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AWARDS

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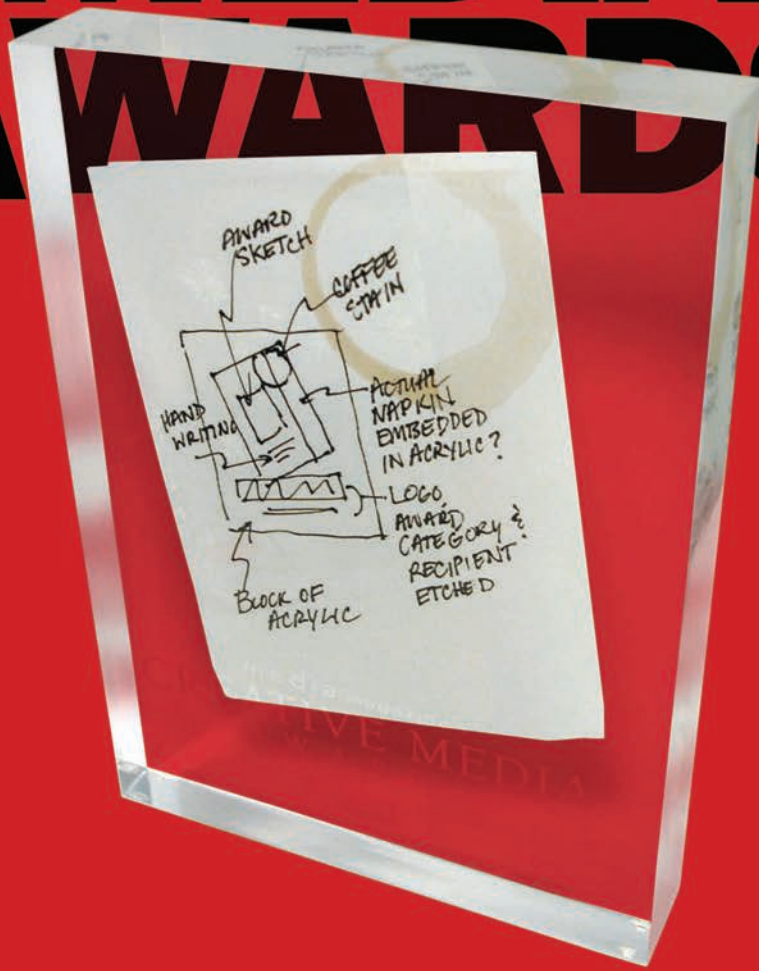
*Agencies
of the Year*

AND 2022 MEDIAPOST

All-Stars

**CONGRATULATIONS TO
ALL THE FINALISTS,
AND GOOD LUCK! THIS IS IT.**

**MEDIAPOST'S 2022
CREATIVE
MEDIA
AWARDS**



FEBRUARY 2, 2023

THE UNIVERSITY CLUB, 1 WEST 54TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

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MediaPost 2022 Agency of the Year

4 MEDIA AGENCY OF THE YEAR MINDSHARE	14 SEARCH/PERFORMANCE AGENCY OF THE YEAR MERKLE
7 HOLDING COMPANY OF THE YEAR GROUPM	16 CLIENT OF THE YEAR PATAGONIA
10 INDEPENDENT AGENCY OF THE YEAR PMG	18 SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR NBCUNIVERSAL
12 CREATIVE AGENCY OF THE YEAR GIANT SPOON	20 EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR MARC PRITCHARD



MediaPost All-Stars

MARKETING	MEDIA	CREATIVE
24 EVAN JONES	30 DELPHINE FABRE-HERNOUX	36 SHANA BELLOT
26 CARL LOREDO	32 MICHAEL GULLAKSEN	38 KINNEY EDWARDS
28 TINA MAHAL	34 KRYSTAL OLIVIERI	40 ALEX STRIMBEANU
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Two decades after WPP formed Mindshare by merging the media departments of JWT and Ogilvy together, it broke it apart in 2022 — albeit in a visually symbolic way that partly underscores why it also was MediaPost’s media agency of the year.

“The time to embrace the intent of our name has never been more pronounced,” Global CEO Adam Gerhart explained when he unveiled the brand refresh at the end of 2021, which included separating the terms “mind” and “share” in a way that actually connotes a new kind of coming together: collaboration — with the other professional services entities it does business with — clients, parent company, sister agencies, partner agencies, vendors and suppliers, and consumers too.

But perhaps most importantly for our awards, with the trade press too. And by that, I mean placing an emphasis on the “share” part of its new brand identity, because MediaPost’s annual awards are unique in that we have a distinctive bias that we can only recognize things that agencies share with us.

Or at least publicly, in the world we can see in order to recognize them.

I hate to begin this profile recognizing Mindshare as our media agency of the year by grouching about how poorly some other organizations do that, but it is actually one of the key, unspoken criteria that make our awards different from other trade publications and organizations.

That’s because we believe agencies are the best communicators in the world, and the best of them know how to communicate their own stories, including their awards-worthy ones.

For the life of me, I don’t understand after decades of doing this why others don’t do it as well, and it should be clear by now if you look back at past years’ winners that there have been some common themes — as well as many repeat winners — because they get what we’re trying to unlock: things that demonstrate vision, innovation and industry leadership.

Mindshare — as well as its parent organization GroupM (*see separate holding company-level award profile on page 7*) — clearly gets it. Not that they do it for MediaPost, per se, but because they understand that the most fundamental way an ad agency can brand itself starts with letting

others know about what they actually do that differentiates them from others.

That clearly is a communications process, and I understand why some agencies have cultures that prevent them from doing it, but if you look at the other category winners in this year’s awards — PMG (independent agency of the year), Giant Spoon (creative agency of the year), Merkle (search/performance agency of the year), Patagonia (client of the year), NBCUniversal (supplier of the

year), and P&G's Marc Pritchard (executive of the year) — one of the things they have in common is that they are not shy about letting others know what they're up to and why that makes them better than others they compete with.

Its unique ability to share in such a meaningful way in 2022 underscores another important reason we selected Mindshare as our media agency of the year, and one I hope other shops reflect on, because in an industry where many of the leading holding-company media-services brands have become increasingly subsumed by their parent-level organizations, Mindshare — and to a similar degree, its other GroupM sister shops — stood out in their ability to demonstrate innovation, as well as taking credit for it.

That has increasingly not been the case at other holding companies — where much of the innovation, resources and investment associated with it are happening at the holding-company level, and the branded media agencies have defaulted to essentially being client-facing service units.

Sure, Mindshare does that as well, of course. But at a time when so much of the innovation rhetoric coming out of big media shops and their parents is a mantra of copycat jargon about new tools, systems and processes that are no more than branding propositions under the guise of proprietary confidentiality, so it's impossible to look under the hood and see what they have actually done.

That has not been the case with Mindshare and GroupM, where the organizations go sublimely public with their innovations, and often make them

available for the world to see.

You can see several examples of that in our GroupM profile — but with regard to Mindshare, I will repeat just one: how it partnered with its parent to develop a state-of-the-art media carbon calculator, and then released it publicly for others in the industry to use as part of a coordinated effort to organize the entire industry around a unified standard.

The reason was that as good as proprietary carbon calculators might be, unless they are industry-standard ones, they will foster confusion

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and indecision among agencies, clients and suppliers that likely would hold media industry climate action back.

So it is noteworthy that the organizations unveiled their effort for the first time in a presentation by Mindshare Global Chief



Amanda Richman

“We believe in strong agency brands, and we believe they are stronger together. We’ve worked out how to create distinct cultures, but cultures that also thrive on collaboration..”

Transformation Officer Ollie Joyce at the Cannes Lions Festival, but followed up with a big push by GroupM to organize the industry around it.

It should be a powerful example for other agency organizations of how their total organizations can work together, share credit — and importantly, also take individual credit for innovating the marketplace.

“We believe in strong agency brands, and we believe they are stronger together,” says Mindshare North America CEO

Amanda Richman, adding: “We’ve worked out how to create distinct cultures, but cultures that also thrive on collaboration.”

Importantly, she says there is another key

benefit beyond the publicly visible ones — which is that it helps Mindshare attract and retain talent that might not be as interested in agency cultures where people cannot take credit, or where there is less collaborative “mobility” across agencies.

She says it is routine for GroupM shops to recruit talent from one another in a way that grows both organizations, but most importantly, advances the individuals doing it.

Richman should know. Before joining Mindshare she was U.S. CEO of Wavemaker, which was MediaPost’s media agency of the year in 2021.

She says the guiding principle underlying this collaborative spirit is a Mindshare mantra of “good growth” that pervades every aspect of the organization, as well as the stakeholders it works with or for: clients, suppliers and consumers.

It’s a principle that governs everything Mindshare does, including several of the innovations that contributed to this year’s win, including:

- Creating systems and tools that enable a more diverse and inclusive media marketplace (PMPs for Black, LatinX, and LGBTQ programmatic media buys), mitigate bias (collaborated with IBM on development of its AI Fairness 360 toolkit), and focus on people’s personal safety (Mindshare’s “Impact Index”).

- Integrating brand and performance in media planning, buying and measurement (absorbed pure-play performance shop Neo into Mindshare, developed an integrated brand/performance model with Unilever, and invested heavily in systems and tools (unified analytics platform Synapse and neuromarketing research facility NeuroLab) that provide powerful, but simple proprietary insights contributing to competitive advantages.

“Good growth” is far more than Mindshare’s internal mantra — it is one that pervades its relationship with clients and vendors alike.

“Mindshare’s commitment to a more inclusive retail media marketplace aligns perfectly with Kroger Precision Marketing’s beliefs,” Kroger Precision Marketing Senior Vice President Cara Pratt says of the agency’s expansion of its inclusive media marketplace commitment to the retail media category. “Together we’re making progress for our shared clients and customers, as we support their Inclusion private marketplace series through our media capabilities.” **Joe Mandese**

This most likely is the most anticlimactic Agency of the Year award profile I will ever write. That's because I called GroupM as our probable holding company-level entity of the year at the mid-year mark back in July based on what it had already accomplished by that point. I added that it was GroupM's to lose, and challenged its peers to step up and prove me wrong.

Others did rise to the challenge, especially Havas Media, but in the end — and after reviewing all our year-end notes and pitches — I stand by the early call, and can add several other important industry leadership milestones accomplished by GroupM since then.

Some of the rationale is based on things GroupM did in the past 12 months that were on par with what some of its peers have also done, including the application of carbon-emission calculators to its media-buying process, developing diversity inclusion marketplaces utilizing programmatic technology to

redirect budgets into minority-oriented and minority-owned media, and also to recruit more diverse professional talent to its organization.

But GroupM went well beyond transforming its own organization to actually impact the industry — as well as the world — at large.

Probably the strongest case for that was its carbon-reduction initiatives, which included heavy investment in the development of its own proprietary calculator, with the formation of a Decarbonization Client Coalition to get marketers on board. And that is not just GroupM's, but any major advertiser that is serious about taking action

to deal with the climate crisis.

Ultimately, GroupM tied the initiative into its ongoing “responsible investment framework,” which includes past award-winning accomplishments such as the creation of its Data Ethics Compass in 2021.

Then it went a step further, by publishing its proprietary carbon-calculation methodology and offering its framework to the entire industry to use as a baseline for developing an industry-standard one.

The framework — which was jointly developed by GroupM and Choreograph Global Chief Innovation Officer

Krystal Olivieri and Mindshare Global Chief Transformation Officer Ollie Joyce — was offered as a starting point, because GroupM understood that having competing, conflicting media decarbonization methods and metrics would only serve to confuse the marketplace and slow actual decarbonization down.

Those efforts alone merited this award, because they demonstrated a level of altruism that goes well beyond winning business and servicing clients, but impacts the entire world.

The second major rationale for selecting GroupM was the way it leveraged its considerable media-buying





Perhaps the last major reason we are singling out GroupM is for the continuous work produced by its Business Intelligence Team, including the weekly 'This Week Next Week' podcast...

cloud to help fill a leadership void that had emerged in the media measurement and accountability marketplace.

With the implosion of Nielsen as an industry standard, and the media supply chain rising forward to push its own “certified” alternative currency suppliers (see *Supplier Of The Year* profile about NBCUniversal, page 18), GroupM stepped up to the plate, creating its own measurement guidelines and offered the industry a cohesive “Roadmap for Audience

Measurement,” which importantly included inputs from the client-side (the Association of National Advertisers) and an important, neutral, self-regulatory authority (the Media Rating Council).

Key provisions of that framework were that the

development of new audience measurement systems had to be interoperable with the way GroupM — and others — already plan, buy and post media.

“Outlining expectations with our measurement partners and working together to implement standards is critical to create real change that makes advertising work better for our clients and to better track our progress towards client growth goals,” GroupM North America CEO Kirk McDonald said when it published the framework.

In a related move, GroupM also examined some increasingly vexing problems with the audience measurement — and de facto currency — used to buy premium advertising inventory in the burgeoning CTV (connected TV) marketplace, including a technical problem known as “continuous play” that credited viewing to an app user even when they weren’t watching a CTV program or ad.

After conducting a joint study with iSpot to benchmark the phenomenon, and publishing the results — finding that overall, 8-10% of all streaming ad impressions were delivered with the consumer’s TV turned off — GroupM began organizing a coalition of major media suppliers, clients and other agencies to create new industry standards for streaming viewability and CTV measurement.



Kate Scott-Dawkins

The industry leadership moves were not unprecedented for GroupM, which has long leveraged its marketplace clout to help organize the industry around new standards.

When a similar void emerged in the media measurement marketplace heading into the 2008–9 upfront advertising marketplace as Nielsen began implementing new time-shifted audience estimates into its national TV advertising currency, it was an earlier generation of GroupM executives — Irwin Gotlieb, Rino Scanzoni and Lyle Schwartz — who broke an industry stalemate and got the entire marketplace to organize around Nielsen’s new “C3” (live viewing plus three days of playback) as the new industry standard at that time.

Perhaps the last major reason we are singling out GroupM as our holding company entity of the year is for the continuous work produced by its Business Intelligence team, including the weekly “This Week Next Week” podcast co-hosted by Brian Wieser and Kate Scott-Dawkins.

In addition to the team’s periodic forecasts and revisions that benchmark the ad industry’s ups and downs, the weekly podcasts break down the real-time dynamics informing their bottom-up approach to building that view, which requires them to analyze detailed earnings data from the

major media suppliers, as well as big advertisers influencing key categories.

Coupled with a trove of important macroeconomic data, the team has painstakingly provided a public industry resource benchmarking the correlation — or increasingly, the lack thereof — between the economy and ad spending.

The team’s weekly and periodic commentaries have also provided some keen insights about the ever-changing, evolutionary nature of the media that the ad industry buys and that consumers spend their time with.

Among the most fascinating has been Wieser’s and Scott-Dawkins’ soul-searching about defining and redefining the media “line items” they used to build their models, as well as their macro view of the ad industry, and where it is heading.

That commentary has been incredibly important, not just for GroupM and its clients, but for the entire industry — including trade reporters — to understand how the underlying classifications of media are evolving, which influences both where people will spend their time and where advertisers will spend their money.

Among the major insights that have come out of that process has been GroupM’s identification of “billions” of dollars in ad spending coming from overseas marketers, especially from China, that are advertising to reach American consumers via digital platforms such as Amazon, Meta and Google — as well as an addition to the first and most substantive benchmark for a massive new advertising category — retail media networks — that already exceeds \$100 billion and is expanding rapidly.

GroupM may not be unique in observing some of these industry changes, or in trying to leverage them to their own and their clients’ advantage. But it is unique in the degree to which it makes them public for the entire world to benefit from.

MediaPost has always acknowledged that these awards are only as good as the information that agencies, advertisers and the media share with us, and that we are probably missing lots of great innovation coming from others who deem theirs to be proprietary and confidential. The problem is that those cannot move the entire industry forward. And they cannot be recognized as part of these awards. **Joe Mandese**

If Nike is correct, MediaPost likely will be naming PMG our overall media agency of the year in the near future, because it is betting the Texas-based independent is, in fact, the agency of the future.

But just making that \$1 billion media-buying bet — at a time when the nature of media is changing so much and so fast — is a major reason that we once again named it our independent agency of the year for 2022.

“It was a validation of our vision,” founder and CEO George Popstefanov acknowledged. However, he added that he winced when another trade publication described it as a win by a “relatively unknown digital agency.”

He says he winced for two reasons. The “unknown” reference, obviously, because PMG already had a long, solid track record deserving industry recognition. (MediaPost named it our independent agency of the year two years ago.) But also for the dismissive categorization that it was a “digital agency.”

Yes, PMG has chops in digital media, but that is true for all the media it helps clients manage. And their data. And their insights. And their technology. And their content. And their creative. And their business actions and outcomes.

What ticks Popstefanov off is that the industry at large still had not understood what PMG actually does.

But Nike does. And so do about 40 of the top 50 Fortune 500 companies that have moved their business to PMG — not just to manage media, but to help them solve problems and simplify and optimize the processes that go into and come out of media management.

The truth is that PMG is more of a technology

developer that specializes in optimizing media and marketing services in an increasingly complex and tech-centric world of media and marketing.

The agency employs more than 100 engineers — which likely matches, if not surpasses, any of the big agency holding companies it competes with.

Most importantly, it employs them for one simple reason: to enable its marketing clients to work better and more simply so they can focus their resources on their core products and services.

As a result, every one of PMG’s clients, including Nike, now licenses its proprietary technology platform — dubbed Alli — which is built into their contracts as an SaaS subscription model.

The reason is that the technology is integral to enabling PMG to optimize all the data inputs and outputs in order to improve operations, measure results, and execute campaigns in an increasingly complicated

marketing world — where clients like Nike are not just looking at what is going on now, but how they will operate and interact with their customers in the not-too-distant future of Web3, metaverse and whatever comes next.

If PMG has a secret sauce, it is both its Alli platform as well as its team of media, strategy, planning, creative and business solutions people who work in an agile way to constantly improve its clients’ operations.

And to do that, the PMG team works directly with publishers and media platforms to ensure it



is jointly developing the next generation of client solutions with them as beta and even alpha testers, as well as co-developers.

So when Google introduced its Performance Max solution for big retail marketers in early 2022, PMG's team had already integrated it into Alli. That is important, because a significant part of PMG's roster is the big retail marketers that moved their business to the agency for precisely those reasons.

And while Nike straddles both worlds — manufacturer and retailer — the effects of its midsummer move to PMG could already be seen by year-end, according to MediaPost retail editor Sarah Mahoney, who in December reported that Nike had “trounced” its sales expectations for the year, based largely on the power of its D2C retail sales.

PMG executives, not surprisingly, would not comment on what they have been doing for Nike, but they did offer other client examples to illustrate how they used technology and people to innovate the way their clients go to market with media, as well as creative and performance.

A case in point was a campaign PMG developed for SurveyMonkey, featuring actor Giancarlo Esposito (who portrayed the character Gus in “Breaking Bad” and “Better Call Saul”).

The campaign was conceived, cast Esposito, and produced in four weeks, all based on insights mined from the “zeitgeist” utilizing Alli's technology.

“That's where the future of our industry is threading,” Popstefanov boasted, adding: “Most agencies would have taken 12-16 weeks to do that.”

It's not just the data mining, machine learning, and automation powered by Alli that differentiates the agency, but the ability of PMG's account teams to move with agility based on its outputs that differentiate it from the big holding companies it is competing with.

“Our competitors have to show up with six or seven sister companies to do the same remit — the same scope — that we can do, because we've been fully integrated since Day One,” he says, likening PMG's team to the kind of “consistent customer operations” one might expect when dining at an elite restaurant like 11 Madison or the French Laundry.

“It's all about the consistency of the experience,” he says, adding: “We think about what we are doing the same way.” **Joe Mandese**





Earlier this year, to get fans excited about the final season of the Netflix hit show “Stranger Things,” agency Giant Spoon used New York City’s Empire State Building and its leading-edge light-show capabilities to take onlookers into the program’s fantastical world.

Thousands of passersby witnessed the two-hour spectacle of a luminous fissure slowly cracking open on the 102-story building’s façade, appearing as a portal into the show’s mysterious alternate dimension known as the “Upside Down.”

According to the agency, it was the first time the building’s owners allowed a third party to combine lights, sound and projection to create a

fully immersive show.

That’s the kind of big idea Giant Spoon is known for, and it was just one of many that the agency came up with in 2022, prompting MediaPost to name it Creative Agency of the Year. It’s the fourth time that the shop has collected AOY honors from MediaPost since the agency was formed in 2013.

The Empire State Building experience was just one of 15 reality-bending activations that the agency coordinated around the world (in places like London, Prague, Mumbai, and Malaysia) to generate excitement for the series.

Combined, the global events generated over 190 million organic impressions and hundreds of press articles. More than 110,000 people watched the stunts in person, and thousands more followed along via digital live streams and social coverage.

The agency also pulled off another show-stopping activation at the 2022 South By Southwest festival in Austin, where it returned to an in-person gathering after a two-year COVID-related hiatus.

To promote the Paramount+ program “Halo The Series,” the agency staged aerial drone shows during which 400 drones flew over Austin, creating formations including giant QR codes that when scanned brought onlookers to a trailer for the program.

Separately, the agency started a publishing operation to create the next iteration of *Departures*, the high-end American Express print magazine.

In its heyday, the publication reportedly generated \$50 million in annual revenue. But by 2021, the magazine was losing traction as a print-first vehicle and Amex, then partnering with Meredith to publish it, ended the venture and shuttered the title.

Then Amex turned to Giant Spoon to rebrand, revive and transform the publication into a digital lifestyle resource for its Platinum and Centurion cardholders.

Over the span of 8 months, Giant Spoon’s in-house publishing team redefined the publication’s mission as a trusted, taste-making confidante for the sophisticated global traveler. Branding, content strategy, and the operating model were

completely overhauled for life in a re-envisioned digital ecosystem.

A weekly newsletter, penned by agency editors, is the portal into the *Departures* world. The gated digital publication now sees hundreds of thousands of visitors each week, who return for inspiration, tips, and exclusive recommendations in travel, cuisine, style, wellness, and arts.

The publication has once again become a revenue-generating business with over 200 ad campaigns. It reaches over 1.4 million cardmembers who spend around 9 minutes on the site per session.

With the success of the partnership, Giant Spoon continues to transform itself — its new publishing arm has quickly evolved into a 50-person team comprising editorial, production, advertising sales, and account management. Look for more projects from the agency in the “brand as publisher” space.

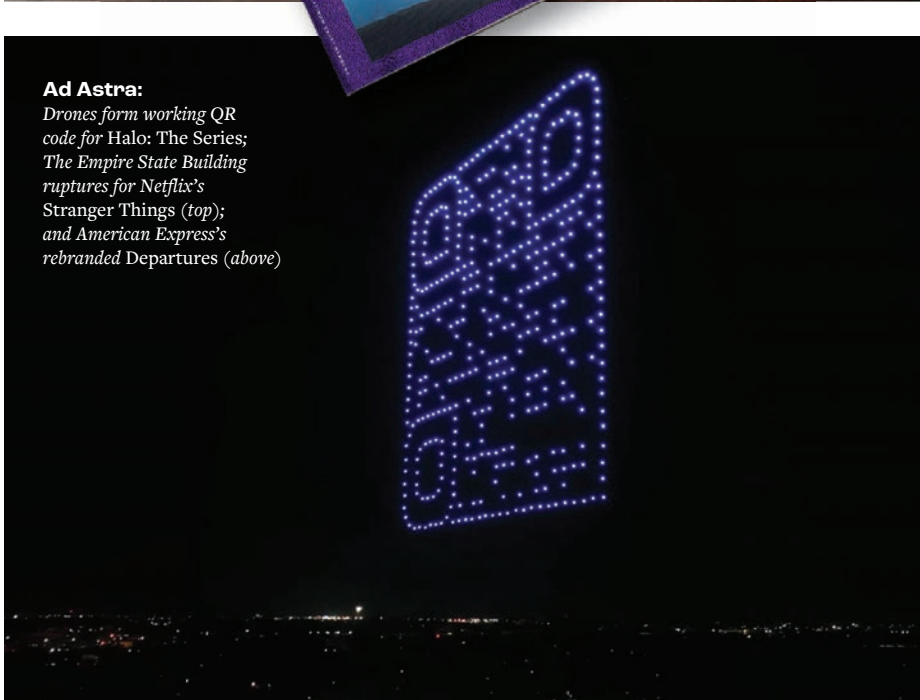
The agency, now with a team of 135 and revenue in 2022 of \$42.5 million, has evolved in other areas, expanding beyond its creative, media, and event-focused roots. It recently launched an audio strategy unit that has worked with Pearson, the New York Mets, and iHeart media.

The firm is also beefing up its media practice with enhanced performance-media solutions and advanced data and analytics capabilities. Omnicom alum Darrell Jursa recently joined the agency as executive vice president/platforms and data to lead that effort.

The agency is also investing more in its social offering. Kristin Maverick (formerly of 360i) joined in May as executive vice president, social strategy. She is tasked with expanding the practice in a bid to compete with the largest social-first agencies.

Creative is in the agency’s DNA, but it is doubling down on additional talent to vie for larger creative accounts and for lead creative agency roles. Industry veteran Noel Cottrell recently joined as Partner, Creative Chair, having previously served as Chief Creative Officer at VMLY&R’s New York office.

The shop had a big year in business development, adding 18 new accounts including Amazon, Savage X Fenty, Petco and Kate Spade. It has also expanded assignments with clients like Amex, which added Resy to its remit. **Steve McClellan**



Ad Astra:

Drones form working QR code for Halo: The Series; The Empire State Building ruptures for Netflix's Stranger Things (top); and American Express's rebranded Departures (above)



MediaPost
Aoy

**SEARCH/PERFORMANCE
AGENCY OF THE YEAR**

Merkle

Merkle does not want to reinvent Google, but as part of its innovative approach, the agency's developers have built technology to identify signals and determine how search engines react to queries.

The search agency's plethora of platforms and technologies crunch thousands of data points to personalize experiences while adhering to privacy standards, and then measure the performance to support a variety of search services — organic and paid — for advertisers.

Cameron Nichols, vice president, head of search engine optimization (SEO) at Merkle, refers to the tools built by the company as an innovation in

thought leadership to help clients stay ahead in an ever-changing landscape.

When Merkle's agency representatives ask clients to make technology investments, they have enough faith in the decisions made by their reps to follow through — especially when it comes to identity resolution.

“The ability for brands to acquire a customer and know enough about them to personalize the experience takes a lot of technology.” says Matthew Mierzejewski, senior vice president of search and the performance marketing laboratory at Merkle.

Merkury, an identity solution that supports first-party data collection of searches, identifies site visitors and helps the company personally recommend products or services without the need for browser cookies.

Having the ability to identify and understand client-specific curves in clicks for organic and paid search enables Merkle to create a complete strategy for clients.



Click curves help estimate increases or decreases in website traffic based on the overall site's keyword rankings or positions and clickthrough rates (CTR).

Vertical-specific total-search click curves will enable advancements across all areas of search, and provide an industry-leading innovation proprietary to Merkle's search program.

Perhaps clients are willing to explore technology investments because Merkle offers its clients the scale of a large company supported by parent company Dentsu and about 15,000 employees across offices in more than 70 cities worldwide.

While it has scale, it built its search practice through specialized segments uniquely positioned to carry brands through the details in campaigns.

The agency also publishes a quarterly performance report with information and insights ranging from search to social and retail media. Yet despite its size, the goal to work with clients in a more personal way is valuable.

Merkle offers several technology platforms,

but another innovation is called Merkle Matrix, a search intelligence tool that leverages machine learning and artificial intelligence to bring deeper meaning to user search data. The technology can tell how frequently terms are searched on.

Merkle Matrix takes large keyword data sets and runs them through a machine learning algorithm and categorizes them to get a sense of the top driving needs and interests of the consumer. It uses the brand's data, but also third-party data sources such as Google Search Console or BrightEdge.

Mierzejewski refers to Merkle Matrix as an end-to-end data and workflow solution that is "helping brands reposition the importance of looking at data and organic together."

It's not just the technology and data analysis that supports Merkle's nomination for Search Agency of the Year, but also the culture and the forward-thinking approach led by its employees.

Merkle's employees are changing the way brands think about search. "There's talk about TikTok overtaking Google as a search engine," Mierzejewski said. "We're seeing behavior on TikTok similar to the way consumers use Pinterest, where they search for inspiration. This also is true for apparel. They want to know what's hot. You're not going to get that on Google."

The company is working to integrate with social platforms like TikTok as well as Ad.net, which manages intent and audience-based targeting campaigns, and privacy search engines such as DuckDuckGo, Brave and others. In organic search, Merkle continues to monitor Apple's search bot for clues of its own search strategy.

The industry will see other changes in 2023. For example, Mierzejewski and Nichols also have analyzed OpenAI's ChatGPT. They view it as an alternative to Google Assistant or Amazon Alexa, a "point-in-time transactional quick sound-bite when you're expecting an answer, but it's not search."

Search, Mierzejewski says, is more of a journey. "You have a purpose in mind," he says. "You're going to form some type of activity and go through a journey. ChatGPT is more of a natural language, commentary, give-me-a-deeper-level synopsis tool that tells me what I should care about." **Laurie Sullivan**



At a time when plenty of consumer marketers are leaning into acronyms like ESG – environmental, social and governance – as part of their brand promise, Patagonia took the ultimate step in 2022 and literally gave the entire company away to a single shareholder: Planet Earth.

“For years, we looked for a way to lock in Patagonia’s purpose and unlock more value to fight the environmental crisis. Well, we did it,” the company said in a promotional email linking to a letter from its founder and chairman Yvon Chouinard explaining why he gifted his family’s ownership to a trust that would allocate all its profits to the climate crisis and protecting land.

“While we’re doing our best to address the environmental crisis, it’s not enough,” Chouinard

wrote, explaining: “We needed to find a way to put more money into fighting the crisis while keeping the company’s values intact.”

He said the company explored several conventional deals to support it — including selling Patagonia or taking it public — and donating the proceeds, but that there would be no guarantee its new owner/s would maintain the values Patagonia had established for its employees and its consumers around the world.

“Truth be told, there were no good options available. So, we created our own,” he said, explaining why Patagonia will continue to operate as a for-profit company whose profits are used 100% to sustain the planet, while continuing to market one of the world’s best-regarded brands in sustainable ways — from sourcing and manufacturing through retail, and even customer relationship management all the way up to returns and repairs.

As someone who became an avid mountaineer in my youth, Patagonia has long been my favorite brand for making and fulfilling those promises. At first it was just because they worked better and were designed to function better in extreme outdoor conditions.

But there was something unique and fundamental about the Patagonia brand’s DNA that predates the many of the industrial world’s environmental marketing cycles — from “green marketing” to ESG.

I first discovered Chouinard’s products

when I was learning to rock climb in the early 1970s at a time when the sport was transitioning from older, far less environmentally kind technology like metal pitons that climbers would hammer into and remove, scarring the

ancient rock walls as they climbed.

Chouinard’s first company — Chouinard Equipment Ltd. — was a leading supplier, but also began innovating new forms of “leave no trace” rock-climbing gear — chocks, hexes and camming devices — that could be easily placed and removed from rock walls without damaging them. They revolutionized the sport and are still the state of the art for climbers today.

Along the way, he helped usher in a new ethos

for the burgeoning outdoor equipment industry — and its most diehard consumers — all based not just on leaving no trace, but on doing what you can to build sustainable systems that actually give back to Planet Earth.

Over the years, Patagonia has innovated and integrated these processes into its entire footprint, from manufacturing through distribution and ultimately, its customer interactions.

Its trademark synthetic fleece apparel was one of the first to begin integrating recycled plastic from drinking water bottles into its fabrication process, and the buttons on its garments are made from the shells of rainforest nuts that provide a sustainable business model, providing an economic incentive for locals to preserve them.

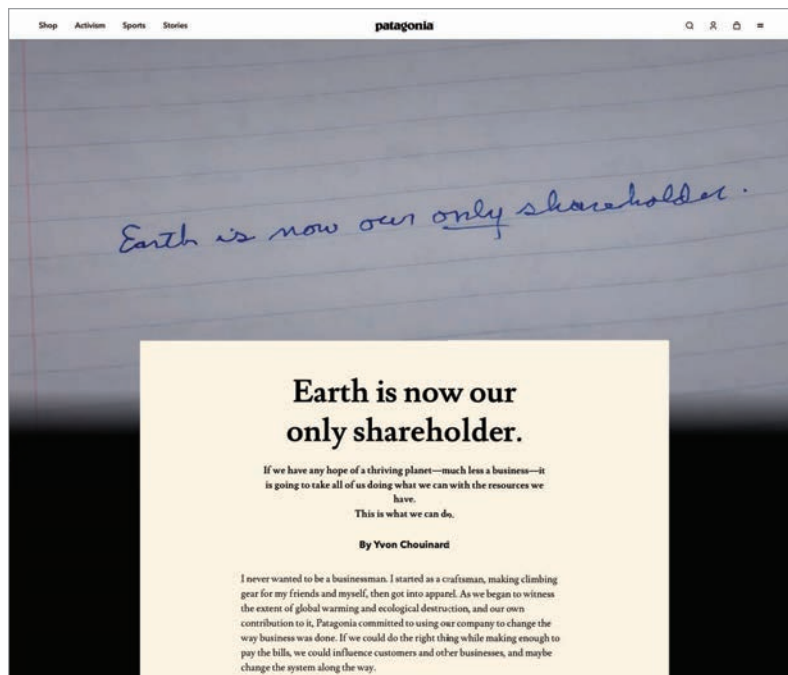
In more recent years, Patagonia has added products incorporating other recycled materials — including natural ones like cotton and wool — and even created a program that recycled and resold returned apparel under a separate “Worn Wear” website.

In 2019, it expanded on the concept by launching a “ReCrafted” initiative that manufactures and markets apparel made from the scraps of fabric coming from used Patagonia gear that couldn’t be reconditioned as “Worn Wear.”

Among its CRM initiatives are periodic newsletters instructing and reminding its list how they can repair their own gear, which fosters not just sustainability, but a sense of self-reliance that also is core to the Patagonia brand.

Almost since its inception, Patagonia donated a percentage of its profits to sustainability, and in 2016 it began donating 100% of the profits it generated from Black Friday sales to environmental groups as a pragmatic offset for the less-than-environmentally friendly conspicuous consumption that happens on the annual retail marketing day.

“Black Friday is a frenzy of deep discounts, limited-time offers and last-ditch efforts urging you to ‘save’ by spending more,” the brand said in a promotion introducing the concept. “We’re not doing that. Instead, we’d like to slow down and think about the bond we all build with our clothes. That’s why we’re committed to learning how to repair what we already own, shopping for used gear to keep it out of the landfill, or — when you do need something new — buying clothing and gear that’s built for the long haul. We also have ways



Planet Fitness:

Patagonia’s chairman and founder Yvon Chouinard’s letter (top); email graphic (center); New York Times anti-Black Friday ad (bottom)

you can donate your time, money or skills to the issues that matter to you most.”

In 2018, Patagonia donated \$10 million it received from the Trump Administration’s 2017 corporate tax cut to groups focused on the climate crisis.

So, when after nearly 50 years of marketing its brand this way, Chouinard announced last September that he was making Planet Earth its only shareholder, no one would have been surprised that he was simply fulfilling Patagonia’s original brand promise. **Joe Mandese**



As I write this article explaining MediaPost's supplier of the year, I wonder if the NBCUniversal brass aren't dreading it. And not without reason.

I spent much of the past year editorializing about their campaign to persuade advertisers to begin using currencies certified by a supplier: NBCUniversal.

Mostly, I just pointed out that it represented a fundamental shift from the past half century

of currencies accredited by a neutral third party — the Media Rating Council — as part of a self-regulatory consent decree with the Justice Department following Congressional oversight of the audience-measurement industry.

That, plus 40 years of advertisers and agencies telling me they don't want suppliers grading their own homework.

It turns out I was talking to the wrong sources, because in 2022 they would not be the ones who would make the decision.

It would be a new generation of digital natives who grew up in a world where it was common industry practice for platforms to certify how and with whom they do business, including the people who buy advertising from them.

It would not be the first time the ad industry operated in two topsy-turvy worlds of contradictory business practices, but the NBCU team had the vision to see that might be coming to an end, and that there was an opportunity for an inflection point in 2022.

And it proceeded to execute what arguably is the best sell-side research and marketing effort to restructure the TV advertising marketplace since Turner's Media at the Millennium shifted billions of dollars from broadcast to cable.

It would not be the

In retrospect, it is easy to see how it was a perfect storm opportunity, because of how things aligned coming into the year:

- Growing dissatisfaction with the ability of conventional TV audience measurement to accurately represent viewing in a cross-media world.
- Historical dissatisfaction with the industry's near monopolistic supplier, Nielsen.
- The MRC's suspension of accreditation for both Nielsen's national and local services.
- Nielsen's own implosion as it fumbled the

timing of its own transition to a new cross-media measurement service.

- Breakthrough innovation from startups in the audience-measurement supply chain, including one that NBCU ultimately ended up certifying as its currency — iSpot — following extensive test-and-learn trials with its biggest advertisers and agencies.
- The generational shift from old-school sample-based ratings to platform-based audience data. All that was needed was an organizing principle.

The truth is that NBCU already was on the path to be the one to organize it. It has long transformed its advertising and research organization from a TV ratings-centric one into a platform mindset and had brought in new management to help execute it.

It also brought in one of Nielsen's top executives — Kelly Abcarian — to lead the development of new “alternative currencies” instead of Nielsen's.

The fact that Nielsen proved to be its own worst enemy in defending its position was probably icing on the cake.

suppliers to make a case for testing them as potential alternative currencies, and running a series of test-and-learn market trials so big advertisers and agencies could be part of the process.

It began with one of NBCU's biggest tentpole events — the Super Bowl — and culminated with another, its coverage of the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, before iSpot ultimately was certified as its national cross-media advertising currency for the 2022-23 upfront buying season.

“I knew this day was coming,” NBCU's



Kelly Abcarian

first time the ad industry operated in two topsy-turvy worlds of contradictory business practices, but the NBCU team had the vision to see that might be coming to an end, and that there was an opportunity for an inflection point in 2022.

While Nielsen is expected to ultimately regain the MRC's stamp of approval, it is now more than 15 months since CEO David Kenny told investors accreditation was just “months” away.

Those were the factors leading up to Madison Avenue's embrace of alternative advertising currencies, but it was NBCU's campaign that activated them.

The effort was carefully planned and effectively executed.

It began by briefing the press that NBCU had issued a request for proposals from measurement

Abcarian told me when I spoke with the team to prepare for this article.

NBCU had already put its pieces in place by creating its “One Platform” for unifying linear TV and connected TV audience measurement. All that was needed was a framework and a blueprint for executing it, she said. And working with big advertisers and agency holding companies to be part of it.

“In the end, it was clear that real change was needed,” she said, adding that it only required organizing the industry around it. **Joe Mandese**



There were more than a handful of worthy candidates considered by MediaPost editors for this year's Executive of the Year honors.

It's hard to argue, for example, that a newcomer to the media owner space — Elon Musk — didn't have significant impact on the industry this year. Many would argue that it was negative impact. It was certainly disruptive.

Impact, innovation, vision and media industry leadership are the KPIs that guide us in our selection of the award recipient.

This year's honoree is Marc Pritchard, chief brand officer, Procter & Gamble.

Pritchard was chosen for his ongoing focus on diversity and inclusion and for his calls for fundamental changes in the media buying and selling process, which include eliminating audience guarantees and makegood ads and his recent declaration that the industry should abandon general market media targeting.

Pritchard is a 40-year veteran of P&G — the world's largest advertiser with ad-related expenses of \$8.2 billion in 2021, according to the company's annual report for that year.

He has been in his current role since 2014. He has been building brands at the company for most of his career. He was named Global Marketing Officer in 2008 and Global Brand Building Officer in 2009.

Pritchard has been lauded with some of the industry's most prestigious awards, including being honored by Cannes Lions as the Marketer of the Decade in 2020. That year he was also named Marketer of the Year by the World Federation of Advertisers.

In 2022 he entered the American Marketing Association Hall of Fame and was awarded the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters Corporate Impact Award.

In October at the ANA's Masters Of Marketing Conference, Pritchard outlined his vision for a better way of marketing by doing away with what he called the "habitual mindset that there is a general market."

There is no "average consumer," Pritchard said.

"We live in a diverse country with many cultures," and people within those cultures "expect brands to meet their unique needs with products and marketing developed precisely for what they want, need and deserve."

The better alternative, Pritchard said, is to "build multicultural marketing into the fabric of everyday marketing."

Multicultural marketing, he stressed, "is mainstream marketing."

By extension the industry's approach to market research needs to shift as well to a more inclusive model. And that means a shift away from the so-called "representative base" that is skewed to white demographics that underrepresent, well, everybody else.

He cited one example in the personal care category — shampoo. For Black women, the cliched marketing mantra, "lather, rinse, repeat," simply doesn't ring true.

It "misses what the 'wash day' ritual is for Black women — from the number of steps in the process, to the types of products she uses, to how she uses them, and how often."

Breaking the "rep base" research habit, said



Pritchard, means going deep into understanding the needs of each individual consumer group. The result: “true insight.” And it has led P&G to develop new lines of hair-care products tailored to the specific needs of Black women.

It’s no secret that minority groups have been underrepresented in ad content. There has been progress, and P&G is helping lead the way. The company did a recent audit of its ad content and found that overall, P&G brands cast 29% of characters in ads with Black actors. But the firm found that other groups including Hispanics, Asian Pacific and Native-Indigenous people are underrepresented. The company is now focused on boosting representation for those groups.

And Pritchard says the company is also more focused on eliminating inaccurate and stereotypical portrayals of characters in ads, which intended targets find off-putting if not offensive.

Another major issue is a dearth of programming that resonates with Black and

other minority audiences. The opportunity is that well-done ads will perform better if placed in programming that highly resonates with the viewer, likely resulting in double-digit increases in sales and overall trust.

P&G has created an internal team to develop partnerships with Black-owned-and-operated media for both programming development and media investment.

But to significantly scale up such investments, Pritchard sees a need for industry-wide consortiums with groups like the Association of National Advertisers, the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters and others.

On the content front, the company has created a number of initiatives designed to boost the amount of relevant and engaging programming in the market targeted to Black audiences, including an effort called “Widen The Screen.” The program is described as a content-creation, talent development and partnership platform to increase and support Black program creators across the advertising and film media industry.

Separately, Pritchard earlier this year proposed that media sellers eliminate the practice of offering audience guarantees and resulting “makegood” ads when guaranteed audience levels are not met. He called the practice “incredibly inefficient,” in part because audience forecasting “inevitably falls short.”

In today’s ad market, Pritchard asserts there should be a broader effort to “connect media directly to commerce” (one reason for the rapid growth of retail media).

Does he have a specific alternative in mind? Not yet, but he wants to work with sellers to test new approaches.

“It’s time to find a better way,” he told those attending a media conference earlier this year.

And as the largest advertiser globally, it’s a good bet P&G and its master brand builder will have a big say in that better way.

Steve McClellan

He cited one example in the personal care category — shampoo. For Black women, the cliched mantra “lather, rinse, repeat” simply doesn’t ring true. “It misses what the ‘wash day’ ritual is for Black women...”



MediaPost

**ALL
STARS**

2022

★ **Marketing All-Star**

Evan Jones

CMO, Fender

Under the direction of Evan Jones, legendary guitar makers Fender have successfully shredded their way into the minds of a generation born a decade after the famed inventor and company founder Leo Fender passed. As CMO, Jones and his team have ensured that the Stratocaster doesn't become your dad's old guitar.

With initiatives like “Strataverse,” — a virtual reality island shaped like one of the iconic guitars — collaborations with TikTok creators, and astounding campaigns such as the one behind the American Professional II series with the tagline “The One. For All,” Fender has not only captured a new generation of musicians but has also successfully transitioned from a historically trade-based brand to one that is consumer-centric.

“I'm super proud of how far we've come,” says Jones. “But we're also building on a head start that comes from 70 years of making some of the most beautiful instruments in the world.”

Jones pulls on extensive experience to make this happen. He's been at Fender for the last seven years but has also led teams at headwear company New Era, video game producers Activision, and shoemakers DC Shoes. One of his key memories involved working with the late basketball player Kobe Bryant at Nike.

“He used to talk about chasing greatness,” Jones remembers. “He was so driven, and his relentlessness has always stuck with me.”

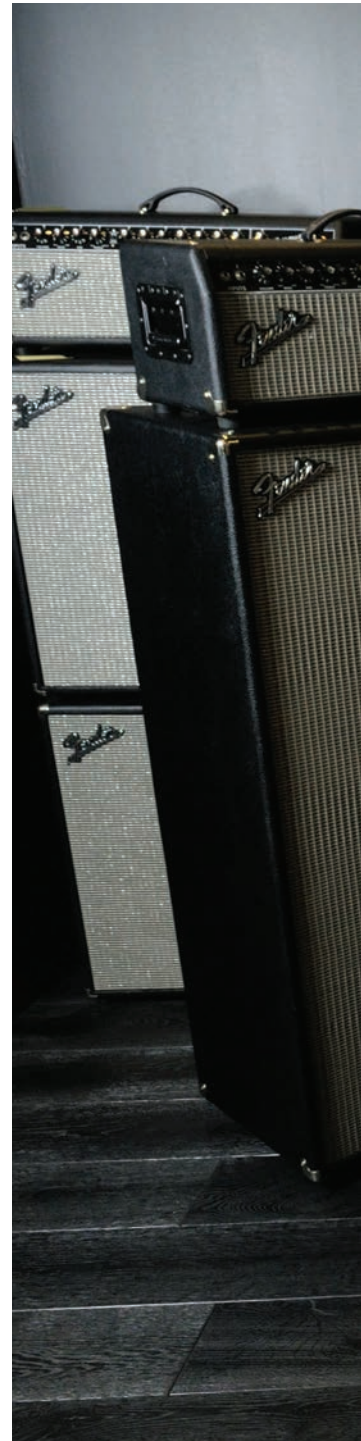
At Fender, he has focused heavily on moving into the digital space and expanding the guitar maker's audience beyond its predominantly male demographic. Under Jones' direction, the brand

launched its first signature guitar under a Black female artist, Gabriella Wilson, professionally known as H.E.R.

“I think that was a really important moment for the brand,” says Jones. “She's a transcendent artist who is breaking the mold, and her aspiration is to really inspire millions of young women and people of color to pick up the guitar.”

TikTok makes perfect sense for Fender, since it's inherently audio-based. Their collaborations with leading creators there have connected them with the younger audience, and their own channel has grown to almost 2 million followers since it launched in September.

Out of their investment in the digital arena has also come the online learning app for guitar, bass, and ukulele, Fender Play. Originally a subscription service, they made the platform free for a limited





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She’s a transcendent artist who is breaking the mold and her aspiration is to really inspire

millions of young women and people of color to pick up the guitar.”

time when the pandemic began in 2020, and more people than ever were turning to pick up a new instrument in their spare time.

To Jones, all of these efforts are about creating community. He ensures that Fender walks the walk when it comes to this mission. Through the Fender Play foundation, 15,000 children in Los Angeles to date have received instruments, and on top of that, the company backed a ballot initiative in the city

that passed this year that would create an annuity to fully fund music education across the state of California.

“At the end of the day, we’re committed to getting more guitars into more peoples’ hands,” he says. “Because if we’re successful, what we’re really doing is putting more music in their hands.” **Lukas Harnisch**



★ **Marketing All-Star**

Carl Loredo

CMO, Wendy's

Under the guidance of Chief Marketing Officer Carl Loredo, since 2019, Wendy's has seen some of its most ambitious years.

Online, the brand has gained quite a reputation setting itself apart in a social-media scene saturated with clean corporate accounts and often gaining attention through snarky tweets.

That attention has turned into real-world success.

Under Loredo's direction, they launched a new breakfast daypart in a market packed with established breakfast quick-serve restaurants.

The odds were stacked against them, but their market share now rivals those of competitors that have been in the game for nearly 50 years.

They have also made innovative strides in a field that many of their rivals are hesitant to enter. The Wendyverse, which was built in Meta's Horizon

Worlds, is a great example, and one that Loredo is incredibly proud of.

"Building the Wendyverse in Meta's Horizon Worlds from the ground up with creators has been an exciting venture for us," he says. "While others have been simply playing the game, we've been creating it. Truly a first of its kind, the Wendyverse bridges the best of today with tomorrow and provides fans a new form of community to connect with us, and each other."

That's just one of the ways that Wendy's is virtually reaching consumers. At the launch of *Animal Crossing: New Horizon*, the brand live-streamed footage of the game using the Wendy



“Building the Wendyverse in Meta’s Horizon Worlds from the ground up with creators has been an exciting venture for us. While others have been simply playing the game, we’ve been creating it.”

persona to advertise its free delivery service.

Watching a corporate persona play a video game was a first for many in the community — and at its peak, the stream garnered 16,000 viewers.

Loredo and his team continued to focus on the gaming community with an exclusive Uber Eats menu created by and for gamers so they would “Never Stop Gaming.” The company partnered with popular streamers to promote the campaign and gave out prizes in orders.

For Loredo, all these efforts are perfectly in line with the company’s mindset. “Everything we do at Wendy’s starts and ends with the consumer,” he says. “‘Customer-first’ is not just a mindset or a mantra for us; it’s the magic that sets the Wendy’s brand experience apart from all the other quick-serve restaurants.”

He has brought veteran levels of experience to his leadership and has been a part of and led teams at PepsiCo and Craftmade International, collecting

several accolades along the way. Over time, he has learned that it is important to be strategic about what trends to attach his brand to.

“It’s never been the Wendy’s way to simply pounce on the latest trend,” he says. “We’re purposeful in our campaigns and partnerships, ensuring we deliver at the right time, in the right place, with the right message for our brand, and our fans.”

“We’re all about meeting our fans where they are — listening to their passions and showing up for them in unique and engaging ways,” he says. “We know who

we are, what we stand for, and who our fans are. In 2023, we’ll continue to be at the forefront of culture and show up for our fans where others have let them down.” **Lukas Harnisch**

**LITTLE MISS
I'M NOT MEAN
I'M SARCASTIC**





★ *Marketing All-Star*

Tina Mahal

SVP – Marketing, Frito-Lay

Snack food may be a guilty pleasure – but the campaigns can be compelling. As senior vice president, marketing for Frito-Lay, part of PepsiCo, Tina Mahal directs creative campaigns for popular food brands such as Cheetos, Doritos and Tostitos.

A big shoutout: The nearly 20-year company veteran spearheaded Frito-Lay’s debut partnership with the 2022 FIFA World Cup, making the product the first salty snack collaborator in the game’s history.

And she added star power by leveraging its legendary players, such as Mia Hamm and David Beckham.

Soccer is the fastest-growing sport in North

America, and the company pushed its new sponsorship to acknowledge that reality.

The result? The campaign garnered more than 4 billion earned-media impressions, and made Fritos the snack du jour for the game.

In fact, before taking on her role of senior vice president earlier this spring, Mahal served as vice president, brand marketing at Frito-Lay.

In this capacity, she grew the brands’ businesses



— leading the dips' businesses to 2.7 points of share gain and achieving 10% growth on all brands as of this spring.

Mahal also aligned brand values with consumers. "This year, we leveraged one of the most iconic brands in baseball — Cracker Jack —

and flipped the script to celebrate the stories of women breaking barriers in sports by introducing Cracker Jill," says Mahal.

Five depictions of Jill on special-edition bags highlighted empowerment to girls.

With 9.2 billion earned impressions, Cracker Jill achieved 41% overall share of media impressions against other brands activating around MBL Opening Day. It also showcased society's diversity.

"Our goal was to demonstrate our commitment to expanding the representation of women in sports in action — putting even more financial support behind it through a \$200,000 donation to the Women's Sports Foundation," she says. In addition, 6,000 donations have been made to the foundation via CrackerJill.com.

"What is timeless about good creative advertising is the need for a compelling insight," Mahal adds. "Consumers are interested in how you turn an insight into entertainment or something that is relevant to them." To her, authenticity is paramount.

Prior to PepsiCo, Mahal was part of the SC Johnson Ltd. marketing team in Canada, where she worked on brands such as Raid Off!, Ziploc and Windex.

But Mahal is committed to looking ahead, not back. Noting the great innovations in the media space, she is determined to be at the forefront.

"At Frito-Lay, we have a world-class media team and valued partners, and we are constantly challenging ourselves to be experimental in this space. We know that consumers juggle more screens than ever before — with 51% of Gen Zers checking their phones every few minutes. We take this insight into consideration when developing media plans, and we push for some element of experimentation in every big campaign we do."

Success is not just quantitative; it's also qualitative.

"I try to lead with kindness, empathy and high expectations. Like most leaders I like challenge and I like to see progress," she says. "With all the volatility in the world, I've learned being a good leader and having high empathy can go hand in hand." **Fern Siegel**



If you scan Delphine Fabre-Hernoux's LinkedIn profile, you'll see that she has spent her career straddling two industrial worlds: advertising and Big Tech. But it is the correlation of the two that has given a unique perspective of a third world: the one we all live in as consumers of advertising, media and technology, as well as the products and services they sell.

"I've had two lives," the Wavemaker Chief Data & Analytics Officer explains. "One life with big tech companies and one life with agencies. And now I am using the life I lived inside big tech companies to help the agencies."

Specifically, Fabre-Hernoux has built a new kind of research, data, analytics and insights group inside Wavemaker, an agency already well-known for its data-processing chops.

Fabre-Hernoux, who joined Wavemaker in

 **Media All-Star**

Delphine Fabre-He

2021 after serving as Amazon's global head of advertising insights sharing and data governance — as well as alternating stints at Publicis, Facebook, Denstu, Microsoft, and CBS Interactive before that — says that privileged access to the inside thinking about and application of some of the most powerful consumer data insights in the world is what prepared her to innovate the way Wavemaker, and by association, parent GroupM, handle it.

She describes the current consumer and data insights marketplace as “chaotic,” but says it is her well-organized and disciplined approach — character traits she learned during her family upbringing, especially from her father, as well as her formal European education — that has made her uniquely suited to innovate it.

“I grew up in a family where my dad really encouraged me to think and ask questions,” she recalls, adding: “And to constantly think out of the box and to read and learn.”

That's why she spends much of her time reading academic journals and research papers that have nothing to do with advertising, media or technology in order to discover new ways of thinking about — as well as modeling — how advertising can work better.

One of the first ways she did that after joining Wavemaker was to do it organizationally, by setting up a unique data and analytics infrastructure she dubbed “MIS.” But not MIS in the traditional sense of that acronym (management information systems), but a new kind meaning “marketing intelligence & insights” — with a heavy emphasis on intelligence and insights.

Here, she credits collaboration with GroupM and its sister agencies, and describes the innovation she has been contributing to like a team sport, noting: “In a big organization it's very difficult to have a lot of people working together and moving in the same direction.”

And when it comes to directions, Fabre-Hernoux is just as likely to zig when others are zagging, as long as it leads to a better result.

Case in point: When the ad industry and its data supply chain were faced with the deprecation of consumer identity signals following Apple's privacy framework — and soon, Google's third-party cookies — instead of trying to figure out workarounds in the way that many of its peers and suppliers have focused on, Fabre-Hernoux came up with a novel solution: contextual targeting.

Instead of trying to find new ways to discover people's identities, she has championed new, more sophisticated ways of using data about the media people use — channels, platforms, content, etc. — to understand who they are and how to target them.

Interestingly, that is the way most advertising was targeted before the emergence of digital cookies and device IDs, and it is her contention that it can work just as well as — and maybe even better than — trying to harvest and stockpile data about explicit consumer identities and behaviors.

And it's equally important that she says this can be a far more efficient process than warehousing volumes of consumer data, and mitigates the risks of running afoul of regulators and consumer privacy advocates too.

“I want to walk away from PII completely,” Fabre-Hernoux told MediaPost as she began implementing her contextual-targeting strategy early last year. Instead of personally identifiable information, Fabre-Hernoux and her MIS team are focused on developing new models for enhancing contextual targeting and educating clients on how to use it and what they can learn from doing it. **Joe Mandese**

Instead of trying to figure out workarounds, in the way that many of its peers and suppliers have focused on, Fabre-Hernoux came up with a novel solution: Contextual targeting.

rnoux Chief Data & Analytics Officer,
Wavemaker



★ *Media All-Star*

Michael Gullaksen

CEO, NP Digital

An agency's success begins at the top. A positive culture supports change and creates a place where productive people want to work.

NP Digital, headquartered in San Diego, California, has experienced a 50% increase in full-time employees during the past year. One of those strategic new hires during the first quarter of 2022 was search expert Mike Grehan. The former Acronym CMO leads global Corporate Communications as the company expands globally and increases revenue.

NP Digital's annual revenue forecast in 2022 is estimated to surpass \$100 million. Of its

\$32 million in revenue growth, 61% came from new clients and 39% from offering premium versions and cross-selling

services to existing clients. Non-U.S. revenue grew by 397%.

The person behind those achievements at the top of the agency is Michael Gullaksen, CEO, NP Digital. Gullaksen deserves the title of 2022 MediaPost Media All Star, if for no other reason than his humble approach when talking about the agency's achievements rather than his own.

When talking about the agency's global expansion and branding, he attributes the

company's growth to employees across the organization — about 756 employees. NP Digital has offices in seven countries, but employees support clients in 15 countries. Some customers do work in 50 countries.

"Getting everyone marching in the same direction with one real goal of having a global enterprise business that can support any customer any size anywhere is aspirational," he says. "It's the most monumental task we've taken on."

Gullaksen wanted to work in marine biology or as a dentist when he was in high school, but he never imagined he would become the CEO of a performance-based agency.

"I was graduating college in early 2000," he says. "My roommate's sister was a TV anchor in Scottsdale, Arizona, and dating what we called an 'internet guy.' He took her and my best friend at the time out all the time. I got invited out, too."

This "internet guy" — Jeff Herzog, the founder of iCrossing — convinced Gullaksen to work for his startup selling search-engine marketing services. At the time it wasn't called iCrossing.

Gullaksen attributes trust- and relationship-building to his success. When asked to cite the one thing people would be surprised to learn about him, Gullaksen says: "I'm an introvert. I don't like crowds and social settings can be tiring."

People tell him he's not an introvert because he loves spending time with them. "It's fruitful and worth it," he says. "I had to push myself to do it."

The greatest career advice anyone gave him, around age 29, came from his dad while transitioning from iCrossing to Covario.

During a conversation with his dad, he questioned his ability to start an agency. Covario at

the time was a software company. It did not have an agency.

"My dad kept telling me to bet on myself," Gullaksen said. "'You have to bet on yourself,' he kept saying. I had never started a company before. My dad did. His dad did. They were successful and sold their businesses. Bet on yourself. It's great advice."

Gullaksen, 44, is not overly spiritual, but believes in karma. He believes that people need to "do right" by others, and take care of others.

His greatest joy is taking care of clients and employees and to see them succeed.

"I'm a firm believer in taking care of employees, helping them find the work-life balance — and that will flow down to the customers," he says.

Perhaps that's why NP Digital offers free software in various disciplines in search-engine marketing and content solutions, which attracted a dedicated following and user base in the millions. It

helped build the agency's brand while building trust across the marketing community. Loyal decision-makers have helped propel its business in the global market.

Gullaksen lives life giving back to others. In March 2022, NP Digital partnered with the Digital Marketing Institute (DMI) to create a new Online Search Marketing certification course with materials focused on search strategy, paid search and SEO, demand generation, search analytics, and data visualization. DMI's 200,000 active members can study search marketing using a dynamic mix of interactive lessons, videos, and downloadable tools, along with live sessions on the latest trends and channels.

That need to take care of others starts with his new wife and expected child. **Laurie Sullivan**

"My dad kept telling me to bet on myself.

'You have to bet on yourself,' he kept saying.

I had never started a company before. My dad did. His dad did.

They were successful and sold their businesses.

Bet on yourself.

It's great advice."



Krystal Olivieri

Global Chief Innovation Officer,
GroupM & Choreograph

If data is the “new currency,” as GroupM proclaimed when it named Krystal Olivieri its global chief innovation officer — as well as for its newly formed data consultancy Choreograph — last May, then Olivieri might well also be described as the ad industry’s Fed chairman, if not its guiding spirit.

After cutting her teeth as the director of business strategy and partnerships at GroupM’s Xaxis unit, she has taken on a series of roles to better organize the massive consumer data that GroupM and its clients sit on, as well as innovating more wholesome ways of leveraging it.

In 2021, Olivieri was the chief architect behind the development of GroupM’s Data Ethics Compass, a sophisticated assessment tool that enables GroupM’s global organization, as well as its clients, to understand the ethical issues associated with utilizing consumer data.

The tool — which was developed amidst an array of national and local regulations, as well as potential fines and litigation — was a pragmatic solution to mitigating the potential liabilities associated with misappropriating and/or misusing some of the most sensitive data defining us as consumers.

At a higher level, the tool enables GroupM’s team to have meaningful conversations about the role that data increasingly plays in understanding consumer intent, action — and as the set-up to this profile suggests, a sense of consciousness about the underlying value of doing that.

Or as Olivieri described it at the time, helping its team “do the right thing” and understanding


when something doesn’t pass the “ick” test.

In 2022, Olivieri helped raise GroupM’s — and hopefully the world’s — consciousness about the role that media buys play in the climate crisis, and developed another tool to help them manage it.

GroupM first unveiled its media-buying carbon calculator during a presentation at last year’s Cannes Media Lions Festival, but Olivieri followed up with a plan to make it far more ubiquitous — and perhaps more importantly, standardized — for the rest of the industry.

Understanding that one of the big limitations in organizing the ad industry and its media supply chain to efficiently reduce carbon in the advertising footprint also required universal standards, Olivieri’s team set out to do exactly that by reaching out to the rest of the industry — peers and competitors alike — and offering GroupM’s own calculator as a template for an industry-standard one.

“We’re taking the methodology that we’ve created and we’re going to build a software-based approach to it,” Olivieri said of the initiative’s ultimate goal to create a frictionless system for assessing the carbon impact of media buys so that the entire industry could work efficiently toward reducing it.



In a world of proprietary, not-invented-here ad-industry mindsets, Olivieri has proven that collaboration — whether internally across GroupM, its agency units and clients, or with rival agencies — sometimes can provide a better return on investment. Especially when it returns a better, more ethical and sustainable world. **Joe Mandese**

GroupM first unveiled its carbon calculator during a presentation at last year's Cannes Media Lions Festival, but Olivieri followed up with a plan to make it far more ubiquitous...



★ *Creative All-Star*

Shana Bellot

Managing Director StrawberryFrog

What's in a name? For openers, a quirky, offbeat agency name gets attention. Say StrawberryFrog.

The moniker is inspired by the strawberry frog, the rarest frog in the world, with blue legs and a red body. It is the opposite of what managing director Shana Bellot calls factory dinosaurs — slow, bureaucratic firms.

StrawberryFrog is agile, fast and nimble — and she credits that “rebel-with-jeans” ethos for the agency’s winning track record.

Bellot shares some of that credit.

As managing director, she led the expansion of the agency’s 25-year-old Movement Strategy, Movement Outside and Movement Inside principles. The Movement platform provides a strategic framework for marketing that galvanizes employees and mobilizes consumers.

“We work with large companies to establish or transform culture, focus employees so companies can thrive, such as Walmart and

Pfizer. We call this Movement Inside. I push our teams to use creativity to solve business problems,” she says. “For example, an augmented-reality message can be delivered through a QR code — a unique way to reach your audience.”

“I have honed my philosophy around two core beliefs. First, you need to use creativity in the service of a Movement — it’s a powerful way to engage and mobilize people inside and outside companies.

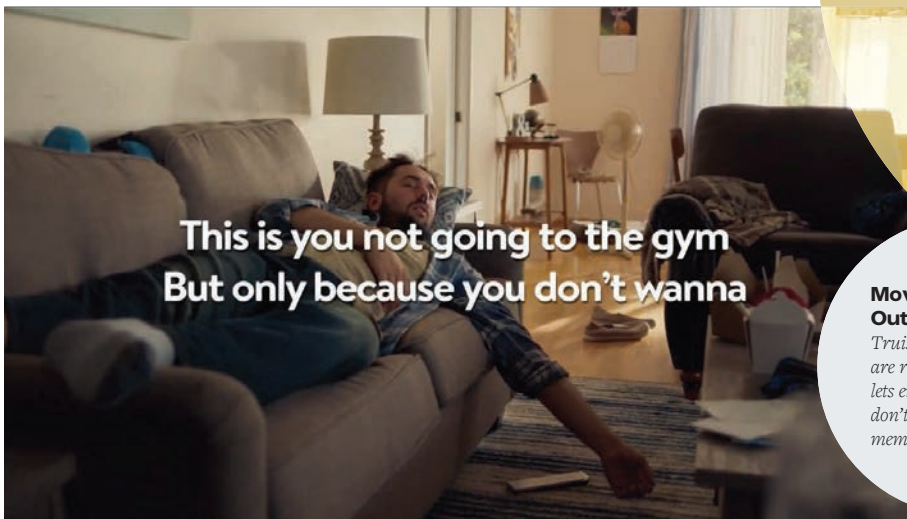
Second, creativity means ideas that build your business, disrupt and solve a problem in a way that stimulates,” Bellot says. “Creativity is vital at every touchpoint” to build a community.

And her commitment is paying off.

Agency co-founder-CEO Scott Goodson says Bellot spearheaded the development of better



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Movement, Outside and In:
Truist asks the public if they are ready (above); Walmart lets employees know they don't have to use the \$9 gym membership benefit

processes and systems that enabled the company to “woo, win and deliver 20% growth in the business,” working closely with co-managing director Dan Langlitz to devise a five-year plan for StrawberryFrog’s future. She is quick to give a shoutout to her team’s talents in project planning and management.

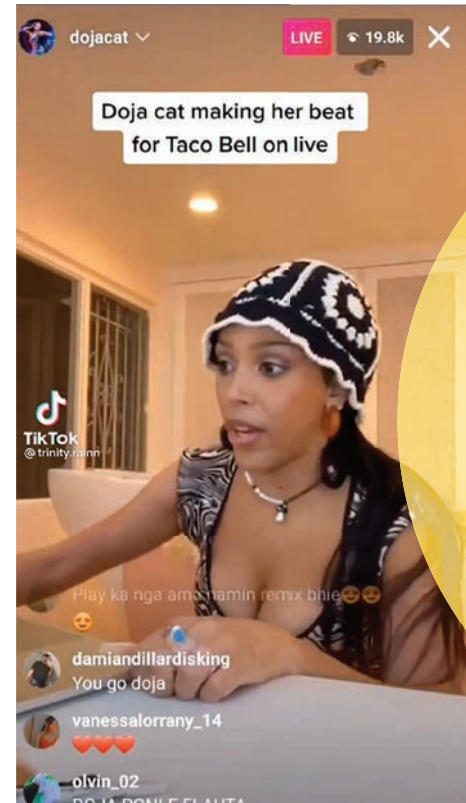
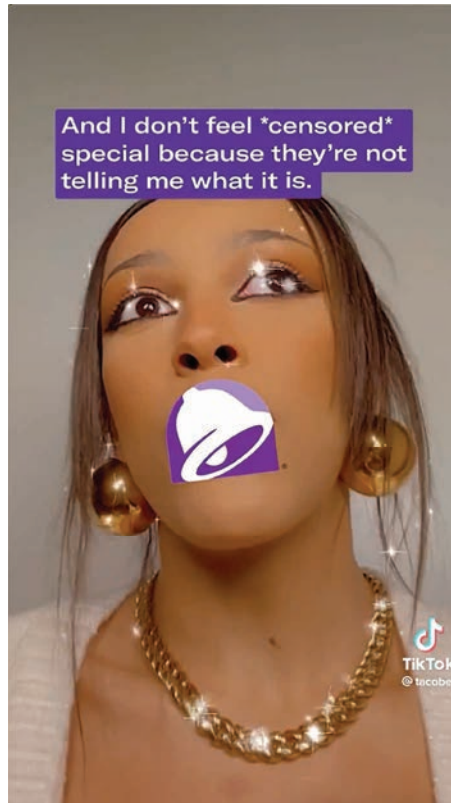
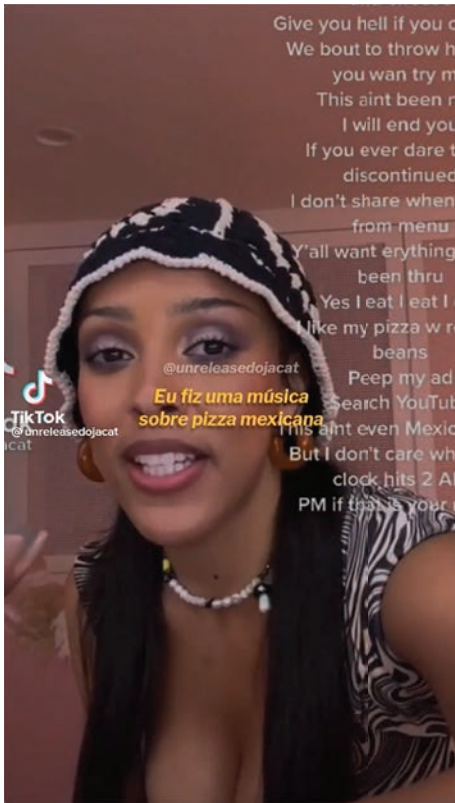
“Profitability is all about being a well-oiled machine, so you can create the highest-quality work with the greatest efficiency, especially on complex projects,” she says.

Those projects also include Prudential and Truist. Bellot brought decisive leadership that helped guide these clients, including Pfizer, to strong performances — even during a period of record inflation. She also oversaw the agency’s Walmart work, which used social media for the first time to engage a hard-to-reach audience.

A former group account director for Yard NYC, group business director for McKinney and account director for Ogilvy, Bellot is acutely aware of advertising’s specific challenges since the Covid-19 pandemic — from marketing fatigue to employee burnout. “It’s a bit of a crisis, but also an opportunity for us,” she says. “Realizing our opportunity is about building and growing the best team in the marketing and purpose-driven transformation space.

“At StrawberryFrog, I am more of a visionary. You have to have clear goals, bring teams into that shared vision, then mobilize and motivate. When it’s all working, you feel the flow — and it’s amazing.”

Bellot reports that she and Langlitz have found a powerful way to lead the organization — as befits its name — “from leap to leap.” **Fern Siegel**



★ Creative All-Star

Kinney Edwards

Global Head of Creative Lab, TikTok

It's rare to be able to boast that you have been a part of the digital marketing field from its very founding, but Kinney Edwards is one of the few who can honestly say they have been there very close to its beginning. As senior art director at Zentropy Partners, Edwards quickly established himself as a leader.

"It was an interesting period," Edwards says of the early 2000s. "People were still carving out what digital marketing meant, and the terms were not even really quite there yet. We were calling it 'interactive media' and 'non-traditional!'"

But Edwards recognized the promise of the medium right away. "There was so much potential in that one-to-one communication with audiences that it offered."

From there he moved quickly to other creative heavyweights like Ogilvy and Tribal Worldwide. He has led creative teams on high-profile

brands including Adidas, AT&T, Mars Wrigley Confectionery, Mars Petcare, Cadillac, the National Football League, Pfizer Consumer Healthcare, Wounded Warrior Project, Nickelodeon, Intel, Pepsi, Diageo, Philips, UNICEF, and Neutrogena.

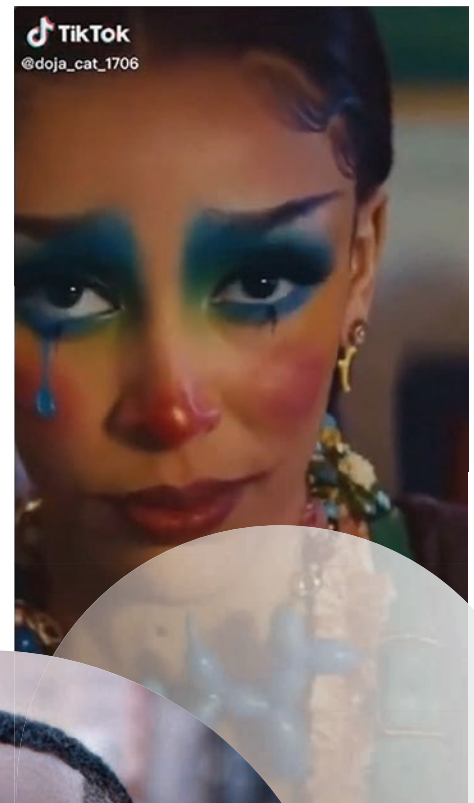
"My niche became working between the traditional, those big campaigns focused on mass awareness, and turning it into a more personalized and engaging message," Edwards says.

Now, he is global head of the creative lab at TikTok. There, he connects brands with the greater culture through the ironclad hold that the app has

“We’re moving away from the attitude

of just showing up on a platform and selling stuff.

It has become more about making something interesting and collaborative.”



on the zeitgeist. “It’s a lot of serendipity,” he says about his entry into the role.

He sees himself as helping brands to best understand how to connect with their audiences.

Edwards understands that there is a fundamental difference when advertising a product that relies on engagement with content. For him, the substance of campaigns is key and relies on authentic storytelling, and much of that comes from brands co-creating with established personalities.

“One of the biggest achievements for me and my team recently has been helping brands to see the power of that co-creation,” Edwards says. “We’re moving away from the attitude of just showing up on a platform and selling stuff. It has become about making something interesting and collaborative.”

He points to the success of Taco Bell on TikTok and the brand’s community that came to life around Doja Cat’s investment in the restaurant’s Mexican pizza. The brand gave the artist almost absolute creative freedom on her popular TikTok page. It was a huge success.

Two weeks after its release, Taco Bell had to announce that it was running out of ingredients for the menu item.

Creators like Doja Cat are the lifeblood of the



platform, and Edwards wants to ensure that brands looking to market can understand their power. “They can make their efforts much more relevant,” he says.

“Creativity is the answer,” he says. “I know that this still feels relatively new, but we’re seeing a lot of momentum, and that’s energizing for me. My teams across the world are pushing this sort of relevancy and connection for brands in such creative and inspiring ways. That has been amazing to watch.” **Lukas Hamisch**

 **Creative All-Star**

Alex Strimbeanu

Creative Director, Jandl

Based in Bratislava, Slovakia, the offices of Jandl are not far from Ukraine and the war that erupted there in the last year. The agency's Creative Director, Alex Strimbeanu, understood immediately that he and his colleagues had a role to play in supporting their neighbors and fighting injustice propagated by the Russian administration.

In March 2022, Special Love Operation was launched by Strimbeanu and other independent advertising professionals in the region to bypass Russian government censorship that blocked access to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and several foreign news organizations.

The group cleverly uses Tinder — which has not yet been blocked — to get details about the invasion of Ukraine to Russian citizens to counteract the misinformation being fed to them by their government.

Tinder Plus users are able to change their location to anywhere in the world that they want. Users simply have to include information about the invasion in their profiles — including photos and a message in Russian Cyrillic that Special Love Operation provides on their website — and then change their location to somewhere in Russia. Tinder users looking for love will end up finding the truth about the war in their neighbor's country.

“I spoke with many Russians and it was interesting to see two sides there,” Strimbeanu remembers. “It was surprising to see positive reactions from Russians against the invasion, but of course, there were also many who were blind to the truth and bought into the government's story. It's just another example of the polarization online that we see all around the world.”

It was a unique and cheeky form of resistance through one of the most powerful tools in a creative's arsenal.

Even the name itself is a reference to Vladimir Putin's lie about the invasion as just a “special military operation.”

The project is an extension of the advocacy that Strimbeanu has focused on throughout his career.

In his current home country of Slovakia, his work has challenged homophobia. In a 2021 campaign with Absolut Vodka, they posed the question: “Would you still love me if I were gay?”



This year, their campaign revolved around the slogan “Every Love is Love.”

Beyond the advertisements, Strimbeanu, Jandl, and Absolut changed the Slovakian dictionary definition of love that was confined to heterosexual love.

Spurred by the campaign, an accompanying petition, and social unrest caused by a homophobic terrorist attack in the country in October, the Slovak National Academy of Sciences changed the definition to one that was more inclusive.

“I’m proud that we had a part to play in this change, which might be small, but can be a starting point,” says Strimbeanu.

Strimbeanu is a decorated leader and creative in

“I spoke with many Russians and it was interesting to see two sides there. It was surprising to see positive reactions from Russians against the invasion, but of course there were also many who were blind to the truth...”

the advertising field with over 12 years of experience with agencies large and small. The serious aspects of his work are belied by a childlike, creative spirit. “It’s a childish

profession in a way,” he jokes.

“You have to have some humor.”

For inspiration, he turns to hip-hop artist Lupe Fiasco, whom he calls “an extremely good copywriter,” for his ability to fit so much meaning into a single line or word.

Of course, he has to temper that part of himself, now that he mentors and leads the next generation of creatives — but he says that this makes it all the more rewarding. “I’m consistently surprised by their growth. They have such amazing ideas, and it shames and spurs me to come up with my own.” **Lukas Hamisch**

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