



A LOOK AHEAD TO 2021



FOREWORD

Well hello 2021!

Was ever there a year more longed for? Yet only weeks into 2021, brands and businesses are knee deep in political, environmental and social conflicts. Combined with our own industry challenges it has never been a more interesting time to be in the world of advertising.

The need to look ahead and make sense of the cultural changes impacting business and communication has never been so vital and interesting! The Starcom team have outlined five new tensions that brands will need to consider as we progress through 2021.

The overarching theme of 2021 that reflects the interconnected nature of these trends is surely bravery. The radically changing business landscape, alongside changing consumer behaviour and values, mean that brands must bravely take tough decisions, support each other and be prepared to think differently.

For more information and detail on any of our trends, or to start discussing how these could impact your business, please don't hesitate to get in touch!

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RECOVERY

VS

REVOLUTION



WHAT IS HAPPENING? Unprecedented challenges call for drastic measures.

The global pandemic will again be the defining feature of 2021 and its impact has rippled across every area of our lives. The unprecedented disruption it has brought to society has highlighted many of the challenges that threaten our future. Whether it is societal inequality, unsustainable consumption, the importance of trusted information, the state of our healthcare and housing system, (we could go on) there are few areas of life which have been left untouched by the enforced rules of lockdown, and the threat to life and livelihoods they bring.

The scale of the chaos means that many simply want to heal. We want to return to times of stability, keep our heads down and focus on our families and self-care. 41% of people aim to become calmer according to the Foresight Factory. We want our jobs and our healthy bank accounts back, we want to return to our buzzing city centres, our schools, our pubs and our places of entertainment.

But there is also a hunger, not to simply recover but to rip up the rule book and instead “build back better”. Across the world people are demanding systemic change to solve our greatest challenges. The World Economic Forum has found 86% of people globally (87% of the UK) want the world to change significantly to become more sustainable and equitable. In the UK, ‘Reset’, the cross-party consultation enquiry, asked over 57,000 Brits about how they wanted society to function after the COVID-19 pandemic and found radical calls for a fairer, greener system. 66% believe the government should prioritise health and wellbeing over GDP. 57% back some form of

guaranteed monthly income for every household. These demands should not be dismissed as simply wishful thinking. As President Biden declared in his inaugural speech, “Don’t tell me things can’t change.”

The problem of course is that if recovery seems tricky, then envisaging a revolution is a much tougher task. As always, it is the seeming dichotomy between long and short-term goals. It feels almost luxurious to reimagine the work-place environment when many are struggling to find any job at all. It feels heartless to insist that we lead more sustainable lives when sustenance is the main priority for many. Even when the vision is strong, implementing real change is difficult. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement is still going strong, but concerns grow about its direction and ability to enforce change that truly brings greater equality.

But in extraordinary times, extraordinary things can happen. It has been proven over the past few months that homeless people can be given shelter virtually overnight. Furlough schemes have protected livelihoods. We can choose to turn coal off for good. President Biden – whose career has been built on bi-partisan compromise – may well be able to deliver ‘the most progressive presidency since FDR.’ Ideas that were previously unthinkable have been proven to be possible, if the desire exists to put your money where your mouth is. It is the strength of that willpower that will help define how we end up living and working when we emerge from the pandemic.

BRAND EXAMPLES



Beer brand BrewDog, who are already carbon negative, have called out brands whose carbon neutral goals will come into effect just in time, and those that won't, stating, 'After 2030 it is too damn late'.



ITV's 'Britain Get Talking' campaign is a 5-year commitment to help support mental health. It encourages people to communicate to reduce stress and loneliness, partnering with Mind and Young Minds.



Ecotalk, a collaboration between energy provider Ecotricity and RSPB have created a new mobile contract (running on the EE network) where bills go directly to repurpose disused land to create new habitats for wildlife.



Burberry's support for the voices of tomorrow includes the partnership with Marcus Rashford to support youth club initiatives. They also support the Global Youth Resiliency Fund, which aims to close nutrition gaps and unlock access to livelihoods.



RECOVERY

VS

REVOLUTION



WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR BRANDS? An opportunity to do things differently.

In the short term, many brands will be simply focused on ensuring a full recovery, retaining staff, ensuring access to key resources and keeping the shop doors open. But key to this will be their engagement with their customers. Customers are judging brands against new criteria: how they have behaved and supported their communities beyond just building profits. According to a special Covid-19 edition of Edelman's regular Trust Barometer, 65% state that how brands respond to the pandemic will have a 'huge impact' on their likelihood to buy their products.

Whilst revolution will always be a scary word, small changes can make enormous differences. A record 500,000 signed a pledge to only eat vegan food in January (Veganuary). 54% plan to travel domestically in the next 12 months (Mintel). 53% take ethical considerations into account when switching energy supplier (Foresight Factory). En masse, such small actions will have a huge impact on the country's collective carbon footprint. Brands that offer easy alternatives and suggestions to nudge positive behaviour may also be able to reap rewards for future-facing thinking. Brands must build products that serve us.

Leadership and decisive planning will be essential. People will remember the brands who were vocal and present in the early, most disruptive days of the pandemic, and will also remember those who went dark.

Planning or participating in any revolution is not simple, but challenges are increasingly defined and measured by data. Investors are most hopeful, as they have faith in the data that suggests real change is coming. It seems that consumers are prepared to support and follow those ready to lead the way. Entrepreneur Boyan Slat, founder of Ocean Clean Up which removes plastic from the ocean said, "I thought the main difficulty would be people not caring - and the technology would be relatively easy. Actually, it's the opposite. But that makes me hopeful that when all the tools are there, it will actually happen." Similarly, calls for NHS volunteers, builders of the London Nightingale hospital (built within days), or on conservation projects all demonstrate that people are willing to volunteer and make a difference if given a leader and clear goals to follow.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Trust in your ability to make a difference.



As brands balance the reactive need to recover, and the more active desire to spark and implement change, inward assessment is needed. Advertising has proven to be a powerful tool to entertain, provide hope, stability and information. Advertisers must believe in their ability to spark change through their messages and campaigns. Oliver Dowden, Culture Secretary, has described news brands as the 'fourth emergency service' for their ability to deliver reliable sources of information.



Believe in your data... and your gut instinct. Tough decisions are required to simplify product line and focus budgets. Risks are easier to take if you know exactly what you are up against so smart data analysis is key. Creativity can thrive when forced into a corner.



Dial up all opportunities for physical and mental availability. People are consuming more media, as they are at home and able to give branded messages their full attention. This is an important time to land new ideas and talk to people in new contexts. Explore new opportunities as people behave in new ways to understand how you can resonate and connect.

TOO MUCH TIME VS NOT ENOUGH TIME



WHAT'S HAPPENING? Lockdown bends our sense of time.

The pandemic, plus the adoption of new technology that creates increasingly frictionless interactions, has given us all the sense of having more time on our hands. But, until the pandemic is over, many will experience the sensation of living on 'prison time'...

time on the things that enrich us, but the reality is that most people feel busier than ever and are more stressed not less. More than half of home workers are experiencing the work creep, unable to close their computer at the end of the day according to a survey by studyfinds.com.

These slow pursuits are only possible because of new 'frictionless' advantages saving tedious travel and admin time. Time is saved if you can 'visit' grandma via Zoom, shop for anything or eat from anywhere almost instantaneously...

So, with life in limbo, and no 'release date' in sight, people appear trapped by the time conundrum of having time to slow down, yet too much to do. Commutes and routines might feel like inconvenient wasteful moments, but they provide a rhythm to our day...

BRAND EXAMPLES



Meditation company Headspace has developed its own Netflix show to help people unwind and focus.



Japanese onsen owners are uploading content to YouTube of their hot springs, so that people anywhere in the world can relax in their bathtub and, via a VR headset, can be transported to a calming place of wellbeing.



In Dubai, IKEA have started to offer discounts based on the time taken to travel to the store, using Google Maps data. This incentive is to reward the loyalty of customers travelling from further afield.



Beauty brand Murad have specifically developed products to combat 'cultural stress', the pressures of modern life that affect the skin, including a Revitalixir Recovery Serum.

TOO MUCH TIME VS NOT ENOUGH TIME



WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR BRANDS? A new tempo to keep in tune with the times.

First and foremost, the evolution of time will fundamentally mean brands will have to review their typical purchase journey norms. What might have taken six months could now take six seconds. Whilst this may be daunting, these decision moments, being online, make the process easier to track as well as easier for brands to become present and provide instant purchase opportunities. It is a huge opportunity to be more efficient and effectively drive sales.

But brands have always known they have had to move faster. Perhaps an even greater challenge is to help protect the 'leisurely' aspect of our new leisure pursuits. Both digitally and physically, how can brands help us avoid presenteeism and perfection that can dull and stupefy what was initially supposed to bring joy? How instead can brands continue to help consumers be creative, reflective, kind to themselves and others as we try to fill our moments with positivity, rather than stress. When the days seem long and repetitive, these are golden opportunities for brands to deliver experiences and content that can resonate and rejuvenate us.

But frictionless experiences raise all consumer expectations again. When time already feels elongated, consumers have no patience for time lags or loading times. With 5G on the horizon, these expectations will only increase. Make sure you have the capability to be able to service frictionless purchases where and when consumers want it, or the danger will be that faster competitors provide the stress-free alternative to yourselves.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Enrich every moment people spend with you.



This isn't an either/or debate; brands should aim to deliver both sides of consumers' desire to downplay the time that doesn't benefit them and elongate the time that does. Social sites such as Instagram arguably do both, delivering in-app purchasing experiences as well as stories and photos to inspire and enrich.



'Slow media' has huge value during these stressful, slow times. Printed papers and magazines have seen a resurgence and titles such as Tortoise Media celebrate slow news. But how can the internet, a space designed always for speed and breadth rather than depth, also become a beautiful place for reflection and recharge?



Focus less on speed and more on a frictionless experience. People don't want to be hurried and feel pushed into a purchase but driving consumers directly from browsing to purchase with ease should always be available.



Recognise that different people are going to have different thresholds. For some, time will be more bent than others. Remote office workers juggling childcare, will feel time pressures differently to furloughed or on-site workers. Understanding this and adapting messaging to develop different levels of interaction is paramount to make sure your brand is not just in time but takes just the right amount of time.



LOCAL

VS

GLOBAL



WHAT'S HAPPENING? A renewed focus on distance and accessibility.

Whilst we are amid a global pandemic, the notion of local tiers and national borders have radically changed our perspective of distance. For the past generation, people have become accustomed to being able to travel across the world unhindered, and for goods to be able to travel to them, with limited hassle or delay. However, the impact of both the virus and that of Brexit, means how we travel and access the things we need, are being re-considered.

As people have avoided travel of any kind, online shopping has increased exponentially. Print and digital subscriptions too, have increased around 300-500% according to Enders Research. But so too has local shopping as people consciously prioritised community businesses. Indeed, COVID-19 has driven a surge in 'localism' around the world, with two-thirds (65%) of consumers now preferring to buy goods and services from their own country (Kantar). As the UK enters its new independent trading position, this could intensify if new competition and standards emerge. The growing impact of climate change will also play a role as supporting local produce and people - whether it be our food or our big annual holiday - will take on greater status kudos.

However, whilst local will have a resurgence, we are undoubtedly more closely connected as a global community too. Conspiracy theories and damaging political movements can spread quickly around the world, but more positively, we also expect to see a continued growth in the desire and respect for global and cross-border collaboration when it comes to information and resourcefulness. Indeed, during lockdown people have been able to access global events remotely whether it be performances or talks, that would have been unavailable previously.

The COVID-19 vaccine is the result of nations working together at speed, pooling expertise and resources. And even as the pandemic threat declines, the impact of climate change will continue. The accepted understanding that we are all interconnected - what happens in one nation affects another - will intensify the notion that only through global collaboration, with leading politicians and brands working together, can solutions be found and implemented. As countries face the threat of becoming isolationists, at worst treating people from other countries (even other national regions!) as pariahs, showcasing the best of globalisation's creative thinking and collaboration for the global good must unite us.

BRAND EXAMPLES

Google



Bookshop



Google launched their 'Dear Local' campaign with Anthony Joshua and Sheridan Smith to encourage users to promote and support local traders.

Launched in June 2020, Black Pound Day encouraged more money to be circulated within black owned businesses. It's estimated that the Black British community has a spending power of £300bn (IPA), yet only 2% of this has been spent within black businesses.

Bookshop.org, launched in 2020 in the US and UK, allows readers to buy books online while supporting their local independent bookseller.

IKEA's campaign, 'Fortune Favours the Frugal' promotes smart, thrifty and therefore more sustainable consumption, reflecting new social habits and aspirations.



LOCAL

VS

GLOBAL



WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR BRANDS? Location matters as new routes are navigated.

For the past few months, brands have not only seen a change in where we shop but what we want access to. Whether it was bird seed and bog roll taking centre stage over lipstick and dry cleaning, habits changed en-masse over-night, causing a monumental headache for businesses in terms of stock choices and supply and demand. As the pandemic exposed the over-reliance on global supply chains, McKinsey's survey with supply chain leaders found that 93% plan to increase levels of resilience across the whole supply chain.

We should expect greater innovation in areas such as automation (a fifth of Amazon's workforce are robots) and 3D printing, that minimises waste and heightens efficiencies. Automation could allow businesses to localise further, onshoring production closer to home, as they adapt swiftly to new consumer demands. In terms of entertainment, virtual media allows curated experiences to be enjoyed and felt anywhere in the world, a vital means for people to escape their enforced local bubbles if needed.

Brands must also consider the new consumer attitudes and habits that may become further established even after shops reopen. As shops closed, consumers have been forced to consider their own shopping habits and question whether items can be repaired or adapted, locally shared or sourced via neighbours. Brands that perceive themselves as the sole provider of an item, may now need to reconsider their role in this more local 'shop your neighbourhood' approach, such as Samsung's 'Galaxy Upcycling at Home' scheme which offers ideas to repurpose old devices to create IoT tools for use in the home.

Brands also can think of supply chains and physical assets as 'growth not efficiency' plays. What do assets like a shop really deliver and what could you do differently? What belongs in digital and what belongs in the physical realm? This assessment may well help brands define their purpose and place in local communities, which they can celebrate and innovate within. What partners in local spaces can connect you to new opportunities? Many brands have donated money at a national and global level and these social expectations will continue, even when the worst is over.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Build agility so your message can travel when needed.



Build brand presence in local communities via local media, and by tailoring communications to be locally relevant, messages will become more effective. Our bubbles have shrunk, and information is often confused, so brands that can bring local, relevant and timely communications will be welcomed as people are consciously attracted to what is happening in their local area and what impacts them directly.



Global brands can create compelling stories by communicating the work and efforts that are being made to rethink supply chains, adapt to change, and help local communities. Sharing these narratives on owned and earned platforms all help build the brand. People will continue to see global brands as a force to bring positive change at scale, and media as the persuasive means to land these new ideas.



Conversely, even when focused on local executions, all brands should have a sensitivity for what is happening on the global stage. Brands must take a stand in that global context, but with highly charged political and social moments being shared across the world through social media at lightening-speed, ensuring that your brand tone is always correct and that messaging is agile enough to be adapted if needed is vital.



Lastly, whilst brands may be revisiting their own supply chains to be as efficient and sustainable, it is worth also considering the supply chain of their media activity and to see how even their communications can support local environments and people for the positive good.

INTROVERT

VS

EXTROVERT



WHAT IS HAPPENING? People re-evaluate their jump back into the world after lockdown.

For some people, the enforced social distancing of lockdown has been painful and desperately lonely. For others, it has been liberating to be able to say no to social engagements without guilt. These two opposing sets of social realities beg the question: will society tend towards an extroverted consumer culture or turn collectively inwards, or will it find a better balance between the two?

In the wake of the pandemic, we have seen an increased focus on 'me time'. Over the past decade, one of the key reactions to the growing emotional strain of the political, social and technological strife has been to control the things in our remit that can be controlled, creating a profitable market for personal betterment. But with 92% of us feeling pressure from society to always be improving ourselves, lockdowns and social distancing have many second-guessing the status quo (Ace & Tate). As opting out of social commitments becomes, not just a choice, but also an act of self-care, consumers are reframing indoor time as a tool to switch off from the madness of the outside world. Even in 2019, British consumers favoured JOMO over FOMO; 33% being often relieved when a friend cancelled plans (YouGov). It is no coincidence then that many, even with a vaccine available, will simply want to feel closer to home. Brands such as P&G believe this is so, and will continue to focus on home health and hygiene, from laundry to clean air.

For others, the pandemic has intensified a craving for social interaction and release, as we become 'zoomed out', emotionally isolated and climbing the walls of our homes (and UK new builds are the smallest in Europe at 76sq m according to Cambridge University!). 45% of adults say that staying in touch with family and friends is a much higher priority now than it was pre-pandemic (Mintel), but people haven't forgotten how much they value physically seeing people and being in collective environments such as gigs and festivals. The strength of the nation's desire to go on holiday can give the sector some hope, with a projected +260.4% change in spending levels between 2020-25 (Mintel).

Introversion is the state of getting your emotional energy from within, and extroversion is when your emotional batteries are recharged by connecting with other people. People have a need for both but with the current disruption there is a conflict between needing social interactions to help smoothly navigate the rhythms of the day, against the freedom to do what you want, when you want, unhindered from any social pressures at all. These are both felt in different degrees and in different moments. But brands and of course media can help fill these gaps, if sensitively done.

BRAND EXAMPLES



Tesco's 'Little Helps for Safer Shopping' demonstrates the small practical ways they are making stores safe for people to return, alleviating any fears anxious shoppers may have.



The National Theatre's 'NT at Home' scheme was one of the biggest virtual successes of lockdown; screening 17 productions with more than 15m views from audiences in more than 170 countries. It has created a new way of experiencing theatre via the intimacy and privacy of one's own home.



Microsoft Teams and Headspace have designed virtual commutes for remote workers to help transition in and out of the workday. These time blocks encourage people to take a walk or reflect on the day to relieve stress, particularly for those who have struggled with the loneliness and lack of team comradery of home working.



Teleparty (formerly Netflix Party) allows viewers to watch TV with friends online by synchronising video playback and adding group chat to Netflix, Disney, Hulu and HBO, transforming home entertainment to a more social experience.

INTROVERT

VS

EXTROVERT

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR BRANDS? Deliver against JOMO as well as FOMO.

The most immediate implication of this trend will be the retail and physical experience space post-lockdown. Brands need to be ready to welcome the raucous, the hesitant, and the reluctant back in stores. Building trust is paramount, and all activity should aim to build the brand as a welcoming venue for customers.

But also, brands should re-evaluate the alternatives that they successfully pivoted to during the 2020 pandemic. They should question what elements of their virtual community groups, online purchasing, or other adaptations worked well and should continue. Above all, brands should look to be as digitally agile as possible. In a Deloitte Global Marketing Trends Consumer Pulse Survey, almost 3 in 5 respondents were able to name a brand that was able to quickly adapt its offerings to suit the new conditions brought about by the pandemic. Of this set of respondents, 82% said such new, relevant offerings had increased their desire to do more business with these brands. The pandemic has also heightened use and adoption of

digital channels, with 66% agreeing that the pandemic has increased their appreciation for well-designed user-experience and furthermore, 63% agreed they would continue to use digital technologies more post-pandemic.

Brands also will be key to help consumers re-connect after months of isolation. Virtual experiences have diminishing returns as technology can't fully compensate for in-person interactions and brands need to move quickly to address this demand. 2021 will see people looking to reunite as the pandemic recedes. We are social creatures; we like to shop and socialise amongst others. Brands will need to help safely facilitate the crowds coming together when lockdown restrictions end, and offer sponsorship and support for cultural bodies such as music and theatre who have suffered during this time. This presents brands with an opportunity to lead on messaging and action designed to not only keep social connections alive, but also highlight empathy and togetherness.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Provide support as we reconnect with the world.



From a media perspective, channel choice needs to be adjusted to account for the significant and nuanced change in movement across the recovery period. Broadly speaking, people have filled their time at home with media, seeing an increase of time spent with print (+28%), TV set (+16%), radio (+13%) and gaming consoles (+47%). However as people's routines have fluctuated, being in the right place at the right time is now, more than ever, more personalised and fluid. Therefore, using data signals to understand when people are on the move, or in a relaxed state etc., is crucial as our broad daily assumptions are increasingly invalid. Instead brands must adapt to new routines with fresh ideas.



Mainstream broadcasting will continue to be fundamental in helping us feel connected to others - be these our radio hosts or shows and quizzes that reflect normality. In terms of messaging, we've seen the WhatsApp 'voice note' take off, as the new ideal way to hear tone, nuance, emotion and idiosyncrasies that simply can't be conveyed through emojis or texts. Brands therefore should continue to think of their actual voice and how sound above all other senses can help us feel connected. Time spent with voice activated devices has grown 27% during lockdown (IPA).



Data analysis will be paramount in the understanding of who needs what. The discrepancies between those that can go out and party and those that financially, or emotional can't or won't, need to be recognised and managed sensitively by brands. Brands should use confidence metrics to identify and quantify the value of at-home needs-gaps and potential offerings and invest in research to understand how demand is changing, especially when it comes to the places and ways that they once came to know about products and services.

MONOLOGUE

VS

DIALOGUE



WHAT IS HAPPENING? Isolation has changed the way we communicate.

The global pandemic has radically changed the way we communicate. As the balance has shifted between online and real-world communications, social scientists have long used deprivation studies to highlight the value of things we take for granted. Face-to-face dialogue, with naturally flowing conversations, gossip, inane chit-chat, deep debate in pubs and homes and offices will be appreciated like never before as the growing recognition of the value of human contact is sure to emerge.

Since the 'The Cluetrain Manifesto' was published 20 years ago, brands have been told that 'markets are conversations', that the corporate voice is a thing of the past, and intranetworked employees talking to internetworked markets are the future, and so have been conversing with their audiences via earned media. But, in the heat of our conflicting, chaotic and complex world, (and certainly 2021 has kicked off with a bang, with the riots in Washington alone) the deepening polarisation of opinions and fear, rage and misinformation remains rife, meaning many seemingly 'safe' topics are now potentially explosive, and brands must be ready to engage in tough conversations if they want to participate at all.

And so, we see the ever-rising importance of 'monologue'. Monologue, or 'talking to' encompasses far more than the corporate tone that proponents of the conversation model of brand communication describes. Brands have always needed to make bold statements, but today these shouldn't be limited to their category or service. Whilst dialogue, can be highly persuasive and engaging, monologues can provoke, challenge, and inspire at a level and scale that perhaps dialogue can only aspire to. When a brand takes a strong position on an important or conversational issue, it doesn't ask a question; it makes a statement. In 2016, Ben and Jerry's suggested it might be disingenuous to build campaigns on the bandwagon of a particular cause célèbre and compared it to their position of asking what they as a company care about, and designing campaigns to engage with customers on the topics of the brand's choice.

Indeed, by preparing brand monologues, we believe the reality will be that a brand's dialogues with customers and other brands will be sharper, richer and more engaging. In fact, we believe you can't have a truly meaningful dialogue if you don't have a genuine stance of your own. Both are needed in today's advertising.

BRAND EXAMPLES



Twitter enabled 'conversation settings', allowing users to disable the Reply button to their tweets. For users, this can be used as a way to manage harassment. For brands, it can be used as a way to make a statement without inviting an ongoing open conversation, or limiting it to specific participants - something that can be particularly powerful around controversial topics.



In an unprecedented act of solidarity, Aldi, Asda, Co-op, Iceland, Lidl, M&S, Tesco and Waitrose united on a Channel 4 ad break to stand together against racism following the racial abuse to Sainsbury's Christmas Ad.

ALEXANDER
MCQUEEN

Fashion brand Alexander McQueen launched the 'McQueen Creators' community aiming to "inspire and initiate creative conversation", by launching a new creative concept to encourage followers to engage artistically on the brand's social media accounts.

MONOLOGUE

VS

DIALOGUE



WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR BRANDS? Engaging and speaking up is more important than ever.

Listening will always be the cornerstone of communication. But we don't just mean your customers. Being tuned into global trends, issues and moments will ensure all communication is appropriate, whether it be tweaking your monologue, or preparing to engage in new dialogues over important issues. This requires agility. To rework creative if necessary, to pull content if needed etc. Listening to your employees, agencies, media partners and designers will fine tune the gut reaction to how the brand communicates so that it remains authentic (that golden attribute!). Thinking through the lens of the Overton Window – a system of tracking the social movement of ideas - what used to be controversial but is now unthinkable? What was once acceptable but is now essential?

Many brands during the start of the pandemic went dark, preferring to say nothing than get the tone wrong. This may have appeared to be the safe option, but it was the brands that engaged in conversation, that provided much needed information, entertainment and comfort that many customers remember, even when perhaps the brand was a little off the mark.

Brands shouldn't believe that one-to-one communication with customers is the only way to spark a dialogue. If your audience sees a particular TV spot more than once, then it's a fairly safe bet that at least some of their friends will have seen the exact same message too; in this way, brand messaging

can become a cultural touchstone that – arguably – isn't the case for the exact same creative in a different, online environment. The medium is not the message – but the two are closely interlinked. While there are countless benefits of two-way platforms for businesses, and advertiser spend increasingly moves towards online platforms, it is important to be mindful of the benefits of one-way broadcast/monologue communications.

Technology has enabled our industry to fully endorse an age of dialogue. Social media accelerated the need for conversations with consumers, not just expecting them to listen. This isn't going to change, indeed arguably the single biggest mistake Trump made in the Presidential race was refusing a dialogue and talking over his opponent in the first debate. However, at the height of 'social media is the answer to everything' fever even the High Priest Gary Vaynercick had to admit that not every single consumer was wholly engaged. That you needed the odd 'Superbowl' spot to drive fame, tell people who you are. Brands will play a big role in how we build back from the pandemic and the successful ones will be brave, accept the challenge to play a role and take a lead. Consumers expect it and will reward the advertisers who talk to them in the right way about things they care about.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Aim to listen harder in order to turn up your own volume.



Embrace all opportunities for dialogue, both in the real world and online. As we gradually move away from enforced lockdown, the excitement of real-world events will spill into social media where brands can engage on owned and earned channels. Being agile and being able to capture the mood of the moment will be key for brands to truly engage in these conversations.



Engaging with genuine leaders of conversation via social influencers has proved to be exceedingly powerful during the pandemic. In Finland, 1,500 influencers were named 'essential workers'; an unpaid position where they were tasked with spreading important and vetted safety information to the public. So, working with influencers that can help guide conversations will be an important way of brands conversing and being involved in conversations.



But as people have been spending longer with the media that resonates with them, there are also many media opportunities for brands to create content that is purely monologue. Long form articles, documentaries, collaborations with shows or presenters will allow brands big, long form and often slow media opportunities to articulate a mission or message.



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Nadine Young | Starcom CEO | nadine.young@publicismedia.com

Heather Dansie | Starcom insights director | heather.dansie@publicismedia.com

Rebecca Khan | Starcom PR & comms lead | rebecca.khan@publicismedia.com

