional connection with potential customers is one of the best ways to increase brand awareness, engender trust and, crucially, generate and convert leads, they argue.

“Marketers have a constantly evolving set of techniques, but delivering these successfully is tough,” says Canon’s director of B2B strategy and marketing in EMEA, Marc Ranner. “One of the biggest shifts in this field is the expectation of the consumer environment being brought into the B2B space. Marketers and processes for lead generation need to change to reflect that, enabling the buyer to behave how they want to behave. Agility is key.”

Even before the pandemic, a B2B marketer could typically spend up to a year engaging a lead before a sales commitment would be made, building strong foundations with valuable contacts based on trust. But the swathe of Covid-related redundances across many industries has meant that many of these brand advocates have left their companies over the past 18 months.

The 2030 B2B Trends report, published last year by the B2B Institute and LinkedIn, highlights that “in B2B marketing, all we seem to care about is driving more leads... Activation effectiveness is driven by process, not creativity.”

While it’s widely accepted that buying lead lists can be risky and costly because such data can be unreliable, the report goes further in arguing that brand building is the holy grail of lead generation. Marketers should invest at least half of their budgets in brand building to capture the leads that will fuel their firms’ long-term growth, it urges.

Peer-to-peer validation is becoming more important in gaining trust and bolstering brand awareness. Customer advocates and case studies act as ‘social proof’ for lead generation, as Mary Keane-Dawson, group CEO of marketing agency Takumi, explains.

“It’s important to remember that B2B brand relationships are built on human-to-human communication,” she says. “Lead-generation tactics that are intrinsically human should therefore be prioritised. Maintaining and rebuilding brand awareness and emotional connections must work hand in hand for a brand to grow.”

A focus on creativity and brand building can mean tapping into shifts in customer behaviour, including their social networking habits. This means that B2B marketers need to explore less conventional social platforms, including TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and even Clubhouse, as well as LinkedIn.

Meanwhile, the decline of live events has reduced options to generate leads through networking at trade shows, conferences and seminars. While a government testing programme for events has been taking place over the past few months, including a 400-participant business conference held



Clear Wong via Getty Images

“We can be more human and engaging. We must not be afraid to let loose and tap into the emotional connection

An over-reliance on digital channels and the desire by many to get back to face-to-face meetings may shift this balance back in favour of in-person events once they can go ahead again. But there are clear ways in which marketers can tip the digital scales in their favour. The most obvious of these is offering access to differentiated insights and business-critical knowledge that can solve problems facing a company and, in turn, bolster its bottom line.

Moving away from content that only touches the surface of an issue to genuinely business-critical information delivered in a creative way will produce more qualified sales leads. It also means that an individual lead is more likely to register and download the content, rather than assuming that they can find the same information free of charge (or at least without having to give away their data) elsewhere.

“Getting ahead of trends is what’s important – looking at angles really carefully, so that the information you’re offering is genuinely new and valuable,” advises Lisa Haskins, director of EMEA marketing and operations at video creation platform VidMob. “Otherwise, the potential lead will just go back to search to find the same content, but without having to register.”

Making the content or the delivery channel as creative as possible is also key. While consumer marketers have long understood the value of creativity in marketing effectiveness, many B2B players, especially those in lead generation, are only just realising this.

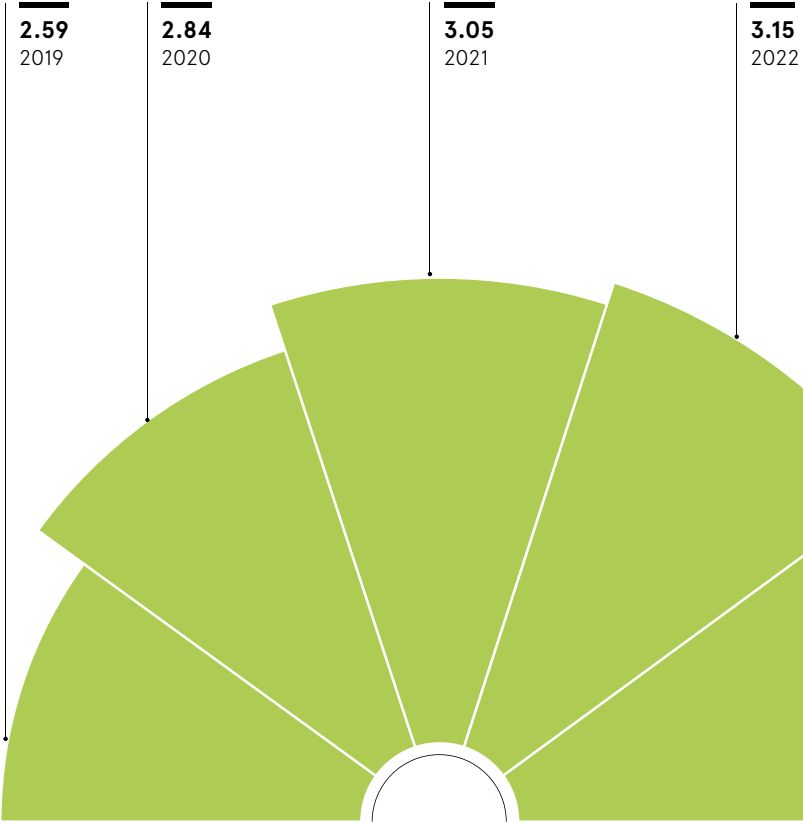
“Creativity can get overlooked when developing content for B2B lead generation, but it is crucial in grabbing people’s attention and strengthening emotional connections,” Haskins says. “Companies that never would have touched digital before, such as those in industrial sectors, have realised that they need to figure out how to ‘navigate their creative’ on social channels. By scrutinising creative data, it’s possible to make more with less, rather than churning out masses of content, helping to manage costs.”

Roffey observes that, given the complexity of the B2B decision-making process, there should be “room to be innovative and creative. B2B has to be relevant and smarter through multiple interactions over time to secure the sale. If anything, we can be more human and engaging. We must not be afraid to let loose and tap into the emotional connection.”

## SPENDING ON LEAD-GENERATION ADVERTISING WILL KEEP RISING

eMarketer, 2019

Forecast expenditure (\$bn) in the US



in Liverpool in April, it is unclear when face-to-face lead generation will return.

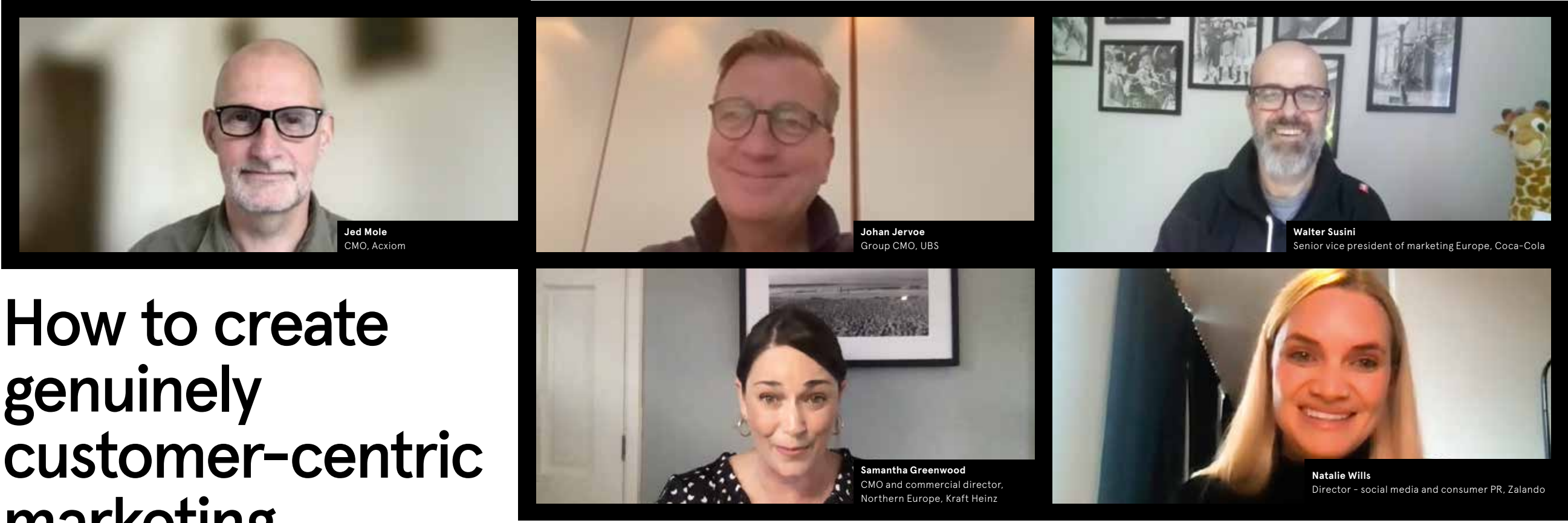
This shift to digital among many B2B brands has had both positive and negative effects for Cisco Systems, according to its vice-president of marketing for EMEA and Russia, Emma Roffey. She has observed an increase in the number of rivals to her company, causing the market to become “more innovative” but also “more complex and competitive”.

The emphasis on using digital channels to generate leads has also affected the outbound market. “Email fatigue is at an all-time high,” says Ranner, meaning that “a lot of flex and adjustment is to be expected as everyone reassesses their position and redefines their priorities”.

That has in turn led to an increased focus on using online content to generate leads.

Blog posts, organic social media posts, podcasts, YouTube videos and webinars are all effective tools in developing a strong, trusted digital presence, according to a US study by the Kellogg School of Management (KSM) in 2018. In its analysis of 1,203 digital and 919 in-person events, KSM found that digital opportunities such as webinars resulted in more leads and completed sales than their in-person equivalents.

## Commercial feature



# How to create genuinely customer-centric marketing

A virtual roundtable of five experts discusses how to build on strong brand foundations for deeper, long-term customer engagement

Morag Cuddeford-Jones

**Q** How has the role of brands changed in terms of what customers want from them?

**WS** The relationship that people have with brands has become different. People wouldn’t be bothered if 75% of brands disappeared overnight. We need to bring real value and memorable experiences that people can share, talk about and feel. That is the way for brands to be relevant.

**JJ** Brands and people are not that different; we all know lots of people but not everyone is our best friend. Think carefully what insights you’re serving when you communicate. If you do that the right way, you stay top of mind.

**NW** We need to have made a positive contribution to society. Brands have to work very hard to show that they don’t just have values, but that they’re actually making an impact.

**SG** A basic level of service isn’t enough and we’re really pushing ourselves to find ways to be relevant, even if it doesn’t benefit our brands in an obvious way.

**JM** We only sustain relationships with people when we share the same values. If someone treats you like a stranger when you feel you know them well, or treats you badly, that relationship is lost. We must use data and technology to understand each other and so we can remember people and communicate with relevance and respect.

**Q** Can brands be purpose-led and avoid the trap of ‘wokevertising’?

**WS** In the digital world today, weaknesses of any brand can be exposed quickly if you don’t do what you say. When Covid hit, we decided to stop advertising and use the money to help the people who make our

business: bars, restaurants. Sometimes it’s better to stay silent and do.

**JJ** During Covid a number of companies at the beginning of social distancing took their logos apart. That doesn’t help me understand the concept and it doesn’t build trust. We spent the first three months giving credit. Within 12 hours of submitting, the money was in the customer’s account. That builds more trust than taking our logo apart.

**JM** Consumers have that sixth sense for when something is for show, versus for real. We can affect change very quickly and while Covid wasn’t something I’d want to live through again, it was a great shot in the arm for innovation and it’s shown us how people-centric we can be. For example, with insurance premiums being returned, that felt real and built brand trust.

**SG** We were concerned about children at risk of food poverty not having breakfast because they weren’t in school and we were able to help by providing actual food, partnering with people like [footballer] Marcus Rashford and the charity Magic Breakfast. It’s focused on actual acts rather than how we can spin it for the business.

**Q** How do you approach the building of a life-long relationship?

**SG** Covid means people are re-evaluating how they feel about their eating habits, becoming more plant-based for example. We need to find new ways to

reintroduce ourselves to consumers to keep that relationship going versus just shouting for attention.

**JM** Don’t get good at selling; get good at helping. The numbers will take care of themselves. The true purpose of the brand is to provide value.

**NW** Customer lifetime value is our north star. Every marketing initiative is an opportunity to build a more engaging brand, and marketing stories are never created in a vacuum. We need to understand what drives our customers.

**Q** Where do we best use data to help brands get creative with experience?

**NW** Data-driven marketing is a very powerful tool for making content more inspiring and relevant. We obviously use it to make sure that the shopping experience for customers makes their life easier, and that we’re selling products they want to buy.

**JJ** Money is emotional but if banking is anything, it’s a negative emotion. Banks have got really good at explaining why it’s complicated. But it isn’t really, it’s just cumbersome. If, as a bank, you can make it feel easy, that’s the first step. It feels like I’m helping you achieve your dream.

**JM** Data is a partial art – part art, part science. It’s unfortunate that along with a growing awareness of data there is also suspicion and misunderstanding. Perhaps it would help to be able to explain why good

things happen – data helped us treat you as a valued customer.

**Q** Can you connect with customers without being intrusive?

**JJ** As a marketing team, you are responsible for looking at first-party data and figuring out what the best solution might be. That’s why we often choose brand journalism to tell our story.

**WS** It’s important to reassure people that they are in control through transparency. People are willing to give you data, if you give back something of value, but they have to feel in control. Things like pop-ups really go against that feeling.

**SG** There’s a fine line between assuming you know exactly what people need to hear from you. I’ve witnessed the swing from being hyper-targeted and seeing effectiveness drop off a cliff where you got too narrow.

**NW** It’s key for us to show that every piece of information the customer shares with us will improve and enrich their experience. It’s a commitment rooted in trust, but we also need to show we’re offering utility.

**Q** Are we inclusive enough in our quest for data?

**NW** We have to make sure we are representing diverse backgrounds and

experiences. Embracing diversity will allow us to understand and serve a more diverse set of audiences and it’s something more businesses need to invest in.

**WS** Diversity and inclusion has to start from inside. We did a fantastic programme for Ramadan last year because the entire team that worked on the projects were either Muslim or from Muslim organisations. The only way the programme was relevant was because the team knew what was and what wasn’t an issue.

**JJ** [There are better] single-digit top lines and bottom lines, as well as a better high single-digit stock performance, of those who have a more diverse setup. So, it’s not only the morally right thing to do but it’s also, numbers-wise, the right thing to do.

**SG** We’ve got to force ourselves to ask the question about how representative we are being, not just in our decision-making, but also where we’re getting information from.

For more information, please visit [axiom.co.uk](https://axiom.co.uk)

**axiom.**

To watch the full roundtable on demand, visit [raconteur.net/topic/sponsored/customer-centric-marketing](https://raconteur.net/topic/sponsored/customer-centric-marketing)



BRAND REPUTATION

# Putting reputations on the (top) line

There’s an apparent discrepancy between consumers’ ethical purchasing intentions and their actual buying behaviour. Does being ‘good’ really make much difference to a brand’s sales?

Cath Everett



In July 2020, British fashion retailer Boohoo hit the headlines when some of its suppliers in Leicester were accused of paying their factory workers far less than the minimum wage. In March 2021, US Customs and Border Protection started investigating the allegations. If it finds against Boohoo, the agency could impose an import ban.

Yet this long-running scandal seems not to have been detrimental to the business. Boohoo’s sales revenue increased by 41% year on year to £1.7bn in the 12 months to 28 February 2021, while its adjusted pre-tax profit rose by 37% to £174m.

More than 60% of younger consumers consider a firm’s ethical values and authenticity before buying its products, according to research by Accenture. But it seems that one of the most high-profile

ethical crises affecting a retailer in years hasn’t radically changed their purchasing habits.

This apparent disconnect between consumers’ ethical purchasing intentions and their actions is just as evident in relation to other brands. Amazon, for instance, is regularly criticised for its harsh employment conditions and aggressive tax-avoidance measures, yet customers spent more than £272bn with the company last year. Volkswagen was found to have cheated diesel emission tests in 2015, but five years later the group achieved its highest market share ever (22.1%) in the UK.

What is going on here? Mike Beverland, professor of marketing at the University of Sussex, believes that several factors are at play. One of them is an “expectation-behaviour gap”.

He explains: “If you ask someone: ‘Do you want that brand to be ethical?’ they will say ‘yes’. But, if they’re asked to rank what they consider important, social purpose tends to come quite low down on the list.”

As Claire Heathcote, co-founder of sustainable fashion brand Loop Cashmere, says: “Sometimes people don’t have the financial ability or knowledge to make an ethical choice – if you’ve got only £15 in your purse, price will be your top priority. But sometimes you do know the right thing to do, yet you don’t always do it. If you’re offered an apple or a cake, for instance, you may still choose the cake.”

Dan Cullen-Shute, founder and CEO of advertising agency Creature, agrees. “The world tends to adopt binary views of good and bad, but people are fuzzy and contra-

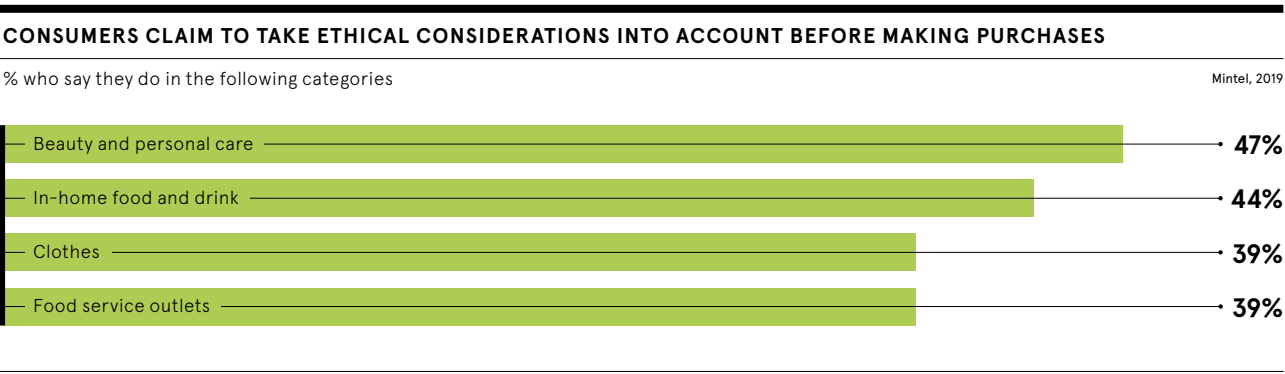
dictory. They rarely make entirely rational choices,” he says. “In the emotional ledger behind their decisions, if there are more ticks in the ‘it’s good for me’ box than in the ‘it’s bad for me’ box, consumers will find ways to rationalise their choices.”

Even post-millennials, who are generally cited as being more ethically focused than preceding generations, are affected by this tendency.

“The media is full of statistics about how much young people care about the planet, but they’re generally less financially secure than their elders, which will influence their spending habits,” Cullen-Shute says. “That doesn’t make them bad; it makes them human with context.”

Another key point, he stresses, is that a brand’s reputation is not driven solely by an internally defined “purpose”, although that may play a part. More important here is “promise”, which is less about what a business wants to achieve and more about what customers can expect to experience each time they interact with it.

“The reason we ‘do purpose’ is that it fits with our values and motivates our staff,” Cullen-Shute says. “But purpose needs to



“The world tends to adopt binary views of good and bad, but people are fuzzy and contradictory. They rarely make entirely rational choices

be tethered by promise to make it meaningful. If it has no bearing on your customers’ experiences, your brand at best loses credibility and at worst looks hypocritical.”

If brands that trade on their ethical credentials were found to be acting unethically, that would cause them significantly more reputational damage than it might to a company such as Amazon, Beverland observes. That’s because its brand promise centres on a completely different aspect of the business – that is, getting goods to customers as quickly and cheaply as possible.

Nonetheless, an ethical scandal is likely to have lasting ramifications for businesses of all types. The way a company handles the situation at the time will have a strong bearing on its long-term prospects, according to Heathcote.

“If its leaders hold their hands up and say ‘we’ll learn’ – and then make changes that feel genuine, rather than smoke and mirrors – long-standing customers in particular will give that business another chance,” she says.

Moreover, behaving ethically does carry some weight too, not least in terms

of appealing to social media influencers and boosting the organisation’s employer brand. In fact, Cullen-Shute believes that, as long as putting ethics at the core of a business remains a relative rarity, “there’s a strong argument for it to be a brand differentiator. It’s in the last six inches where it becomes powerful.”

He explains: “If you’re looking at two identical jumpers and one comes from an ethical supplier, most people will go for that one, even if it costs a couple of quid more. It becomes a tipping factor.”

Commercial feature

## How marketers are redefining their relationships with customers – and with tech

A roundtable of influential senior marketing industry leaders discuss how they are striding into the post-pandemic era, empowered by savvy data use and working with tech partners on their own terms

MaryLou Costa

The changing brand and customer relationship warrants greater ownership of first-party data, and for marketers to take stock of the value their tech partners provide. That was the consensus of an expert roundtable held exclusively for this supplement.

As Wulfric Light-Wilkinson, general manager EMEA for performance marketing engine Wunderkind says: “There’s been a shift from working with the big platforms by reacquiring users and making it all very transactional, to really owning those audiences and customers and making them ‘vote for you.’ Lifetime value is the most important thing; if you can get that customer in and care for them, and deliver value with a personalised experience, those are the brands that are going to last.”

UK sportswear brand Gymshark, dubbed one of the country’s most recent unicorn startups thanks to an investment deal last year which brought its value to over £1bn, is renowned for growing its brand and customer relationships through its own channels over third-party retailers. “We understand so much about our customer because we are D2C. We know buying behaviors, what they like, what they don’t like, because they interact with us literally 24 hours a day, seven days a week on social media, while in our workout app, we can see when a customer’s trained this week. We’re not good marketers, we’re good listeners,” Gymshark’s chief brand officer Noel Mack says.

“We know buying behaviors because customers interact with us literally 24 hours a day, seven days a week on social media. We’re not good marketers, we’re good listeners

**Listening closely to customer communities**

While Mack described Gymshark’s way of working as a ‘winner,’ he acknowledged that creating a personalised experience at scale remained a challenge but working closely with customer advocates delivered results.

Mack says: “The scale comes from understanding the people who are super passionate about the brand, and we’ve built our process so far on addressing what most people want, and through osmosis that works for the rest of the audience. We’re just avid listeners, and the constant feedback loop is amazing. For example, I could see that Sally in Little Rock, Arkansas, tweeted saying that it took seven days to get her leggings. You

can dive into that one nugget of information to solve a wider problem.”

Shoe brand Kurt Geiger, meanwhile, has operated both with a D2C and third-party retail partner model, opting to focus more on its D2C channels to better control the customer experience.

“We’ve been very careful about who we’re distributing with, to align our core values with the core values of the platform. As we’ve become more focused on having an authentic relationship with the consumer, we don’t want our goods just distributed widely on platforms, who perhaps you don’t fully align to either their pricing strategy or their marketing strategy, or even their core values,” says Gareth Rees-John, the brand’s chief digital officer. “Because the reality is whether or not we own the relationship, the customer thinks we do.”

The “constant feedback loop” Gymshark leverages is also pertinent for home crafting brand Hobbycraft, which also harnesses customer insights through its 104 local branch Twitter feeds but has also taken things a step further by engaging floor staff in the process.

“We have the Hobbycraft Club of about five million customers, and while we look at the data all the time, we’ll go to stores and colleagues to fill in the gaps. We will walk a store with customers to get direct feedback on something that we’ve picked up in the data. We’ve got a group of ‘artisan colleagues,’ who are entrepreneurial crafters, who also give ongoing feedback. And it feels more like we’re part of a community, than



we are this retailer just selling a product,” says Katherine Paterson, Hobbycraft’s customer and e-commerce director.

She adds: “Having worked on bigger brands, I’m far closer to my customer in this business. You might start with a smaller budget, but you just need to test a concept. Walk a store with the customer, get the feedback from store managers and colleagues, then you can evolve your solution.”

**Aligning big marketing decisions to business strategy**

Generating such a wealth of data and insights from multiple customer channels has prompted Kenyatte Nelson, chief brand officer, of fashion and homewares retailer N Brown, to analyse technology platforms and partners with greater precision.

“We have a portfolio of brands with different customer bases with different needs. And there’s been a massive proliferation of media channels over the last decade. That poses some challenges for us because you need to be in more places. So as a result, there are parts of our marketing tech stack that we might look at and say we want to own this, we want to build it or buy it. And others we might say we want to ‘rent’ this or use a third party,” Nelson says.

He adds: “One of the most important things any marketing team can do is be clear

about what makes the business different. Then ask, what do we want to ‘major’ and ‘minor’ on, whether that’s content creation, social media amplification, influencer communication, above the line, bringing digital teams in, which we’ve done at N Brown.”

Both Kurt Geiger and Gymshark have made important decisions around how they work with big social media platforms. Kurt Geiger boycotted Facebook for a month last year, while Gymshark is part of an Instagram advisory board.

“It was a way of making a point. We feel uncomfortable about certain data and privacy values, and whether it gives platforms to people we wouldn’t want to be aligned with as an organisation. So as the second biggest channel we spend money with on a week-to-week basis, to completely pull the plug on that was really brave,” says Rees-John. “It made us a lot sharper about how we use these platforms, and how we can go back in with a clean slate.”

Conversely, Gymshark’s strategy to get closer to platforms like Instagram is so it can share its best practice experiences directly, says Mack: “These platforms are so big even they don’t really know what they have on their hands sometimes and it’s hard for them to figure out best practices themselves.”

He adds: “We’ve been to Instagram’s Menlo Park headquarters, and got on first

name terms with them, showing them that, because we have so much data from our audience, here’s the pressure that our community is putting on us. So what are you going to do? How are you going to help us answer these questions, so we’re always shining light on the dark corners of their platform?”

Ultimately, Nelson says, marketers must figure out how to make their own brand channels and propositions “really sticky,” so brands can become less reliant on big tech platforms for customer acquisition and take ownership of the whole customer life cycle.

To create this ‘stickiness’, Light-Wilkinson says, requires “doing the basics really well – convenience, price, quality and so on – but also treating the customer as an individual, with digital experiences, on-site and across all marketing touch points, that reflect their preferences and behaviours. Brands can only deliver these types of considered, 1-1 experiences by having a really good first-party dataset – and the right tools to leverage it.”

For more information please visit [wunderkind.co](#)

**Wunderkind**  
Formerly BounceX



Commercial feature



# Building connections across the customer journey

Marketers need to balance data and insights to deliver the best consumer engagement strategies. How can data inform this process without overwhelming creativity and experience?

Morag Cuddeford-Jones

- Q

What insights are marketers using to improve the customer experience?
- RW

The number of sources has exploded. We're using a combination: bespoke market research to technical-driven analysis and in-store behaviour. Personally, talking to customers directly is hugely beneficial.
- DR

We have lots of methods to keep in touch and pore over our own data. And just staying close to what people are saying on social helps you stay close to the underbelly of what people are thinking and feeling.
- HC

It's interesting that we've started a bit old fashioned. You'd think we'd be talking about cookies and data. Yet, it's all about talking to people. At AB InBev, we have a lot of sources, but some of the most

- profound campaigns we've worked on have come from understanding our consumers and customers.
- RJ

We've gone 'back to the future' with a direct connection to consumers. It's important to think about the context of where we are in marketing. Facebook and Google have a coterie of third-party data that makes it very easy to hyper-personalise. But we've almost gone in the opposite direction [now] with privacy, and that's a good thing for marketing.
- Where are you gathering the most valuable insights from?
- DR

We rely on automated personalisation and rich data when we personalise

## Roundtable attendees

- HC

**Hugh Cullman**  
director of connections & draftLine  
AB InBev
- RJ

**Richard Jones**  
chief marketing officer  
Cheetah Digital
- DR

**Dan Rubel**  
brand & marketing director  
Dixons Carphone
- RW

**Rob Worthington**  
customer director  
Anthropologie

- experiences but that nudge messaging, asking customers what they want, is becoming very powerful.
- HC

As sponsors of the Premier League, just asking a simple question – what team do you follow? – and giving them the right content is a very straightforward, very transparent transaction for the consumer.
- RJ

Consumers [think] ads based on location data from companies they didn't know is creepy, not cool. There's definitely a change in consumer attitudes to some of the tactics we've been using in digital marketing over the last decade.
- RW

It's far more important to give [customers] experiences that are relevant to them. We're now quite driven by understanding what the individual customer wants to see. There's been a big shift.
- RJ

By using zero-party data to trigger a personalised experience, the consumer is essentially designing the experience themselves. That is shifting away from designing things at a cohort level. These things can be relatively simple.
- Is there a 'back to basics' approach to targeting?
- DR

We've had a pretty profound year on personalising which will shape our business for a long time to come. We [now] offer customers a 24/7 video shopping experience, talking to the same experts we've spent years training [in-store]. We sell things people don't buy that often and it's nice to talk to someone who knows what they're talking about.

- HC

B2B doesn't have to be emotionless. It can have heart. 'Save Pub Life' was a deep emotional need. The campaign [came] because we understood that lockdowns would be a huge problem for the industry. You didn't need deep data, but you did need deep empathy.

## Could too much data stifle creativity?

- DR

There's a danger that we convince ourselves that granularity and analytics is not an essential part of being a brilliant marketer. It is. But it's not the only part. The most impressive marketers like a bit of granularity, but they don't get lost in it, and they're bold. I wish that our industry would encourage those behaviours.
- RW

Granularity has given us the ability to quickly see what's going on. You can do that at the same time as brand-building. Reacting to changes in the market and switching to trying things on digital; that becomes a learning, another data point. It all points towards building the brand.
- HC

Marketing is always about the art and the science and if the science can help you take smarter risks, that's fantastic. But there is so much data. You can get lost in it and you can use it to obscure the absolute truth. You need to know the 'why' behind the data.
- RJ

There are parts of the marketing ecosystem that are going to have to rely more on creativity than data than they have in the past. Privacy and the death of the cookie are having an impact on multi-touch attribution. But our ability to take risks that aren't necessarily justified by data, that's 100% part of our job as CMOs.

## Is there enough respect for the marketer's judgement compared to the data?

- RW

The really standout campaigns are where someone just has a fantastic idea. The brave companies are the ones that implement that idea, then they can measure it through the data. That's the joyous bit of marketing, when all of that comes together.
- HC

Data allows us to take more risks. Data after you've made a decision is incredibly impactful too. Data allows us, via our internal agency – draftLine Labs – to put ideas out into the market for very small cost and see what's working.
- DR

I'd disagree that there's more data now than ever before. I remember being just as data-focused at the start of my career as I am now. I often make this plea: let's not be negative about data, embrace it, do it in the right way and create better marketing that is bold and innovative.

## How do marketers make data sources relevant for customer targeting?

- RJ

The IAB said it's not just about the direct-to-consumer relationship. You

- now need to think of the value exchange of free services, discounts or delivering deeper experiences such as loyalty programmes.
- RW

Customers are happy to give us information as long as it's in return for something of value. We have a loyalty programme, not based on points but on softer benefits such as early notification of product or a birthday treat. But the nub of the scheme is to grow that relationship.

“  
B2B doesn't have to be emotionless. It can have heart...You didn't need deep data, but you did need deep empathy

- HC

If you can anticipate their needs, that's of real value. Loyalty programmes are an area where we can continue to have a relationship with our consumers. We have amazing sponsorships, and we can offer exclusive access which is valuable to the consumer. It's important to figure that out because we don't have the more traditional ways of having that data exchange.
- DR

We have an enormous loyalty programme that isn't points based. Of course, we use the programme to communicate deals, but we also use it to create a turbo-charged welcome journey. What we land are tips and hacks to look after the tech you've bought.
- RJ

The one thing that loyalty programmes have always done is act as a brilliant conduit for data from consumers. There will be an expansion of modern loyalty programmes that are the frameworks for bringing brands and consumers closer.

For more information, please visit [cheetahdigital.com](https://cheetahdigital.com)



To watch the full roundtable on demand, visit [Raconteur.net/topic/sponsored/building-customer-connections](https://Raconteur.net/topic/sponsored/building-customer-connections)

SEARCH

# Scroll with it: is your website ready for Google's 'page experience' update?

The search engine is altering its ranking criteria in favour of websites offering smooth and rapid downloads, but few firms seem prepared for what's set to be a significant change

Sean Hargrave

- F

or the first time, Google is about to start ranking web pages not only by how useful their content is, but also by how they perform when being viewed.
- The search engine's so-called core web vitals (CWV) update will reward pages that download quickly and are steady and responsive as they do so. If items on a page move around as they materialise, increasing the risk of a false click on an advert, say, the new algorithm will take a dim view. Having links that are instantly responsive when they show up on screen will also be a key criterion for a high ranking.
- The update references all the 'page experience' attributes a site must possess to satisfy the search engine. This was originally due to start applying in May but has been postponed to June, with a full implementation due by the end of August. The reason for the delay could well be a lack of awareness among website managers. When Searchmetrics recently analysed 2 million sites, it found that 96% offered a page experience that would be deemed substandard.



- Jonathan Hopper, CEO of Garrington Property Finders, is not surprised by this finding. He believes that many companies are "asleep at the marketing wheel" and underestimating the impact of the update.
- "Businesses should be approaching this with a good dose of fear and a sense of opportunity," argues Hopper, who has been studying the update's implications. He believes that a good starting point for website managers would be to focus on the part of the page that viewers don't see until they start scrolling.
- "To defend our top positions in search, we at Garrington have worked hard at speeding up the performance of our site by compressing pictures and also by bringing in 'lazy loading'. This allows the part of the page on view to be prioritised, with pictures below the fold loading only as a viewer

- scrolls down to them," Hopper says. "This means that a page appears much faster on screen, because it's not waiting for unseen content to download."
- Finding the fastest way for pictures to download is a common concern for businesses dealing with the CWV update. Patrick Heath, CTO of experience-days provider Fizzbox, reveals that he has been treading a fine line in this respect.
- His firm's website needs to be rich in content, featuring lots of high-quality photos to convey the joy of the events on sale, but it must also be easy to download. The answer, he says, is to change the site's coding to make images appear on the screen more quickly and without shifting. That entails programming in the size of pictures, so that browser software "knows" how much space to leave for them on the

- page as a placeholder. This prevents items on the page from suddenly shifting midway through the download.
- Fizzbox is also creating different-sized versions of pictures for mobile and desktop browsing, so that smartphones are no longer obliged to download large image files – an especially frustrating experience for users on a low-bandwidth mobile connection.
- Heath recommends looking through website code to eliminate any programming errors that might be making the pages slower to load than they need to be.
- "This is a real balancing act, but there's much that companies can do simply by not being lazy," he says. "We've gone back to best-practice methods."
- Energy supplier E.ON has been going through similar processes to improve its site's performance. The company's head of

## PAGE EXPERIENCE EXPLAINED

Google's page experience update will measure three facets: loading, interactivity and visual stability

● Good   ● Needs Improvement   ● Poor

Loading (measured as 'largest contentful paint')

0 to 2.5 seconds	2.5 to 4 seconds	+4 seconds
------------------	------------------	------------

Interactivity (measured as first input delay)

0 to 100 milliseconds	100 to 300 milliseconds	+300 milliseconds
-----------------------	-------------------------	-------------------

Visual stability (measured as 'cumulative layout shift')

0 to 0.1 seconds	0.1 to 0.25 seconds	+0.25 seconds
------------------	---------------------	---------------

Google, 2021

- search-engine optimisation, Sascha Otto, says it has been working hard to ensure that image files on its pages are compressed as much as possible, so that they download quickly. It has also examined the way its pages were programmed to ensure that their contents don't shift.
- "We've had to look at the programming to ensure that the navigation icons on a page stay in the same place when it downloads," he says. "We noticed that they could change position, which was not good. We also took a long, hard look at the coding to see if it was all necessary. We stripped out those little pieces of script that had been inserted over the years that weren't strictly necessary but would probably hold us back."
- Although the changes required may seem daunting, they are serving as a wake-up call to businesses to consider their websites as more than a repository of marketing material.
- Financial software provider Finastra is another company that's applied lazy loading in its bid to satisfy Google's upcoming algorithmic alteration. But it has also made some crucial tweaks to settings on its content management system that would have

- been overlooked if its SEO agency, Tug, hadn't spotted the need for them in an audit.
- A good example of how small changes can have a big impact came with the discovery that Finastra was using a font on the site that differed from the default option in the content management system. Simply changing it to match the default has enabled far higher page download speeds.
- Any company that focuses on serving its online content to customers more smoothly will be sure to gain a competitive edge on Google's rankings, according to Tina Lange, senior SEO consultant at Searchmetrics. The company's research has revealed a low level of awareness among businesses, which means that few will be ready in time for the start of the update in June.
- Lange's advice is for companies to look not only at their own sites, but also at those of their competitors. Google has tools for measuring a page's performance that can specify what a business is getting right and where it can improve, she says. They can even show whether a rival is better prepared and so give a business some strong hints as to how it might perform better when the page experience update begins. ●





DIGITAL

# When the cookie crumbles

Digital marketing is facing upheaval as two of the biggest players in tech wield their power as regulators of internet privacy. How should marketers respond to the challenge?

Chris Stokel-Walker

The ability to track customers as they browse the web could soon become a thing of the past for marketers. Google is laying the groundwork for a future without third-party cookies, while Apple's attack on app usage tracking via the unique identifier for advertisers (IDFA) assigned to each of its devices is limiting firms' capacity to monitor customers' online activities.

These developments are the result of a backlash against such surveillance from consumers, who are becoming ever more aware of how much valuable data they have been giving away.

Apple's iOS 14.5 update in April obliged iPhone apps to start seeking permission from users to track their online movements through their devices' IDFAs. The mobile operating system's default state has, in

effect, changed from opted in to opted out of tracking. Only 13% of iPhone and iPad users had opted in by the end of May, based on figures compiled by app marketplace Flurry.

Businesses are having to adapt to this severe limitation on their ability to follow consumers' digital footprints. Three-quarters of marketers responding to a poll conducted in September 2020 by AppsFlyer and the Mobile Marketing Association agreed that both Apple's and Google's decisions would reduce publishers' advertising revenues, for instance.

Despite this, the early signs are that few companies are well prepared for these changes. Only a third of marketers say the brands they work with have made plans for a post-cookie future, according to research by the World Advertising Research Center (WARC) in 2020. So what should those other two-thirds do?

Ebay's general manager of UK advertising, Harmony Murphy, acknowledges the problem, but is seeing it as an opportunity too. While third-party data has been a mainstay of the marketing industry for more than 20 years, the move to first-party data should be seen as a chance to improve advertising, she argues.

"This moves marketers from being less subjective about that data to being more objective. Using first-party data provides a lot more relevance because it's coming straight from the source," Murphy says.

Some of the UK's biggest publishers and advertisers have joined forces in a bid to harness the power of first-party data. One such collaboration is the Ozone Project, which claims to offer brands the ability to reach 99% of the UK's online adults "with

trust and transparency" by combining the readerships of publishers such as Guardian Media Group, Telegraph Media Group and Bauer Media. (News UK, the parent organisation of the newspapers publishing Raconteur reports, is also a member.)

Yet not all organisations are able to collect reliable first-party data, because they don't have the infrastructure in place to gather that level of detailed information on consumers or, if they do collect it, they can't then parse it correctly. Just over 40% of marketers responding to the WARC survey did not agree that their companies had a plan for actively collecting first-party data from customers.

Despite this, some ad industry insiders are sanguine about the post-cookie future. Matt Dailey, chief performance officer at agency network Havas Media, is one of them. He says that the upheaval provides "the opportunity for those of us who want to be honest to stop pretending about the all-pervasive power of digital. We can actually get back to some proper media-planning principles that have always held true, but have been bastardised somewhat."

Dailey, who thinks that some brands have become too reliant on cookie data that can often be flawed, adds: "From a planning, channel-allocation, value and measurement point of view, it's going to help us correct the balance."

For brands eager to maximise their reach, Dailey suggests that search can be a useful replacement for third-party cookies and app tracking. "Search has always been underplayed, because people think of intent as: 'I want to buy a phone on O2.' But there is so much generic opportunity further up the funnel where people are demonstrating intent," he says.

Some high-level data on demographics will still be available, Dailey points out, meaning that it will become more important to go back to core principles of marketing, such as relevancy, quality and effective storytelling. Retooling campaigns to focus less on frequency and more on quality will reap benefits, he predicts.

"There are people burying their heads in the sand and saying: 'We just need to find another way of replicating cookies.' Those people are going to struggle, because Google has said that it won't support any technology that simply tries to replicate cookies," Dailey explains.

For those businesses that want to retain an element of the digital approach they have spent the past decade or more honing, there are opportunities. For instance, long before the beginning of the end of the cookie era, eBay used its first-party data to help support customers.

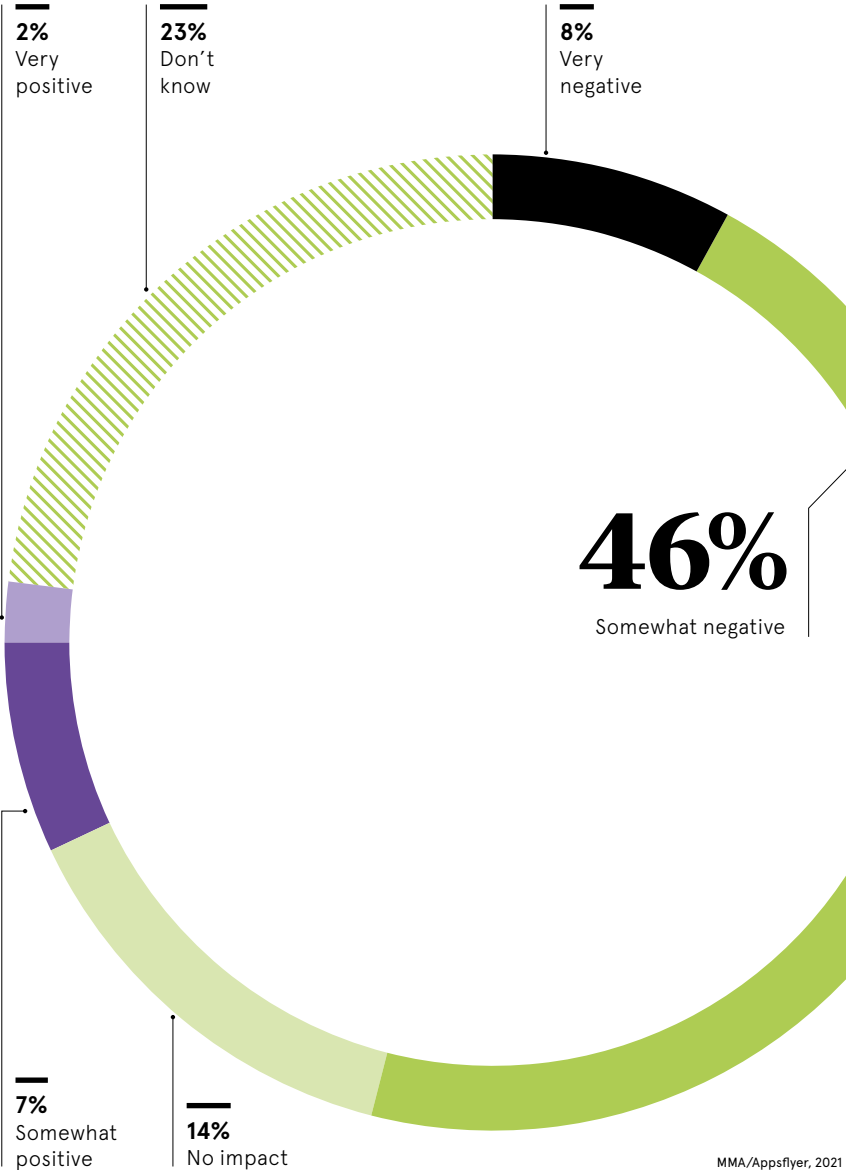
"When targeting, this means using that first-party data in a really intricate way to ensure that you are enriching that consumer journey," says Murphy, who adds that the freedom from a bombardment of ads is a boon for customers. "It keeps them within the ecosystem to the degree that they want to be in it."

Ebay is not alone. Adobe's head of product marketing, Ryan Fleisch, says: "We saw the writing on the wall with some of these changes and the need to evolve to include more durable identifiers. There will definitely be short-term pain for a lot of those companies that feel they need to reimagine different pieces of their business."

But he adds: "If you're one of the brands that effectively manages this over the next 12 months or so, you'll be leapfrogging many of your rivals that won't be ready."

## MARKETERS EXPECT APPLE'S DIGITAL TRACKING CHANGES TO HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THEIR CAPABILITIES

The impact marketers think the changes will have



INTERVIEW

# Activist in chief

Patagonia has been held up as a paragon of brand purpose, but its recently appointed CEO, **Ryan Gellert**, stresses that his company will always find room for improvement

Oliver Balch

Ryan Gellert is not the kind of business leader who dilly-dallies. Barely a week after his appointment as CEO of Californian clothing brand Patagonia in September 2020, he was spearheading a hard-hitting campaign to defend public land rights in the US. Next, he was supporting a community energy initiative in Europe, followed by a coalition protecting citizens' access to the vote in the state of Georgia.

The activist streak in the 49-year-old Floridian informs his approach to the business and free enterprise more widely. While most CEOs enter the job promising growth, growth and more growth, Gellert admits to "wrestling" with the size of the operation, which turns over about \$1bn (£710m) a year, and how to square that with his views about capitalism's undesirable effects on the world.

"We are a for-profit enterprise, but we are committed to using our business to do more than make money," he says.

Speaking in his first UK interview since his promotion from the role of general manager of the firm's EMEA operations, Gellert has no qualms about blaming unrestrained capitalism for the "ecological crisis" and many social inequalities.

As unorthodox as his stance may seem, it's effective. In May, his company topped a reputation ranking by Axios and Harris Poll of the 100 most prominent brands in the US. The next clothing company in the league table was Adidas – in 49th place.

So what's the secret of Patagonia's marketing success? And what can other brands learn from its ascent from niche vendor of climbing kit to globally admired clothing label?

Gellert balks slightly at his company's status as a marketing case study, yet it's routinely cited as an exemplar in how to achieve a winning brand purpose. Part of the reason for this is the continuing influence of its founder and owner, Yvon Chouinard. Gellert may be free to set Patagonia's strategic compass and run its day-to-day operations, but the 82-year-old former rock climber remains the company's visionary in

chief. A lifelong environmentalist, Chouinard pledged in 2002 to donate 1% of his firm's sales income each year to grass-roots environmental charities. It was also his idea to do the same with the savings the company achieved as a result of the corporate tax cuts enacted by the Trump administration.

Clearly, not all brands can imitate Patagonia in claiming that they are "in business to save our home planet" – and nor should they, Gellert stresses.

## PATAGONIA IS CLEAR ABOUT ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD

**35%**  
of its apparel assembly factories pay their workers a living wage, on average

**100%**  
of its electricity needs in the US are met using renewable sources

**64%**  
of its fabrics are made with recycled materials

To be "authentic", a company needs to analyse its own markets, offerings and customers before identifying its guiding purpose.

You simply can't fake it, he warns. "As an individual, you don't wake up every morning and ask yourself: 'What does the world want me to be?' The same applies to businesses."

For that reason, Gellert is cautious about placing too much emphasis on the commercial benefits of brand activism. Ideally, he says, a company should be close enough to its customer base that the public positioning of the former matches the beliefs of the latter, thereby creating a virtuous, reputation-enhancing circle.

A prime example of this is the remarkable Patagonia ad campaign during the Black Friday pre-Christmas sales period of 2011, which told shoppers "Don't buy this jacket", just as most retailers were offering huge discounts to fuel the seasonal spending spree. The idea was to encourage consumers to repair their old clothes rather than always buying new. It actually led to a spike in sales.

Patagonia knows that having the courage of its convictions will alienate some potential customers, but it's clearly reconciled to that prospect. In 2019, for instance, the company antagonised many anglers by campaigning against artificial salmon breeding in a feature-length documentary called *Artifishal*. While it knew that the move would harm the sales of its fishing gear, it went ahead all the same.

"However uncomfortable it may be, if we feel strongly about an issue – and if that issue ladders back to our reason for being – we have an obligation to step forward," Gellert says.

It's not a strategy for the faint-hearted. Last summer, for instance, Patagonia decided to pull all its advertising from Facebook and Instagram because of its dissatisfaction with the former's efforts to tackle hate speech and fake news. Gellert admits that this move reduced "eye-balls on our messaging" and has made it harder to reach consumers. But he insists that the firm's approach to marketing is what brings "energy, complexity and excitement" to the brand.





Andrew Burr/Patagonia

“However uncomfortable it may be, if we feel strongly about an issue – and if that issue ladders back to our reason for being – we have an obligation to step forward

It has a positive impact on staff, he says, who often join Patagonia because of its activism. It also lands well with its loyal customers, many of whom have almost come to expect the company to make a nuisance of itself.

Another reason why brand activism is so hard to get right is that it puts a firm at serious risk of being accused of hypocrisy. Whenever a company publicly criticises another entity, in effect it’s inviting every consumer, journalist and competitor to start muckraking.

With this in mind, Patagonia works hard to ensure that it can take a stand and

remain on the moral high ground while doing so. For instance, it uses 100% organic cotton and includes recycled fabrics in two-thirds of its products.

This doesn’t mean the firm has found all the answers. Its use of petroleum-based materials remains an issue, for instance. Selling nylon backpacks and plastic sunglasses, the brand is still wedded to the fossil-fuel economy it so readily berates.

Indeed, the brand’s refusal to sell its fleeces to oil companies prompted a *Wall Street Journal* reader to write a letter to the newspaper in April 2019 denouncing

Patagonia’s “self-satisfied environmental snobbery” as “hypocrisy masquerading as virtue”.

The conventional advice to firms in such situations is twofold: be honest about any shortcomings and be clear about how these are being addressed. Patagonia does both. Regarding the first, it states on its website that “everything we make has an impact on the planet”, but that it’s working to mitigate that impact. As for the second, it reports the percentage of petroleum-based fabrics in its overall clothing range every year.

Gellert concedes that the difference between Patagonia’s low-impact ambitions and its considerable footprint presents an inherent “contradiction” that cannot be ignored.

“This keeps us on our toes. We must constantly figure out how we can lessen our impact, how we can scale up solutions and then how we can use this business to champion the issues we care strongly about,” he says.

Whenever Patagonia works with grass-roots campaign groups, it tends to keep its brand in the background so as not to hog the limelight. The exception is when its marketing clout might give the cause a crucial boost. Take the Balkans, where many of Europe’s rare free-flowing rivers face being dammed for hydroelectric power projects, whose environmental costs would far outweigh the benefits. With opposition from local activists failing to make an impact, Patagonia has put its marketing muscle behind their cause (see the “Patagonia Films” panel, right).

Whatever the level of support provided, it’s crucial that the relationship between the brand and the campaign remains strictly non-commercial, according to Gellert, who adds: “You’re not going to see it splashed across our home page.”

The same goes for working with other brands. Gellert’s recent denouncement of Georgia’s bid to impose voting restrictions, for instance, was part of a campaign co-founded with Levi’s and PayPal. The “Time to Vote” initiative now has about 2,000 other corporate signatories.

An advocate of “talking straight” in corporate communications, he argues that terms such as ‘purposeful’, ‘responsible’ and ‘regenerative’ are now so “coopted” that they’ve become almost meaningless. “When companies that use organic cotton in the trims of some of their T-shirts start talking about ‘sustainable collections’, it’s bullshit. And it’s not bullshit by accident; it’s bullshit by intent,” he says.

In the case of cotton specifically, Patagonia’s solution has been to set up a robust certification system under the aegis of the Regenerative Organic Alliance. That way, shoppers can be sure that the organic cotton they are wearing is the real deal.

Next, brands need to pick their causes carefully and be careful not to jump into every campaign going, cautions Gellert. Once you’ve chosen one to support, he says, offer it a credible plan of action. Clever

### Patagonia Films: very moving pictures

Few clothing companies have a dedicated film department, but then few clothing companies claim to be in business to “save our home planet” either. Central to that mission, according to Gellert, is storytelling, which is best done through the medium of film.

Patagonia has 47 films to its name to date, ranging from high-octane shorts to feature-length documentaries. As to be expected of an outdoor brand, the list includes a fair share of people climbing impossibly sheer cliff faces and riding insanely dangerous waves. Yet alongside this adrenaline-packed output is an impressive archive of more sober movies focused on pressing social and environmental problems. Patagonia’s logo appears in the credits, but otherwise the content is serious, sophisticated and free of branding.

This series of activist productions (the preferred in-house term is “advocacy documentary”) has clocked up 16 million views on YouTube. A number have also been picked up by streaming service Netflix, including *DamNation* (2014), *Jumbo Wild* (2015), and *Fishpeople* (2017), expanding their reach enormously.

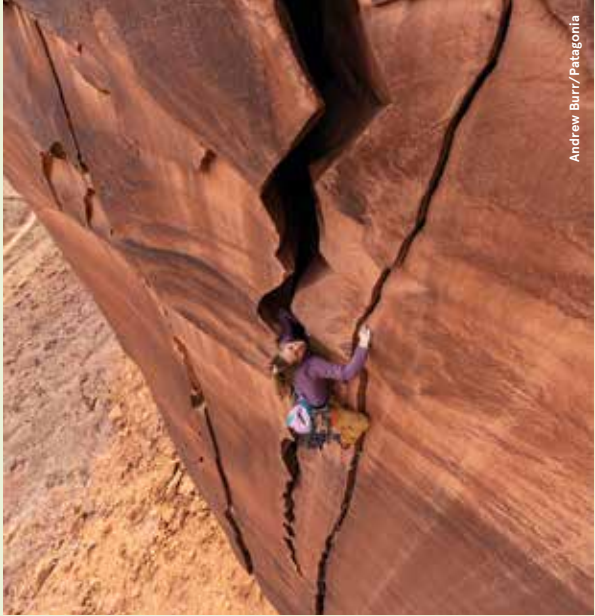
Done well, filmmaking can take issues around the world that “people care about and take them down to stories that feel really relevant”, according to Gellert. He is equally passionate about using film to connect people to stories that otherwise might be overlooked – a prime example being *Blue Heart* (2019), the award-winning documentary that raised awareness about the damming of Balkan rivers.

Patagonia Films has racked up some notable successes over the years. *Takayna* (2018), about threats to Tasmania’s last old-growth rainforest, prompted the biggest environmental petition ever tabled in Australia’s parliament, attracting more than 275,000 signatures. Similarly, the award-winning *DamNation*, about “deadbeat” dam projects in the US, has galvanised support for dam-removal efforts across the country. One river whose waters are running free again as a result is the Elwha in Washington state.

Hopes are also high for *Public Trust* (2020), which counts Robert Redford as executive producer and covers the fight to protect publicly owned lands from privatisation. It has led to renewed discussions about granting extra protections to areas cited in the 98-minute documentary, including Bears Ears National Monument, Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge.

Patagonia Films’ most recent production, *We the Power*, promotes cooperative renewable-energy projects in Europe. It has attracted 885,000 views on YouTube since its release in mid-April.

Linking screenings to follow-up actions, such as petitions, is crucial in turning viewers’ interest into tangible action, Gellert says. The goal is never “just getting eyeballs on a film. We must have a pathway to engagement attached to it as well.”



Andrew Burr/Patagonia

tweets and catchy adverts have their place, but this work needs to be baked into the business model and strategy. Patagonia’s approach to documentary filmmaking is a case in point. Behind every new release comes a series of follow-up actions, from town-hall-style debates through to parliamentary petitions.

Talk of petitions brings the conversation round to politics, a subject that few brands seem willing to discuss publicly. Patagonia is different. Brands, like citizens, operate as a part of a wider ecosystem, Gellert says, so efforts to effect change eventually

encounter structural barriers that only legislators can fix.

While playing politics is clearly a risk for brands, Gellert believes that there’s more room for consensus than many people might imagine. The bearpit of party politics aside, most of us broadly want the same things, he reasons, adding: “The more we can figure out where those basic values unite us, the more effective we can be.”

Not every CEO has as much freedom as Gellert to express an opinion. In the month he started in the job, pairs of Patagonia shorts began mysteriously appearing in

stores with a stitched tag reading ‘Vote the assholes out’, clearly referring to the Trump administration. This sort of thing would push most companies into full-on crisis mode, but Patagonia is different from most companies. Chouinard simply said: “These are great. I need a pair in size 32.”

Gellert concedes that brand activism is a tougher task for companies without such “enlightened leadership”. But he concludes that “the absence of an owner like Yvon is no excuse for you not to work out how to play a role in the business world that goes beyond lining your pockets”.

### Commercial feature

# A proactive era for customer engagement

Engaging consumers in a post-Covid era of greater expectation requires brands to be a lot more proactive. Rethinking the customer experience will be crucial if businesses are to win

Nick Easen

The Covid crisis, lockdowns and the wholesale shift to online has inevitably forced many businesses to rethink the way they engage customers the world over. Over the last 14 months, consumer expectations have reached new heights, the digital transformation of many organisations have moved up a gear, while disruptive, agile brands are raising the bar when it comes to customer experience.

The new imperative in the post-pandemic era is for brands to be more proactive when it comes to customer engagement, turn data into practical insights and forge a new relationship with those people who buy their products and services in order to maintain market share, loyalty and trust.

“Consumer behaviour is changing the longer Covid-related disruptions have gone on. Consumers have also discovered some great experiences with brands. They then expect that experience with every other company and service they interact with. So, there is a cross pollination of experiences that is happening. This blending and changing is disrupting businesses,” says Sunny Rao, global senior vice president for sales at Vonage.

The question is how much of the new online-focused behaviours will stick

as economies open up, high and main streets welcome shoppers, and physical retail experiences, as well as social interactions return. There is no doubt that the coronavirus has been an acceleration event. The issue is whether it has really shifted the dial when it comes to customer engagement and by how much.

“Living without moving has become a lifestyle choice. That’s something that companies are having to facilitate going forwards. It doesn’t mean that this will be how people decide to live their

“We still live in a reactive world. Brands must be proactive. If you want to reach 100% of your customers, you can only do that with machines



lives entirely, but they want the option. Customers now need to have the convenience of banking, healthcare or food delivery at their fingertips – that’s been a big shift,” says Stanford Swinton, vice president of global care and customer experience at Deliveroo.

When it comes to customer engagement there’s no doubt that brands need to do more. A survey by Gartner of more than 6,000 customers found that only 13% reported receiving any type of proactive customer service. The same research showed that proactive engagement also resulted in better customer satisfaction scores.

“We still live in a reactive world. Brands must be proactive. If you want to reach 100% of your customers, you can only do that with machines,” says Dr Mark Smith, founder and CEO of ContactEngine.

In recent times those businesses that have raised the bar in terms of service delivery and customer engagement have done so by moving towards a more customer-centric operating model, with a better understanding of the customer journey end-to-end, particularly the key touchpoints. Actionable data is key. Empowering consumers is also part of this picture, so they have the tools to engage with brands in a meaningful way.

“One of the megatrends is to move to a system where patients are taking more control of their own health. A lot of the data within healthcare is not really used. People are not really taking action or using data to be proactive with their health yet. In healthcare, we will see a lot move forwards in this space in the coming decade,” adds Johannes Schildt, CEO of Kry, or Livi in the UK.

Customers or patients have also become more comfortable with their virtual selves over time. Consumers are increasingly relaxed at sharing data with companies and brands that they want to interact with online.

“Banking has never been short of data. But as a sector we’ve not been great at using it in the past. There are a lot of opportunities to use this information to be proactive. Banks can do more to help customers be in control of their money,” says Kat Robinson, customer experience director at Metrobank.

She adds, “Banks can now use robotics and AI – artificial intelligence – to do a lot of the mundane and straightforward transactions, this can free up our staff to deliver more value-added experiences, whether that’s coaching someone to use digital banking or helping another to manage their money better.”

Looking ahead, the future of customer engagement looks brighter. Covid-19 may have been a catalyst and an acceleration event, but it has also made brands rethink barriers to market, streamlining bureaucracy and forcing corporations to make things happen.

“I think this is going to give rise to a lot of new business models that are going to disrupt the market even more. You will see markets disrupted from healthcare to food delivery to insurance. So, we have some interesting times ahead of us,” says Rao. “How do you make data more actionable is the biggest challenge and allow a holistic view of that consumer? Brands will need to offer a more consistent experience across all touchpoints end-to-end.”

Another challenge is the paradox of choice. This needs to be tackled. Endless options on Netflix, Spotify or any other customer-facing digital solution can lead to dissatisfied customers and a lack of engagement, as well as poor experiences.

“We are seeing paralysis from our consumers. Go on to Deliveroo in west London today and search for a burger you will get 150 different options. Go on Netflix and start scrolling, people spend two hours looking for the thing they want to watch,” says Swinton.

“We are in a world where we are getting too much selection. The opportunity in the short to medium term is around curation and discovery. But as soon as you put curation in, you shut down my product discovery. This is what machine learning does. So, it’s about good personalisation and curation, but also discovery that allows you to taste things that you otherwise wouldn’t.”

For brands in the future there will be a sweet spot when it comes to customer engagement. Not all will achieve that perfect mix that brings together the hyper-personalisation of products, offers consumers enough choices that allow them to discover new things, but also curates services in a proactive way, so that consumers are not overwhelmed.

For more details go to [www.vonage.com](http://www.vonage.com)







# The man with all the answers

Reliance on outdated search technology means brands are losing out to competitors in the critical digital space. Yext CMO Josh Grau is using storytelling to communicate the pressing need for companies to invest in modern search, and not rely solely on Google. His track record means CMOs would do well to sit up and listen

Josh Grau has form for identifying burgeoning areas in digital. He joined YouTube in 2008, when it was attracting less than 800 million monthly active users. Today it attracts more than 2 billion. In 2010 he joined Twitter; the platform's monthly active users had grown sixfold by the time Grau left in 2016. He also advised Strava between 2016 and 2019, in which time its user base expanded from 20 million to over 40 million.

Grau was drawn to YouTube and Twitter because they were new modes of communication, fuelled by passionate users who understood the potential and were helping to innovate the platform. "The real business challenge was scaling the user base and figuring out monetisation, while also preserving that core community that helped create that early momentum," says Grau.

Two years ago, his attention was drawn to New York-based technology company Yext as it was transforming into a search company. He joined as interim head of brand and became CMO in the summer of 2020. He describes Yext as "the next big thing in search", driven by the growing realisation that while consumer search has innovated considerably thanks to Google, enterprise search continues to lag a long way behind.

Not much has changed since 1999, with companies still using basic keyword search technology on their websites. Yet search is critical to a brand's success. While companies invest huge amounts in slick, fast websites and conversion optimisation, they often overlook search functionality, hindering the user experience with slow or inaccurate responses.

Many CMOs unknowingly persist in powering their most precious asset with outdated technology, perhaps because they wrongly believe that Google is handling everything. It isn't. Google does not extend to a business' own website, or the wider search ecosystem.

Grau can see that many brands, while investing heavily in other critical areas of marketing, risk creating a poor experience by neglecting search. When Yext talks to prospects to assess if upgrading their search is important, it focuses on the customer experience. "If you have a question and go to a company's website, type your query, and don't get the answer you need, it's frustrating," says Grau. "The next natural step is to go to Google to seek out the same information, but when that happens the odds of a competitive ad taking over that customer's journey is really high."

He adds that this is akin to going into a store, asking a question and getting a blank stare back or receiving unhelpful information. "You'd be horrified if that's how an employee treated a customer, yet poor search experiences do the same thing."

Website search is an undoubted driver for business and Grau's job is to find creative ways to communicate this

message and spark urgency. As a lecturer in storytelling at both Northwestern and Stanford Universities, it is a challenge he relishes.

He launched Yext's first brand campaign in 2019, which saw the creation of earnest know-it-all Todd Munion, billed as 'the man without the answers'. A series of ads depicted Todd in various everyday settings where he interrupted people mid-conversation, spouting outlandish – but somehow plausible – facts. Just like third-party websites, his 'Toddsplaining' left people bemused. The campaign won several prestigious Shorty Awards last year.

Grau and his team used Todd's character to convey humour and emotion, tapping into what happens beyond a brand's website. "All too often people are led to these random third-party sites when searching and it looks like it might be from the brand or from a reliable source but really it is click bait. We used Todd to draw attention to the problem in an X-Files way – it's lurking out there so the best thing you can do is protect your own home base."

**Search is the real secret weapon for driving an effective business website – modern AI search leads to more time on site, a lower bounce rate, more conversions and lower support costs**

He is currently working on the company's next brand campaign, which evolves Yext's story to highlight the downsides of using old search technology. Search isn't often at the forefront of a CMO's mind, so the campaign will draw attention by throwing the spotlight on innovative technologies from the 1990s that have had their moment and since evolved, positioning outdated, keyword-based search as the industry villain that has failed to advance.

"CMOs need to understand that there are two kinds of searches they can have for their website – outdated keyword search from the last century or modern search built for today. From a storytelling perspective, it's a classic 'old versus new'. While music, movies and fashion from another decade always make their way back into the mainstream, old technology isn't something anyone cares to

revisit because it just doesn't do the trick anymore."

The campaign will draw parallels between keyword search and obsolescent items like clunky flip phones, dial-up modems and fax machines: "Items which are so absurdly out of date that no one would dream of using them to run their business."

Grau adds that Yext tries to educate brands on search as the real secret weapon for driving an effective business website, demonstrating that modern AI search leads to more time on site, a lower bounce rate, more conversions and lower support costs.

One challenge lies in the fact that each business has different search needs, meaning there is rarely a sole decision maker. As Grau says, sometimes the CTO is trying to solve the whole search puzzle, from site search to support search to intranet search, meaning they consult other stakeholders, including the CMO. It demands a holistic approach from brands. "At Yext, we want to make sure we're educating everyone on how outdated search can slow your business down, while modern search built for today acts as a business accelerator. No matter whether it's a CMO or a CTO, that's a message that gets attention."

Grau is thoroughly enthused by his latest role, and his time at pioneers like YouTube and Twitter have stood him in good stead for ensuring that his message – namely that modern search can build customer trust and hit critical business objectives – is heard. "In 2007/2008, brands investing in video as a content strategy was a pretty foreign concept. At YouTube, we really had to convince marketers that video was going to change the content paradigm and it took a while to reach a critical mass. The same was true at Twitter – marketers struggled to see its potential as a major branding and customer service platform."

His job now is to communicate why enterprise AI search has never been more important for businesses – and why old search has had its day. The story is a compelling one.

**Is your business tech stuck in the past? Take Yext's Escape the '90s challenge and find out: yex.tt/CMO**

**Yext is on a mission to transform the enterprise with AI-search. For more information, please visit yext.co.uk/CMO**



Nestle's purchase of British recipe-kit company SimplyCook marked its fourth D2C investment

Simply Cook

## DIRECT TO CONSUMER

# What the big beasts see in D2C

The pandemic has restored the allure of direct-to-consumer brands, turning several into attractive takeover targets. But how much could an acquisitive multinational really learn from these upstarts?

Lucy Handley

When you work in this model, there are no middlemen and you have direct contact with the consumers. You have the right insights."

So says Annica Rantala, CEO of Stronger, a Swedish online clothing brand. She is explaining the business model that recently prompted Polaris, a Danish private equity house, to take a 51% stake in her firm, valuing it at SEK1bn (£85m) in the process.

"We're creating and curating this brand and this business, together with our customers, with help from data. That secures a long lifetime for the brand," Rantala adds.

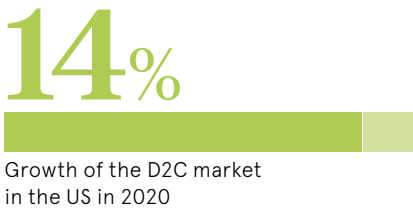
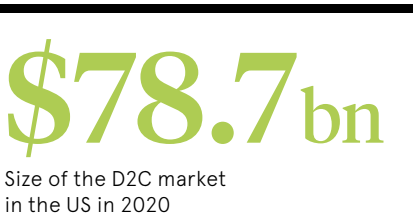
The obvious benefit of the D2C channel is that it gives businesses key information about shoppers' purchasing habits that they wouldn't have when selling through a third-party retailer. Grasping the potential of this model, some big multinationals have been on something of a D2C acquisition spree this year. Unilever bought US food supplement brand Onnit, for instance, while Nestlé's purchase of British recipe-kit company SimplyCook marked its fourth D2C investment.

Venture capitalist David Pakman led funding rounds for Dollar Shave Club before its 2016 sale to Unilever for \$1bn (£710m), one of the earliest and largest D2C deals in the packaged-goods sector. He says that the big players are going from having "absolutely no infrastructure to sell directly to consumers" to learning from their acquisitions how to communicate directly with customers, often via social media.

Pakman, a partner at Venrock Associates, says that one of the main reasons why Dollar Shave Club was so attractive to his firm – and, subsequently, Unilever – was the nature of the brand's arrangement with its razor supplier.

"In this case, the big difference was that there are only five razor manufacturers in the world. Dollar Shave Club had an exclusive deal with one of these. Even if you were Amazon, you wouldn't be able to enter this space," he explains.

Aside from the chance to gather valuable data on customers, could the basic fear of missing out be a factor when large companies acquire D2C brands? Not so, according



eMarketer, 2021

to Andreia Vaz, Nestlé Portugal's head of consumer market insight, strategy and innovation. "I wouldn't say that's a reason. Everything in business is about time to market. Sometimes it's quicker to invest in existing businesses and add value to their breakthrough ideas, rather than creating things from scratch," she says, adding that Nestlé Portugal is "always active" in considering any potential M&A target.

"Having partners that can be an extension of our business is key. We seek partners with which we can co-create," Vaz says. Nestlé assesses a company's unique proposition and considers how hard or easy it would be to start a similar business."

Acquiring D2C brands has also helped Nestlé to learn new working methods. "A lot of great start-ups have created businesses based on different premises from those of the traditional industry. Bringing in this new mindset adds value to the operation," she says.

But the acquisitive approach isn't for every big player, of course. Doing D2C in-house makes more sense for Reckitt, for example. The owner of brands such as Durex and Cillit Bang has seen a 21% increase in its ecommerce sales in the UK over the past year. Although he acknowledges that looking outside the business could be an option,

Reckitt's ecommerce director in the UK, Tom Price, believes that his firm is already well capable of reacting to changes in the market and developing new projects itself.

"We can actually get from idea to creation within six months," he says, pointing to the eetail site that Reckitt created for dishwashing brand Finish at the end of 2020.

The data that's gathered through the website helps to inform Reckitt's consumer marketing campaigns for Finish, as well as those aimed at retailers.

"We can now understand what bundles work together and what don't, what price points to hit and when people are doing most of their shopping. That's all super rich data for us," says Price, who adds that consumers tend to spend more when buying a bundle of products that are delivered direct.

Huib van Bockel, a former marketing executive at Red Bull and Unilever, started drinks business Tenzing Natural Energy in 2016, selling via retailers to start off with. Since he started using the D2C channel about 18 months ago, Tenzing's ecommerce sales have rocketed, obliging van Bockel to expand his team to help field the queries that come in directly from shoppers.

**Everything in business is about time to market. Sometimes it's quicker to invest in existing businesses and add value to current breakthrough ideas, rather than creating them from scratch**

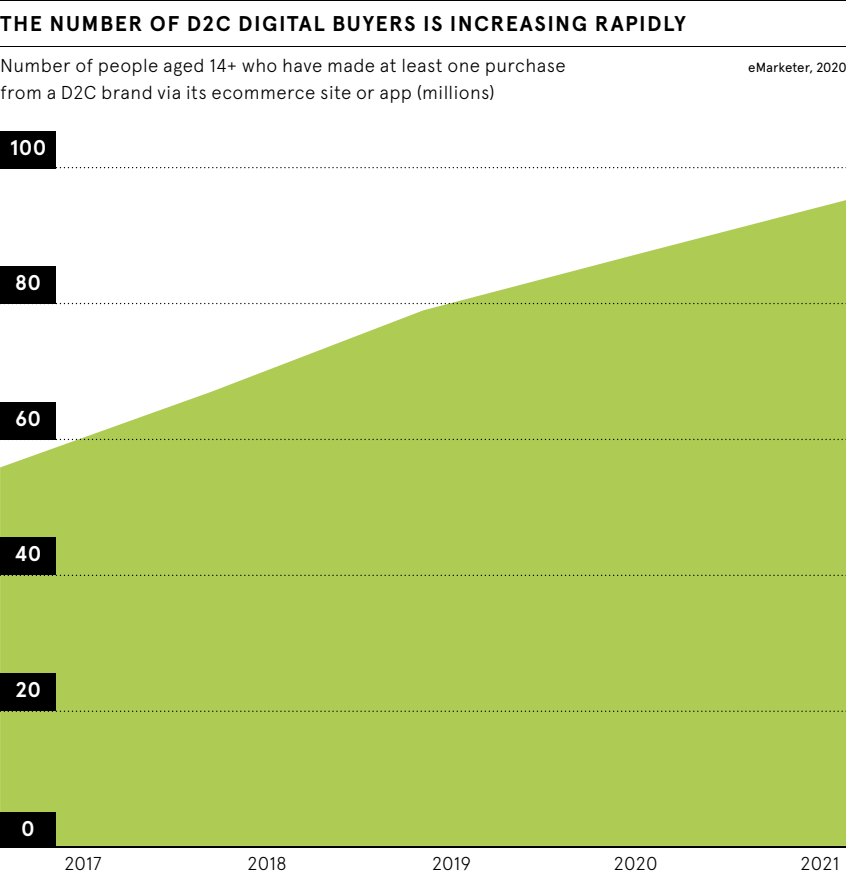
He believes that it's "wise" of larger companies to buy up D2C brands, noting that "real innovation usually comes from the outside". He does also detect a fear of missing out among some acquirers, which is driving their investments.

These larger players often have substantial deals in place with retailers such as Walmart or Tesco, so any decision to start selling a long-established brand directly to consumers might create conflicts with these powerful supermarket chains. Either starting their own D2C brand from scratch or acquiring one can help them to avoid such a clash, Pakman notes.

The risk of falling out with a retail giant has not been a concern for van Bockel, who believes that the two channels can be complementary rather than competitive. "Say that you subscribe to Tenzing and have a couple of cans in your fridge. If you're then out in a shop, you're more likely to get one there as well," he argues.

Now that many of the big players are getting their ecommerce affairs in order, their future D2C acquisitions may be more about the product than the channel, according to Pakman.

"There was a time for Dollar Shave Club and others to exploit the weakness of the incumbents in using this new channel," he says. "But, now that things have equalised a little, we're really going back to being interested in the product, how differentiated it is and how under-served the market is."





VOICE SEARCH

# A little more conversation, a little more action, please

The proliferation of smart devices and the improving capabilities of AI-powered voice assistants mean that voice searchability is no longer a mere ‘nice to have’

Oliver Pickup

Hey, Siri. Are marketers and their businesses investing enough time, money and effort in improving their conversational search rankings?

Given that Juniper Research forecasts that consumers will be using voice assistants on more than 8.4 billion devices by 2024, while MarketsandMarkets predicts that the global conversational AI market will grow from £3.4bn in 2020 to £9.8bn in 2025, there's a strong case that they should be doing more.

Firms that have already invested in achieving higher voice search rankings are benefiting from it. For instance, translation

service Lionbridge started optimising for voice search in July 2019. Twelve months later, it had almost 47 times more ‘featured snippets’ – the short text at the top of a page of Google search results. This improvement aided a 127% year-on-year increase in traffic to the company's website.

“Businesses should view optimising for conversational search as mandatory,” argues Olga Andrienko, head of global marketing at Semrush, which manages Lionbridge's marketing analytics. “We have already seen the dramatic effect it can have on businesses’ search results. As voice assistants are further integrated into people's everyday lives, this influence will grow.”

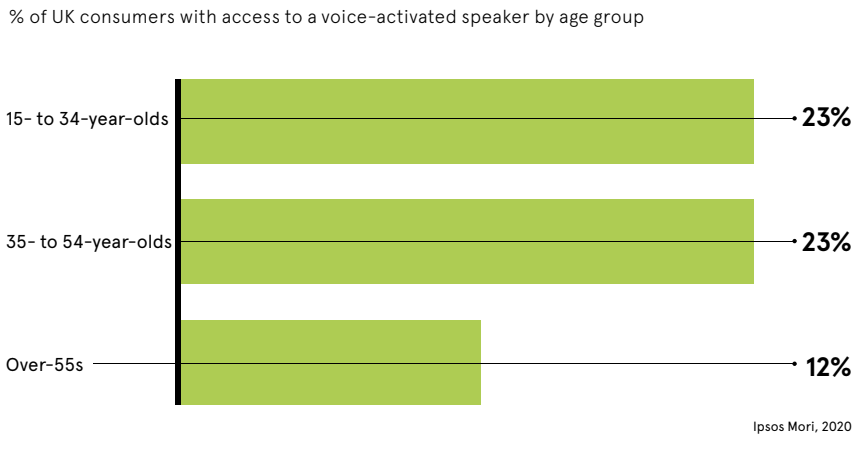
Nick McQuire, chief of enterprise research at tech consultancy CCS Insight, agrees. “As one of AI's most important areas of development, conversational search is progressing rapidly,” he says.

Conversational search development has accelerated “because it sits at the centre of two important trends”, McQuire suggests. First is the improvement in AI speech technology. Second is the need to improve information search in businesses. “This area”, he says, “is often listed as ‘broken’ by customers owing to information silos, especially across several data stores, documents and applications. The fact that all the big tech firms have started to tackle this



Rohane Hamilton / EyeEm via Getty Images

## CONSUMER USE OF VOICE ASSISTANTS IS HIGHEST AMONG YOUNGER AGE GROUPS



area with products and tools demonstrates the scale of the customer need.”

Conversational search is a more complex matter than people simply using their voices instead of their keyboards, though. For instance, on what smart device is the search being conducted – a screen-less Apple HomePod, a Google Nest Hub Max or an in-car Amazon Alexa?

While companies can pay to appear on the first page of a conventional typed search

on a computer screen, mastering conversational search is not so straightforward. For one thing, marketers don't always have the same real estate for advertising.

If a device being used for voice search has no screen, how likely is it that a business will pull traffic to its website if it ranks outside the top three search results? Equally, if the device has a screen, a more visual response is presumably better. Notably, the average answer length for the three most

popular voice assistants – Siri, Alexa and Google Assistant – is 23 words, according to Semrush.

Semantics aside, the crucial point for marketers is that consumers want their problems solved quickly. So says Kashif Naqshbandi, CMO at IT recruiter Tenth Revolution Group, who adds: “Most of the time they're looking not only for a ‘what’, but also for a ‘how’ and ‘why’. This is why question-driven conversational search has spiked.”

Naqshbandi explains that few people are now searching online for, say, a “mountain bike” and then clicking through web pages of information. Instead, they are asking specific questions – for instance, “what sort of mountain bike should I buy?” – to seek a contextualised answer.

“Consumers are more accustomed to these fast, personalised interactions that help them cut through the digital noise and find a solution,” he says. “Marketers have to evolve to deliver interactive, dialogue-based experiences to stay competitive.”

Euan Matthews, director of AI and innovation at ContactEngine, a developer of conversational AI systems, agrees that people ultimately want to save time wherever possible and are happy to pay for convenience.

“Consumers embrace new technology if it makes life simpler for them. Otherwise,

## THE CONVERSATIONAL AI MARKET IS SET TO TRIPLE IN SIZE OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS



what's the point?” Matthews says, attributing Amazon's continuing ascendancy to the time it saves customers. But he adds that a “big pitfall” for marketers is to focus only on the search element.

To illustrate his point, Matthews says that some devices, when asked about the best Indian restaurant in a given area, say, will now offer a follow-up option of booking a table through Google, and – if the user accepts – they will add this booking to the digital calendar.

“This time saving is not because of the conversational search,” he says. “It's more because that search has been seamlessly married with the ability to execute a transaction on your behalf. Marketers must consider how to marry conversational search and the transactional capability of the voice assistant, because this is what saves consumers time and makes it more likely that they'll progress down the sales funnel.”

The direction of travel is clear, so marketers need to alter their course accordingly, according to Matthews, who predicts that “we will see more advances in the ability for conversational search to end in a transaction – which will drive uptake”.

Will it ever replace typed search? “I doubt it,” he says. “Some searches are best not voiced aloud.” ●

OPINION

# ‘We all believe in the power of creativity and its capacity to change minds, behaviour and business prospects. We just need to get on the same page’

At the start of 2021, Lions conducted its first global survey to examine the state of creativity following a year of disruption. The honesty in the 1,500 responses we received from marketers, creatives and media owners, alongside the one-on-one interviews we held with global CMOs, creatives and marketing leaders, led to some illuminating insights. The feedback clearly showed that creativity is vital in driving competitive advantage and that opportunity lies ahead for the brand marketing community.

We synthesised these findings into the Lions *State of Creativity* report to provide global insight for marketing leaders. The analysis showed that marketers – both brand and agency side – undoubtedly value creativity to drive growth, even if their priorities don't always align.

Despite what creative partners might experience in practice, 67% of the brand leaders we interviewed see creativity as extremely valuable as a competitive advantage in business. However, only 17% of creative partners believe that brands value creativity to the same extent. That is an alarming disconnect.

Our industry has been criticised in the past for being resistant to change and too slow to adapt. If anything will force us into new territory, it is this recent period in history. The pandemic upended people's wants, habits and choices. Brands quickly pivoted to reach customers through new channels and focus their creative efforts on improving experiences. Digital transformation was once a business advantage, now it is a business imperative. The *WARC Marketers Toolkit 2021* report has revealed that the majority of

marketers are prioritising a focus on quality customer experiences to adapt to the economic recession.

There is an opportunity for brands that can be truly distinctive. And that is as much about culture as it is about technologies – and as much about the idea as the execution. As advertising legend Sir John Hegarty once put it when speaking at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, “it's 80% idea, 80% execution”.

Our survey also highlighted the difference between how brands and agencies claim to be spending their creative budgets. Where brands say they are prioritising creative investment in brand building and brand awareness – work associated with longer-term strategy initiatives – creative partners have a different experience. More than half of the creative partners surveyed believe brands are fixating on targeted promotions and activations for sales uplift – work associated with shorter-term projects.

The industry has stepped into survival mode over the past 15 months amid the chaos caused by the global pandemic and with social justice issues at a tipping point across the world. Scientists and artists often assert that chaos can create the conditions for creativity to flourish. But times of crisis can also reduce everyone to short-term thinking. In fact, it's a natural human response. As one marketing leader put it: “It's fight, flight, freeze or fixate on immediate results.”

While brand leaders spoke of their businesses willingness to invest in creativity, the scrutiny on creativity's return on investment has intensified. Well over a quarter of brand leaders (28%) told us there is more urgent

and mounting pressure to prove the effectiveness of creativity. The most cited creative effectiveness issue was demonstrating the impact of long-term creativity.

It would make sense that the respondents to our survey believe in the power of creativity and its capacity to change minds, behaviour and business prospects. We just all need to get on the same page. As one creative put it: “There is a perception that ‘creativity’ and ‘effectiveness’ are two different entities when in reality they are two sides of the same coin. Work can only be truly effective if it is truly creative.”

Find further details on Lions and new Lions Membership, a year-round platform for the creative community to access inspiration, learning, resources and a global directory of talent, at [www.lionscreativity.com/membership](http://www.lionscreativity.com/membership) ●



Charlotte Williams  
Vice-president of content,  
Lions

Commercial feature

# Why CMOs must prioritise creative excellence

This year more visual content will be created than ever before, yet marketers still struggle to track the quality of their creative output

The impact of strong creatives is well documented; companies that demonstrate high creative performance in their digital marketing benefit from up to 46% more profitability, according to the IPA.

Each platform defines creative quality differently: Google Ads, for example, uses its quality score metric, while Facebook measures content against a relevance score.

“The rise of platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Pinterest, coupled with an increase in digital banner ads, means brand communications are more visual than ever,” explains Anastasia Leng, founder of CreativeX.

She says in some cases the amount of creative content brands are putting out has “quadrupled” year on year, leading to issues around control, transparency and quality.

Data from CreativeX, which helps clients like Unilever and Heineken measure and improve creative efficiency, consistency and effectiveness globally, recently analysed more than half a million ads and found on average just 20% of creative assets meet a brand's own minimum standards of quality.

## The rise of the creative excellence team

Brands are tackling these issues by dedicating teams to defining guidelines around creative excellence with the likes of L'Oréal, 3M, Coca-Cola, Mars, Nestlé, Diageo, J&J and Pepsi setting up internal creative excellence teams.

Leading brands have gone further, employing AI-driven technology to help them automate creative quality and consistency detection. For example, CreativeX allows brands to analyse the imagery and video used in their campaigns, offering brands a ‘bird's eye view’ of all creative performance. This arms their teams and agencies with preventative tools that safeguard off-brand content from eating up media budgets.

Nandus du Plessis, previously head of content excellence at AB InBev, used CreativeX to analyse their global creative footprint. He says: “In the past, our brand managers judged content based on emotion and opinion. Now we have the data to show what's working. When you have data and opinion, then you can create great work.”

In the past, our brand managers judged content based on emotion and opinion. Now we have the data to show what's working

## So, what tools do CMOs need to unlock their creative potential?

Develop guidelines for creative excellence in addition to your own brand guidelines. This means implementing a set of objective rules against a bar of creative excellence that all ads can be measured against. Such KPIs could include channel optimisation or use of distinctive brand assets.

Next, look to track which of your creatives are meeting these guidelines to get a truly global picture of creative and media efficiency. This is where you can find actionable insights such as what share of marketing spend has been spent on ‘excellent’ ads.

## Looking to the future

Once brands can track creative quality and brand consistency, they can innovate into other opportunities in the creative excellence space.

Try incorporating compliance regulations within these guidelines to help make sure ads are in line with the category regulations in each market. Automating this through technology could drastically minimise the risk of fines and bad publicity while increasing the speed of campaigns to market especially in regulated industries like alcohol, pharmaceutical, financial services and gambling.

Exceed company priorities around diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as Unilever's ‘Unstereotype’ initiative or the new representation framework from the World Federation of Advertisers, through tracking talent representation across creative worldwide. For example, set a global goal on what share of your content will feature progressive portrayals of people by end of 2022.

Leng from CreativeX says creatives need to be not only optimised for platform-specific consumption but also consistent with the brand, compliant with regulation, and representative of a brand's audience.

“Creative excellence is not a new concept. From the beginning of time, marketers have sought to make content that resonates and cuts through with their audience,” Leng concludes. “But measuring and improving this on a global scale? That is creative excellence 2.0.”

For more information please visit [creativex.com](http://creativex.com)







DIVERSITY

# The promised adland

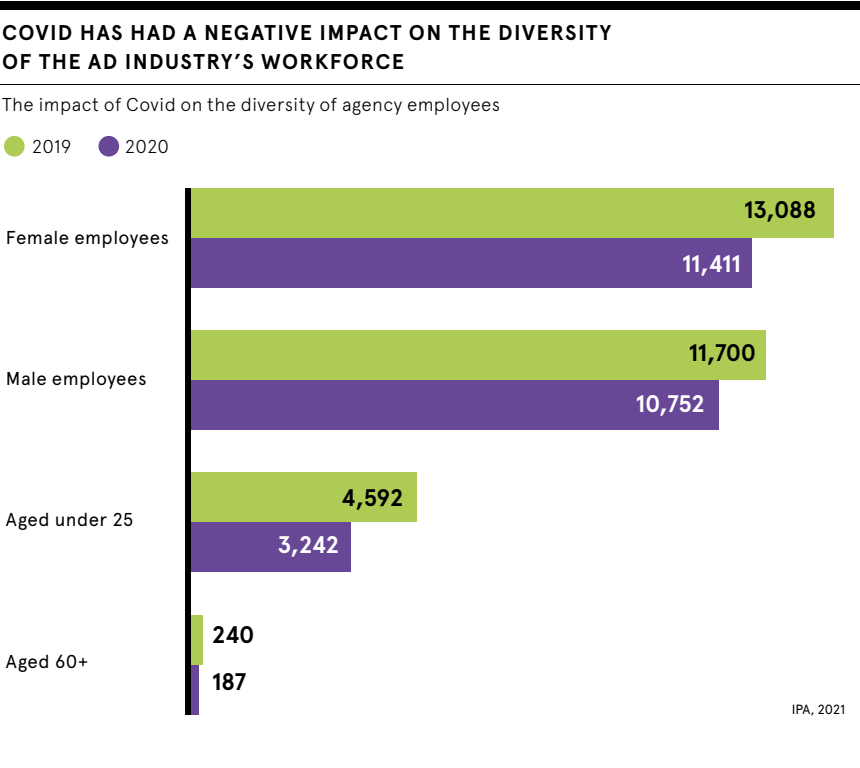
The advertising industry has a particularly poor record on diversity, but some of its key players are determined to change this by casting the net far more widely for talent

**Sarah Vizard**

The UK advertising industry was hit particularly hard by the pandemic in 2020. As survival in the short term became the priority for most players, there were restructurings and redundancies, as well as budget reductions and cuts to long-established agency ties. All this came against a backdrop of an industry struggling to change perceptions that it is too London-centric and not as open as it could be to a diverse workforce.

How, then, is it to attract the next generation of talent and ensure that it's creating work that reflects the full spectrum of British experiences?

The latest agency survey by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) shows the serious impact of Covid-19. Staff numbers at its member agencies fell by 10.8% year on year in 2020. Just over a quarter of those departures were a direct result of the pandemic. Digging deeper into the data,



it's clear that the impact has not been felt equally. Female employees were hit harder, with their number falling by 12.8% compared with 8.1% for their male counterparts. The proportion of C-suite posts occupied by women also declined, from 34% in 2019 to 32.4% in 2020.

The youngest and oldest employees have also taken the brunt of the job losses. The number of under-25s employed by IPA member agencies declined by 29.4% in 2020, while the number of over-60s fell by 22.1%.

But there have been some more positive developments. For instance, the proportion of non-white employees in the industry in 2020 was 15.3%, up from 13.7% in 2019. At the C level, 6.4% of roles were occupied by people with a non-white background, up 1.7 percentage points year on year. Yet there is clearly still a huge amount of work to do to improve diversity at the highest levels of the industry.

The IPA's recently appointed president, Julian Douglas, acknowledges the industry's enduring inability to make significant improvements in this area. One task that's high on his presidential agenda is "accelerating efforts" to make adland a more inclusive place.

Douglas, who hails from Manchester, is also aiming to make it less of a London-centric business. Signalling his desire to attract talent from outside the M25, he deliberately gave his presidential address to the IPA at Manchester's Science and Industry Museum, rather than somewhere in the capital.

"Brilliant things happen on many levels beyond London. There are loads of great agencies out here," enthuses Douglas, who is also international CEO and vice-chairman at the VCCP agency. "The biggest positive societal impacts will be achieved by attracting and harnessing talent from around the UK. I'm talking not only about agencies, but also about brands. Most of the brands that I work with are outside London."

The Creative Equals consultancy, which works to improve diversity in the advertising industry, supports Douglas's aims. As a sign of the work that's still required, its director of client services, Dinah Williams, quotes data from recruiter Major Players

showing that a white man earns £10,000 more a year on average than a white woman and £20,000 more than a Black woman in the same role.

Covid, she says, has nullified "any previous wins or progress we had seen in terms of Black representation. We know that the resulting downturn has affected more women than men – even more so for women in underrepresented groups."

Williams continues: "Pay equity is a huge issue in the industry, while representation of Black employees at C-suite

or senior leadership level remains low. The mean average is 2.9% and the median is 0%, which means that more than half of all teams at these levels have no Black members. And we're still finding that 71% of organisations aren't collecting data on the ethnicity pay gap."

Some agencies have been making concerted efforts to address the problem. Leo Burnett, for instance, anonymises applicants' CVs to prevent any unconscious bias among recruiting managers from affecting shortlisting decisions. It has also signed up to the open apprenticeship scheme operated by its parent company, Publicis Groupe UK. This aims to reach 10,000 people with disadvantaged backgrounds and offer them training, mentoring and employment opportunities.

"It's hard to hire people from diverse backgrounds into more senior positions because the industry simply hasn't worked hard enough and early enough on attraction and retention," says Leo Burnett's MD, Carly Avenier. "Our strategy has focused on entry-level talent, which is where we can make the most impact right now."

As Douglas has highlighted, the industry's clients must also play their part. With this in mind, the Advertising Association has just created an alliance called Black Representation in Marketing in a bid to "create meaningful change". Sponsors include Facebook, Unilever, VCCP and travel company Tui. Its advisory group features representatives from organisations such as Accenture, the BBC and Creative Equals.

The World Federation of Advertisers (WFA), meanwhile, has published numerous guides for brands, including 2020's *A Marketer's Approach to Diversity and Inclusion*. Its aim is to encourage users to consider not only the diversity of their teams but also the work that these produce.


Pharma giant GlaxoSmithKline – a WFA member – is seen as a leader in this area, having created a dedicated diversity hub containing best-practice guidance and training for its marketing teams. The firm also encourages users to run workshops to share their knowledge more widely.

Such initiatives are slowly helping the industry to address its diversity problems and so better represent the customers it serves. This in turn should make it a more attractive proposition for the next generation of talent.


Tara McRae, chief marketing officer at shoe company Clarks, is excited about the opportunities. The pandemic, she says, has forced her firm to accelerate the work it had been doing to adopt more progressive and innovative marketing methods.

"At Clarks, we have some new mentorship programmes that we're about to start with partners within [poorly represented] communities in the coming months. I am personally engaged and super excited about these," McRae says. We aren't perfect and we're not there yet, but we are committed to making positive changes. ●


## Commercial feature




**Angela Byrne**  
Managing director, shared experience and digital transformation, NatWest




**Mantas Ratomskis**  
Head of CRM and retention, Kilo Health



**Holly Ainger**  
Marketing director, Nuffield Health



**Steve Tan**  
Vice-president and general manager, EMEA/APAC, Airship



**Neil Kirby**  
Marketing and consumer director, Bupa Global

# Putting engagement first in marketing

The cross-channel evolution of marketing is enabling companies to develop deeper connections with their customers through personalisation, data-driven insights and engagement

Morag Cuddeford-Jones

Marketing strategies have evolved, particularly over the past year, to deliver deeper multichannel experiences, more creative technological solutions for customer retention and better data-driven insights into customers' needs. Here, five marketing leaders share their perspectives on multichannel strategy and how to enrich the experiences customers have of their brands, as part of a virtual roundtable discussion.

**Taking a holistic approach**

Marketing has shifted from a focus on channels to a more holistic approach. Those achieving excellence in the delivery of customer experiences are engaging more effectively with technology, data and insights. Devising a customer-centric approach to marketing is made possible through more effective mobile marketing.

For Mantas Ratomskis, head of CRM and retention at virtual health platform Kilo Health, creativity is key to navigating issues related to privacy, changes to cookies and mobile marketing. He says that having the right technology partner – Kilo Health works closely with Airship, a mobile-first

customer engagement platform – is crucial to achieving this.

For many, the future of marketing relies on a clear, engaging approach to messaging. At NatWest, messaging must evolve throughout the customer lifecycle. Angela Byrne, managing director of shared experience and digital transformation, says the investment in the technology used to manage this was once a lengthy and costly investment. Now, technology can be implemented more easily and adapted more readily, enabling greater engagement and better experiences for customers.

Steve Tan, vice president and general manager of EMEA/APAC at Airship, adds that the future of marketing will be more about reacting and delivering in real time, and that it will be more customer focused.

However, with greater capability to deliver one-to-one experiences and engagements, marketers must strike a balance between personalisation and the value of the brand. Personalisation has led marketers to focus too greatly on the granular details about each individual customer. A stronger strategy, the speakers agree, is to experiment and remain

creative around the depth of personalisation, while also ensuring data is well understood. Technology capabilities are also improving, allowing marketers greater insights at faster speeds than ever before.

**Balancing personalisation**

Ratomskis highlights how 20% of a company's customers typically provide 80% of the revenue. Focusing too much on individual personalisation, he suggests, will dilute the resources devoted to those loyal – and valuable – customers. Others agree that, while every customer is valuable, constantly attracting new customers is time-consuming and ineffective, while also carrying the potential for brand dilution. By understanding what the most engaged customers want and need in terms of their relationship with the brand, marketers can deliver better strategies and experiences.

For Nuffield Health, this was never more apparent than during the pandemic,

“

**The future of marketing relies on a clear, engaging approach to messaging**

when the company lost a third of its gym members. Holly Ainger, marketing director at Nuffield Health, says the company approaches personalisation by analysing customer data to deliver more relevant experiences, leading to a long-term relationship between the brand and the customer. The key to achieving this, she and Tan agree, is by harnessing the power of first-party data.

Byrne adds that connectivity is important in terms of data management. Aligning different systems requires an investment in technology and the implementation of the right APIs. In doing so, companies can deliver a seamless, multichannel experience for their customers.

The speakers agree that better customer experiences can lead to greater retention and improved loyalty. But achieving this requires a clear understanding of customer data and the technical capability to act on it at the right time. The pandemic has influenced many brands to re-examine their customer retention and loyalty strategies while also propelling them to offer more creative and useful digital experiences for their customers.

**Focus on loyalty and retention**

Ainger's passion about loyalty and retention shines through Nuffield Health's response to the coronavirus pandemic. To ensure those who remained loyal felt

valued, the company created a digital fitness platform, allowing customers to work out anywhere. To retain customers, Ainger had to examine the churn rate and analyse the best approach toward supporting people in their relationships with the brand. The success of this has extended beyond the pandemic as Nuffield Health is considering ways of monetising its app for both members and non-members.

Bupa Global, the specialist offer for high net worth individuals, faces a similar challenge in regards to peer-to-peer recommendations and customer retention. Marketing and customer director Neil Kirby says customer feedback is essential to driving retention. Insurers, however, thrive when customers do not need to use their services. That presents a paradox because those who have actually used Bupa's services are more likely to recommend them.

To tackle this, Kirby implemented a two-pronged approach. First, Bupa Global delivered services that could be used on a regular basis, such as physical therapy, opticians and dental treatments, to encourage people to engage with the brand. Second, the company reached out to customers directly to ensure the human connection was fostered in the customer journey. This yielded greater satisfaction and retention.

Combining the digital and physical experiences delivers a seamless, multichannel customer journey that capitalises on the

brand's value and ensures loyalty in the long term. Tan says it's important to drive rich personal experiences throughout the customer lifecycle. In response to the growing use of mobile interactions between customers and brands, Airship has unveiled a live chat functionality that enables companies to have one-to-one conversations through branded apps or over SMS. There will be no end to the opportunities for increased customer engagement as brands deliver seamless experiences and multiple ways to interact with data guiding how that is delivered to each customer.

All agree that data is essential to understanding the needs of customers, but a creative and strategic multichannel approach will lead to greater success. Marketers are primed to achieve this because of the proliferation and ubiquity of mobile, the increased accessibility of technology for automation and a clearer understanding of the role personalisation and insights can play in customer relationships.

To find out how Airship can support your customer engagement strategy visit [airship.com](https://airship.com)





Commercial feature

# Data is the inhibitor and enabler as CMOs drive business growth

CMOs are taking a key role in driving crucial data-driven outcomes for the business, but there are challenges to overcome in achieving the holistic view and single source of truth they need

As the use of online channels and platforms has proliferated over the past year, CMOs have played a key role in facilitating digital transformation across the enterprise. Having helped businesses adapt to serving more digital customers, now they are taking centre stage in the next key goal: capitalising on the rapid economic rebound expected to follow the pandemic.

The reason for CMOs’ elevated role in recent years, and increased accountability for business outcomes, is simple – they are closest to one of the most important business assets today: customer data. Recent research by Gartner has shown a rapid and significant growth in CMOs’ investment in analytics and data science tools and talent, as quantitative savvy becomes foundational to marketing craft skills. But data is as much of an inhibitor as it is an enabler, and marketers are struggling to meet their targets.

Salesforce’s annual State of Marketing report revealed that the top challenges marketing leaders facing are engaging customers in real time, creating cohesive customer journeys, sharing a unified customer view with data from various sources, and continuously innovating. Besides tackling these, their key priorities include the improved use of tools and technology, and complying with privacy regulations.

This challenge around sharing a unified view of the customer and giving visibility across an organization is only growing, and data continues to explode across channels and platforms. In the past two years alone, the number of data sources used by marketers to understand their customers and optimise campaigns grew by 50%, according to Salesforce. Identity management is just one;

68%

of customers say COVID-19 has elevated their expectations of companies’ digital capabilities

88%

of customers expect companies to accelerate digital initiatives due to COVID-19

State of the Connected Customer, 4th Edition, Salesforce Research, October 2020

knowing a person who signed up for a company’s newsletter with a work email is the same person who registered with its e-commerce store using a personal address.

“As parts of the world begin to enter a new normal – and with employees continuing to work from anywhere – building a complete picture of each customer becomes more important than ever,” says Shannon Duffy, executive vice-president of cloud marketing at Salesforce.

“Marketing leaders need to focus their innovation strategy on customer data. Right now, only one in three marketing leaders is satisfied with their ability to reconcile

customer identities across data sources. Technologies like customer data platforms will help brands manage data across any channel to get that all-important unified customer profile. And then be able to personalize every interaction for them based on those insights.”

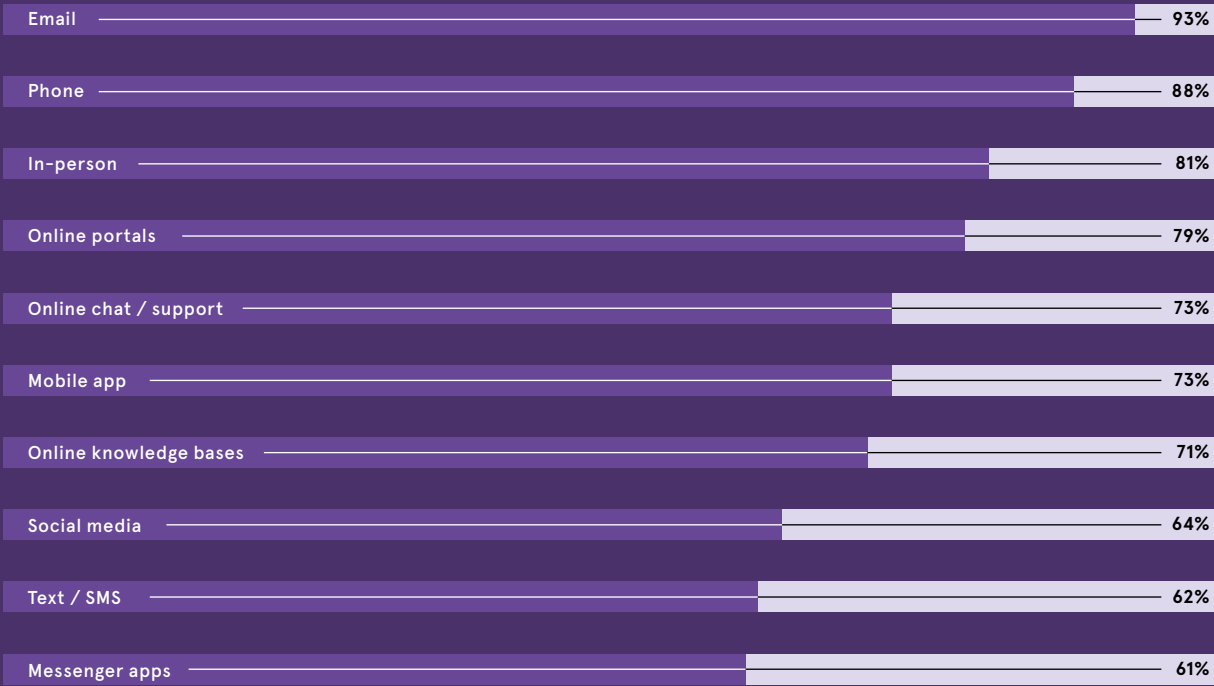
While brands increasingly want to provide personalised experiences, only 28% of marketers are completely satisfied with their ability to balance personalisation with customer comfort levels.

As we are reimagining marketing for the post-pandemic era, it is crucial for success that marketing teams double down on communication with customers, telling them exactly how and why they are collecting and using their data, and what customers will get in return. This is now becoming of utmost importance for brands to think long-term and invest in building trusted relationships with their customers.

In 2020, when assessing the skillset of their teams, global marketing leaders said that data science, coding and emotional intelligence (EQ) were their team’s least advanced skills. If you think about this challenge of personalisation versus trust, it is a combination of these technical and empathetic-led skills that a modern marketer needs to be successful.

“One of my passion projects at Salesforce is providing free learning tools to all marketers to grow or change their careers, especially to disadvantaged communities. We are building on the success of our free on-demand learning platform Trailhead this year and launching a tailored learning experience to help current and future marketers gain these critical skills,” says Duffy.

## DIGITAL CHANNELS HAVE REACHED NEW LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE



In 2019, only 42%

of customers interacted with companies online

Last year 60%

of customers interacted with companies online

43%

growth in share of online interactions

State of the Connected Customer, 4th Edition, Salesforce Research, October 2020

As marketing leaders are rethinking their entire strategies to cater for the all-digital customer, they are looking for technology partners to help them be successful long term, achieve a more holistic view and evolve with their business needs. This is driving a shift from point solutions to a more all-encompassing approach that allows both speed and scale grounded in the vast data collected and activated by marketers. In short, CMOs want to simplify their marketing stack.

For two decades, Salesforce has helped brands build a 360-degree view of their customers, first for sales teams and customer relationship management, and now across the customer and buyer experience. While it has been a key technology partner, Salesforce has also been a trusted advisor on creating the organisational roadmap for meeting far-reaching business goals.

The company recently launched Salesforce CDP to enable marketers to

ingest, organise, analyse and activate customer data from a variety of sources inside and outside the Salesforce ecosystem, both in batch and via streaming (real-time) data ingestion. For companies with multiple organisations collecting and storing data, the variety of ingestion choices allows them to easily connect all these orgs and gain a combined view of the data for cross-team collaboration.

“We are in a unique position, because of our history, to not only help marketers achieve a scalable, single source of truth but do it in a way with trust at the core,” says Duffy. “Companies can now activate their data for personalisation across customer touch-points, serving the right message in the right moment, and on the channel that individuals are most receptive to. Your interactions become more human, building a lasting connection with customers on their terms.”

From hundreds of conversations every day, we know that marketing leaders are working tirelessly at the forefront, delivering business growth, reducing uncertainty in the boardroom, embracing data-driven decision making and leading their teams with confidence and authenticity through these times of change. We seek to empower them with technology and help them do the best work of their careers.

For more information, visit [sforce.co/marketer](https://sforce.co/marketer)



## OPINION

# ‘The time has come for organisations to stop viewing marketing as the function that spends the money and start seeing the value it can deliver’

As a growing number of societal challenges around people, purpose and planet are thrown at us, it is more important than ever that businesses understand and use the full breadth of skills the marketing function has to offer.

Arguably, the biggest challenge we face today is that of the planet and moving towards a more sustainable future. ‘Sustainable transformation’ is coming and I believe it is bigger and more important than digital transformation ever was. Sustainability already has changed, and will continue to change, how business has to think, plan and behave at every point in the stakeholder chain.

What has this got to do with marketing? Well, the role of marketing and the value it can deliver to an organisation if truly understood is one that I spend much of my time discussing and debating. Marketing’s remit is far more diverse than businesses realise and goes beyond just advertising and selling stuff. We need to pause, put our hands up and take responsibility for shaping the behaviour that has led to unsustainable levels of consumption and unmanageable levels of waste.

However, the pandemic and the environmental crisis have helped to put marketing in a position where it can start to change how it is perceived and deliver the value it is truly capable of. Data published in early 2021 from the inaugural edition of *The CMO Survey* in the UK found that 73% of British marketing leaders believe that the role of marketing in their companies has increased in importance.

Businesses called on their marketing teams for insight, agility and adaptation of propositions and services, and to gain an understanding of how to communicate and retain engagement. They also, perhaps most crucially, make use of their skills to ensure they were seen as a brand that people could turn to when trust was at an all-time low and uncertainty was at an all-time high. Sustainability is no different. It also needs this level of input from marketing. However, the thinking needs to be longer term and the problem is far more complex.

When it comes to delivering value, marketing needs to take a step back in order to move forward and deliver a better future. Sustainability gives marketers an opportunity to champion getting back to the ‘core of the brand’, exploring, uncovering and sharing not only what your brand does but how it can make a difference.

We see a lot of noise around brand purpose – and for good reason: consumers are growing increasingly conscious, employees want to work for organisations that share their values and investors are demanding sustainable development plans before they commit to any spending.

Marketing has to play a significant part in shaping organisational strategy and communicating the business case for change clearly and effectively, as well as driving new behaviour in our society.

Marketing still struggles to be heard and all too often does not have that seat and voice at the top table. The time has come for organisations

to stop viewing marketing as the function that spends the money and start seeing the value it can ultimately deliver. ‘Sustainable finance’ is surely a catalyst for change in the relationship between marketing and finance that has always been a bone of contention. Both functions have to appreciate and understand the greater cause, as all the evidence clearly points to the truth that good business is, in fact, good for business.

Marketers need to place a sustainable lens on everything they do. They need to educate themselves and the organisations they work for and lead on sustainable transformation. Why? Because we should all want the alternative ending, not the one we are currently heading towards. ●



**Gemma Butler**  
Marketing Director,  
Chartered Institute of Marketing

## OPINION

# ‘Marketing leaders are uniquely qualified to be the engine of growth for their organisations’

The Ancient Greeks had two words for the concept of time. *Chronos* was for time as we know it – the chronological implications of ticking clocks and passing days. The second word, *kairos*, connotes the correct and significant point for action; the opportune moment when everything comes together.

Great business leaders have always known that in commerce, as in comedy, timing is everything. Marketers are facing a significant inflection point in history, for society but also for the economy and business. This is when the CMO and the smart marketer can make an impact and a difference, when they can lead what happens next.

Over the past year, many businesses have been led by financial caution. Understandably, the fear of uncertainty as well as the decline in revenue for many firms caused by the coronavirus lockdowns have meant that the CFO has become the principal decision-maker. The button that they inevitably pressed? Pause.

The pandemic had different impacts depending on the sector. Some industries had revenue entirely obliterated, others have faced complications, still others have thrived. The path moving forward for companies in each of these circumstances will, therefore, be different. But, whatever the impact on your particular industry, sector or business, there are opportunities and challenges ahead where the role of the marketing leader will be pivotal.

Marketing leaders are uniquely qualified to be the engine of growth for their organisations. This is because of their

ability to connect what the consumer needs with what the business can deliver, as well as their experience of being comfortable with the discomfort caused by uncertainty and change. They are also the person who can unite silos and departments inside an organisation around a customer focus.

This means it will be the marketers who reshape businesses after Covid. And it is a reshaping that will be needed, whatever the sector. We are all inevitably focused on concepts of recovery and rebuilding, but redesigning for the future has to be considered as well.

While history and heritage always provide clues for the future, the global brands leading the recovery are not the ones looking in the rear-view mirror. They are instead acting fast to develop recombinant innovations or using technology to achieve step-changes in convenience and customer experience.

Great marketers know that some things will never change – core human needs and emotions, the importance of the ‘four Ps’ and the way that customers’ brains are wired, for example. But the context in which they operate and the opportunities ahead mean that those who aim for a ‘new normal’ will find themselves stuck on the rewind button.

Marketers have always been change-makers, shifting opinions, actions and markets. We can now help to shape businesses that are not only responsive to changing times but also responsible in a world with a changing view of capitalism and the role of business. This is the moment for marketers to be proud of what we do. This is our *kairos*.

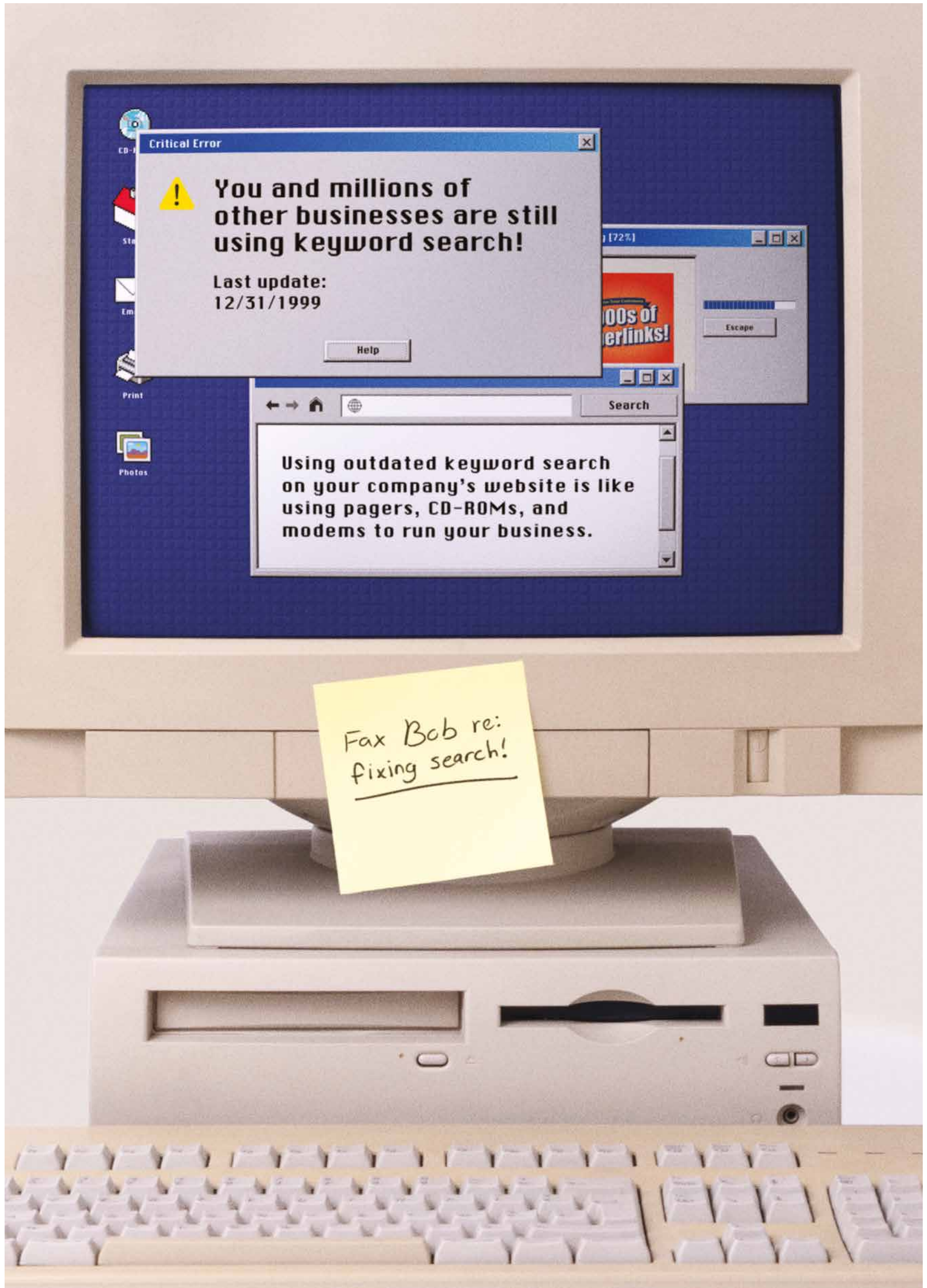
The pause button that has been pressed for so many months needs to be released and marketing leaders need to help their organisations summon up the courage to press play instead, to ignite ambition and support not just for a recovery but for something even more. It’s time for a renaissance, a rebirth of business, alongside a recognition of what great marketing can achieve.

Let us seize this moment and progress with pride and the thrill of what comes next. This is our time to lead. For it is only the CMO who can cut across silos, galvanise people and unite the organisation behind a consumer-focused vision, giving business enough confidence to press fast-forward towards a new marketing renaissance. ●



**Sophie Devonshire**  
CEO,  
The Marketing Society





Say goodbye to the past and hello to Yext.  
Search made for today, not 1999.

[yext.co.uk](http://yext.co.uk)

