# DIGIDAY

SPRING 2016

BONUS
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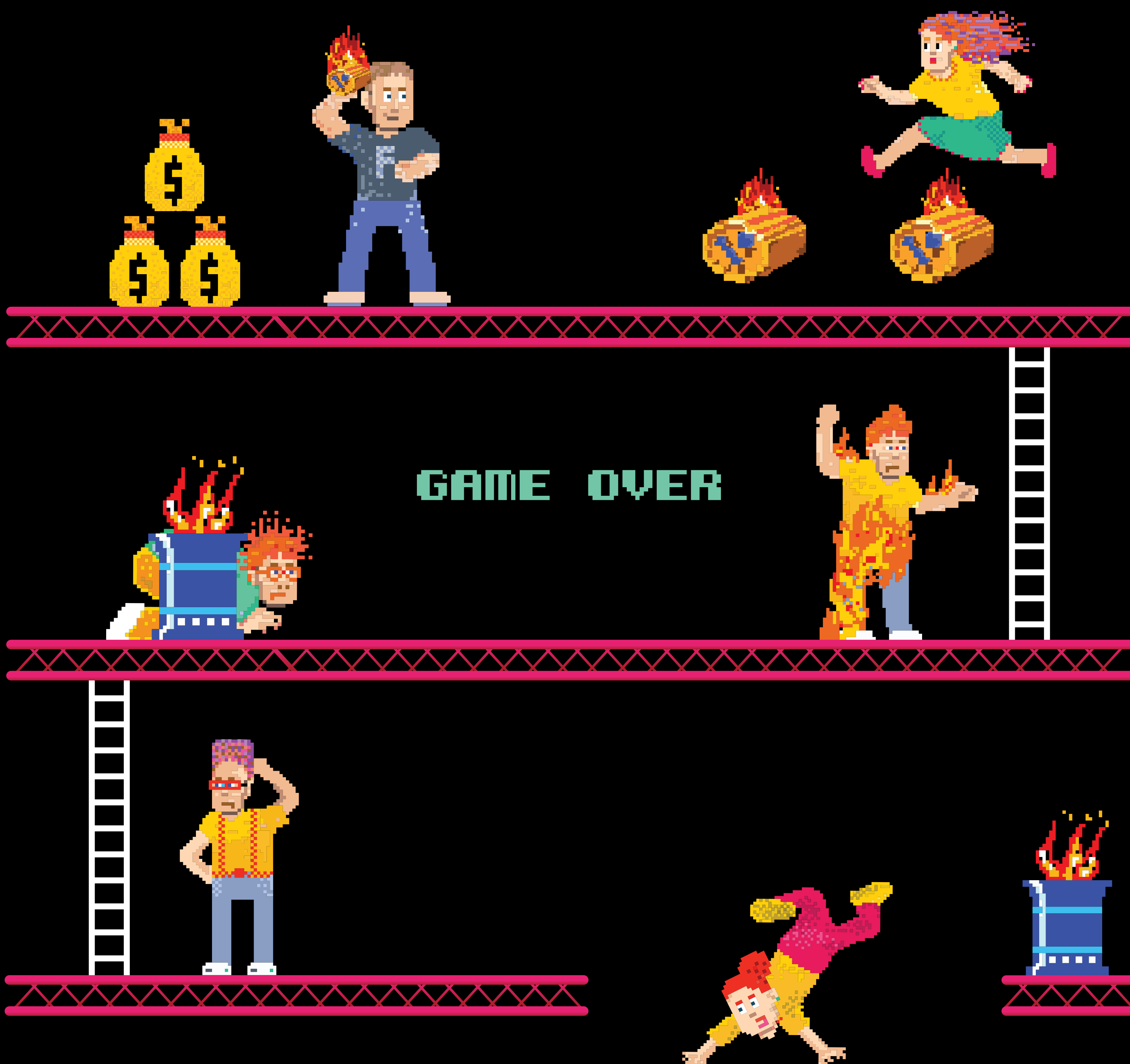
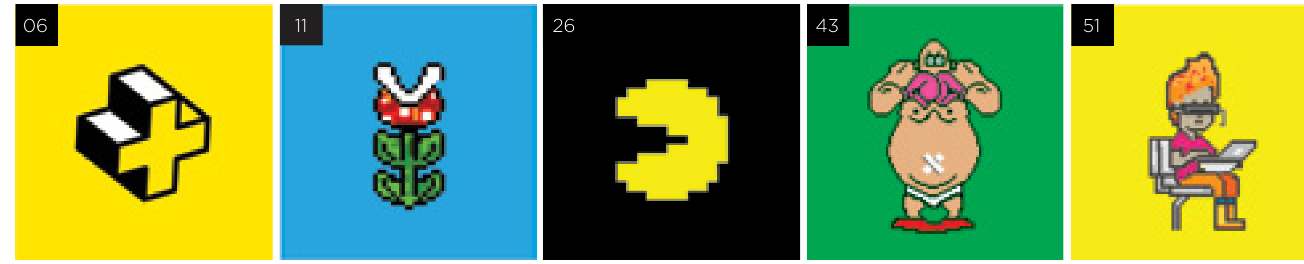


# SPRING 2018

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# DIGIDAY MEDIA




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# EDITOR'S NOTE

*BY LUCIA MOSES*

**The media world, seemingly perpetually in flux, is in the midst of what appears to be a more significant period of upheaval, with tech giants sucking up the majority of ad dollars, digital advertising plagued by a lack of transparency and controversial content, companies taking a hard look at their role when it comes to workplace fairness and cultural impact, and the need to stake out a global claim taking on new urgency.**

Fixing massive industries isn't as simple as hitting a button and starting the game over. But as we show in our ninth issue, media and marketing are in ways large and starting anew from an era where scale trumped loyalty, reach obscured impact and the short term dominated the long term. We see the media and marketing world becoming less reliant on Facebook, more transparent, increasingly globalized, and belatedly more inclusive and representative. These themes run throughout the issue, with a "Master Mechanics" section highlighting those in the trenches mastering the tactical expertises that will define what comes next.

In media, our focus is on how publishers are attempting to cobble together a sustainable, independent future, free, as much as possible, from the whims of the duopoly. As the recent demise of LittleThings shows, very little in digital media has proved lasting. One day, LittleThings was boasting how it shot to 50 million users; months later, it was winding down operations. Nothing speaks to this more than Jonah Peretti, once Facebook's biggest booster, pleading publicly for more money for publishers from the sprawling platform. Peretti and other media executives are finding their voices in vocally opposing platforms like Facebook, a turnabout from their recent acquiescence to the whims of Facebook. (See video, pivot to.) Joanna Coles, head of content at Hearst Magazines, takes the long view, telling us the recent travails of fake news only prove the necessity and power of editing.

We also profile the unsung heroes of the modernization of the media, from the newsletter editor to the subscription czar to the head of data protection.

But for change to happen, it must follow the money, and in media, that means the marketers. Shareen Pathak spent time with Norman de Greve of CVS Health, who is at the forefront of the trend of chief marketer as politician, intent on making purpose-driven marketing not just a gimmick. Change will also come externally, as detailed in the shadowy pressure groups springing up to force marketers to clean up their acts. For agencies, change is always afoot, with the current disruptors coming in the guise of the big consulting firms.

For our part, at Digiday, we're embracing change by building out our premium membership program, Digiday+, which includes exclusive benefits like this magazine, research, Slack town halls and live events. We hope they're informing, inspiring and delighting you. As always, let us know what you like, dislike and want that you're not already getting. We appreciate all the feedback.

# ALL THE WAYS PUBLISHERS BEG FOR DIRECT CONNECTIONS

Here are tricks they use to capture email addresses, app users and registered readers.

**REFER A FRIEND**
Why do audience development when your existing fans can do it for you? Email-focused publishers including The Hustle, Morning Brew and theSkimm use referral programs to rope in new subscribers, offering swag like coffee mugs and T-shirts and private access to Facebook groups as incentives.

**SWEEPSTAKES**
An email address is an email address, right? Publishers including Refinery29 and Domino still dangle winnings to hoover up new email subscribers.

**ONE-CLICK MOBILE SIGN-UPS**
It helps to make it easy. Publishers are using technology that lets mobile visitors sign up for newsletters with a couple taps of a finger.

**FISH WHERE THE FISH ARE**
Right after Facebook announced it would deprioritize news in its news feed, BuzzFeed launched an ad campaign on the social platform asking users to download its mobile app.

**GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**
To make sure their posts don't disappear entirely from people's Facebook feeds, publishers including the MIT Technology Review are instructing their readers how to ensure their content is seen first in the new news feed.

**IN-PERSON EVENTS**
Publishers are throwing more events in part because they're a great way to reach new subscribers and get them to provide their email addresses. At a taco festival Gannett threw last summer in Detroit, most attendees were not subscribers to any Gannett titles.

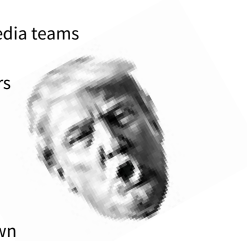
# TRANSLATOR

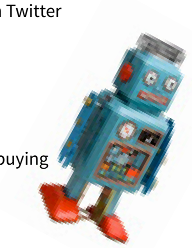
What people say and what they really mean in media and marketing.

**AUTHENTIC:** Pretending to act like a real person
**FACEBOOK WATCH:** YouTube without the audience
**DESTINATION:** Website
**DIVERSIFICATION:** Going from Facebook to YouTube
**WATCH TIME:** Proof of actual viewership
**COMMUNITIES:** Glorified message boards
**WELLNESS:** Selling health and beauty products
**IN DEVELOPMENT:** The show's happening, we swear!
**VIDEO FRANCHISES:** Web series
**IP:** Web series
**LICENSING:** Selling web series to different distributors
**PREMIUM VIDEO:** Still not good enough for TV
**FACEBOOK GROUPS:** Glorified message boards

# WHAT'S IN/OUT FOR 2018






| IN | OUT |
|---|---|
| Pivot to voice | Pivot to video |
| Apple News | Facebook news feed |
| Bragging about email subscribers | Bragging about Facebook followers |
| Paid amplification | Organic reach |
| Surfaces | Verticals |
| Commerce editors | Copy editors |
| Abandoning SXSW | Abandoning Cannes |
| Google as benevolent dictator | Google as tyrant |
| Newsletter teams | Distributed media teams |
| Emboldened CMOs | Meek marketers |
| Trump churn | Trump bump |
| Brand safety | Cheap reach |
| Adam Mosseri | Campbell Brown |
| Influencers | Ad agencies |
| NBA | NFL |
| Vice as a cautionary tale | Vice as a model |
| Time well-spent | Pageviews |
| Membership programs | Ad revenue |
| Better ads | Autoplay video ads with sound |
| Tech addiction | Sex addiction |
| Human followers | Bot followers |
| Wellness brands | Fitness brands |
| Alexa | Spectacles |
| Consultancies | Ad agencies |
| Diversified revenue | Pipe dreams |
| Live events | Live video |
| Trust | Plausible deniability |
| AR stunts | VR stunts |
| Local news on Facebook | All other news on Facebook |
| Livestreaming on Twitter | Facebook Live |
| OTT | Cable TV |
| Pivoting to voice | Pivoting to video |
| AI-driven media buying | Ad agencies |
| Blockchain | Big data |
| GDPR hysteria | Ad-blocking hysteria |

# HOW PAYWALL PUBLISHERS KEEP YOU FROM UNSUBSCRIBING

Replacing subscribers is expensive. Here are some of the ways publishers keep people from churning.

**PRICE CUTS**
Appeal to people's wallets. In January, Los Angeles Times subscribers that called to cancel were offered another year for just $1.04. LA Times parent Tronc has offered similar deals at other titles. Those deals account for less than 5 percent of Tronc's subscriber base, says Mark Campbell, svp of digital marketing, but they also help ensure a steady subscriber base.

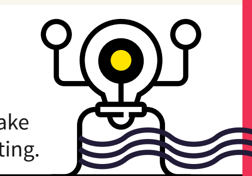
**ADDED BENEFITS**
Publishers are constantly adding coverage and benefits to keep subscribers engaged. Tech publication The Information, for example, recently added the ability for subscribers to follow certain topics and companies that it covers.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE**
To keep subscribers, it helps having people give prompt, personal responses when questions or problems arise. The Atlantic is growing the number of people on staff who deal explicitly with customer service and experience for its paid products this year, including digital access to the magazine and The Masthead, its membership program.

**COMMUNITY**
Community is one reason people subscribe, which is why publishers such as The Dallas Morning News and college sports site Scout use message boards, Slack channels and Facebook groups to bring their readers together. Eighty percent of Scout's monthly pageviews last year came from its message boards.

**PERSONALIZATION**
Publishers are tailoring messages, offers and content to readers. The Wall Street Journal, for example, adjusts its renewal offers based on the kinds of content subscribers read and who they are.

# AI BY THE NUMBERS



The use of artificial intelligence — the technology that might take over our jobs in the near future — is steadily growing in marketing.

**1950:** The year computer scientist Alan Turing posed the question: "Can machines think?" (Source: "Computing Machinery and Intelligence")

**78:** The percentage of marketers who are increasing their spending on AI marketing technologies (Forrester)

**74:** The percentage of marketers who have seen increased sales of products and services over the past year because of AI (Capgemini)

**$29 BILLION:** The number AI spend will reach by 2021 (eMarketer)

**14:** The percentage increase in orders Volkswagen's dealerships saw this year after using AI for media recommendations for the first time (Volkswagen)

**$650 MILLION:** The reported price Google paid to acquire AI lab DeepMind in 2014 (The New York Times).

**$143,000:** The average salary of an AI engineer (Paysa)

**14:** The number of times the volume of active U.S. startups developing AI systems has jumped since 2000 (AI Index)

**60:** The percentage of marketers that are using AI for media buying and programmatic purposes (Salesforce)

**100:** The number of AI researchers employed by Facebook (Facebook).

# INFLUENCER DICTIONARY

**#AD** The Federal Trade Commission's preferred hashtag for disclosing material connections with advertisers, like receiving money for promoting a product on social media.

**AUTHENTICITY** A sought-after quality in influencer marketing that suggests an influencer has a real connection to a product they are endorsing.

**BOT PROVIDER** A service that Instagram influencers use to generate likes, comments and followers in an automated way based on certain rules.

**BRAND AMBASSADOR PROGRAM** An arrangement in which an advertiser books an influencer for an extended time period, like back-to-school or prom season

**CO-CREATION** Collaboration between an advertiser and an influencer to make a co-branded product such as a clothing line.

**ENGAGEMENT** A like or comment on a social platform.

**FTC ACT** Law that prohibits deceptive advertising and requires disclosure of material relationships between advertisers and endorsers.

**FTC ENDORSEMENT GUIDES** Information from the FTC that explains how material connections should be disclosed under the FTC Act.

**INFLUENCER** A person with a large following on a social platform.

**INFLUENCER ROSTER** A group of influencers that a brand rotates to create more transparency and drive clearer results, such as the Victoria's Secret Angels.

**INSTAGRAM POD** A group of up to 30 Instagram accounts that works to boost the engagement on pod members' posts so the platform's algorithm displays the posts in more users' feeds.

**LOGAN PAUL** Infamous influencer that faced backlash for posting a YouTube video of a hanging body he discovered in a Japanese forest known for suicides.

**MICRO-INFLUENCER** An influencer with 10,000-100,000 followers. Micro-influencers are considered more authentic than influencers with millions of followers.

**MUSICAL.LY** Popular lip-sync app with Gen Z that is the next frontier for influencer marketing.

**NANO-INFLUENCER** An influencer with less than 80,000 followers. This subset of micro-influencers is supposedly even more relatable than micro-influencers.

**NETWORK AMPLIFICATION** A fraudulent tactic in which Instagram influencers work together to promote certain posts or accounts to boost results

**OFFICIAL STORIES** Snapchat's version of other platforms' verified accounts.

**PAID POD** An Instagram pod in which a moderator requests between $5 and $20 from users who want to join, to keep members accountable.

**#SP** A hashtag commonly used to denote partnerships between advertisers and influencers but isn't good enough for FTC disclosure purposes.

**SPRAY AND PRAY** Mocked by influencers, this strategy involves a company sending a product to an influencer and hoping they post about it.

# SLOW BURN

Facebook has long subjected media and marketing companies to its whims, resulting in a relationship characterized by angst and suspicion. Here's how Facebook has screwed over companies through the years. ***BY JUJU KIM***

2013 - 2018

## 2013

### HOLD THE MEMES

Facebook reduces the visibility in its news feed to businesses that post low-quality memes, resulting in less traffic for those companies.

## 2014

### NOT TAKING THE BAIT

In April, Facebook says it will reduce "like-baiting" — when a post asks for comments, shares or likes — in its feed and in August does the same for stories with clickbait headlines. In November, it launches a new tool to make it easier for users to banish friends and brands from their feeds that advertise too aggressively.

## 2015

### FRIENDS AND FAMILY FIRST

Friends and family content begins appearing higher than companies' posts in the feed in April. A week later, Facebook shutters its application programming interface that shared friends' data, like location, with third-party apps and those brands' marketers. In July, Facebook's new See First feature lets users choose which friends and pages show up at the top of their feeds.

## 2016

### WALLED-GARDEN STRATEGY

In February, Facebook starts favoring what it thinks users want to see based on user surveys. Facebook Audience Network, which uses Facebook data to sell ads outside the social network, expands in May, giving Facebook control over access to its inventory and user and advertiser data. Facebook admits nine different measurement errors.

## 2017

### WATCH OUT

Facebook debuts in October human review for politically targeted ads after discovering Russian trolls spent $100,000 on ads on its platform to influence U.S. politics, warning this could slow down how quickly marketers can launch and adjust ad campaigns. Two months later, Facebook's feed algorithm starts prioritizing creators producing shows for its Watch video-viewing section.

## 2018

### FRIENDS AND FAMILY FIRST 2.0

Facebook announces the feed will favor friends and family posts, effectively de-emphasizing content from publishers and brands. A week later, Facebook says it will consider users' ratings of news outlets' trustworthiness when ranking publishers in the feed.

# UNFRIENDED

The deteriorating relationship between Facebook and media and marketing companies, in quotes ***BY JUJU KIM***

2012 - 2018

## 2012

### FOLLOW THE AUDIENCE

"In the U.S., people spend about 25 minutes a month on news sites and eight hours a month on Facebook. As a news organization, why wouldn't you want to publish where the audience is?" — Martin Belam, then-lead user experience and information architect at the Guardian, on benefits of publishing to Facebook

## 2014

### TEMPERED EXPECTATIONS

"We've lowered our expectations from Facebook in regards to collaboration and partnership." — Jeffrey Melton, then-chief distribution officer at digital agency MRY, on declining organic reach on Facebook

## 2015

### SUSPICIONS EMERGE

"Facebook is just another walled garden, and it's happy to extract your content and make money on it." — Shay Brog, then-senior director and head of partner strategy at AOL, ahead of the launch of Facebook Instant Articles

## 2016

### FACEBOOK AND FAKE NEWS

"Because Facebook does not think of itself primarily as a news company, it seems to want us to stop expecting it to act like one. Whether we should is a more complicated matter." — Katharine Viner, editor-in-chief of the Guardian, as Facebook comes under fire for spreading misinformation and fake news

## 2017

### ENDING VIDEO PAYMENTS

"If they came back to us six months from now and offered to pay for another type of program, I'm not sure we'd go back because none of it has worked." — an exec at a top publisher, on Facebook ending payments for live and in-feed video

## 2018

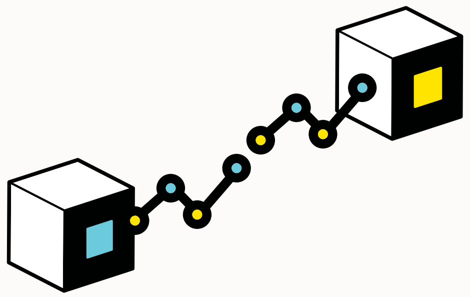
### FINAL STRAW

"[It's the] final nail in the existing coffin." — Doug Baker, director of strategic services at digital agency AnalogFolk, on organic reach on Facebook after it announces its feed will prioritize user content over posts from publishers and brands

# KNOW YOUR BLOCKCHAIN

It's the buzzword du jour. Here's enough to know to be dangerous. ***BY TANAYA MACHEEL***

A blockchain is a shared ledger that's updated nearly instantaneously, maintained and auditable by the participants — and relies on no single party and can't be doctored. Sounds anticlimactic compared to all the blockchain buzz, but there are a lot of opportunities for improvement in the media and marketing industries that a distributed ledger can help.

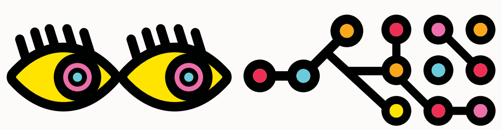


## 1 MANAGING CONSUMER DATA

Blockchains allow marketers to see data in the network and use it for brand-building efforts — without having to attribute it to any individual. For example, Comcast's Advanced Advertising Group has a blockchain-based platform that lets marketers make ad buys in broadcast, and streaming TV allows them to anonymously match their data with programmers to target consumers without having to share customer information.

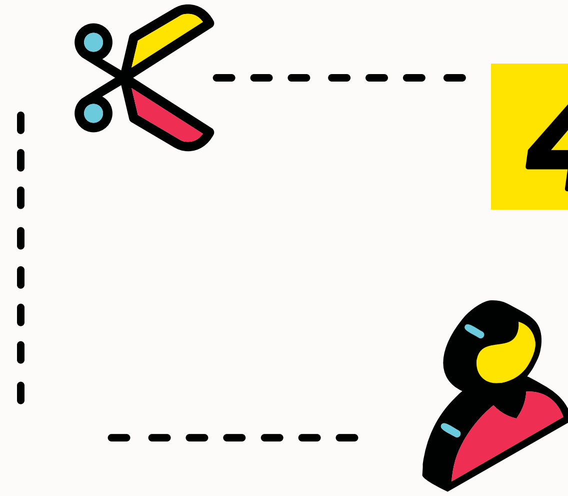
## 2 MARKETING

Conceivably, advertisers can use data to grow customer profiles using all the information they're willing to share, rather than gathering information about customers from various disparate sources — one that tells a customer's age, another its salary and another its favorite restaurant, for example. The technology would allow advertisers to be more targeted in their marketing and only spend advertising dollars on people who'll be receptive to it.



## 3 TRACKING AD IMPRESSIONS

Blockchain technology will be most effective if there is a network effect. Because of its ledger-based nature, a company can defer to the network to view an impression and confirm on chain if it's real. MetaX, an adChain-powered platform, for example, can essentially tag a creative asset and follow it on the internet to track whether it was seen, who saw it, where it ran, conversion rates and how budget was spent along the chain.

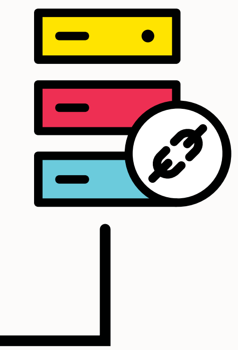


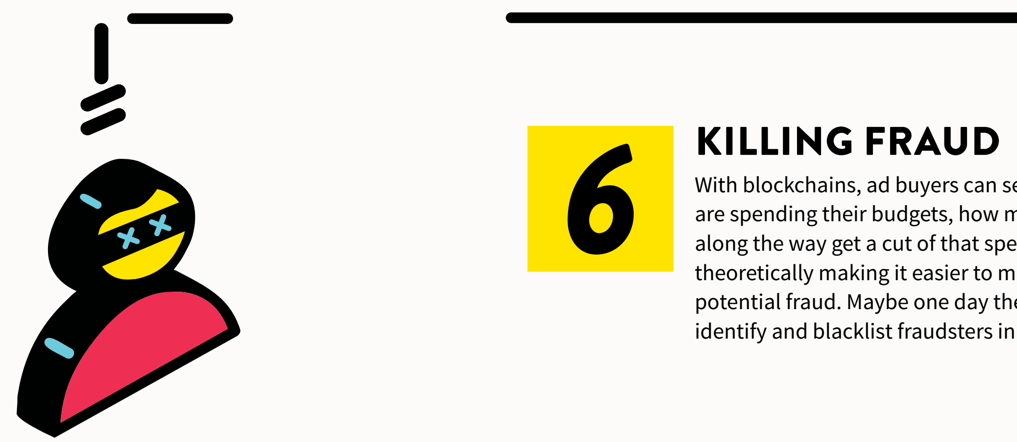
## 4 DIRECT CONNECTIONS

Many brands are intent on removing the middlemen when it comes to data to establish more direct connections to customers. Transactions have always involved middlemen — blockchains remove the need for them and any other unnecessary parties. For example, a search engine built by BitClave on blockchain technology allows businesses and consumers to interact directly and removes the need for ad-service platforms.

## 5 AD-DELIVERY VERIFICATION

Blockchains have the potential to detect whether ads are being delivered and if they're going to the right place, thanks to their ability to document not just a single exchange of value, information or data, but to document the entire history of that data point on the chain.



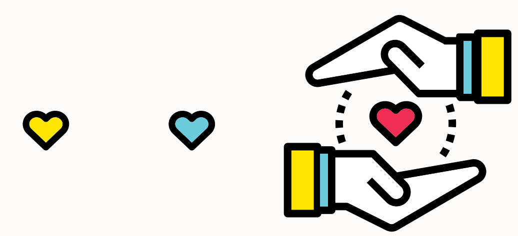


## 6 KILLING FRAUD

With blockchains, ad buyers can see where advertisers are spending their budgets, how many parties along the way get a cut of that spend and who — theoretically making it easier to monitor and mitigate potential fraud. Maybe one day they'll be able to identify and blacklist fraudsters in real time.

## 7 CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

It's hard to see or verify whether companies ever actually follow through on their CSR promises, but blockchain technology would make them public and hold the companies accountable. For example, employees participating in charitable giving initiatives can rest assured their money will go to their organization of choice and that their employer doesn't have access to them. The organization can trust companies are sending the funds, know the makeup of the funds and secure their terms and delivery.



# ISSUES SHAPING THE NEW WORLD

2017 was a turbulent year for media and marketing. Publishers faced harsh realities about the strength of their audiences as their reliance on the duopoly became more pronounced, agencies began facing up to some home truths about their cultures, and brands finally began asking serious questions about how their digital ad dollars are actually being spent. As the dust settles, a new landscape is emerging. Four key issues are helping shape it:

***BY JACK MARSHALL***

## 1.

### LIFE AFTER FACEBOOK

Media companies must now get to grips with a reality marketers did years ago: If you want Facebook to distribute your content, you're going to have to pay for it. Building a viable publishing business on Facebook's back is no longer an option, and companies reliant on the social network have to diversify their traffic sources and build more meaningful connections with their audiences instead. That isn't necessarily bad news. Some suggest Facebook's shift could be a blessing in disguise for purveyors of quality content, forcing them to be more disciplined about their own businesses. Not everyone will figure out how to adapt to this post-Facebook world successfully, of course. Casualties can be expected.

## 2.

### CULTURE

For all parties in media and marketing, cultural pitfalls are now deeper and more pronounced than ever. Consumers increasingly expect the companies they interact with to take a stance, be it on social, political or other cultural issues. But at the same time, the backlash for ill-placed appropriation is fiercer than ever, with organized groups taking to social media to name and shame those who miss the mark. It's a delicate tightrope to walk, and it isn't getting any easier. And it's not just companies' public-facing activities that are coming under more careful examination, either. Agencies and media companies have for years claimed their unique "cultures" set them apart from the crowd, but it's suddenly those very cultures that threaten to undermine their entire businesses as stories of impropriety and harassment bubble to the surface. If your unique selling point to clients or audiences is your "culture," it's time to take a hard look at what that culture actually is.

## 3.

### TRANSPARENCY

When it comes to making demands from partners, advertisers' bark is often worse than their bite. But brands now demand greater transparency around how their money is being spent and how their agencies are actually being compensated. Awkward transparency questions can no longer be dismissed with artfully phrased excuses or by pointing fingers at others. Meanwhile, media companies, platforms and vendors are also coming under greater scrutiny as advertisers question their ability to place ads in appropriate places, or even to disclose exactly where they appeared after the fact. Digital media is maturing, and as investment in the channel continues to grow, questions about what's really going on behind the curtain are becoming far more sophisticated.

## 4.

### GLOBALIZATION

For years, marketers and media companies have talked about thinking more globally, but actually doing so has become a necessity. The global influence of Chinese internet giants such as Alibaba and Tencent is intensifying as they ratchet up their activity in the U.S. and pour investment into companies like Snap Inc., while retail giants such as Amazon and Walmart are increasingly setting their sites beyond the domestic market. Meanwhile, for publishers, international interest in U.S. news is as strong as it's ever been, and international media outlets smell an opportunity to offer U.S. readers a more "objective" voice. Brands, too, are finding themselves under increased pressure to cater to and be sensitive to wider, more global audiences. To make matters worse, the General Data Protection Regulation is making companies think more globally, whether they want to or not. The European regulation, which will be enforced starting May 25, will force a wide range of media and marketing companies to handle consumer data far more carefully or risk significant fines. It may even break some business models in the process.

# ‘REINVENTING ADVERTISING’:

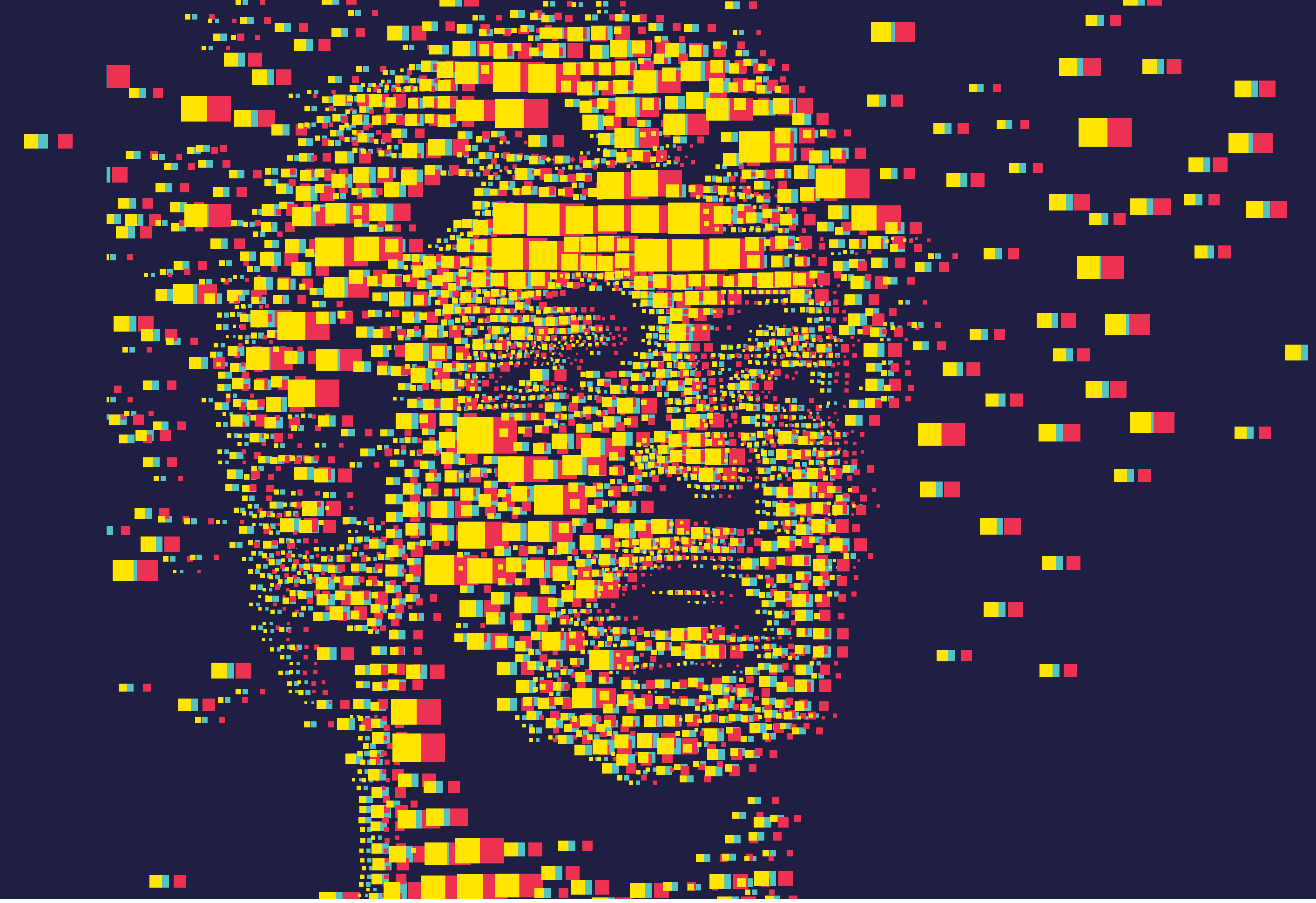
An oral history of Facebook Beacon

***BY JACK MARSHALL***

**In 2007, Facebook’s now-booming ad business was nascent.** The company had sold banners and experimented with other ad placements, but hadn’t yet offered the types of highly targeted behavioral ads it’s known for today.

The introduction of its Beacon ad product drastically changed all that. The service effectively began broadcasting its members’ activities on third-party websites directly to their Facebook news feeds by default, often without their knowledge. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many Facebook users weren’t impressed, citing privacy concerns and an inability to control what was being shared to their accounts.

Facebook formally shuttered the controversial product, which was subject to class-action lawsuits, in 2009. CEO Mark Zuckerberg subsequently described the initiative as a “mistake,” and the company named a conference room after the product as a cautionary reminder to staffers. Here’s the story of Beacon from people who were there.



## THE PRODUCT

**Jeff Glueck, then-CMO, Travelocity:** Facebook approached us about being one of the launch partners for Beacon. Initially, we were quite enthusiastic — Facebook was the hot new social network. We sat down with them and were very excited to participate and gain from the social viral graph around travel. If someone booked a trip to Hawaii and it appeared on their Facebook feed, maybe that would encourage their friends to book a trip. It seemed like a good idea.

**Chad Stoller, then-executive director, emerging platforms at Organic:** It was certainly a big deal at the time because it was a way for Facebook to be more sophisticated in the ad game. The whole offering was about saying for the first time: “It’s not just advertising; we’re going to turn your friends into endorsements.”

**Jeffrey Chester, executive director of the Center for Digital Democracy:** I still think about Beacon a lot. It was Facebook’s first major foray into digital advertising, and with some bumps along the way, it’s existed in some way ever since. We immediately publicized and critiqued the business model. This idea of “we collect all your data all the time” was inappropriate.

## THE LAUNCH

**Glueck:** I remember Zuckerberg at the launch event in a swanky loft in Tribeca. He’s so articulate and such a visionary, but at the time, he was really young and still learning how to give a public speech. He somewhat awkwardly said something like, “Once every hundred years, everything in media and advertising changes, and today is such a day.” I remember thinking at the time it was a pretty confident statement.

**Stoller:** At the time, Facebook was still new. Looking back, it’s hard to remember there was a time when it was struggling to get attention from CMOs. It was one of those things that was helped by people being curious about Zuckerberg. There was still this fascination about this hoodie-wearing CEO.

**Chester:** Zuckerberg said he was “reinventing advertising as we know it,” which I thought was absurd. It showed his naivete and showed you there was a lack of insight and understanding.

## THE BACKLASH

**Chester:** Beacon alerted everybody that Facebook was going to be a privacy problem. And what was important was that it wasn’t just people like me complaining; it was users publicly complaining and embarrassing the company. One guy complained his girlfriend found out on Facebook about an engagement ring he purchased. The users themselves were upset, and that was the first time Facebook really ran into that problem.

**Stoller:** The initial reaction happened pretty quickly. There’s nothing cool about shopping for a bargain, and I recall people being worried Beacon made them look cheap. They were buying stuff on Overstock.com and maybe didn’t want their friends to know that.

**Glueck:** We were sensitive to how Beacon was going to work [in terms of user privacy], and some concerns began to build on my team. In the end, Travelocity declined to participate. We pulled out quietly; we didn't want to make a stink. We told them privately the way they were constructing the privacy opt-in and opt-out was not going to fly. There was a lot of danger in being opted in by default. If you miss it, the surprise trip you’ve booked for your wife is suddenly showing up in your profile.

## THE AFTERMATH

**Glueck:** I think we felt we had tried to help them avoid these problems that were avoidable. Facebook was a new company; they were moving fast and breaking things and just didn't want to slow down. I think their view was the world should be social, and privacy was overrated. Beacon ultimately morphed into Facebook Connect and has been hugely successful. I think Facebook learned a lot of lessons with Beacon.

**Chester:** Beacon wasn’t killed. It was wound back, but just took a different guise. Facebook can change its stripes and clothing very adeptly. To this day, it expects to make an announcement [about a product related to user privacy], for there to be an attack, and then to dial it back a bit but keep the basics. Nothing has altered that business model.

**Stoller:** I look at Beacon as probably one of the key chapters of connecting behaviors and sharing your behaviors online. If anything, it kind of opened up that era. I think it was an important era, regardless of it working or not. Often, things fail, but they come back in a different guise. Nowadays, Facebook is getting something like 40 cents out of every dollar.

# BACK TO REALITY

BuzzFeed CEO Jonah Peretti tells Digiday that Facebook is returning to its roots — and that's not a bad thing for BuzzFeed. ***BY LUCIA MOSES***

**As a media company that's grown on Facebook's back, you surprised some by taking a shot at the company. How should Facebook help publishers?**
My big criticism of the strategy so far is all their revenue is generated in the news feed, and they only share revenue for new surfaces — Instant Articles or Watch — but don't share any of the revenue from their main source of revenue, the news feed. There's no way to influence what's in the news feed if the algorithm is only about distribution. You're not getting to the economics of the traffic production. So it's in Facebook's interest to share news feed revenue, not because it's good for the world, but it allows Facebook to have some control of what's showing up in the news feed. If they say they want local or trusted news, they say that will get more distribution and more revenue, so companies can produce more of it. It doesn't need to be some carriage fee or a thing where the amount of traffic is directly related to the revenue. It could be that they have a metric for time well-spent, and you're paid 2 cents per minute of time well-spent. Now, they don't really have levers to influence it.

**How do you think Facebook's stronger focus on sharing will impact BuzzFeed?**
Facebook is going back to their roots, and that got us excited. A lot of the stuff we make has a high level of comments. You post a Tasty video, and people post their own versions and use it as an excuse to get together with friends. So this shift is encouraging for companies that make content with a deep social DNA in it.

**The pivot to video has seen a backlash this past year. What's your view?**
There's a secular shift toward video, and I see that continuing. It's the majority of our content views and revenue. I think sometimes people overplayed it a little bit. I don't think text is going away. But video's really important. What we realized is, video isn't a discipline — it's a way of communicating. We've cracked a lot of the formats. Tasty videos are short, sped up, have a lot of power, drive real-world activity and are very social. Then, we have shows like "Worth It" and "Unsolved" that are TV-like and air on YouTube. They're appointment viewing. That's replacing what basic cable was, with the added benefit of building community. We've started to develop longer stuff for SVOD type of platforms.

> "Google and Facebook are going to do more to support news. If they don't, they'll be regulated."

**BuzzFeed missed its growth target last year and ended up laying off people. What would you do over if you could?**
The big thing would be staying more true to our social DNA and pushing with clients to make video that fits with what we know works with our audience. Having some clarity on formats and give an advertiser something that works on social, even if it takes longer to convince them. One of the things that happened was there was pressure to make video that looks like commercials that look like TV, and it'd be hard to do business and deliver. Sometimes brands say [they] want a different format that we know doesn't work.

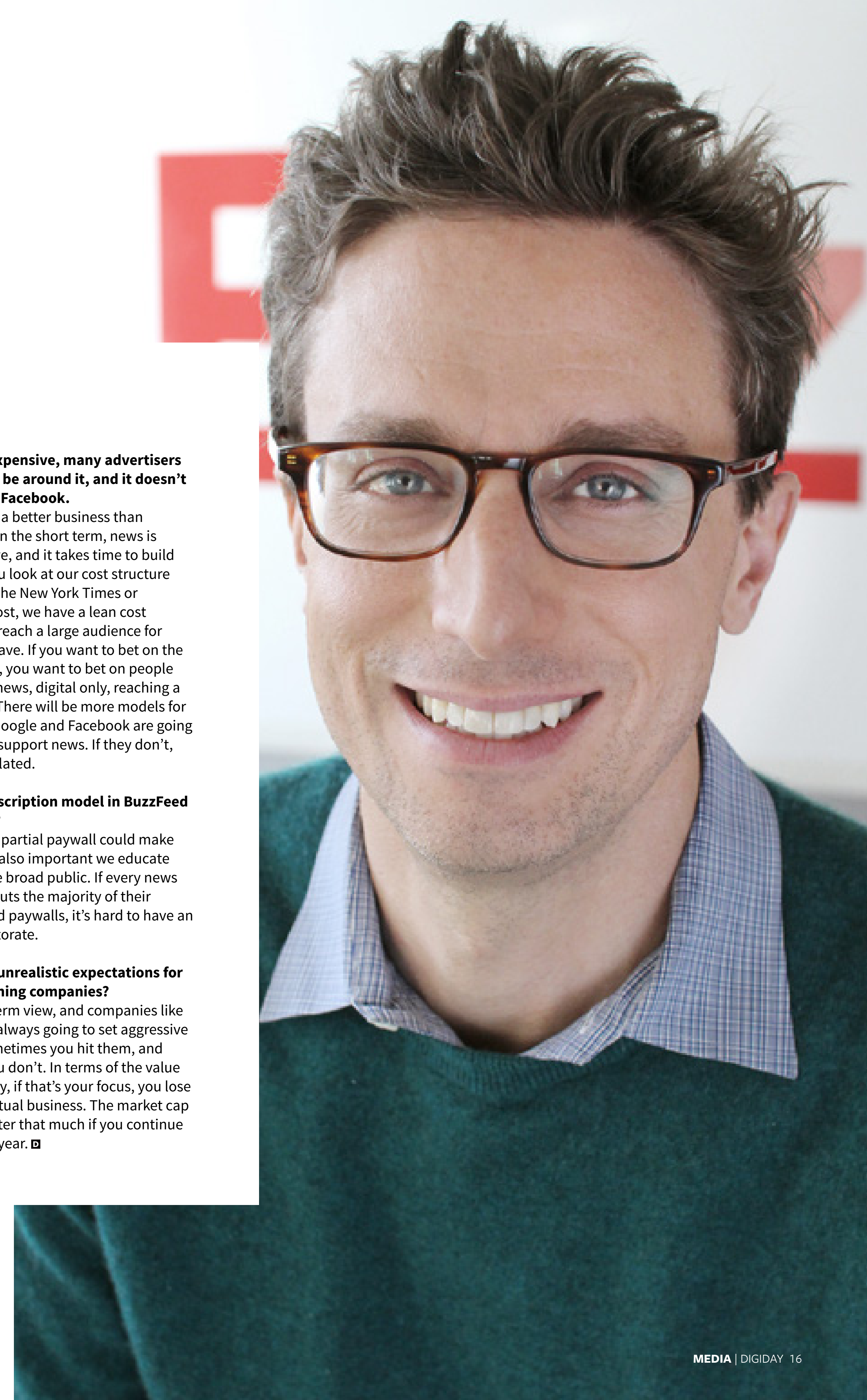
**Was going all-in on native a mistake in retrospect?**
Not initially, but there was a point where it made sense to shift. We could have done it a little earlier. When we started, programmatic was a lot worse — ads loaded more slowly; companies doing it were startups and making ads that had lots of latency and often didn't have good data privacy. When we did testing with a small percentage of our users, we found no negative impact and lots of revenue. We also saw positives in coordinating native and programmatic and the overhead of having lots of communication back and forth.

**Are you still committed to news, and why?**
I love our news business, and it's very important to our strategy. It's incredible, the year they've had, with the [Steele] dossier and Kevin Spacey story, and our U.K. team just broke a Brexit story. Their contribution to the company is manyfold. News does provide prestige and charisma to a company that has benefits. I think news is increasingly going to be important to the platforms; Facebook is saying it doesn't want fake news on the platform.

**But news is expensive, many advertisers don't want to be around it, and it doesn't share well on Facebook.**
I think news is a better business than people think. In the short term, news is more expensive, and it takes time to build trust. But if you look at our cost structure compared to The New York Times or Washington Post, we have a lean cost structure and reach a large audience for the team we have. If you want to bet on the future of news, you want to bet on people doing quality news, digital only, reaching a lot of people. There will be more models for news. I think Google and Facebook are going to do more to support news. If they don't, they'll be regulated.

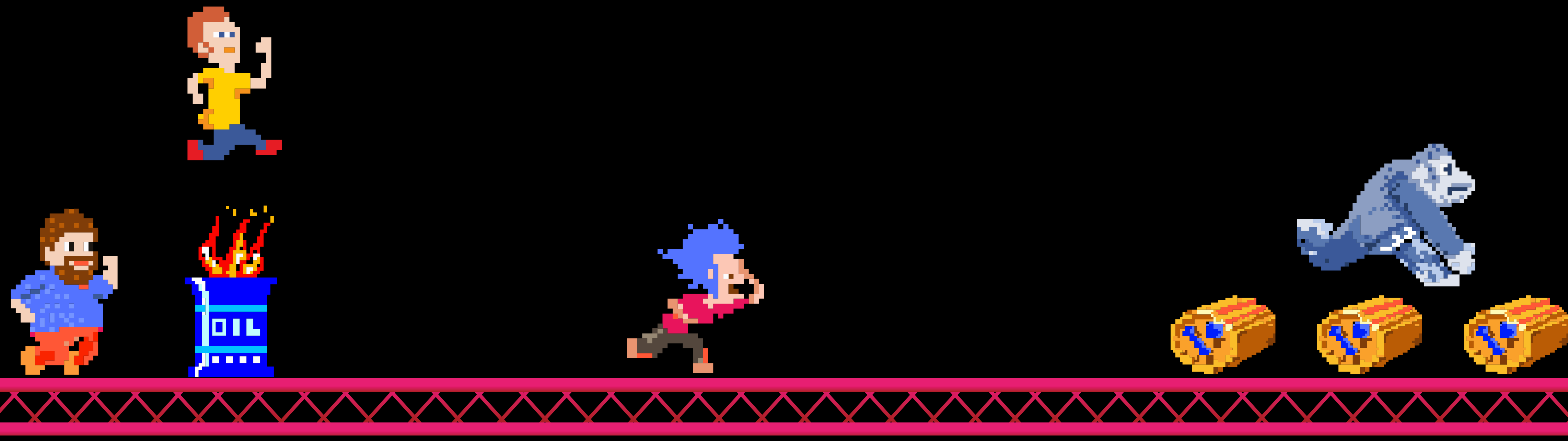
**Is there a subscription model in BuzzFeed News' future?**
It's possible. A partial paywall could make sense. But it's also important we educate and inform the broad public. If every news organization puts the majority of their content behind paywalls, it's hard to have an informed electorate.

**Did VCs have unrealistic expectations for digital publishing companies?**
I take a long-term view, and companies like BuzzFeed are always going to set aggressive goals, and sometimes you hit them, and sometimes you don't. In terms of the value of the company, if that's your focus, you lose track of the actual business. The market cap shouldn't matter that much if you continue to grow every year.



# THE REBELLION

Media companies are speaking up against the dominance of Facebook and Google. ***BY LUCIA MOSES***




**It was April 2016, and BuzzFeed had just exploded a watermelon on Facebook Live, making it Facebook's most-watched live video to date.** BuzzFeed was flush with $3.1 million in Facebook money, making it the media company the platform paid the most to make live video content, ahead of even The New York Times and CNN. Just a few days later, onstage at Facebook's F8 developer conference, BuzzFeed founder Jonah Peretti expounded on all the live video the viral content company could make for Facebook, including even a game show. Facebook and BuzzFeed seemed to be arm in arm, marching into the brave new world of live video.

That was then. These days, Peretti's spiel has turned into a rant at conferences, to media outlets and to BuzzFeed staff that Facebook needs to share more of its news feed revenue with publishers. It's a bold statement for a media company that literally built its business around Facebook. It signaled more broadly to the rest of the media landscape that the platform-publisher imbalance wasn't just hurting traditional media.

"It's in Facebook's interest to share news feed revenue, not because it's good for the world, but it allows Facebook to have some control over what's showing up in the news feed," Peretti later said in an interview with Digiday. "It would drive a lot of benefits for their business and help some media companies have better models."

It used to be that criticizing the mighty platforms was something media executives would only do behind closed doors, in hushed tones. The fear, as Wired Editor-in-Chief Nick Thompson recently referenced on the Digiday Podcast, is Facebook has a dial somewhere that can be turned to cut off media that gets too uppity. But now, publishers are at the end of their ropes, and even formerly ardent Facebook boosters like Peretti are finding their voices. The biggest target is Facebook, due to its audience reach, influence and frequently changing strategy that publishers have scrambled to keep up with. The feeling at many publishers is they got a raw deal. They helped Facebook by feeding it content to keep people engaged, and Facebook has meanwhile taken a huge chunk of their business through a better ad system.

Peretti is joined by other publisher critics, chiefly News Corp chief Rupert Murdoch and his top newspaper executive, Robert Thomson, who in blunt and sometimes florid terms charge that the tech giants are damaging journalism's business model and should do more to compensate media companies. According to Wired, Murdoch has gone further, bluntly threatening Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg last year that they would attack Facebook unless the platform did a better job of compensating publishers. Since then, Thomson has laid out terms: "carriage fees" that Facebook would pay publishers. Facebook hasn't dismissed the idea, either; Campbell Brown, news partnerships chief at Facebook, responded "never say never" when asked about it at the Code Media conference in February.

Justin Smith, CEO of Bloomberg Media, has been using his perch to warn other publishers about the danger of rushing head-first into giving their content to distribution platforms. Linda Yaccarino, ad sales boss for NBCUniversal, has become an evangelist for fixing digital advertising, which has included bashing Facebook for failing to meet the measurement standards that television is held to. "It was after years and years of the inability of the industry to keep up with consumer behavior, which was frustrating all of us to a boiling point," she says.

Media executives are still lobbying the platforms behind closed doors. But by speaking publicly, they hope to sway advertisers that are spending more and more of their budgets with the platforms. They also are holding out the possibility that Facebook truly fears: A united front to impose stringent regulations on it either in the U.S. or Europe. Media wields outside influence when it comes to swaying public opinion. And the leverage media has — something Murdoch is well aware of — is denting Facebook's public image and standing with government officials and regulators.

Indeed, after years of going from strength to strength, Facebook had a rough 2017. Sure, profits continued to soar, but the aftermath of the U.S. presidential election and questions about what role Facebook played dogged the company. On a parallel track, the media has been falling out of love with Facebook for years.

Starting in 2015, Facebook introduced Instant Articles and paid publishers to make live and news feed video for the platform, giving publishers hope that they could build a real business on the platform. But the revenue hopes never really panned out, and Facebook kept changing tack on video, which was exasperating for publishers that organized themselves to give the platform what they thought it wanted. Whole companies got venture capital funding on the basis of those hopes. All the while, Facebook was sending less organic traffic to publishers.

Around that time, Jason Kint, CEO of digital publisher trade association Digital Content Next, crunched the numbers and found that all the growth in digital advertising was going to Google and Facebook, which became his cause célèbre.

"You're always looking for simple ways to describe to the market that it's not right," Kint says. "It's pretty hard to argue most of the growth going to two companies is healthy."

At the same time, public opinion started turning against Google and Facebook after the discovery of "fake news" leading up to and during the 2016 election, which gave media companies leverage. There's growing awareness about the addictive nature of technology. In 2017, the News Media Alliance, a trade group representing 2,000 newspaper companies from The New York Times to McClatchy, began to seek an antitrust exemption from Congress so its members could negotiate collectively with the platforms. Along with the exemption, David Chavern, CEO of the News Media Alliance, has been lobbying the duopoly to provide subscription, brand, data and revenue support to publishers.

"You're trying to highlight the problem for Google and Facebook; you're trying to make policymakers aware of this problem; you're talking to the broader public about the fact that this is not a legacy versus digital problem," Chavern says.

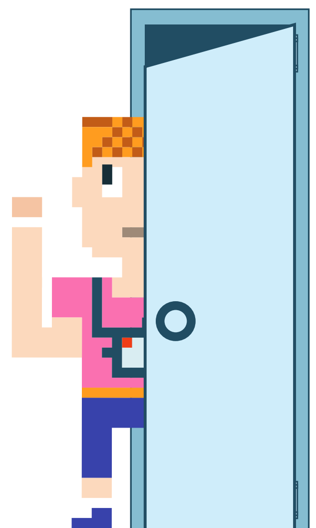
In some ways, U.S. media execs are catching up to some of their counterparts in Europe, where suspicion of and opposition to U.S.-born tech giants runs deep, there are influential media companies like Axel Springer and there's a long history of sensitivity to privacy concerns. The U.S. media hasn't overtly asked for the platforms to be broken up or regulated, which seems an unlikely outcome. But if publishers are entering the acceptance stage of their loss of faith in platforms, they're getting more vocal.

The tech companies are at least listening, and then some. Facebook, along with Google, is testing subscription support for publishers. Google has expanded its fast-loading mobile pages to accommodate more article formats and introduced an ad-blocking version of Chrome that quality publishers hope will lead to higher ad demand for their own sites. Chavern is hopeful there will be progress on his antitrust initiative this year.

There's extra urgency now with research highlighting the decline in society's trust in social platforms and the potential rub-off effect of that on publishers, along with consumer brands, when they appear on those platforms.

In the U.S., though, the number of people speaking out is still limited to just a handful. The vast majority of publishers use Google for their ad stack; Google and Facebook still contribute some 70 percent of publishers' referral traffic. There's still a pervasive fear that in speaking out too loudly or too often, someone at Facebook will turn a dial and turn off their referral traffic entirely.

"There's no upside to being in the public on this," Kint says. "They can't survive without them."



# OPEN LOOK

Athletes' moves to control the narratives circulating about them in the traditional media have the attention of fans and advertisers. ***BY JUJU KIM***

**It's Jan. 14, the night before the final regular-season game between the Golden State Warriors and the Cleveland Cavaliers, and Kevin Durant and LeBron James are sitting in the back of an Uber — a Cadillac Escalade, to be specific — in Akron, Ohio.** But instead of talking trash while riding through the falling snow, the two rivals are discussing President Donald Trump.

"Our team, as a country, is not ran by a great coach," Durant says.

"It's not even a surprise when he says something," James adds. "It's like, laughable."

ESPN host Cari Champion shakes her head from the driver's seat. "But it's also scary," she says.

The exchange occurs during an episode of "Rolling with the Champion," a show produced by Uninterrupted, James' digital sports programming network, with Uber as a sponsor. The series features Champion chatting with NBA players about topics including culture, music and basketball as she drives them in her Uber. It's unfiltered moments like these that Uninterrupted strives to capture in its athlete-driven video series and podcasts.

Uninterrupted, founded in 2015 by James and his business partner Maverick Carter, isn't alone in these endeavors. Other athlete-driven digital media companies, including The Players' Tribune, started by retired New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter and Excel Sports Management chief marketing officer Jaymee Messler in 2014, and Durant's Thirty Five Media, have launched in recent years, all with a similar mission: Let athletes share their stories from their own perspectives — something traditional media hasn't often allowed them to do — and facilitate connections with fans.

These companies also provide athletes, with their tens of millions of followers on social platforms, the chance to grow their own brands and make money from sharing their stories, rather than telling them for free.

Durant and business partner Rich Kleiman, with this opportunity in mind, founded Thirty Five Media in April 2017 with the debut of Durant's YouTube channel, which documents the NBA player's on- and off-court life and has amassed more than 20 million views and 614,000-plus subscribers. This January, Thirty Five Media announced a deal with YouTube to create sports programming for the platform, including a new series featuring actor Michael Rapaport, and help other athletes, like Seattle Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman, start their own YouTube channels. Athletes are paid for their involvement, but Thirty Five Media wouldn't share the amount. YouTube declined to comment for this story.

Max Barnett, global head of digital at Nielsen Sports, says content like this appeals to fans because it's authentic. "It gives fans access to behind-the-scenes content, content that they've always wanted to see," he explains. "It's a bit more real."

For Uber, authenticity factored into working with Uninterrupted on "Rolling with the Champion." "I wanted to reach out to [Uninterrupted] so they could help us tell the stories of athletes in a way that would be human and interesting, authentic, while using the situation and context of Uber as the catalyst to have that conversation," says Bozoma Saint John, Uber's chief brand officer.

Building a business on authenticity has worked so well for The Players' Tribune, which features first-person written pieces, podcasts, video and photography from athletes, that it plans to expand internationally. (It wouldn't disclose further details, though.) When Jeter — known for his reticence with the media during his MLB career — unveiled the site in October 2014, writing in a post that he wanted it to be a place where athletes could "connect directly with our fans, with no filter," it was widely mocked — contributing athletes received titles like "senior editor," for example — and doubted.

Since then, The Players' Tribune says more than 1,800 athletes have contributed, including retired NBA star Kobe Bryant, Denver Broncos linebacker Von Miller and Olympic gymnast Aly Raisman. Jeff Levick, who previously served as Spotify's chief revenue officer and had stints at AOL and Google, joined The Players' Tribune last September as its first CEO. The site had 3.4 million unique visitors in January, according to comScore.

A point of pride for The Players' Tribune is how engaged fans are with its content, which ranges from retirement announcements to accounts of sexual assault and stories about overcoming illness. The site claims its average time on page is more than six minutes — a number "almost unheard of anywhere else," says Gary Hoenig, content consultant for The Players' Tribune. The most resonant stories, which tend to focus on off-field subjects such as mental health and social issues, exceed this figure, says Sean Conboy, the site's executive editor.

Achieving this time on page requires significant effort. Conboy says his team approaches each written story like a feature for a major magazine, though the editorial process for every post differs. To start, athletes — who aren't paid for unsponsored contributions — can submit written notes or drafts, or they can discuss or dictate their thoughts via phone, for example. Then, the team makes initial edits before sending the copy back to them for feedback. The foremost priority is conveying athletes' stories in the way they intended, so they approve the final product before publication. Conboy adds that the high time spent on page that results from this process makes The Players' Tribune attractive to advertisers.

The company says ad deals are its primary revenue driver, and it has worked

with more than 35 brands since launch. For example, it published an installment of its "Letter to My Younger Self" series in January for Showtime, which wanted to promote its new drama series "The Chi" in a post from the perspective of an athlete from Chicago. In the piece, retired NBA player Quentin Richardson reflects on growing up on Chicago's South Side, with branding for the show appearing throughout. Conboy says around 200,000 readers spent about 7 1/2 minutes on average on the story page.

"People are sharing this. You had multiple NBA players sharing the article," Conboy says. "Advertisers increasingly want to be associated with something that is actually sticky and engaging and not just a click trap."

Barnett agrees, adding that the high engagement rates for athletes' posts on social platforms also appeal to advertisers. NBA players, for example, have an average interaction rate — likes, shares and comments — of 0.38 percent on Facebook and 2 percent on Instagram, according to Nielsen Sports data, rates Barnett says brands would have to "spend considerably" to achieve.

One hurdle for athlete-driven media companies is building brand affinity. While timely retirement announcements or game-related content — which Hoenig acknowledges is "here today and gone tomorrow" — can rack up millions of views, it doesn't keep fans returning to these sites. But Hoenig insists The Players' Tribune's pieces that address emotionally moving topics such as social issues or players' personal struggles draw people back.

"They continue to read those stories, years later," he says. "Those stories have a great shelf life."

Even a big name like Sherman's isn't necessarily enough to build a business on. Sherman's YouTube channel, which launched before the announcement of the YouTube-Thirty Five Media deal, has less than 37,000 subscribers. One of the first videos posted to the channel is a 12-minute livestream of him answering fans' questions from his hospital bed after his surgery in November to repair a ruptured Achilles tendon, and it has just over 27,000 views.

But advertisers seem unfazed. Advertiser interest was one reason why Thirty Five Media, which counts Alaska Airlines and American Family Insurance among its brand partners, expanded beyond Durant's YouTube channel. "Seeing how receptive brands were to us to spend behind branded content, we saw that as another possibility," says Kleiman, "now that we could develop this network of athletes that all have their own channels."

"Thirty Five Media is the future of how brands are going to work with athletes," says Natalie Bowman, managing director of marketing and advertising for Alaska Airlines, which is teaming up with Durant's company on sponsored videos highlighting their support of youth and education initiatives in the Bay Area. "Athlete-driven creative and athlete-driven content is going to resonate with fans, and they are going to expect more of it."

As athlete-driven content proliferates, there is the issue of saturation. "It's going to be hard over the long term for one company to differentiate itself versus another," says Dan Shevchik, partner and svp at consulting firm Sports Media Advisors.

Scott Langerman, CEO of Athlete Content & Entertainment Media, the NFL Players Association's athlete-driven content development and production company, says die-hard fans can never get enough information about their teams and players. "They're insatiable," he says.

Hoenig and Conboy say they welcome others to produce this content. "Competition is good," Hoenig says. "It makes you better." Carter puts it more simply: "I don't think people ever get tired of great stories."

# GOING FOR GOLD

Joanna Coles, chief content officer at Hearst Magazines, talks about why print is having a moment, why pure digital is a thing of the past and why Snapchat is a healthier social network than others.

*BY LUCIA MOSES*

**Hearst seems to be more bullish on — and do better at — magazines than other big magazine companies. Why is that?**
We love print. I'm a huge believer in it. We've lived with devices long enough to understand their enormous advantages and disadvantages. If you've spent 90 minutes scrolling on your phone, you don't necessarily feel more informed. You may feel listless and restless. We're moving into a post-digital euphoria. We've seen e-books have plateaued, and real books have had an enormous rebirth. A magazine is restorative. You need to be able to unplug. You absorb information differently when you read it on the page.

**How many magazines is Hearst going to launch this year?**
We're probably going to launch two or four in the second half of this year. Two, definitely.

**Magazines have had more of an advertising challenge than a reader challenge. Any sign that's changing?**
For certain advertisers, the metrics that some of the digital companies give allow them to be really specifically targeting when they want to move product urgently. But if you want to establish trust with your customer, a magazine is unbeatable. We are hearing from advertisers who pulled out from print who are coming back. We offer incredible value for money; the ad is seamless in the consumer experience. You can't unsee an ad in a magazine. And it's high-quality content. It's real; it's not bullshit.

**How's the approach to launching a magazine different today than before?**
All our successful partnerships — Oprah, The Pioneer Woman — we launched with existing media partners. We're now launching with digital partners who have enormous consumer audience and no longer want to be a pure digital play, and understand the value of having a physical manifestation of their brand. No digital company now wants to be purely digital. They want to use it as a totem as being a member of a tribe. If you carry Airbnb, if you have a copy of Harvard Business Review or The Economist, it says something about the nature of who you are.

**Hearst's approach to magazines has changed. You've taken the approach of having, say, one beauty editor for multiple titles. How has that changed things, and what have the challenges been?**
I had argued for a long time that it made absolutely no sense for the same company to be sending eight different beauty editors from eight separate titles in eight separate cabs to the opening of the same mascara and writing eight stories. It's not a great use of resources. We were competing against each other with our company's money. It's been super reinvigorating. A lot of staffers have been excited to work on different brands. As a result, we have better differentiated content. Now, you can have one person writing three points of view. With the eight, you'd be getting the same story.

**Hearst decided to separate print and web, while some publishers still believe integration is the way to go. What's the case for that?**
Here's how I think of it. I'm the coach for the American Olympics team. My goal is to bring back as many gold medals as I can. The team for running the marathon is focused on different things than the team running the 100-meter sprint. You would never expect one person to be able to do every sport. It's just not practical to expect people to be able to do everything all the time.

**It seems like we're in the backlash phase of #MeToo. Do you worry there won't be lasting change coming out of it?**
I think the only permanent change that'll come about is if we have real diversity in the leadership of companies and government. I'm working as hard as I can to ensure that comes to pass for the next generation. There's no tipping point till you reach 30 percent on boards and senior management. One of my goals is to look for the best possible female and diverse talent and give it the most support I can.

> "The only permanent change that'll come about is if we have real diversity in the leadership of companies and government."

**Do you find it hard to be optimistic?**
I don't think it's hard to be optimistic. I think Trump was a wild-card candidate. I would be astonished if the Democrats didn't take the House back. And I think millennials will put down their phones and get to the polls because they weren't energized for either candidate [in 2016].

**How do you think your being on the board of Snap has helped Hearst?**
It's certainly helped my understanding of how a tech company works. It's been integral to how Cosmo's developed awareness [on Discover]. We now have seven Hearst brands on Snap, so we're the publisher that's the most represented.

**You have long-standing experience in news and magazines. What impact do you hope to have there with that experience?**
One of the reasons I was so engaged with the Discover platform was Evan Spiegel's really prescient understanding that the web was full of crap, and human editors were increasingly important in a world that relied on algorithms. He completely foresaw fake news and wanted to build a platform with reputable media brands. He reads an enormous amount.

**How aligned are Discover publishers and Snap?**
I think all our goals are aligned, especially in light of what's happened to Facebook. We want to make sure we are an easily available route to high-quality journalism.

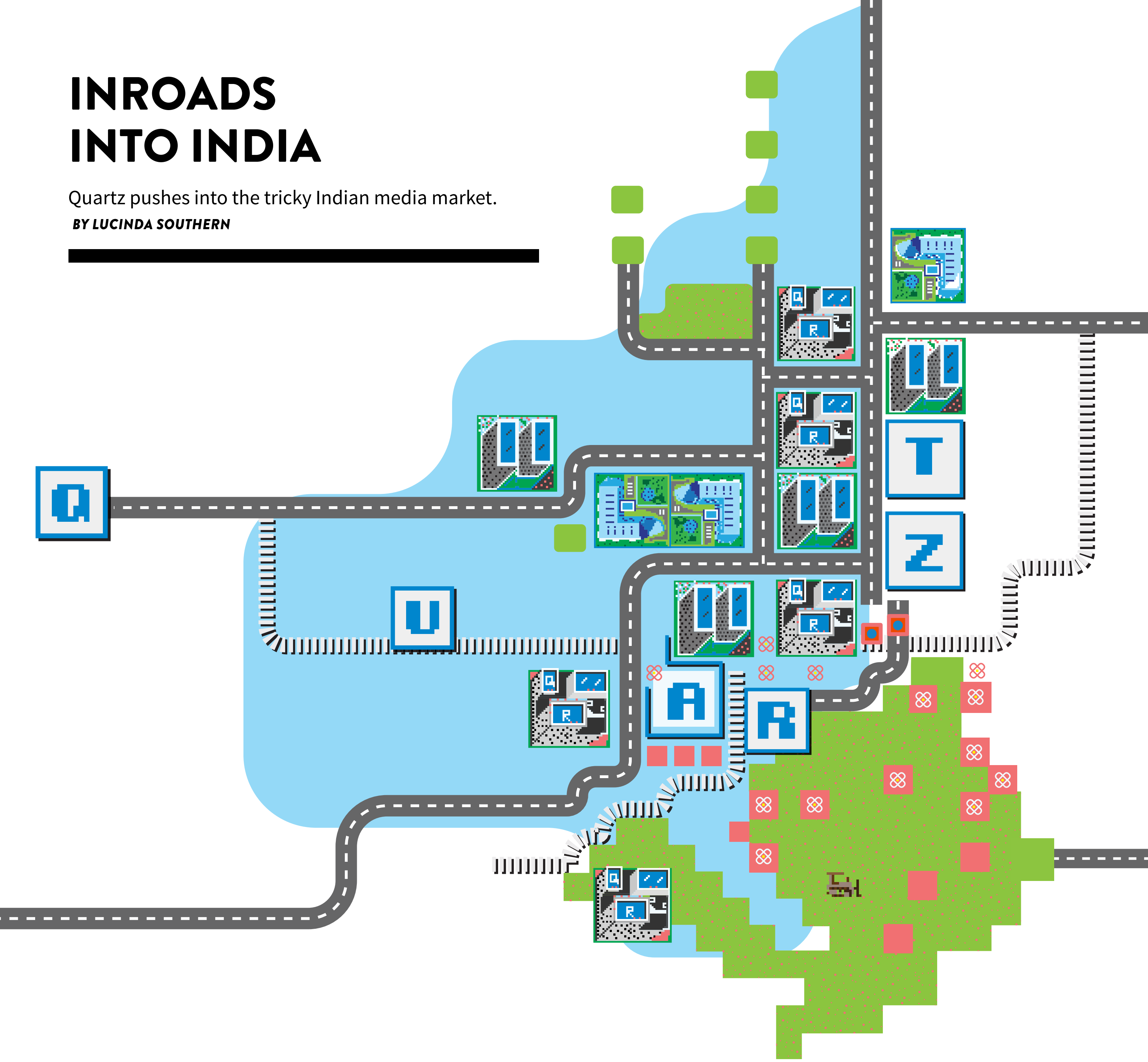
**Thanks so much for talking with me.**
I hope you'll mention my book. It's called "Love Rules: How to Find a Real Relationship in a Digital World." It's really about how, in this particular moment, the importance of actual relationships, communicating face to face, is really important. We're at the point now where people who have a real-life social network will live longer than the people who don't. We understand the nature of electronic media can be addictive.

**How does that square with your involvement with Snapchat?**
The biggest indicator of whether you'll use Snapchat is you have one true friend. There's no like button — the goal is to keep you connected with your actual friends. So not all social networks are created equal.

# INROADS INTO INDIA

Quartz pushes into the tricky Indian media market.

***BY LUCINDA SOUTHERN***



**Back in 2014, convincing a finance brand manager in India who reaches 10 million people through programmatic display ads to take a punt on Quartz's handcrafted native formats was a tough sell.**

That was the type of hand-to-hand combat Quartz and its local partner, Scroll, had to tackle when the business publisher set up in India nearly four years ago, running regular breakfast events for 20 advertisers at a time to convince them of the changing digital marketplace.

"Conversations with advertisers in the first few years showed them to be a hell of a lot more skeptical," admits Jay Lauf, publisher of Quartz. According to Samir Patil, founder of Scroll, Lauf's most effective punchline was that you're more likely to get struck by lightning than click on a display ad. "People listened politely, but that always had an impact," Patil says.

From a distance, the Indian market is hard to resist for traffic-hungry publishers. A population of 1.3 billion, 400 million internet users and a growing number of English speakers using smartphones leaves media companies salivating. But seduction by big numbers is often where multinational media goes wrong.

Keeping targets realistic — only about 50 million internet users are valuable to advertisers — is why U.S. media companies team up with incumbents who can help with forming long-term relationships with advertisers, sourcing local talent and navigating the red tape of such a bureaucratic nation.

"Launching with the largest partner in a region can be a bit lopsided; it doesn't necessarily return equal value," says Lauf. According to Patil, the publisher took an "entrepreneurial" approach to talking to brands. "This is a high-contact sport," he says. "We were meeting people all the time. You can't do that from afar."

Quartz, now with 10 editorial staff located in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore, is known for its simple interface, a refreshing contrast to busy mobile websites and complicated messaging. Simple things like clear citation and linking back to original sources has set it apart.

Quartz brought a couple of other advantages. It arrived in India shortly after Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected in a campaign clouded by the spread of misinformation on Facebook and WhatsApp. An endorsement of Modi attributed to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange went viral during the campaign; WikiLeaks soon denied the endorsement. The following year, a photo showing a young Modi sweeping floors — an image to flaunt the politician's humble origins — was revealed to be fake. Political parties influenced the local press, which left readers feeling let down, providing an opening for a new, independent voice.

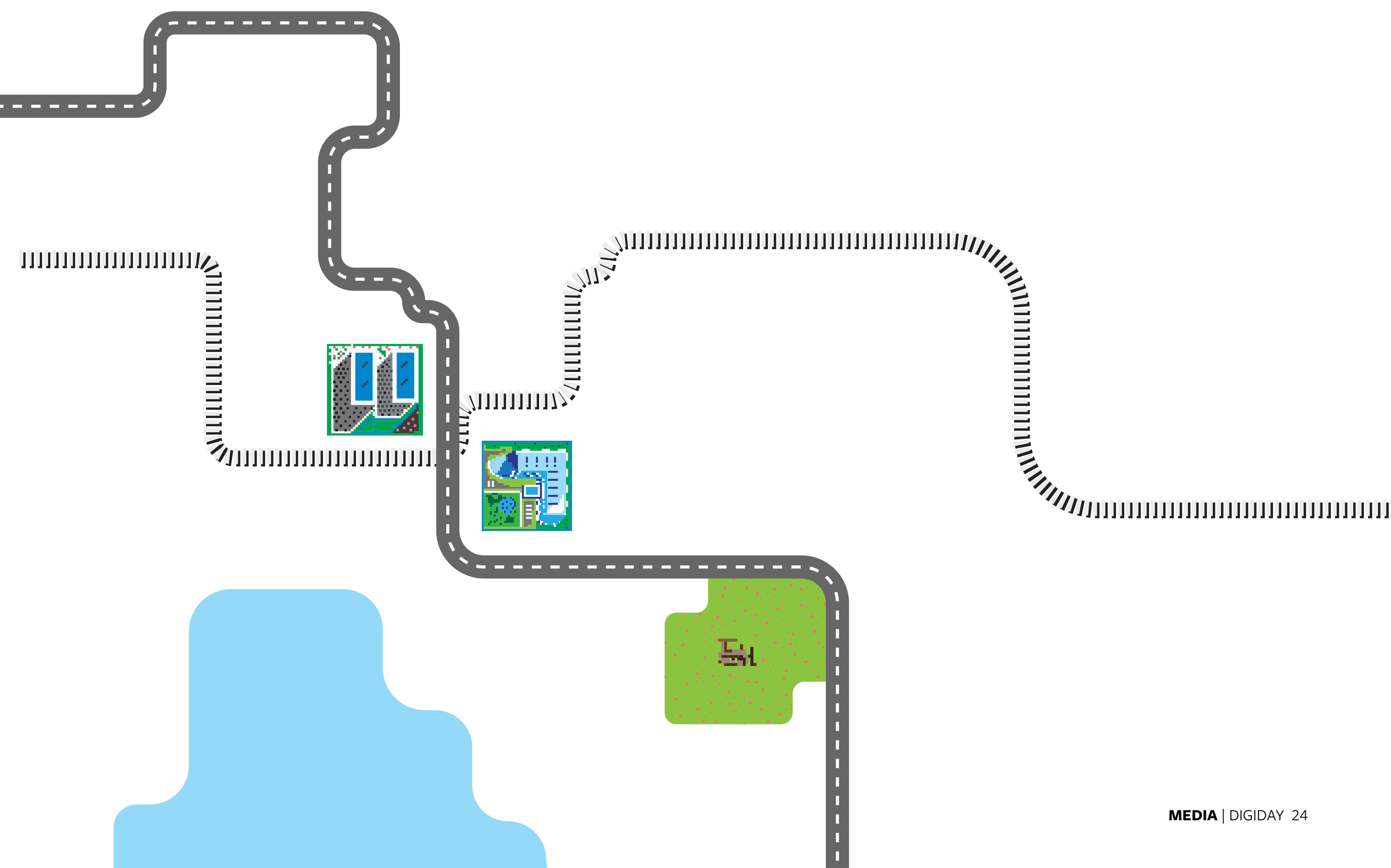
Coverage in India was never going to be the problem — rather, it was where to focus its limited resources. In addition to Modi, Quartz India has gone deep on topics like immigration policy changes and government efforts to oust cryptocurrency from India. Particularly popular are its explainers of dense topics like "Everything you need to know about the $1.8 billion PNB-Nirav Modi fraud."

As a result, Quartz reached more than 18 million people in India last year, up 74 percent from the previous year, and subscribers to the Asia edition of its main newsletter, Quartz Daily Brief, grew 53 percent in two years, according to the publisher.

"With two dozen languages, it gives the sense of it being fragmented, but effectively it means that English is the dominant language, thanks to the colonial education system we've inherited," says Devjyot Ghoshal, editor of Quartz India. Half of Quartz's readership comes from outside the U.S., also giving it an edge over local media. When Tanzanian students were attacked in India in 2016, for instance, the publisher collaborated with its newsroom in Tanzania to cover the news. Now, skepticism from advertisers is dissipating. Traffic to Quartz ads in India has more than doubled from 2015 to 2017, in line with audience growth, according to the company. Over the years, it's worked with brands like GE, IBM India and other local tech companies and global automakers. Quartz has a sales rep in India, but its ad campaigns tend to be sold in New York, London and Hong Kong to advertisers that want to reach the Indian market.

"We didn't anchor the business proposition on drawing revenue and advertising from the market in India, but it's becoming increasingly ripe for content marketing and high-impact, premium display," Lauf says. "Advertisers are leaning in more; they know the industry and economy's changed a lot. Content marketing innovations are more meaningful and working elsewhere."

A breakthrough point came for Lauf during a visit last year flying from New Delhi to Bangalore, while sitting next to a senior executive from a financial institution. "When I told her I was with Quartz, her response was, 'Oh, I love Quartz. It's so unique,'" he says. "That was an exciting 'aha' moment. Before, less than 1 percent might have recognized the brand."



# GDPR FAKEOUT

Confusion gives rise to misunderstandings when it comes to Europe's big new data law.

*BY JESSICA DAVIES*

**The General Data Protection Regulation is almost upon us, and publishers, agencies, brands and ad tech vendors have been working to make sure they're ready when enforcement begins. But the hype around the EU privacy law, uncertainty about how it will be enforced and scaremongering from companies offering off-the-shelf solutions has sowed confusion. Here's a reality check of some of the more common misperceptions about the GDPR.**

**Misconconception:** GDPR is a European challenge.

**Reality:** American businesses will get ensnared in GDPR compliance issues if they offer goods or services to consumers in the EU or monitor the behavior of people located in Europe, regardless of where their offices or ad servers are based.

**Misconception:** Businesses that aren't GDPR-ready by May 25 will face a €20 million ($24 million) fine.

**Reality:** The law will kick in May 25, and there will be no grace period, so regulators can issue fines from this date. But businesses will be expected to continue identifying and addressing emerging privacy and security risks long after this date. Regulators will take into account if companies can show they've been putting the building blocks in place.

**Misconception:** Every business needs a data protection officer to oversee compliance.

**Reality:** Yes, that's advisable if you're a large business with large data sets. But it is not necessary for every single company to have one, unless it's a public authority. Smaller companies can also share a DPO or outsource compliance work to an outside expert.

**Misconception:** My business doesn't need to get public consent, as it's protected by the "legitimate interest" clause.

**Reality:** Using this claim to justify ignoring the GDPR may seem easier and cheaper in the short term, as it avoids all those extra legal fees. But it won't protect ad tech companies. Agencies are already fed up with vendors that make this claim and will drop them fast if it's not addressed. "We only need a few bad actors to push the boundaries too far for everyone to be negatively affected," says a media agency exec. "It would be preferable for ad tech firms to put people's ad experiences and privacy first as opposed to finding crafty ways to find loopholes in the regulation."

**Misconception:** You can avoid fines by flipping liability to the next party.

**Reality:** Passing liability to the next party in the ad supply chain is one of the more irresponsible approaches to the GDPR, one ad tech vendors and agencies have tried. It's a risky shortcut and one regulators will not necessarily be lenient about.

“You have to go beyond the algorithm. A machine can’t do everything.”

# THE ENERGIZER

Linda Yaccarino, chairman of advertising and client partnerships for NBCUniversal, says media must get moving on solving problems.

***BY LUCIA MOSES***

**Last year, you talked a lot about the need to address brand safety, media measurement and transparency issues. Are your priorities the same for 2018?**
I certainly think some of those or all of those issues are the same. But broadly what I’m vocal about is the illogical inertia that is plaguing the advertising industry. There’s safety and transparency issues facing one side of the business. There are measurement issues on the other side. All of those need to be addressed. The industry hasn’t been doing enough. We’re just not willing to wait for other companies that the industry has traditionally relied on to measure viewing reliably or that we offer brand-safe environments.

**What specifically is on your road map?**
Since Comcast bought NBCUniversal, we thought of the traditional competitors to be the Viacoms, Foxes of the world. That has changed. The competitive set is Google, Facebook, Amazon. It’s why we’ve invested in digital capabilities, why we have a relationship with Comcast for set-top box data, why we have an in-house agency. One you’ll hear much more about is the escalation of consumer experience. [After this interview, NBCUniversal announced it would decrease the number of ads in commercial pods by 20 percent and decrease ad time by 10 percent across its networks.] You’ll be able to marry data capabilities with the scale of NBCUniversal and data once only thought of as the tech platforms’.

**You hosted an industry gathering last year that got a lot of attention for bringing competitors together to discuss safety and transparency. These kinds of gatherings often end up going nowhere, though. What do you think was the impact?**
I was frustrated by having identical conversations with the brands, advertising agencies and our peers. Just merely calling the gathering was overwhelmingly positive. The positive outcome was, it gave us permission to change. It has surfaced the need for the big tech platforms to come into their own.

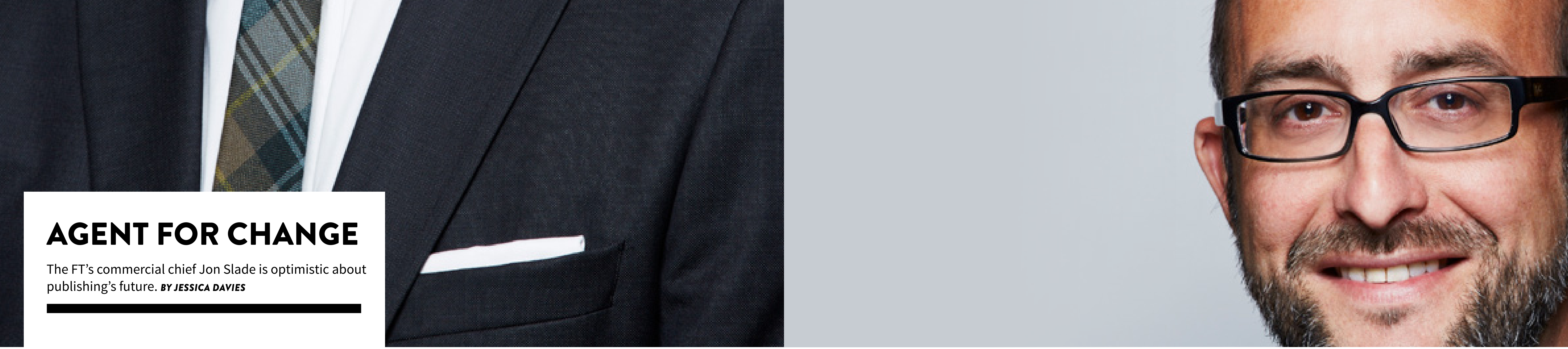
**Do you consider them media companies?**
If you’re in the business of securing billions of dollars of advertising budgets from big brand marketers, it would seem to be that’s what they want to be.

**How would you grade the efforts by Facebook, YouTube and others to address fake news and other problems this past year?**
It demonstrates something I’ve said a lot of last year — you have to go beyond the algorithm. A machine can’t do everything. I’m happy to see it’s a conversation, and it seems they’re taking it seriously. That’s a good thing for us all.

**Is the decline of public trust on social platforms and institutions an opportunity or a risk for NBCU?**
The last two years, there has been a wave of marketer money coming back to television because the overall revenue to platforms wasn’t proving out on sales. When you overallocate on the bottom of the funnel, you don’t have enough of the top stuff working, you’re out of luck. Money has been coming back for that. But what I think is really disappointing is — and it affects NBCUniversal — is that we’ve lost the public trust. This needs to be a year that the trust needs to be established. And most of the onus is on the tech platforms.

**What can NBCU do to improve public trust?**
Communicate consistently that it’s a nonissue for a company like NBCUniversal. There should be a long line of brands that want to support that content. I’ll give you a good stat. This blows everyone away. Over the weekend, NBCUniversal reached 140 million Americans with content called the Olympics. We’re in a unique position as opposed to a lot of other companies. Who woulda thunk a show 43 years old would be fueling social conversation? That’s “SNL.”

**You got attention for calling out Facebook in particular last year.**
On Facebook, I said, I‘m not sure if a like can walk into your store and buy a product. Last year, several of [the platforms] had “Oops, we did it again” moments. I’m unsure why the success metric is very, very different for the linear side of the business compared to the social side of the business. The advertising standards are extraordinarily higher for us than the tech platforms. That said, I’m optimistic for the future. They’re taking the challenges seriously. I just hope they deliver change soon.



# AGENT FOR CHANGE

The FT's commercial chief Jon Slade is optimistic about publishing's future. ***BY JESSICA DAVIES***

**Six months ago, a charismatic 16-year-old strode into the office of Jon Slade, the Financial Times' chief commercial officer, and told him the FT had it all wrong.** The boy had been at the publisher's Southwark office in London on work experience and wanted to offer his view on how the FT could better engage with young audiences. His pitch: The FT should make its content free to access for all students, find a sponsor to underpin that and send them the most relevant news based on what's in the school curriculum. "I sat up and listened," says a smiling Slade.

Appreciation of younger generations' respect for quality media is one of the reasons Slade feels more buoyant about the future of publisher business models than he used to. "There's a confidence that comes with that age group that forces you to get rid of the clutter that can crowd your day-to-day vision and gives a different perspective," he says. "They value quality news more than they're given credit for." Within two weeks of this impromptu meeting, the FT had over half the schools in the U.K. involved, and it secured Lloyds Bank as sponsor, with the result that some 20,000 schoolchildren now regularly visit FT.com.

That free-access project is part of the FT's ongoing mission to appeal to audiences at both ends of the age spectrum, to ensure it can continue building its subscriber base. At 910,000 paying digital and print subscribers, the FT isn't doing too badly. The publisher's advertising business is also in good shape, accounting for just under half of the FT's revenue — a far cry from 2002 when around 80 percent of revenue came from advertising, according to the publisher.

Arriving at that point has taken unwavering leadership and commercial strategic vision, attributes that Slade's colleagues and peers say he has in abundance. As a member of the FT board and chief commercial officer, the 44-year-old Slade is responsible for the FT's advertising and subscription business, as well as the circulation of its print newspaper, overseeing 713 people.

He has ambitious plans for continuing the FT's ongoing transformation from a seller of ad space to a marketing services business entwined with a subscription business. It's a formula Slade believes will guarantee a sustainable business model for journalism. "Subscriptions and advertising are two sides of the same coin. It gives us two engines to fly the airplane instead of one," Slade adds.

### Protector of the brand

Slade is well-known for pushing back against recurring industry issues like ad fraud and brand safety. He oversaw the launch of the FT Commercial Charter in 2017: a pledge to advertisers that the FT would uphold clear standards on areas like viewability, nonhuman traffic, brand safety, third-party verification, reporting and pricing.

The FT made good on that pledge last September, cracking down on domain spoofing of its inventory after an internal investigation revealed it to be prolific across 15 ad exchanges.

The publisher estimated the value of the fraudulent inventory to be £1 million ($1.4 million). As a result, 24 ad exchanges cleaned up what ads they were allowing through. "It makes me mad," says Slade heatedly, "that the industry has put up with it [fraud] for so long and not been willing to call it out."

Since the FT went public with its crackdown on domain-spoofed inventory, other publishers like News UK, which owns The Times of London and The Sun newspapers, have followed suit. Slade is hopeful this momentum will continue. "The genie isn't going back in the bottle. The industry is rightly furious," he says. "As both a buyer and seller [of media], I'm furious that it [ad fraud] is as prolific as it is." Slade's tough stance on brand safety and his protectiveness of the FT brand hasn't gone unnoticed. "Even five or so years ago, we had to convince them [the FT] of the controls and safety we had built into AdX before they considered doing anything programmatic," says David McMurtrie, Google's head of publishers for the U.K. "Everyone, from Jon down, is a guardian of the FT brand and doesn't want that to be diluted." The FT has remained strict on who it partners with, choosing only Google and TrustX as authorized resellers of its inventory. "That [strategy] comes directly from Jon," McMurtrie adds.

Slade is also known across the industry for not mincing his words. "Jon is a tough negotiator. He isn't afraid to step back from a deal if he doesn't think it works for him," says McMurtrie. "But he is very fair in his approach and will always listen to alternative viewpoints."

### Architect and visionary

Colleagues and peers describe Slade as an "incredibly focused" individual known for his high integrity and respected as much for his knowledge of and contribution to product development as for his work on the commercial and marketing sides of the business. "Everyone who knows Jon, whether it's a client, colleague or competitor, thinks of him as a very smart person, grounded and intellectual," says Dominic Good, former global sales director for the FT.

Slade has worked at the FT since 2002, aside from a two-year spell at News UK from 2005 to 2007. In his early FT years, he looked after the FT's technology clients, which armed him with deep understanding of technology and digital. When he returned to the FT in 2007, it was as global head of strategic sales, where he was tasked with building a strategic sales team and the FT's first creative solutions team. Colleagues recall that he naturally gravitated toward digital and became an expert in ad tech, meticulously choosing the right people to build the FT's ad operations team, now run by Anthony Hitchings, while methodically choosing the right technology partners and ensuring the sales team was equipped with the right products to sell based on the FT's [audience] data.

"Jon was the architect and visionary for what that team should be," Good adds. "I didn't realize at the time just how good the setup was, but it is industry-leading. The capabilities the FT has in ad tech and its very strong data offering — that's all down to Jon." Slade was promoted to CCO in 2006, a role newly created after the departure of former deputy CEO Ben Hughes. "When Ben left, our CEO John [Ridding] said that he had left large shoes to fill, but that luckily Jon had very big feet," Good recalls.

Slade's strategic direction and deep knowledge of technology helped drive the FT's product development and data strategy in a way that strengthened the FT's advertising proposition and gave it an edge, according to Good. "He has been one of the experts guiding the FT along a technology route that is now paying dividends. He was an agent for change," Good says. Slade pioneered new measurement models like cost per hour at the FT, which The Economist later picked up. Although the model didn't manage to break into mainstream use, its introduction did help reset the debate around what clients should pay for and the need to look beyond click-through rates as a meaningful metric.

### Transforming into a marketing services business

Slade spends a third of his time on product development and strategic investments. Last year, that involved the acquisition of video agency Alpha Grid to build out FT Squared, the publication's content studio. More than half the briefs that come in now are for branded content, according to Slade. The FT took a majority stake in London-based research firm Longitude earlier this year. The aim is to offer advertisers Longitude's research and thought leadership alongside its media distribution of advertising and branded content, plus its creative and video production that its Alpha Grid team provides.

Slade describes this latest investment as one of the most important steps in the FT's transformation from a "seller of ad space," as it was when he first started there in 2002, to becoming a fully rounded marketing services business. "When I came back to the FT [in 2007], I knew that unless we did something, we'd be commoditized into nothing. This [Longitude acquisition] is perhaps the epitome of that thinking," says Slade. "We want to help clients understand how to connect their brand to audiences via thought leadership, then create the content and distribute it to one of the world's most powerful and wealthiest audiences."

Aside from his professional life, Slade is an avid marathon runner, has a passion for military history and has what close colleagues describe as a very dry sense of humor. That humor comes out while talking about his children. Dominating the wall next to his desk that overlooks the Thames River are brightly colored pictures drawn by his three young children. Balancing family time while keeping up with the demands of the job in a continuously shifting media landscape has been one of his biggest life challenges, he stresses. To ensure he regularly sees his children during the week, he leaves work promptly at 5:10 p.m. to make it home for story time, checking back with work later in the evening. He excitedly lists the current favorites: British author Enid Blyton's "The Magic Faraway Tree" and "The Wishing-Chair," admitting that at times he throws himself so completely into the stories that his children have to beg for a change, to which he submits reluctantly.

"Irrespective of how stressful, crazy or complicated the day has been, there is an enforced stop that comes at 6:30 p.m. that says whatever you were thinking up to this point, park it," he adds. "You just can't have a conversation with 4-year olds while thinking about media strategy."

The same gusto and focus Slade gives his family is what's earned him such respect among peers. "Jon is one of the great leaders in our industry," says Jason Kint, CEO of publisher trade body Digital Next Content. "He is pivotal to the success of the FT, a media brand which has been leading the industry in raising its value with both audience and advertising partners."

# THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

John Martin, CEO of Turner, talks about turning its legacy TV institutions into multiplatform media businesses, the big consolidations happening in media, the growing rivalry with tech giants and the rise of streaming TV services. *BY SAHIL PATEL*

**What's the biggest threat to Turner's business today?**
Our biggest challenge is to remain relevant when there's an increasing number of choices for consumers to spend their time and energy — and their money. Thankfully, we still have big brands and we do have scale, but we have to think about our brands in a more holistic way and not just as basic cable, ad-supported television networks.

**CNN's been active in expanding its business to new platforms. How has that worked out?**
By leaning into nontraditional platforms, we have a brand that resonates with people of all ages. The average age of a U.S. TV watcher of CNN is getting younger, but it's still in the 50s, which by the way is 10 to 15 years younger than Fox News. Then, you have CNN.com, which averages users in the early 40s. The CNN app on the iPhone, it's early to mid-30s; some of the partnerships CNN has done with Facebook and Snapchat, it's early to mid-20s.

These are no longer just television channels, but branded environments that can exist anywhere. Even within CNN, we still talk about, "This is CNN, and this is CNN Digital." The conversations I have with [CNN President] Jeff [Zucker] is that I can't wait for the day that we drop that distinction — because there isn't one.

**What's stopping you?**
It's organizational. When I first came here, CNN's live TV organization and the editorial and video-on-demand organization did not sit in the same building. Under Jeff's leadership, those two not only sit in the same building, but they now sit on the same floor. Thinking of ourselves as not a television network company but a content company, trying to reach people who are passionate about our brands, is a cultural shift that takes time.

**A lot of digital publishers see Facebook and Google as existential threats to their businesses. Do you?**
We had a conversation this morning about our presence on Instagram: How much of it is marketing, and how much of it is a real business where you can actually make money? In many respects, these alternative platforms, it's about half and half at this point. When you're frenemies with the likes of Google, Facebook and Snapchat, we want to be partners, but we have to get paid at the end of the day. We're starting to make breakthroughs. We are starting to have conversations with these alternative platforms about potentially getting paid for our content.

"We want to be partners, but we have to get paid at the end of the day."

**Would you ever walk away from a platform if it doesn't pay?**
Leverage is an ephemeral thing. You need strong brands because then you can have a seat at the table and talk to these platforms about a partnership where we both get paid. But if you have marginal brands, you're dead in the water.

**So Google and Facebook aren't existential threats to Turner's future?**
We don't look at them as threats, but we need to pay attention to each of those companies — and I'd throw Apple and Amazon in there, too. All of a sudden, our biggest competitors are no longer Disney, Fox, NBC, CBS and other networks; it's these "digital companies" that are coming in and taking two-thirds of all digital ad revenues and 85 percent of the marginal growth in digital ad revenues. We're playing at a scale where we can get their attention and get them to come and want to partner with us.

**Aren't they going to compete for the future of TV?**
Too many people give them credit that they are going to be able to get into long-form and short-form and professionally produced programming, and they are going to do it well. It's hard to do.

**I think Facebook is learning that right now.**
And Apple is learning it, too. They've now hired some world-class people to come in and get their TV business off the ground, but in many respects, people still think of those companies as utilities. And last time I checked, people don't have an emotional connection to their search history or shopping cart. What we do in terms of storytelling is very difficult to duplicate.

**The mega-media consolidation that's happening — with AT&T and Time Warner, with Disney and Fox — it's at least in part a response to the growing power of the tech giants. Why is consolidation the answer?**
It's about relevance. In our case, getting together with AT&T is about technology, data and consumer relationships. There's going to be more growth in mobile content consumption. To be able to tap into the tens of millions of customer relationships that AT&T has on mobile would be a great head start.

**Disney argues that it needs to bulk up as it builds more direct-to-consumer products. How important is that to you?**
There's a more concerted strategy here about developing direct-to-consumer businesses, but you have to balance it. We get paid almost $12 billion a year between our advertisers and our affiliates, so we want to make sure we have really powerful offerings that continue to bring in those dollars.

But we need to develop new businesses, and increasingly, those businesses are not going to be new cable networks, but businesses that can stand on their own and consumers will be willing to pay for. We need to grow our non-advertising, nontraditional subscriber revenues.

**Are customers going to want to pay for 20 different subscription services, or are we headed for a rebundling of sorts?**
I think the idea of rebundling is a real idea. One of the reasons I like being in the same company as HBO and Warner Bros. is we collectively have unbelievable content offerings. It's not a crazy idea to, say, soft-bundle HBO Now and Boomerang. All of a sudden, HBO Now, which already has more than 5 million subscribers, can also offer this unbelievable kids offering.

**Are streaming TV bundles a legitimate opportunity or a quick, short-term Band-Aid to combat eroding cable subscribers?**
Last time I checked, the cumulative number of subscribers for these virtual MVPDs in the United States was almost 4.5 million. These are becoming legitimate numbers.

**What's the challenge there? Most of these services are being more selective about what channels they include in their base tiers.**
What that's demonstrating is that there are too many bad networks in this country. There are networks that are carried as part of the uber-bundle that have absolutely no consumer value. And they were originally launched in an era when there was an idea that you could have unlimited amounts of affiliate fees and the pie would continue to grow, and you could sell advertising on the back of that as well. Those days are gone.

# MASTER MECHANICS

Modern media is not just having the right strategy. It's about execution. We profile six people who are doing the hard work of modernizing media, whether it's in forward-thinking data policies, killer newsletters, commerce strategies or staying focused on a passionate niche.

## CONTENT THAT CONVERTS

**Wirecutter was a three-person tech-buying guide when Jacqui Cheng joined in 2013. Now, following its purchase by The New York Times in 2016 for $30 million, Wirecutter has a 70-person editorial team and staff of 100.** Cheng belongs to a new class of editorial employee that's helping publishers diversify their revenue streams as they realize it's hard to survive on ad revenue alone.

Wirecutter's defining product is its more than 700 exhaustively researched product guides. The most recent guide to the best laptop backpack runs over 8,500 words, for example. Along with keeping existing guides updated, Cheng is responsible for expanding Wirecutter into newer product categories like small business software — "Best Online Fax Services," for example — and new editorial formats, including product tutorials and video, for Wirecutter as well as the Times. The goal is to build Wirecutter into a more mass consumer brand as e-commerce continues its push into the mainstream.

Getting there involves tapping the resources of the Times in a way that doesn't discredit the newspaper's journalistic integrity. So far, Wirecutter has been working with editors on Times desks including Smarter Living and Well and tapping Times reporters as sources: It got Eric Asimov, the Times' wine critic, to contribute to a guide on the best wine glasses last year.

Wirecutter has its sights on producing more video, which has been a hard nut to crack for commerce publishers. Wirecutter has been on YouTube since 2015, and only five videos it's published there have gathered five-figure view counts — but Cheng says she sees promise in GIFs and videos that show how products work and are tested, rather than visual versions of the exhaustive reviews that Wirecutter's known for. "It's something we're behind on," Cheng says. "I hope we can make video work for us this year."

Early on, Wirecutter guides were driven by the editorial team's search for solutions to their own tech problems. Gut instinct still plays a role, but so do things like search data, as well as a database filled with seasonal trends.

Some of those trends are straightforward. Interest in iPhone cases and accessories spikes every fall, for example, when Apple drops the latest iteration of its flagship product. Some are less obvious. Interest in emergency preparedness kits, for one, spikes in late summer.

"Sometimes we see things come up in [search] lists that we just don't think is a good product category," says Cheng, recalling a craze in 2017 for air fryers. "Occasionally, we'll do the [guide] and say, 'This is not a good product.'"

For many commerce publishers, there's incentive to cover product categories that yield high sales commissions. But Cheng understands that building a reputation as a true resource requires ignoring immediate incentives sometimes, which is why Wirecutter recently published a guide on the best toilet paper. For the record: Wirecutter recommends Cottonelle Ultra ComfortCare.

*- Max Willens*

## GETTING CONTROL

**Gayle Noah is a new type of marketer — focused just as much on making sure L'Oréal's ad dollars are spent the right way as on what's going to be the next big media plan.**

Noah is L'Oréal's media director in the U.K. and Ireland, charged with policing transparency to ensure media accountability. Noah and her team act more like internal consultants to L'Oréal's marketers, advising them on how best to spend budgets and what technologies to use.

In her first five years at L'Oréal, Noah engineered most of the changes to the company's contracts, agency relationships and media reviews by herself. It was only in 2016 that two more media experts joined her team, as the advertiser committed to producing smaller, cheaper campaigns more often.

"We still need our marketers to focus on audience, message and placement," Noah says. But the emphasis is on "having the right creative for the right platform by being sensitive to how people use their different devices."

Noah worked at Mindshare from 1999 to 2004. Noah has a "great ability to be across the full scope of L'Oréal's media spend and works diligently to ensure the media activity is right for each and every brand," says Ailsa Buckley, gm at the advertiser's agency Wavemaker.

It hasn't always been smooth sailing for Noah as a media director at L'Oréal. The advertiser buys media on an industrial scale, after all. But she doesn't regret the move. "I decided to go brand-side, as I wanted to be able to make a difference from within a business," she says, "and as a specialist, I feel I can add tangible value to [L'Oréal's] brands."

*- Seb Joseph*

## WINNING THE INBOX

**Rachel Van Dongen knows what makes Beltway people tick.** The Washington native started covering politics, taxes and Congress as a reporter in 1996. That experience was the basis of what became The Washington Post's first PowerPost newsletter, which she's edited for three years. The newsletter routinely runs more than 3,000 words apiece, offering a self-contained product that makes the Post a habit — a key consideration for modern publishers. Instead of just content delivery vehicles, publishers now treat newsletters as standalone editorial products that deserve experienced, thoughtful stewardship. Publishers and advertisers are focusing more on email because it's a channel with few middlemen where it's easy to target specific messages to specific audiences.

"They're not meant to be waypoints," Van Dongen says of the newsletters. "These are really reinvented, 3.0 newsletters for the digital age."

Since August, PowerPost, which now has a staff of 14 people, has spawned three more newsletters and plans to add another three, applying the format to other power centers, including technology and finance.

The newsletters have resonated with their core audience — all four rank among the Post's top 15 most opened newsletters out of more than 100 total — and advertisers have responded as well. While newsletters were once thrown in as sweeteners in large digital advertising buys, each of the PowerPost newsletters is sold as a standalone purchase. That's in part because advertisers are more interested in reaching a specific audience.

Van Dongen says she views the PowerPost open rates as an important signal of their success. But she also looks at how each one performs outside the inbox. Each PowerPost email is posted on the Post's website as a standalone story, where it can be just as popular, if not more. The Daily 202 routinely rises to the top of Google News three or four times per week, and PowerPost newsletters routinely rank among the Post's most shared stories every day, she says. They are so well-read that the site's editors regularly put them on the Post's homepage.

The Post wouldn't give hard data, but says these newsletters also help drive and retain subscriptions. Van Dongen says she regularly gets emails from readers saying they renew their subscriptions to the Post solely for access to content PowerPost points them to. Others testify that PowerPost was the hook that got them to subscribe to the Post.

The next step is to see if PowerPost's success can be replicated with other professional classes. The Finance 202 and The Technology 202, aimed at Wall Street and Silicon Valley, respectively, are meant to build the Post's profile among insiders in those worlds.

Figuring out what those readers want will take experimenting. "The key to sustaining these products is making them specialized," Van Dongen says. *- MW*

## VICTORY CIGAR

**To survive in an age of distributed media, publishers either need to achieve scale or own a niche.** For an example of the latter, look no further than M. Shanken Communications. Founder Marvin Shanken built a profitable business around publications that reflect his own passions — Wine Spectator, Cigar Aficionado, Whisky Advocate — and are authorities in their respective categories. Wine Spectator, the largest paid wine magazine in the world, boasts a circulation of 3 million; Cigar Aficionado, which recently turned 25, has nabbed interviews with everyone from Fidel Castro to Michael Jordan. WineRatings+, a mobile app that costs $2.99 per month, has been downloaded over 1.5 million times.

Now, it falls to his daughter, Jessica Shanken, who runs digital operations as vp of business development, to get the brands in front of a younger audience while continuing to serve their long-standing subscribers. "We don't want to abandon the people who love us," Jessica Shanken says. "Our magazines lend themselves really well to things like Facebook and Instagram. But we want to use our digital products so people can find our brands and begin to form a relationship."

Some of that work involves creating more content. But one of her biggest responsibilities rests with finding new ways to leverage the hundreds of thousands of wine, whiskey and cigar reviews the company has produced over the years.

A redesign of Wine Spectator's website, slated to debut later this year, will foreground those reviews more than the current version, which is stocked with news coverage that's more useful to the wine industry than wine drinkers. Many publishers are looking to grow digital subscriptions, and M. Shanken Communications appears well-positioned to make them work.

"The economics of subscriptions in a multiplatform world are actually more favorable than just print," says Don Nicholas, CEO of magazine consultancy Mequoda Systems. "And the single biggest thing you can do as a specialty publisher to put luck in your favor is to launch a premium library."

This past year, M. Shanken Communications' 15-person mobile development team has been launching mobile apps to grow brand awareness. X Values, the publisher's first millennial-targeted digital product, gives users small, seasonal lists of affordable wines that are widely available across the country. The Restaurant Awards app taps into a 4,000-entry database of restaurants around the world that have notable wine lists.

The team has also toyed with less serious ways to build awareness: It launched a package of whiskey-themed iMessage stickers, which costs 99 cents, in May 2017.

The company also has to figure out new content strategies for video. Right now, most of the company's video lives on its own sites and consists mostly of in-depth interviews with winemakers and distillers.

But Jessica Shanken is trying to find franchises that will travel easily across social platforms, such as videos that show how to cut a cigar or explain the difference between whisky and whiskey. (It mostly has to do with where the hooch is distilled, in case you were wondering.)

The trick is to balance growing awareness with staying true to the publications' existing fans. "You don't want to be everything to everyone," says Shanken, "because then you end up being nothing."

*- MW*

## MEMBERS ONLY

**In 1998, Slate erected a paywall and began charging readers $20 a month for a subscription (complete with a complimentary umbrella).** But after peaking at 20,000 subscribers, the paid model was abandoned in favor of chasing a wider audience and offering the site's content for free.

Fast forward 20 years, and the online magazine is approaching its latest paid-access program, Slate Plus, a little differently. Instead of a hard paywall, Plus offers readers access to additional content and perks for a fee of $49 a year, and it has attracted over 40,000 paying members.

Heading the initiative is Gabriel Roth, whom Slate hired in 2015 and tasked with creating content people would pay for beyond the site's core output. Popular features include extended, ad-free versions of Slate podcasts, early access to Slate features, a lighter ad experience and extra content from its advice column, "Dear Prudence."

As publishers begin to recognize the risks of betting their futures on the fickle Facebook algorithm or the latest messaging or news app, a growing number are turning instead to subscriptions, membership programs, newsletters, podcasts and other means to form more direct and unfiltered connections with their audiences.

Roth's role is indicative of this trend, but he says the benefits of Slate Plus reach beyond just distribution and a couple million dollars in extra revenue. Its growth has led Slate to reorient its operation around memberships more generally, largely as a way to serve its audience without the distracting influence of middlemen such as Facebook. "Evolving out of Slate Plus has been focus on loyalty and on loyal readers more broadly," Roth says. "It's forced people across the magazine to really think about that core audience."

In 2014, Slate, like most other publishers, was posting much of its content to social media and optimizing it for platforms to drive as much traffic as possible. That was the way to adapt and survive those days. But Slate recognized that in making content that appeals to a wide audience, you can lose sight of your identity.

Now, the membership program is helping inform Slate's content for a world in which platforms such as Facebook are less of a priority. That's meant basic changes like tracking engagement metrics over pageviews and visits, but also tweaking the types of products and content Slate produces.

When it's developing new products such as email newsletters and podcasts, it's now doing so with the ultimate goal of converting audience into Slate Plus members.

"Once [the membership program] works, you have a core audience that really cares about what you do, and you have something at the end of the funnel," Roth says.

Ultimately, even if readers and listeners don't end up handing over their credit card information, they're probably more engaged with the Slate brand than they were previously. *- Jack Marshall*

## KEEPING IT PERSONAL

**For many people, the word "data" makes their eyes glaze over.** As the chief data protector at Sky Group, Nina Barakzai considers it part of her job to communicate why it matters.

"The best way to explain privacy to folks who don't do privacy every day is to think of situations where they might handle personal data in their working or family lives," she says.

With the General Data Protection Regulation looming and the amount of data that companies handle exploding, data protection officers like Barakzai are becoming a new key role at media companies.

Barakzai heads a team of seven in the U.K. and oversees privacy teams in Germany, Italy and Ireland in looking after the data of Sky's 23 million European subscribers. She uses her in-depth understanding of the law and knowledge of the company to provide legal advice and prepare the company for the coming GDPR. As in her former positions at companies including BT, Reuters and British Gas, having the support from the company to make privacy part of the business, not an add-on, has been crucial.

Customer information can easily become out of date or inaccurate. Sky customers often forget to check the privacy settings on their phones when installing apps or forget to let their cable providers know when they move.

Data protection wasn't the initial goal. Barakzai's 30-year career has been a varied one. After graduating with a degree in Arabic and economics and with a keen interest in business, she moved to BT to qualify as an accountant, along the way realizing that by doing a law degree concurrently she'd be exempt from certain exams in the accountancy stream. After a stint in the news industry at Thomson Reuters, Barakzai deepened her legal qualifications by negotiating oil and gas contracts for British Gas, then setting up the compliance team at what is now Virgin Media, before heading back to the media industry as group head of data protection at Sky in 2013.

Not every company needs a DPO to comply with the GDPR. Companies need to hire a DPO if their core activities require regular and systematic monitoring of data subjects, like online behavior tracking, on a large scale. And with a DPO costing a six-figure salary, it's something companies would like to avoid having if they can.

"It's fairly clear that most broadcasters and newspapers would probably qualify due to scale, but it's much less clear-cut for magazine publishers," says Paul Lomax, an independent publishing consultant and former chief technology officer at Dennis Publishing.

People in Barakzai's role also face the tricky business of navigating regulatory obligations that can be in conflict with or have a costly impact on the business. For Barakzai, who just won the Legal 500 UK Award for Data Protection Individual of the Year, it helps to have a genuine interest in her work.

"I find privacy really absorbing," she says. "I guess that curiosity is what keeps me engaged." *- Lucinda Southern*

# FIGHTING THE MAN

Shadow organizations are creating change.

***BY SHAREEN PATHAK***

**A few days after Donald Trump won the U.S. presidential election, a strange topic captured part of the national imagination: programmatic ad inventory.**

It happened thanks to Sleeping Giants, an anonymous Twitter account that first took aim at finance company SoFi, which was at the time buying ads on Breitbart News. The organizers behind the account took a screenshot, then tweeted it to SoFi. Thanks to the black box of programmatic — and the willful ignorance on the part of brands about where their ads appear — SoFi had no idea it was running ads on the site, which routinely publishes sexist, racist and bigoted stories.

Since then, 3,874 brands (and counting) have pulled ads from Breitbart, including some of the world's biggest brands, like Kellogg's, HP and Uber.

Sleeping Giants now has 137,000 followers, and legions of followers and fans have made it a kind of game to spot companies running ads on Breitbart, Infowars and others of their ilk. It has offshoots outside the U.S., including the EU, the U.K. and Australia.

Similar movements include Grab Your Wallet, started by Shannon Coulter and Sue Atencio, which not only asks consumers to boycott companies that support Trump, but also spots ads that appear on Fox and asks consumers to literally vote with their wallets. And there seem to be more springing up every day — shadow organizations that in the absence of official outlets are putting the pressure on everyone, from big corporate brands to advertising agencies, with one message: Time's up.

**Corporations as conscience**

The way these movements have sprung up have varied. In some cases, like Sleeping Giants, they happened in a vacuum. "[Companies] have always made the rules," says one of the owners of the accounts. "We have no control as consumers. Or, we didn't. And we quickly realized that we have no control, but we can demand the change. They won't make the change unless someone knows about it."

Perhaps there is no bigger indication of this happening than the anti-National Rifle Association backlash following the Florida school shooting in mid-February. As the #NeverAgain movement took hold on Twitter, so did another one: #BoycottNRA. In the first 24 hours, eight companies said they would stop supporting NRA membership. Over the first three days alone, companies from First National Bank to Delta Air Lines said they would stop supporting the NRA, including pulling discounts NRA members received at their companies. Even in the case of companies like Wyndham Hotels, which cut ties with the NRA in late 2017, brands have been forced to make statements saying they had previously ended their relationship with the group.

The fact that brands are even making statements marks a major shift in how they deal with a massive cultural shift. Even just about a year ago, studies like one done by the 4A's and SSRS found that more than half of consumers didn't like a brand to get political. Now, depending on which study you read, more than half want brands to do so — and expect them to.

Companies are filling a gap that has been created because official institutions aren't able to do anything. In the absence of institutions, corporations and private individuals have to step up.

**Whither culture**

And it's not just about public-facing activities. Accompanying a new expectation that companies need to not just be thinking about balance sheets, but about social good, is a lower tolerance for many other practices that for years were swept under the rug.

Last fall, in the tsunami after the Harvey Weinstein scandal and the lack of a similar reckoning in the marketing industry sprung up Diet Madison Avenue, a private Instagram and Snapchat account that has focused on anonymously naming and shaming executives within the agency world. The collective — it's run, according to an Ad Age interview, by 17 people in the marketing industry — focuses on asking people to send it names of those who have misused power and systematically sexually harassed and abused people. Then, it recirculates that information, often through lurid images and snarky commentary.

When Ted Royer, the chief creative officer at Droga5, was fired earlier in the year, many credited DMA for saying what many in the industry allegedly already knew.

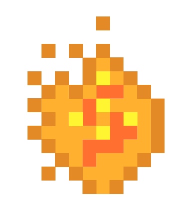
But the rise of DMA, as well as other anonymous forums like Fishbowl, has opened up the conversation to be one that goes beyond resistance and asks what remains of the industry once its institutions have been shown to be crumbling around it.

Agencies have for years sold themselves on "culture." Sure, there are technologies and "proprietary methods," but when a client hires an ad agency, he's really focused on the culture he's buying. That culture is what will determine what kind of idea or concepts are pitched, how they come to life and what happens next.

"What we've found is that clients buy culture," says one longtime agency search consultant. "And guess what, that culture is driven by the strength of the leadership team and creative team." But what happens when it turns out the culture is, in fact, bad? As stories of harassment — as well as racism, sexism and more — continue to emerge, driven by shadow organizations like DMA, the very USP of an agency is at stake.

"Agencies think they're selling capabilities, they're selling state-of-the-art innovative approaches," says another search consultant. "They're selling themselves, personally. And the fact is that agency culture has gotten nasty."

It's a tough line to walk. Resistance is en vogue, but it's not permanent. Ultimately, the resisters hope they'll stop being necessary. "I wish this was ending tomorrow," says the organizer behind Sleeping Giants. "I feel a sense of responsibility to this, and there's been something great come out of it, but I wish simply that we no longer had to exist. Plus, if they finally unmask me, it'll be the biggest letdown in history."



# BEAUTY MARK

Tarang Amin, CEO at e.l.f. Beauty, tells Digiday why fast beauty is the way of the future. ***BY JESSICA SCHIFFER***

**E.l.f. started as an e-commerce brand. Why build an offline retail presence?**
We've simply followed our consumer. We appeal to these young, diverse beauty enthusiasts who learn about things online, but also like the experience in stores and the convenience that they can provide. Having our own stores is the best way to bring the entire brand proposition to life.

**What criteria do you look for when selecting outside retailers?**
Our beauty enthusiasts love Ulta, which is why we're rolling into all of their stores this year. Beyond the consumer, we look at what the strategic importance of beauty is to a retailer's overall strategy. Walmart and Target have always looked at beauty as very important to their future. That makes them a much better partner for us than someone who's still trying to figure out what role beauty plays in their business.

**Your products sell for $6 or less, but you still attract prestige beauty shoppers. What's the secret?**
We've honed our supply chain to be able to deliver on quality, cost and speed so that we can constantly innovate. We co-locate our labs with our main facilities, for example, so that we can formulate and make design choices quickly and have prototypes within a week. But it also comes back to our consumer: She doesn't define the world as mass or prestige. She's just as likely to have something from us as she does from Chanel.

**Do you think all beauty brands today need to rely on that same fast-cycle innovation?**
I don't think it's an option anymore. The consumer knows what she wants, and she wants it now, so even if you're a legacy company, it's important to move fast to meet consumer needs. I have a 23-year-old daughter, and things are so different for her than when I was 23. If she wants a ride, she taps her phone; if she wants something to eat, she taps her phone — her entire concept of time is fundamentally different. We recognize that and know that it doesn't have to result in a trade-off between high quality and accessibility. You used to have to pick between good, fast and cheap, and we've managed to do all three.

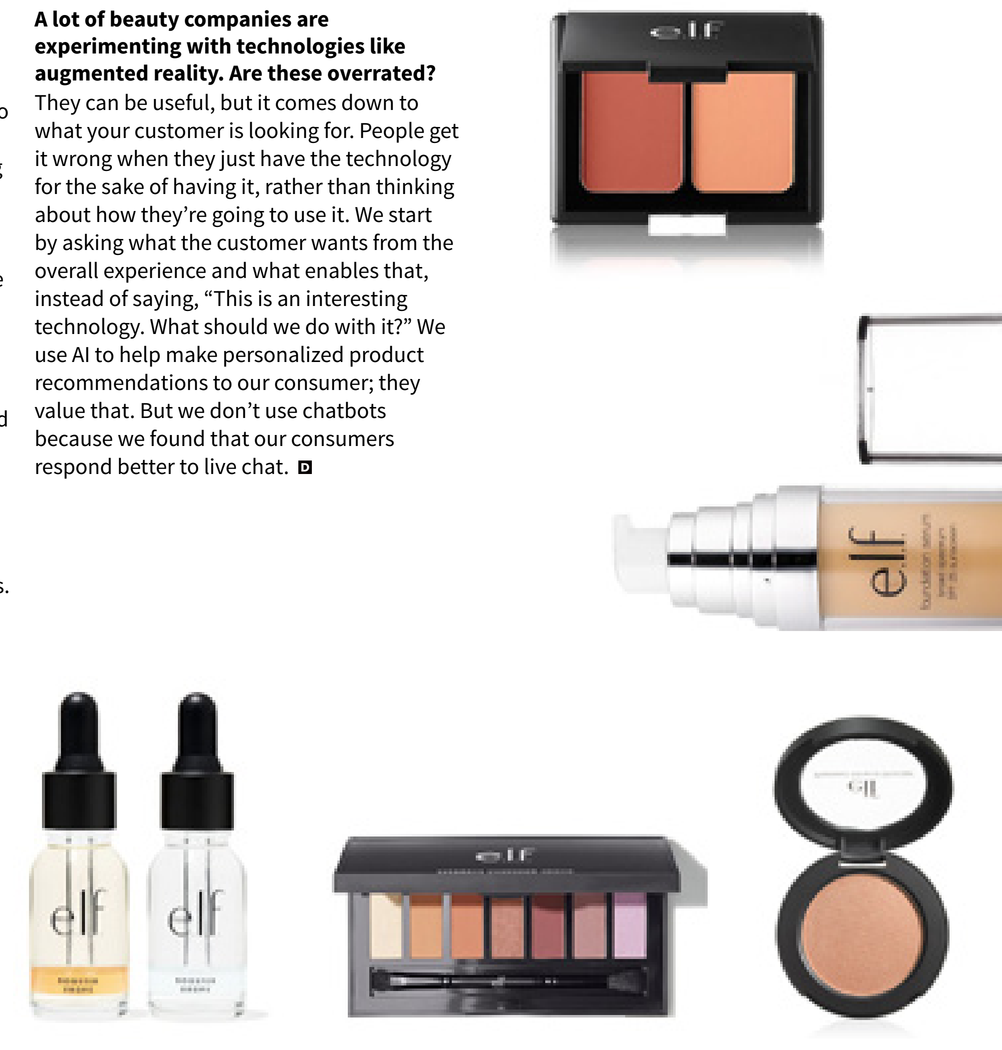
**That must lead to some mistakes. How do you handle failure?**
We embrace it. We don't punish people for getting something wrong. If we put something online and consumers don't like it, we view that as the community helping us to build a better product. Getting those fast insights is vital. If we launch something and it isn't quite right, we will send a handwritten note to every single person who reviewed it with a reformulated product. Customers feel that they are part of building something special and that we're listening.

**How do you promote innovation?**
We have the No. 1 mass cosmetics site in the world, so we don't have to hesitate as much with decisions. We can try things out, put them online and see how consumers react. Testing products amongst employees and through our own channels allows us to avoid being risk-averse.

**Outside of consumers, where do you look for new product ideas?**
We look to our stores, where most of the associates are makeup enthusiasts or artists. We get great insights from them about what they're seeing in-store, as well as what they're looking for themselves. We're also constantly scanning the world — our teams make trips to core beauty markets like Korea.

> "The consumer knows what she wants, and she wants it now."

**A lot of beauty companies are experimenting with technologies like augmented reality. Are these overrated?**
They can be useful, but it comes down to what your customer is looking for. People get it wrong when they just have the technology for the sake of having it, rather than thinking about how they're going to use it. We start by asking what the customer wants from the overall experience and what enables that, instead of saying, "This is an interesting technology. What should we do with it?" We use AI to help make personalized product recommendations to our consumer; they value that. But we don't use chatbots because we found that our consumers respond better to live chat.



# THE DRUGSTORE SAVIOR

CVS CMO Norman de Greve is rethinking transparency. ***BY SHAREEN PATHAK***

**Those looking for an explanation of what a chief marketing officer really does would have been hard-pressed to find it at the Association of National Advertisers' annual Masters of Marketing conference in 2016.**

CMO after CMO took the stage, talking about everything, it seemed, but their own companies: their agencies, their tech vendors, the growing power of Facebook and Google. Being a CMO, it seemed, meant being just that — a representative for the entire marketing industry.

Until Norman de Greve took the stage.

The CMO at CVS Health told the story of losing his father to lung cancer — a decision that played heavily into him accepting the job right before the company decided to quit selling cigarettes and rebrand as a "health care company."

It was a talk that attendees ranked as the year's best — not just because it was emotional, but because, as one attendee later remarked, at least he was talking about his own brand. Amid all of the industry talk around viewability, metrics, platforms and more, de Greve's central focus is much simpler: the customer. It seems trite — of course, brands should care about the customer! — but to the CMO at CVS Health, it's an important distinction and a way not to lose focus.

"My job is not to be the evangelist for the story of marketing," says de Greve, 48, who joined CVS two and a half years ago from DigitasLBi. "A lot of what's happening in the marketing world is about driving the efficiency of advertising, viewability or fraud. But why can't you just start with empathy for the customer and the thing they really need?"

**Taking the broad view**

De Greve is championing transparency in marketing in a way unlike any of the industry's marketing chiefs are doing — not by positioning himself as the savior of the industry, but as the savior of something bigger: health care in America.

That means offering a low-cost epinephrine auto-injector in the middle of the ongoing EpiPen scandal that has led to outrageous price increases for the brand-name EpiPen. In January, CVS decided to make that offering, with an additional bit of smart marketing that let customers qualify for a discount — $100 off the $110 sticker — at the cash register so they could literally see it in front of their eyes. (Most drug discounts happen at a later reimbursement stage.)

There are also smaller moves. In mid-January, CVS said it would no longer "materially" change imagery it creates for the beauty lineup in its stores — committing to not alter people's skin colors, eye colors, shapes and sizes. Part of this was the introduction of the CVS Beauty Mark, a watermark that will appear on authentic and unretouched photos in the store.

De Greve points to statistics that illustrate why Beauty Mark was a priority: Two-thirds of women think the media sets unrealistic standards for beauty; 80 percent of them feel worse after seeing a beauty ad.

"This is the greatest example of how we have to follow the consumer," de Greve says. "If you look at where the consumer is going, it's authenticity. The top five celebrities for young people are YouTube stars."

It's a convenient and lucrative business for CVS to make a mark in. Beauty is an $84 billion juggernaut, according to Statista. But its growth over the next decade is not necessarily in selling more concealers. It's in marketing a concept of beauty that is inextricably tied to wellness, also known in marketing circles as the beauty-belly connection. A Rodale consumer research study late last year found that wellness, of which beauty is a subset, not a sibling, will be a trillion-dollar industry by 2020. "Health and wellness" is broadly characterized as including makeup, supplements, anti-aging products and nutrition. And it has immense cultural connotations as authenticity, inner beauty and the "whole you" become much more important to consumers than something that makes blemishes less noticeable.

It's a phenomenon that's resulted in a massive shift both in the prestige space — witness Goop's newest nutritional supplement "Why Am I So Effing Tired?" — but also has incredible effects in the drugstore aisle. That's where CVS comes in. The company is on a mission to tie makeup with health with wellness with medicine, bringing together some of the bigger cultural forces that it hopes will make the difference.

"There's a lot of stuff in beauty that feels disconnected," de Greve says. "What if we drive more transparency there?"

**Finding purpose**

De Greve is the first of his family to be born in the United States. His parents, who are from the Netherlands, moved to the U.S. in the 1960s. Growing up in Massachusetts, he says the first thing he learned about himself was that he was an outsider. "I liked to observe behavior," he recalls of his childhood. Not having necessary guidance on American culture or customs from his family gave him a vein of interest.

He dabbled in a lot of industries: In college, he vacillated between doing architecture or physics. After, he went into finance, working at Bain Capital. ("That was the way to make it in America," he recalls thinking.)

He landed at DigitasLBi in 2001 and went through every agency acronym, including svp, vp/gd and evp before becoming president at the Publicis-owned agency's Boston and Detroit offices.

"When you get into marketing, you realize a whole function of account planning," he says. "I sort of felt like being a psychologist for businesses."

De Greve joined CVS as the company began to roll out its plan to stop selling tobacco and cigarettes. In September 2014, the company became the first national retail pharmacy chain to stop selling the product. The reason, at least the one it gave, was that it conflicted with its ultimate mission, which was to be a health care company.

If CVS was going to be a health care company, it needed to stop selling tobacco. De Greve was sold. He says he was brought in because of the "purpose-driven" nature of the company and its potential impact. CVS has 10,000 locations — and big ambitions. "When this company does something, it affects health care in America," he says.

For de Greve, whose father died when he was 7 years old, it was a personal story. And it was made more personal by the fact that he now also has a 7-year-old son. "The purpose was a way to unite functions and entities," he says, "to give everyone the same way to think and behave. Tobacco was the symbol of that."

He's talking internally — CVS was making moves to become a real player in health care, a move that will get a boost in the arm thanks to its proposed acquisition of health insurer Aetna for $69 billion.

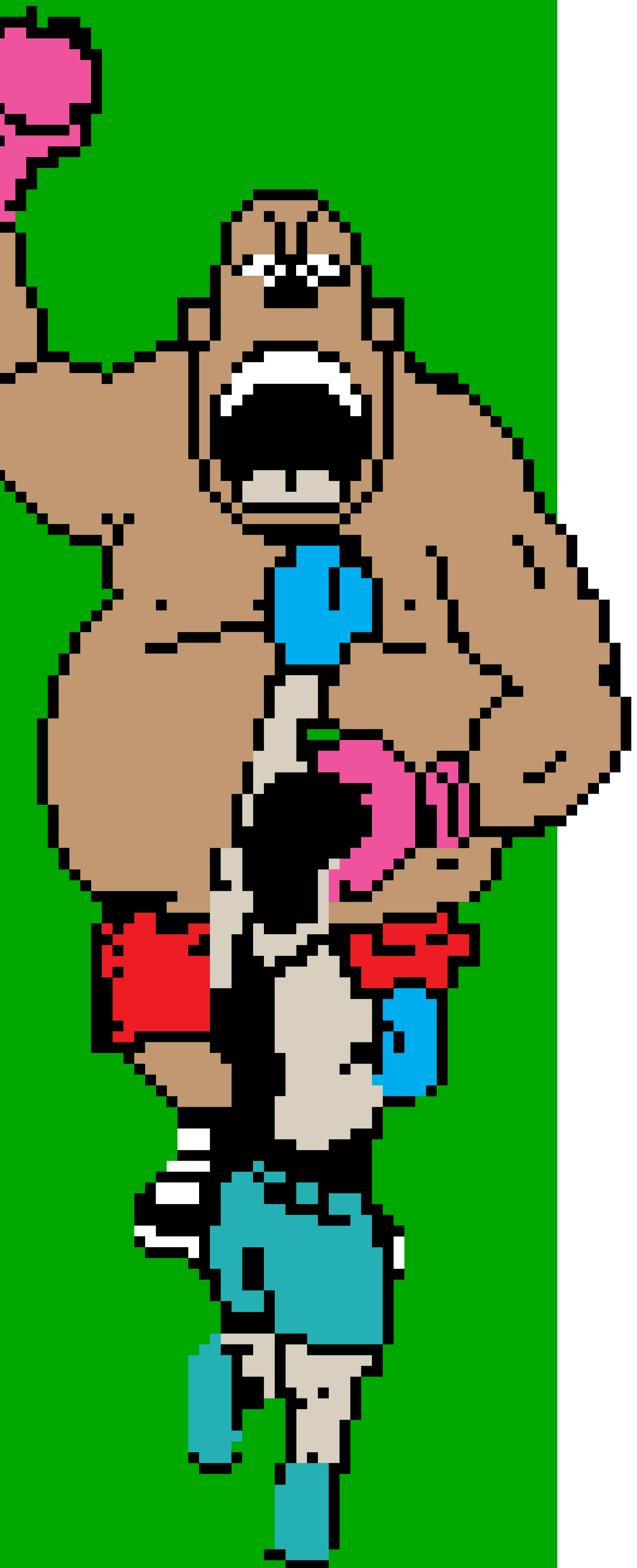
But first, the studying: Health care is a complex industry, with myriad regulations. For de Greve, who had been at DigitasLBi for over a decade, he felt like he had built shortcuts in his head. But once he got to CVS, it was a different ballgame. He pored over health care documents and news at night. "It took time to soak in."

It did. Within a year of CVS quitting tobacco, there was a 1 percent reduction in cigarette sales in all states where CVS had a 15 percent or greater market share. And a study by the CVS Health Research Institute found that the average smoker in those states was buying fewer cigarettes as well.

There have also been other moves: De Greve has pushed to bring healthier options, from almond milk to yogurt, into CVS stores. The company no longer carries sunscreen with a sun protection factor of under 15. "Lots of people are doing altruistic things, but I know that for many, marketing feels like gimmicks and not purpose-driven action," de Greve says. "We have to connect that mission with actually doing something different."

That's what brings us to the CMOs. For de Greve, the biggest challenges are de rigueur: Marketing is a difficult industry, there are many options, the TV world is petering out; it's unclear what will happen once TV does finally become less effective. But de Greve is insistent that his job not be conflated with "running advertising."

The job is much simpler: "I'm here to represent the voice of the customer."



# THE NEW CONTENDERS

Consulting firms are methodically putting in place the pieces to take part of the ad agency business.

***BY SEB JOSEPH***

**Consulting firms are ready to be taken seriously in the advertising game, having been dismissed by agency bosses. Marketing shifted from a cost center to a growth lever at many big brands in 2017, and consequently, a nontransparent, complex agency model was scrutinized by many of those same businesses.** For consulting firms that have spent recent years understanding blockchain, martech and audience data, the shift couldn't be more timely.

Marketers and agencies agree that independent advice and verification is what's missing, but none were willing to commit that this nirvana is achievable. Beneath the technology, organizational charts and audit trails, consulting firms believe they can be that trusted partner for brands. Regardless of the conflicts of interest around their bulging business models, those companies want to show advertisers how they have their best interests at heart.

It's little wonder then why Accenture Interactive is confident for what 2018 has in store. Having launched its fledgling media business last year, which effectively sells programmatic as a managed service by helping advertisers set up their own trading desks, the business is focused on unpicking every part of the supply chain. It is working with independent digital agency Jellyfish to learn more about how it might help brands looking to take the management of programmatic trading in-house.

But industry observers wonder how easy it will be for Accenture Interactive to jump into media buying: They question how conflicts within the business can continue to go unchallenged, when it is trying to influence marketers on their choice of ad tech while also competing for budgets with ad tech propositions of its own. Joydeep Bhattacharya, Accenture Interactive's managing director for the U.K. and Ireland, says the issue will be addressed later, but now is not the time.

Deloitte Digital's plan for media budgets is far clearer than what its peers have revealed to date. The consulting firm does media strategy and planning in-house and then uses an application programming interface to access inventory reserved by a consortium of agencies based on future forecasts. Using the consortium ensures Deloitte Digital the "best-priced, most effective media on a total objective basis," says CEO Andy Main. Unlike other offerings, the consulting firm focuses its media buying on clients' owned properties such as a branded site or a social media page. This is the big secret the world is just waking up to, Main adds. "You have heard a lot from us on owned media, for these reasons — it is easier to keep and grow a customer you have versus getting a new one, and thus, owned media is a great place to focus on to not only spend your marketing money wisely, but also get customers for life," he says.

> "The threat is real"

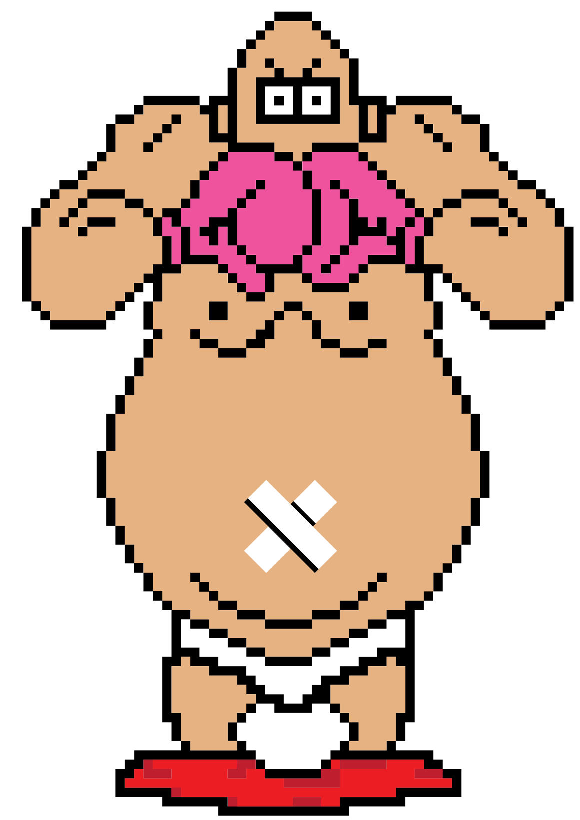
As its rivals try to buy more media, PwC has its sights set squarely on auditing media and data. The consulting firm wants to influence the marketing choices of the world's biggest companies, not perform the tasks. It's why those PwC executives closest to marketers are excited at the opportunity spawned from the transparency debate.

As marketers attempt to get closer to both media and data, PwC wants to be the business that helps them decide which players to invest in, with its media insight and assurance team exerting more influence over how budgets are spent. Brands, agencies and publishers can't afford to just be responsible for how they collect and process data under the General Data Protection Regulation — they need to be able to vouch for all their partners, which is where an auditor like PwC comes in.

If IBM iX gets closer to marketing budgets in 2018, then it will be thanks to blockchain. The information technology firm is "probably" the world's largest blockchain builder, claims Babs Rangaiah, global partner for marketing solutions at IBM iX, and that expertise will prove key in the coming months as the business attempts to use the transparency crisis engulfing media to its advantage.

IBM iX is working with a small group of advertisers, including Unilever, on testing the technology to curb fraudulent traffic and unearth hidden fees on both the media and data they buy. It's too early to reveal the results of those tests, Rangaiah says. Observers have questioned whether the technology can yield the processing power needed to match ad tech platforms that are handling millions of requests per second. It's a question that's come up "several times" during the technology's development, admits Rangaiah, who says that over time it wouldn't be an issue.

"The solution we're working on is essentially like having an operating system with apps on top that allow you to solve different aspects of the speed it takes to buy and process millions and billions of transactions across media."



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# RICHEMONT'S CHINA OPPORTUNITY

Richemont thinks it's found the formula for cracking the elusive Chinese upscale fashion market. ***BY HILARY MILNES***

**Richemont executive Johann Rupert calls it "the great China opportunity."**

For the first time, the French conglomerate is exploring e-commerce capabilities in the region. Today, the luxury-company-finally-embraces-the-internet story is a tale as old as, well, the internet. But the old guard is gruelingly slow to wake up to the potential of digital sales, and in China, a perfect storm of opportunity has kicked Richemont's higher-ups into high gear.

And for Richemont, which owns luxury brands like Cartier, Piaget and Van Cleef & Arpels, launching online operations in China is a chance to rebuild.

After a period of overselling through a network of distribution partners in China during a different time when the market was "booming," according to Rupert, excess inventory flooded the gray market. Luxury watches and jewelry sold at discounts of up to 65 percent. Richemont has spent the past three years buying back all the inventory being sold through third-party channels, in some cases destroying product in order to start over with a clean slate.

"[For years], corruption in China was so rife. Obviously, we had to fight this," says Rupert. "Today, China has normalized. We plan to lift domestic consumption. We see growth across all luxury goods."

Richemont is exploring options around moving more inventory online through partners' luxury-oriented portals, like Tmall's Luxury Pavilion and JD.com's Toplife. The strategic shift represents a retreat from traditional wholesale retailers and a move toward holistic, cross-channel capabilities.

"We've tried to manage [wholesale, retail and e-commerce channels] separately. This is the model of the past," Richemont CFO Burkhart Grund told investors on a recent call. "The customer doesn't see wholesale, retail or e-commerce as separate channels. For them, it is all part of the same experience. That is the much bigger challenge the industry is facing. We believe the traditional wholesale trade, especially in watches, will over time disappear."

Starting over in China is essential today for luxury companies. The Asia-Pacific market (excluding Japan) is seeing growth in the luxury category at a pace that exceeds every other region, and the cohort of millennial luxury shoppers is responsible for a recent spike in luxury spending, according to Bain & Co. For Richemont, the Asia-Pacific market grew by 25 percent year over year in the first half of financial 2018, as reported in November. Overall, it's responsible for 39 percent of all sales.

> "WeChat is a major opportunity."

Reintroducing Richemont's portfolio of luxury brands requires a new strategy. According to Alibaba research, China's luxury shoppers are young, between the ages of 20 and 34, and their lives revolve around their mobile devices. EMarketer predicts that by the end of 2018, 75 percent of e-commerce sales in China, worth over $1 trillion, will be transacted via mobile.

"If companies were to fully understand how much time this customer is spending on their phone and how much time on their phone is spent shopping, they would be running in this direction," says James Rogers, the managing director of CR Retail, a retail consultancy firm based in Shanghai. "It's a way of life."

In 2017, Richemont made its first official move when Cartier launched e-commerce operations on Chinese mobile platform WeChat, which counts 1 billion active users, and Rupert has told investors it's considering other ways it can ramp up e-commerce efforts in China.

"WeChat is a major opportunity for a brand like Cartier," says Liz Flora, the Asia-Pacific research analyst at business intelligence firm L2. "Most brands use it for one-time campaign launches or customer engagement. To launch a store shows a deeper understanding of where customers spend time and money in China today."

What's critical for brands to understand about the "China opportunity," says Flora, is the balance between control and key partnerships. Companies like Alibaba and JD.com are positioning themselves as resources around e-commerce logistics, manufacturing, deliveries and marketing for brands entering the market. WeChat, on the other hand, gives a brand total control to present itself to customers, handle orders and build up customer engagement.

"Richemont, with Cartier, has an incredible resource in front of it," says Rogers. "It won't take long for the company to see this as a road map for the rest of its way forward in China. And this time, it might actually be ahead of the curve." ◘

# THE NEXT BILLION

Marketers are finding their way on WeChat. ***BY YUYU CHEN***

**Advertisers wanting to reach social media users on China have few options, with platforms like Facebook and Snapchat being blocked there. That's made Tencent-owned WeChat, with around 980 million monthly active users around the world, a must-have platform for brands trying to woo Chinese consumers.**

"Ad demand for WeChat is definitely increasing. It was already popular in China two years ago, but it took some time for Western advertisers to understand that WeChat is not a Facebook copycat — it's really something on its own," says Thomas Graziani, co-founder of WalktheChat, a marketing agency that specializes in WeChat. "Tencent has also done some international PR to build WeChat's brand awareness, which also helps drive the ad demand."

Similar to social platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, WeChat lets companies run both paid and unpaid promotions on the platform. Paid advertising — which is only available on the Chinese WeChat app, not the international version — includes videos and images on Moments (WeChat's news feed) and banners on Official Accounts.

"WeChat has lately increased ad formats because Tencent's ad revenue is pretty low compared to the company's overall revenue," says Liz Flora, editor of Asia-Pacific research for research firm L2. "Tencent is trying to ramp up advertising, as it's a one-on-one social platform instead of an open platform, meaning that it's hard for things to go viral on WeChat without any paid media."

Here are the major ways brands use WeChat to promote their products and services.

**Advertising on Moments**

WeChat is known as a closed system, where, similar to Snapchat, only verified friends can see an individual's updates on Moments — friends of friends can't see the person's posts. WeChat served its first ad on Moments in 2015, and brands including L'Oréal, Dior, BMW and KFC have tested this ad format. Moment ads can take the form of still images with captions, videos and "card ads" that direct viewers to a full-screen ad or a product page, according to agency executives. Advertisers can purchase Moment ads in an automated way on a CPM basis, which usually ranges from 80 to 150 yuan (around $13 to $24) CPM, according to Graziani. (Snapchat's programmatic ads range from $3 to $8 CPM, by comparison.)

"Moment ads are the most popular format on WeChat because it looks more natural than banners in the WeChat ecosystem," says Graziani. "An increasing number of our clients like to use Moment ads to target Chinese tourists who travel abroad."

**Influencer marketing with popular accounts**

In addition to Moment ads, brands can work with influencers (known as key opinion leaders, or KOLs, in China) on WeChat by sponsoring long-term content in an influencer's WeChat account or buying banners at the bottom of an influencer's post. While sponsored posts are usually direct buys from influencers, advertisers can buy banners that target influencer accounts on a cost-per-click or CPM basis from Tencent, says Humphrey Ho, managing director of Hylink Digital's Los Angeles operations.

"Buying banners in articles is much cheaper than working with KOLs directly. It's smart of Tencent to let advertisers target specific KOLs — a lifestyle KOL or a travel KOL, for instance — and place banners on their accounts accordingly," says Ho. "Tencent has also developed an algorithm to measure the quality of KOLs' followers, and we audit bots, so WeChat offers clients true engagement."

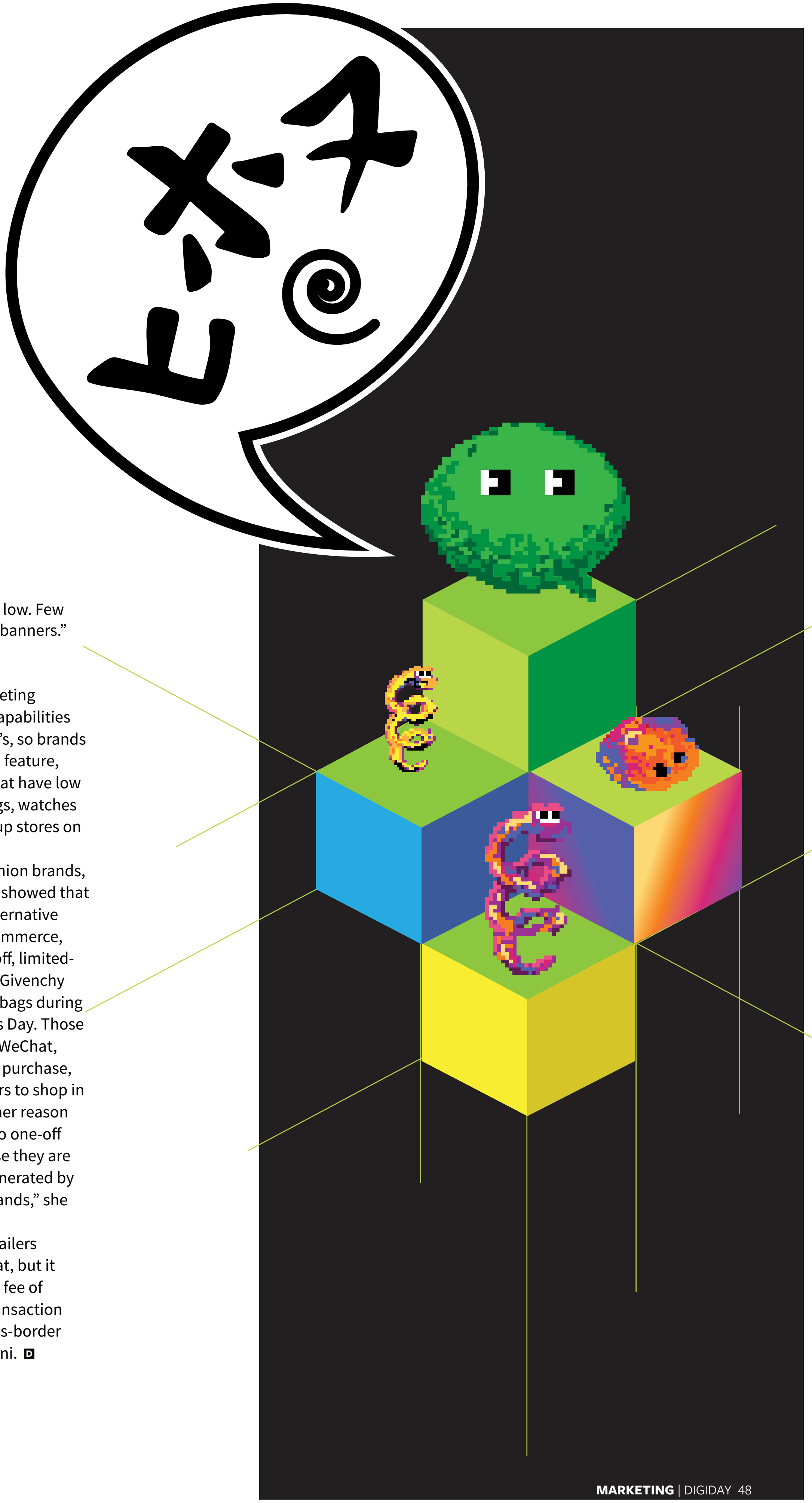
One problem with targeted banners on influencer accounts is that such targeting requires those WeChat stars to give Tencent consent, while top-tier influencers don't want to do so because they can make more money through sponsorships than banners, which are usually worth around 3 yuan (nearly 50 cents) per CPC, says Graziani. "If a brand only cares about price and impressions, banners could be the best option," he says. "The click-through rate of banners on WeChat are really low. Few WeChat users are engaged with banners."

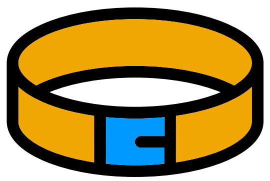
**Digital stores**

While WeChat is a popular marketing channel in China, its targeting capabilities are not as granular as Facebook's, so brands often use WeChat's e-commerce feature, too, Graziani says. Categories that have low product return rates such as bags, watches and leather goods typically set up stores on WeChat, he says.

In a survey of 89 luxury fashion brands, L2's 2017 Digital IQ Index report showed that 8 percent used WeChat as an alternative form of direct-to-consumer e-commerce, with most attempts being one-off, limited-time sales. Brands like Dior and Givenchy have done limited sales of handbags during holidays like Chinese Valentine's Day. Those bags usually sell out quickly on WeChat, so when people want to make a purchase, brands will also direct consumers to shop in store, according to Flora. "Another reason why fashion retailers typically do one-off campaigns on WeChat is because they are still testing waters, and sales generated by WeChat are still low for most brands," she says.

Tencent doesn't charge retailers to open a digital store on WeChat, but it demands a payment processing fee of 0.6 percent of each domestic transaction in China and 2 percent on a cross-border transaction, according to Graziani. ◘





# FIGHTING FAKES

Alibaba is filled with counterfeits.

***BY YUYU CHEN***

**Greg Hankerson, founder of Phoenix-based boutique furniture company Vintage Industrial, has been fighting plagiarized designs on Alibaba's platforms, especially Taobao, for the past two years.** Hankerson first got in contact with Xinghao Wang, senior manager of intellectual property protection and innovation for Alibaba, in August of 2016 when he complained that Alibaba's intellectual property protection reporting system didn't work and suggested that the media would cover his unpleasant experience on the platform.

That November, Hankerson sent Wang 404 listings for products that he believed were counterfeits and another 397 listings last March. To date, Alibaba has taken down around 20 percent of the product listings he reported, according to Hankerson.

"Wang was willing to help, but the counterfeiting situation is not getting better on the Alibaba platforms," Hankerson says. "When you take two plagiarized photos down today, you find another four the next day, which is frustrating."

Alibaba says it has employed big data and proprietary technology and works with law enforcement to minimize fakes on its e-commerce platforms. Taobao, which is often compared to Amazon, still has a big reputation for selling knockoffs, which threatens its image with Chinese shoppers as well as its plans to expand into other markets. For the second year in a row, the United States has put the site on a blacklist for sales of counterfeit goods and IP rights violations.

Hankerson says the images of the plagiarized designs he discovered are stored on Alibaba's cloud content delivery network, and many of them are tied to product listings on Alibaba's platforms, especially Taobao. For instance, an industrial console with three drawers from Vintage Industrial that costs at least $5,795 can be found on Taobao for as little as $93, and a $12,595 crank table base from Vintage Industrial is listed at less than $50 on Alibaba.com.

Hankerson's experience resembles that of some well-known brands on Taobao. A quick search on the platform surfaces a fake Gucci men's belt for around $45 and a $31 tracksuit with a logo similar to Adidas'.

An Alibaba spokesperson says the company has enacted "rigorous measures to ensure that the merchants on its platforms meet the highest standards of integrity." Alibaba uses big data to scan all new and existing Taobao accounts to prevent the setup of new accounts where the prospective merchants use fake IDs. Alibaba also uses identification techniques like facial recognition to ensure that people seeking to open a store are who they say they are. Using its proprietary technology, Alibaba has found and banned "hundreds of thousands of merchants" for selling IP-infringing products on its platforms, the company spokesperson says.

In January, Alibaba hosted a meeting in Guangzhou, China, with members in its anti-counterfeiting alliance, including Burberry, to tighten IP rights protection through law enforcement, test buying of products and Alibaba's own online IP protection platform.

During a fireside chat at Alibaba's Gateway conference in Detroit last year, company chief Jack Ma described counterfeiting, IP infringement and cheating as a "cancer" for his business. "There were a lot [of fakes] at the beginning, but you need to fix it," Ma said on stage. "Today, more than 100,000 brands partner with us. We are the leader in anti-counterfeit and IP protection."

Still, Alibaba landed on the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative's 2017 list of "notorious markets" for the second year in a row. "A high volume of infringing products reportedly continues to be offered for sale and sold on Taobao.com, and stakeholders continue to report challenges and burdens associated with IP enforcement on the platform," states the USTR report released in January of 2018.

Trade group American Apparel & Footwear Association addressed the USTR's decision in a statement: "Many of our members have reported improvements on Alibaba platforms especially those related to procedures and timelines for takedowns. … At the same time, others have reported ongoing problems on Alibaba platforms, particularly Taobao." AAFA declined to further comment on the decision.

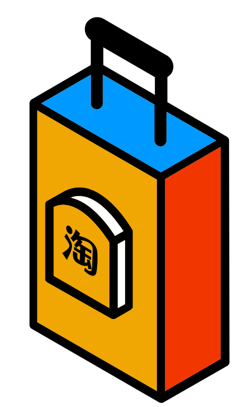
Michael Zakkour, vp of China practice for Tompkins International, a supply chain and distribution consulting firm, thinks the USTR is biased because counterfeiting is not specific to Taobao, and Alibaba made a big effort over the past year to ensure it wouldn't show up on the "notorious markets" list.

"There are fakes on Rakuten in Japan, Amazon in the U.S. and Europe and eBay in the U.S., so how can Taobao be the only e-commerce platform on the USTR's 'notorious markets' list?" says Zakkour. "Nobody offers stats to prove that counterfeiting on Taobao is more rampant than other e-commerce platforms."

Taobao's business model, which largely consists of third-party sellers, might be partially at the root of the counterfeit issue. With its business-to-consumer platform Tmall, Alibaba charges a brand to open a store, takes a commission on each product sold and makes money through advertising. On Taobao, advertising is the main revenue stream. That means Tmall merchants are typically first-party sellers and rights owners themselves, so they understand IP protection well, while Taobao is filled with third-party sellers who know less about IP protection.

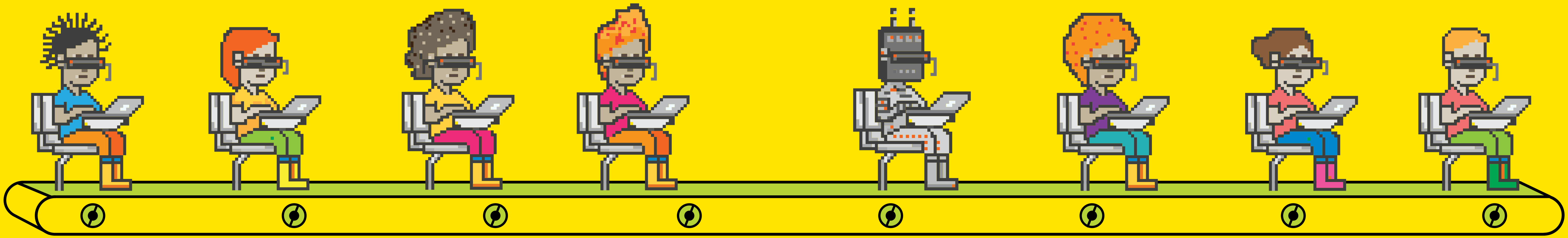
"Fakes don't exist on Tmall, and counterfeit on Taobao is getting better," says Zakkour. "There is external and internal pressure for Alibaba to tighten IP protection. If consumers can't trust the merchandising on its platforms, they will move elsewhere. And Alibaba's motivation is not to risk the company's global reputation for selling a few knockoff handbags. It would be silly otherwise."

But Hankerson's experience says otherwise. On Feb. 2, he found another 5,000 listings and photos of his company's products circulating on Alibaba's cloud content delivery network and is now eyeing legal action. "Alibaba has deep pockets. The company should have the technology to block counterfeit listings, and it is liable for damages," says Hankerson. "My photos are copyrighted with the [U.S.] government, and I told Alibaba repeatedly to take them down, but it's like falling into a rabbit hole. I want to go after those guys to stop this practice. It's not fair and shouldn't be allowed."



# THE NEXT GENERATION

At VCU Brandcenter, there's a new focus on tech and data. ***BY ILYSE LIFFREING***



**At VCU Brandcenter, an anxious group of students heads to the front of the class to present their project proposals.** But instead of their peers' eyes looking back at them, they are faced with a sea of virtual reality headsets.

On any given day, students at the graduate school, part of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, are likely to be working on projects involving emerging technologies like augmented reality and VR for companies like Spotify and Uniqlo. The school's 60 classes routinely bring in new technologies and approaches that agencies, brands and consulting firms want their future employees to have.

"We can't really have a static curriculum because the marketplace is always changing," says Caley Cantrell, head professor of Brandcenter's strategy track and head of the curriculum committee at the 22-year-old school. "Before, there was one route to get a job in advertising. Sure, there are still students getting jobs at agencies, but now we have some starting their own businesses, or going into consulting or working on the client side."

This effort to infuse the curriculum with new technologies that agencies and brands are embracing started three years ago when the school evolved its creative technology program into user experience design and introduced classes such as visual storytelling and information architecture. Classes on artificial intelligence and human-machine interaction are set to start this fall.

In the past several months, students have worked to bring AR and geotargeted content into the Spotify app, brought technology into Lowe's stores and made a mobile app for Uniqlo to help the retailer collect new kinds of data.

"In any given class, we change the content and nature of the assignments, bring in real clients and constantly ask students to solve contemporary problems," said Andrew LeVasseur, experience design professor at Brandcenter. "We are adapting our curriculum in near real time to those changing dynamics."

Brandcenter was started by Diane Cook-Tench, then a partner at The Martin Agency in Richmond, to fill a void. In 1996, there were various portfolio schools for advertising students, such as Creative Circus and Portfolio Center, but there wasn't a school connected to a large university. Cook-Tench wanted to provide a path for students who wanted a career in advertising but also wanted to earn a master's degree. Creatives from The Martin Agency served as some of the school's first teachers, and today the school still employs several professors who got their start at the agency. Being part of a university enables students at Brandcenter to get exposed to other disciplines and work with students in those areas. For example, in fall 2017, Brandcenter strategy students and anthropology students from VCU's School of World Studies worked together on a project that examined age bias in society.

Originally, the school was called the VCU Adcenter and had three tracks — art direction, copywriting and strategy — to train students for jobs at traditional ad agencies. But as media separated from agencies and the public's trust in advertising began to diminish, the school's leadership realized it needed to evolve as well.

Rick Boyko, past co-president and chief creative officer of Ogilvy North America, became director of VCU Adcenter in 2003 and led the school in making siloed tracks more collaborative, moved the school from VCU's mass communications department to the business school and added media buying to the curriculum. As it became apparent that students wanted to work on the brand side, the name of the school changed from Adcenter to Brandcenter.

Being tied to the university can make it complicated for Brandcenter to update the curriculum, yet in the eight years Boyko was director, the school altered its curriculum seven times, which he says is an amount "unheard of in this industry."

As the ad industry becomes more global, Cantrell says the school is looking into creating online classes that would appeal to international students and offering ongoing education classes for executives who are looking to improve their skills outside of a degree program.

The school's emphasis on creative thinking, strategy and technology makes its graduates, which number about 100 a year, attractive to recruiters. Lionel Carreon, global director of creative recruiting at R/GA, calls Brandcenter students "Swiss-army knives." Alex Ross, recruiter at The Martin Agency, says the agency employs 14 Brandcenter alums and tries to hire them as much as it can.

Troy Gary graduated from Brandcenter in May 2017 and is now a digital strategist at Deutsch. "Evolving is the name of the Brandcenter's game," he says. "I don't think companies know what they are looking for, but we are trained and certainly qualified to help them figure it out."

# THE RUSS EFFECT

Russell Westbrook and NBA stars have turned into fashion icons.

***BY HILARY MILNES***

**When Russell Westbrook stepped into Chesapeake Energy Arena, home of the Oklahoma City Thunder, in May of 2016, photographers were waiting to capture his latest ensemble.** The NBA player was wearing a cropped light-wash jean jacket, white jeans, white sneakers, shades and a scoop-neck tank top. By that point, the Russell Westbrook effect on fashion was in full swing, and photos of the outfit lit up Twitter. The NBA tweeted about it, proclaiming that Westbrook had arrived "in the way only Russ can."

That influence was felt online. His jean jacket — a $1,595 version made by acclaimed streetwear brand Fear of God — sold out shortly after. At large, Westbrook's influence on fashion has extended into brand deals, collaborations, a signature pair of Jordans (naturally) and even his own fashion line, Honor the Gift, which hit stores in the fall of 2017. He's worked with brands like Tumi and retailers like Barneys to design lines.

"When you think about the way NBA style has exploded, Russ is the forefront. He is the dude in every way, shape and form, and it's because he's done it best," says Sam Schube, GQ.com deputy style editor. "Whenever Russell shows up, it's a fashion runway. He shows off what he's wearing, and everyone watches, and the rest of the league follows."

The NBA is having an extended moment in the style spotlight thanks to players like Westbrook, LeBron James and Dwyane Wade, who began representing designers in news conferences the same way they do Nike or Under Armour on the court. The league is effectively setting the tone for style trends, which develop in conjunction with top designers and leading streetwear brands. It's not that NBA players showcasing their personal style is new. It's not. The personal style players displayed in the 1990s and early 2000s led to a dress code mandate in 2005 that required players to dress up in suits and ties any time they represented the NBA off the court. The mandate looked to squash out personal style, which at the

*Image source: Shutterstock*

time was displayed through low-hanging baggy pants the league's bigwigs deemed unacceptable.

The catalyst of the NBA's current style stars is the platforms on which the players today are recognized for their sartorial choices.

"The NBA has always been at this point — fashion is a form of self-expression, and these guys have been expressing themselves through what they wear on and off the court," says Jason Stein, the founder and CEO of Cycle Media. "It's become more interesting and talked about and trackable today with the advent of social media. The athletes themselves have millions of fans and followers, and when what they're wearing is posted, there's massive attention. The walk into the stadium is a huge moment for NBA players to express themselves through their favorite brands."

Since joining the league in 2008, Westbrook's style choices are unabashed and — importantly — polarizing. James, the NBA's unrivaled MVP, has pulled off collaborations with retailers like Kith, and he can set a trend. But Westbrook's head-turning style choices, like a neon orange photographer's vest, an all-denim ensemble or a shirt nearly ripped to shreds, draw attention.

"LeBron and Russ have engaged audiences, and if they wear something and share it, it has a big impact, and that's why they're such a big part of marketing today," says Stein. "You could make the argument that they're the best in the league as far as style goes. But what sets Russ apart is that he's not afraid to be himself and try new things. You have to have a high amount of confidence with the new pieces he's wearing, creating or designing. Some people like that or they don't, but that's what makes you a style icon."

Confidence likely comes easy when Westbrook, at 6-foot-3 and 200 pounds, can easily flaunt high fashion. But for the everyman, there's been a rise in style sensibility. According to L2 research, the men's apparel market is expected to grow at a compounded rate of 5 percent over the next two years, more than doubling the expected growth rate of the women's market. Brands and retailers are reacting by opening stores specifically for men and starting dedicated social media accounts and newsletters in an attempt to capitalize on this interest.

But whether or not Westbrook's sartorial choices have emboldened the masses to take more fashion risks is another matter.

"He certainly has the fan base and platform to evangelize fashion, and he does that with bright-eyed enthusiasm," says Brian Trunzo, the senior menswear editor at trend forecasting firm WGSN. "I just don't know, though, that his voice is widely respected or understood as authoritative when it comes to fashion. I believe he has an influence on other athletes, but at large, I just don't know if the average person cares or is influenced by his particular choices."

Trunzo, who insists that he respects Westbrook's clear affinity for fashion and willingness to take risks, says the word "contrived" comes to mind when thinking of the athlete's highly stylized fashion choices, be they an acid-washed denim button-down tucked into blue jeans or a pair of round, red sunglasses perched on the end of his nose.

Trunzo said the uptick in menswear can be attributed to a few different factors, like the flurry of trendy retail options such as Bonobos and Indochino as well as the

mainstream insurgence of streetwear brands like Supreme.

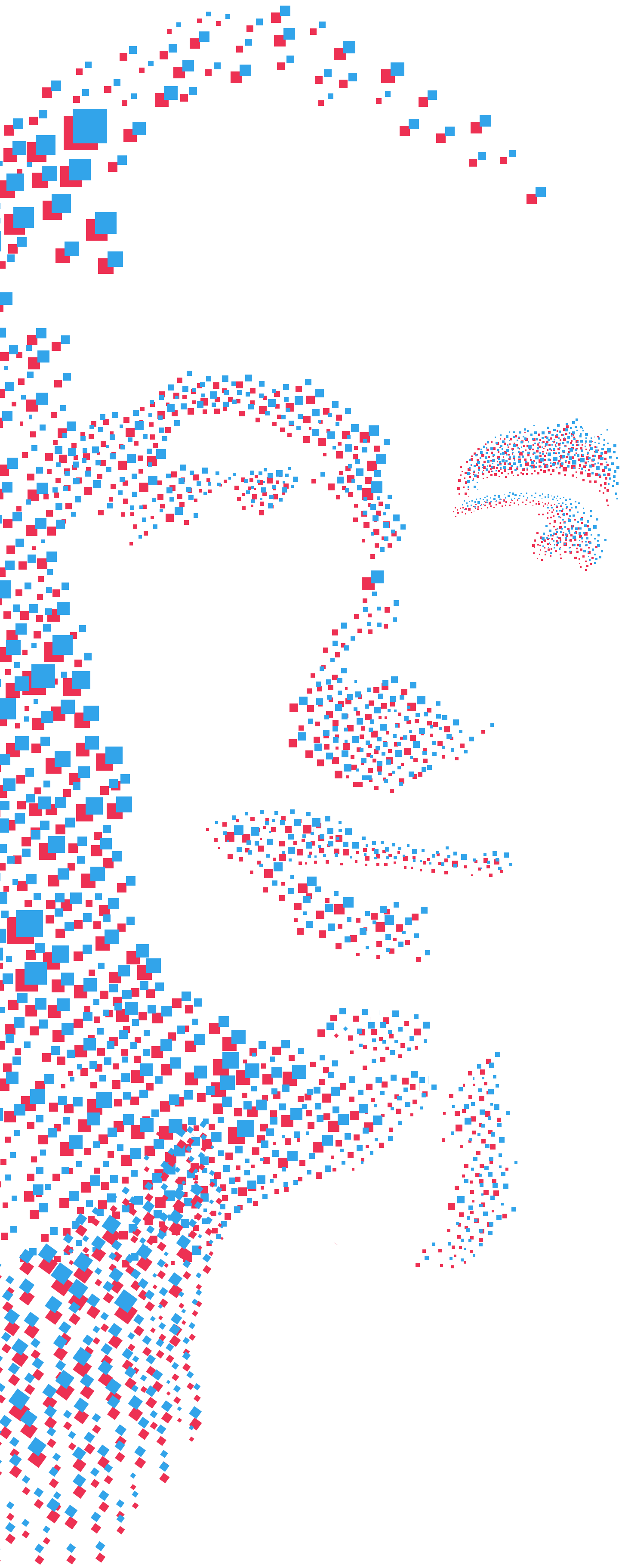
But overall, athletes have become more fashionable, and Westbrook has been at the center — albeit the polarizing center — of that shift.

"Many athletes have gravitated toward fashion and are addressing much more fashion-forward styles than they have in the past," says Steven Kolb, the president of the fashion industry trade association the Council of Fashion Designers of America, which has seen an influx of dedicated menswear designers in the past five years. "Young men look to athletes and are influenced by that."

Whether or not fans think they can pull off Westbrook's joggers and fitted suits, his work within the fashion industry is pushing the envelope of what's considered possible for athlete franchises, Schube says.

"I don't know if athletes knew they could go such places with collaborations before," he says. "Men's fashion is completely different than it was even five years ago, and it's because they see these guys they really admire getting out there and trying things. And if Russell wears a vintage metal band tee, that opens it up to the masses. Fair game."

> **"He's turned the walk to the locker room into an athlete's runway."**



# AMAZON'S INVISIBLE BRANDS

How the company is changing the threat private label poses to established brands ***BY HILARY MILNES***

**Amazon may not want brands to think they have anything to be afraid of, but in 2017, it pulled the trigger.**

That year, the company's private-label business skyrocketed, with Amazon now owning the trademarks for a total of 41 brands across the apparel, shoes, accessories, grocery, household and pharmacy categories, up from 12 in 2016. Amazon doesn't break out what percentage of its sales come from private-label brands versus wholesale retailers versus vendors, but a report from e-commerce analytics firm One Click Retail estimated in December that Amazon's private-label brands drove about $470 million in sales last year.

For now, private label is a small addition to Amazon's thickly lined pockets. For its financial year 2017 earnings, the company's net sales jumped 38 percent to $60 billion. According to the company, it's a merely supplementary business.

"Like any other company, we take feedback from customers, and pay attention to trends and create products we know they are searching for and want to buy," says an Amazon spokesperson. "We're focused on our customers and providing them with low prices, vast selection and fast, free shipping options, and we're not thinking about competitors."

Nothing to worry about here, Amazon says. And that would be true if we were talking about any other retailer, like Costco, Kroger or Macy's, all of which have been selling private-label brands well before Amazon founder Jeff Bezos was even a twinkle in his mother's eye. It's business as usual.

But of course, we're not talking about any other retailer.

"For brands selling on Amazon, there's a threat at every turn. But Amazon's private-label brands are perhaps the biggest source of fear. It's what everyone has worried Amazon would do for a long time coming," says Cooper Smith, the Amazon analyst at business intelligence firm L2. "And what makes Amazon so threatening in this particular space and different from any other company is its data."

As Amazon continues to push its private-label business, armed with years of purchase and search history and a network of algorithms, it could change the way customers search for and consider the products they ultimately decide to purchase by conditioning customers to put less weight on name brands and more emphasis on convenience and price.

So far, Amazon's private-label strategy has been to target the low-hanging fruit: batteries, baby wipes, white T-shirts. It's owning the product categories that drive little brand loyalty, as well as the customers who don't feel passionate about brand names.

But what's next is what brands that rely on loyalty and brand cachet have to worry about, according to Amazon consultants and experts we spoke to, as well as brand executives.

Brands have two choices: Get as far away from, or as close to, Amazon as possible.

**Pioneering a new era of private label**

As Amazon explains it, it navigates the private-label space like any retailer would. It looks for white spaces in its inventory where supply isn't meeting demand. The high margins on retailer-owned brands are worth the investment, which for Amazon, spans several design models. Without providing specifics, the spokesperson said that in creating its private-label products, Amazon works with an internal design team as well as external design and manufacturing partners.

When asked about its private-label strategy, Amazon's spokesperson made no mention of the role its vast customer data plays, but that data makes all the difference.

"What's different now is that Amazon is innovating top down based on the data they can collect through e-commerce. That type of specialized manufacturing, that insight into a brand's customers, is most terrifying to brands," says Smith. "It's not that they can launch a T-shirt that will put Hanes out of business — it's the collective effort around private label that's concerning. Private label can shift sales away from brands if they don't have an established loyalty with consumers. And even if they do, no one knows how long that loyalty will hold."

The company's web of algorithms can track, through billions of purchases and searches, the exact specs of a product in any category and how it's expected to perform, then give it preferential treatment on the basis that Amazon's algorithms favor products that are expected to perform the best. No first- or third-party seller can commandeer Amazon's algorithms like Amazon can itself. Take batteries, for instance: AmazonBasics batteries have risen to the top of every search, surface with an "add to order" button on the product page of every electronics item and always offer a lower price than Duracell or Energizer. Today, those batteries account for 96 percent of all battery purchases on Amazon.

"There's a competitive advantage that Amazon private labels have that the private labels at any other retailer don't, and it's their algorithms and how they use customer data in a way other brands can't," says Michael Yanez, an e-commerce consultant who works with brands as they navigate selling on Amazon. "The mistake brands make, however, is thinking that staying off Amazon's platform will somehow prevent it from creating its own brand in their category."

Yanez argues that it won't make a difference because Amazon can get the data from other brands and from product searches, over which it has vast ownership: 55 percent of shoppers in the U.S. start their searches on Amazon, according to a 2017 BloomReach survey.

But that hasn't stopped brands from holding out, particularly in fashion, where cachet and prestige have a much bigger impact on the bottom line than they do in a category like batteries. As Amazon has demonstrated, brand holdouts just open the floor for more profit-eating private-label brands to bubble up.

In fact, with 29 brands, Amazon has invested the most in its private-label apparel push than any other category.

**Private label and fashion's Amazon problem**

In November, Calvin Klein announced it had inked a deal to partner with Amazon for an upcoming push around its bra, underwear and loungewear categories. The brand would be working with the retailer around the holidays to host a pop-up that sold Calvin Klein-branded boy shorts and bralettes, all using Alexa-powered customer service and Amazon Prime checkout. Additionally, Amazon would become the exclusive seller of Calvin Klein's underwear business throughout the holiday season and potentially beyond.

Investors had questions. During an earnings call in November, Manny Chirico, CEO of Calvin Klein's parent company PVH Corp., faced down concerns that the Amazon deal would scare off other existing retail partners and forfeit too much control over Calvin Klein's brand positioning to Amazon, which hasn't made a reputation for itself as a company that treats its brand partners too kindly.

"Look, I think the focus of this call has been Amazon because of the marketing initiatives that are going on at Klein," said Chirico after the third investor brought up the Amazon partnership. "Amazon is a wholesale model that works really well for us and is profitable. Our biggest growth channel continues to be digital."

According to L2's research, Calvin Klein in fact has performed well on Amazon, despite Amazon's attempt to get customers to buy private label in the exact categories Calvin Klein has pushed on the platform: T-shirts, underwear, sweatpants and other basics.

"Calvin Klein has been extremely successful by doubling down on its Amazon partnership because in tandem, they're running influencer campaigns and working with celebrities and putting high-end fashion collections down the runway, which feels miles away from its Amazon brand page," says Kiri Masters, the founder of Bobsled Marketing, an Amazon-focused brand consultancy. "This all came down to how they let the brand breathe separately while being a first mover on Amazon. If someone wants to buy Calvin Klein underwear on Amazon, no Amazon brand is going to sway that decision."

But many fashion brands, including those in the competitive and luxury spaces, have decided to stay off Amazon altogether, a strategy that may seem like a noble cause in the short term, but could be a death sentence in the long term. Amazon's algorithm favors historical data like reviews and past purchases, putting latecomers at a disadvantage. All the while, withholding brands from Amazon won't stop the rollout of new private-label brands.

"Having a brand-owned presence over Amazon today is a question of survival, and that means realizing that the only way to have control is to sell directly on Amazon and being better than Amazon on a brand level, where they can't necessarily win," says Smith.

As legacy brands like Calvin Klein try to adjust to an Amazon-dominated landscape, the CEO of one direct-to-consumer brand says the key to success is not harboring a "founder delusion" that any one brand story can top Amazon. The brand sells a small selection of its inventory on Amazon to find new customers and drive revenue, but the CEO isn't worried that Amazon will harvest its data to imitate it in a private-label capacity.

"What Amazon will win on is convenience, not necessarily price," says the CEO, who asked to remain anonymous. "By selling to Amazon Prime members, I can ride some of that convenience play and then bring more loyal customers who like the brand back to our site. Everyone talks about brand today, brand, brand, brand, and yes, it's important, but it's foolish to think that your tiny brand can win by ignoring Amazon. You win by using it to your advantage."

# OFFICE HOURS

Julie Alvin, senior digital director of lifestyle at Meredith ***BY JESSICA SCHIFFER***

*Photos: Catalina Kulczar*

**Having an office at all is a novelty for Julie Alvin. She spent four years at the online women's publication, Bustle, when employees worked side by side in a Brooklyn apartment.** Since she decamped for Time Inc. (now part of Meredith) and into her own office, she's moved quickly to put her imprint on it. Alvin is known for her liberal, feminist positions — she's often invited on Fox News to argue with their talking heads — so her office has tokens of female empowerment throughout: a Ruth Bader Ginsburg pendant, Hillary Clinton pins, a hat from women's-only membership club The Wing that reads: "Girls doing whatever the fuck they want in 2017." Her bookshelf boasts Carrie Brownstein, Roxane Gay and Emma Gray.

Alvin was brought on to bring her online savvy to Time Inc.'s Lifestyle arm, which includes print stalwarts like InStyle and Real Simple. Having worked at an online publication for so long, she's had to refamiliarize herself with print, so there are lots of magazines and a wall dedicated to her favorite cutouts from past issues. Outside of the in-house portfolio, she looks to The California Sunday Magazine for inspiration. "It just has a really fresh aesthetic," she says. "It's very diverse and has great reporting."

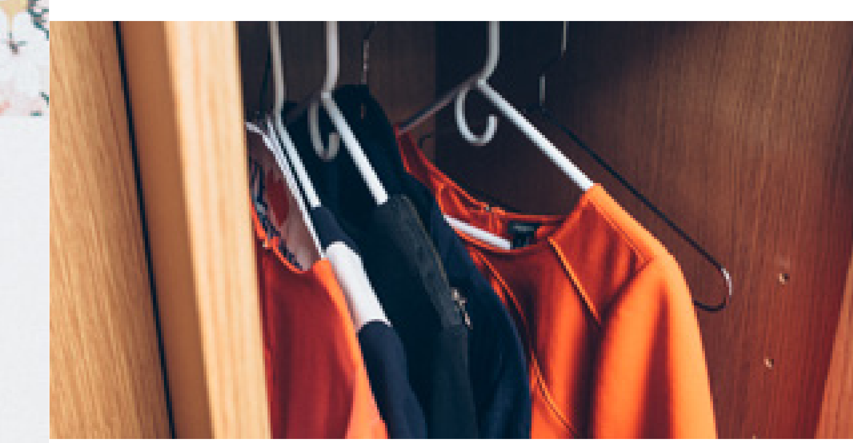
She's made good use of the white, windowless space, jazzing up parts of the wall with printed wallpaper from Chasing Paper and sprinkling a few copper lamps from West Elm throughout. "Thankfully, I sit next to the Real Simple team," she says, "because I'm not at all crafty, so one of their team members put up the wallpaper for me."

She doesn't discriminate between analog and digital when taking notes. Daily and weekly to-do lists go into both the Mac Notes app and small notebooks from Muji that she buys in bulk, using a different one for each brand she oversees. But she hasn't quite adjusted to the corporate world's love of the phone call, preferring to communicate face to face or online. Back-to-back meetings often force her to block off chunks of time ("fake meetings") on her calendar just so she can catch up on email, Slack, site traffic and social media.

After living in band tees and jeans for years, she's also turned the volume up a bit on her wardrobe. Now, it's a lot of midi-length dresses from Zara and Reformation, paired with sparkly socks from COS that peek out of her ankle boots. "I like to keep it a little less serious," she says. On lazier days, she'll retreat to her old uniform, but throw a favorite black blazer from Helmut Lang over it to add polish. The Keds she wore to death at Bustle, however, are on hiatus. ◘

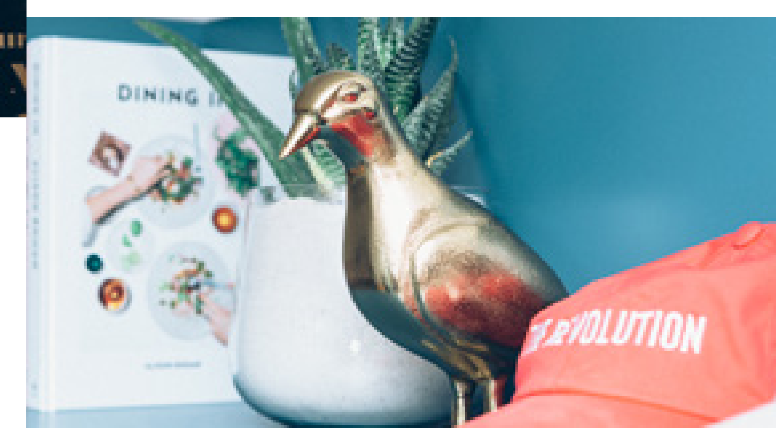

"Coffee makes me crazy, so I buy this Japanese green tea in bulk. Every afternoon, I'll have that with really good chocolate or my guilty pleasure, Cheetos."


"My social handle used to be @juliemacncheese, inspired by an old inside joke several years ago. When I started doing a lot of TV, our communications director was like, 'OK, time to change it to something more professional.'"



"This closet is where I keep my Fox News-approved clothes — a bunch of pinks and corals that I would never wear in real life."


"When my husband and I went to Japan last year, we fell in love with this whisky brand, Nikka Coffey. Thankfully, you can get it in the States."



"I bought this bird at Target and just took it from my apartment to help brighten up the office. I should name him."

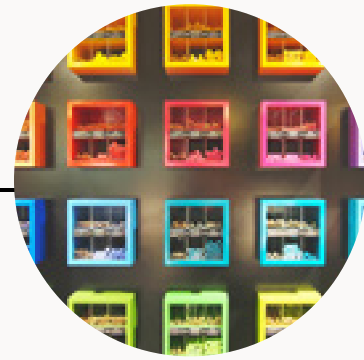
# JEFF STAPLE'S GUIDE TO TOKYO

*AS TOLD TO JILL MANOFF*

New York City-based Jeff Staple, founder of Staple Design Studio, Reed Space and Staple Pigeon, shares his favorite haunts in Tokyo, a city he's visited an estimated 100 times since launching his first business in 1997.

## ISETAN

"If you're into sneaker and street culture, you shop in Harajuku; it's younger. The neighborhood I like is Ginza; it's more upscale. I go to a multilevel store there called Isetan. It has everything you could possibly want and an nth-degree level of customer service. I'll get something like a pair of Visvim sneakers, which are hard to find in America."



## ITOYA

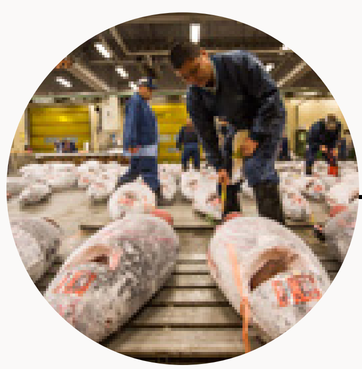
"Itoya is Japan's largest stationery company, and there's a multilevel store in Ginza. I love it because it's really OCD. Everything within a six-degree separation of you and writing, they sell it. Plus, they have an incredible restaurant there, and they grow the vegetables for it on the roof."

## DAIKANYAMA T-SITE

"When I have trouble sleeping due to jet lag, I go to Daikanyama T-Site, which is essentially a bookstore on steroids: There's every magazine from every country, every book, a Starbucks, an antique pen store, an art gallery. It's really inspiring, and it's open until maybe 4 a.m. on weekends. I go there to work or just to read with a cup of coffee."

## NARISAWA

"I go all out for dinner. Narisawa is an amazing culinary experience; the chef really tells a story with every course, and by the end, you feel like you were part of a symphony. It's pricey, probably \$500-\$600 per person, without drinks. And you've got to make a reservation months in advance."



## TSUKIJI FISH MARKET

"It is the largest, oldest-functioning fish market in Japan. They set up these tiny stalls that are like counters with six bar stools each, and you can sit there and have sushi for breakfast, with fish that was pulled out of the water hours ago. I get there by 5 or 6 a.m.; by 7, all the fresh fish has been bought by the restaurants."

## MEIJI SHRINE

"Yoyogi Park is like Tokyo's version of Central Park: a massive park right in the middle of a very congested metropolitan area, Shibuya. And in the middle of the park is this beautiful, historic temple. I like to get in a little bit of culture and a little outdoors; you can kill two birds."

## ATMOS

"There are thousands of sneaker shops to choose from. I recommend Atmos, which has been around for almost two decades. It has maybe a dozen locations and a really great curation. Every brand has a flagship there, but I like to go to the independent retailers. You get a good mix of stuff."

## KONBINI

"There's a big debate about which konbini, or convenience store, is better. They're all open 24 hours, and they're on practically every intersection corner. You can get everything from a hot dinner to underwear to the best magazines to hardware tools. You can pay your bills; you can buy tickets to a show. I hit one for breakfast when I'm on the run: an onigiri and a mini can of coffee."

# DAY IN THE LIFE: MICAELA ERLANGER

Since becoming an independent fashion stylist in 2013, New York-based Micaela Erlanger has been behind the red carpet "moments" of stars including Lupita Nyong'o and Meryl Streep. Here, she shares a day in her life during awards season.

***BY JILL MANOFF***

**6:00 AM:** I get up early, have a big cup of coffee and check the news: Vogue.com, Women's Wear Daily. Then, I dive into email — I'm working with a lot of the European fashion houses, so things are already piling up. I stop to exercise with my trainer, who comes to my home in New York's West Village.

**9:00 AM:** Time to get ready. I'm pretty low-maintenance: For day, I don't wear makeup except mascara. And my work wardrobe is all black, white and gray. Today, it's a T-shirt by The Row, Madewell jeans, a blazer by Band of Outsiders and my Saint Laurent jacket. I throw on Chanel flats and grab my Moncler puffer.

**10:30 AM:** I arrive at my office in Flatiron, and we have our daily team meeting about current projects. For the Oscars, we're styling seven celebrities, including Streep, Nyong'o and Vanessa Taylor, who wrote "The Shape of Water." Plus, we're working with Hannah John-Kamen on some upcoming appearances, there's a shoot I'm styling, and there's a lookbook I'm consulting on.

**11:00 AM:** I have back-to-back phone interviews, which isn't normal. A couple are about dressing for the red carpet; some are about my book, "How to Accessorize," which comes out in April. It's all my styling tips and tricks. I'm really proud of it.

**12:30 PM:** I head out. The first stop is Fred Leighton to choose jewelry for Streep for the Oscars. My team coordinates the collection of the pieces. I don't stop to eat lunch. My boyfriend has a catering company, so he keeps my refrigerator stocked with food from Comparti. For today, I just grabbed some healthy snacks.

**1:45 PM:** I pop into Oscar de la Renta to pick out a premiere look, then it's off to the J. Mendel atelier for a special client fitting. In between, I'm on the phone with Lanvin to make sure a fabric is arriving in time for another client's premiere look and Dior to check on some couture for an upcoming fitting.

**3:45 PM:** I arrive at the Armarium office downtown, where I just assumed the role of fashion director. I have a quick meeting with the team about plans for the weeks ahead: After the Oscars, I'm headed to Paris Fashion Week, sitting front row to make sure we get all the hottest looks for the site.

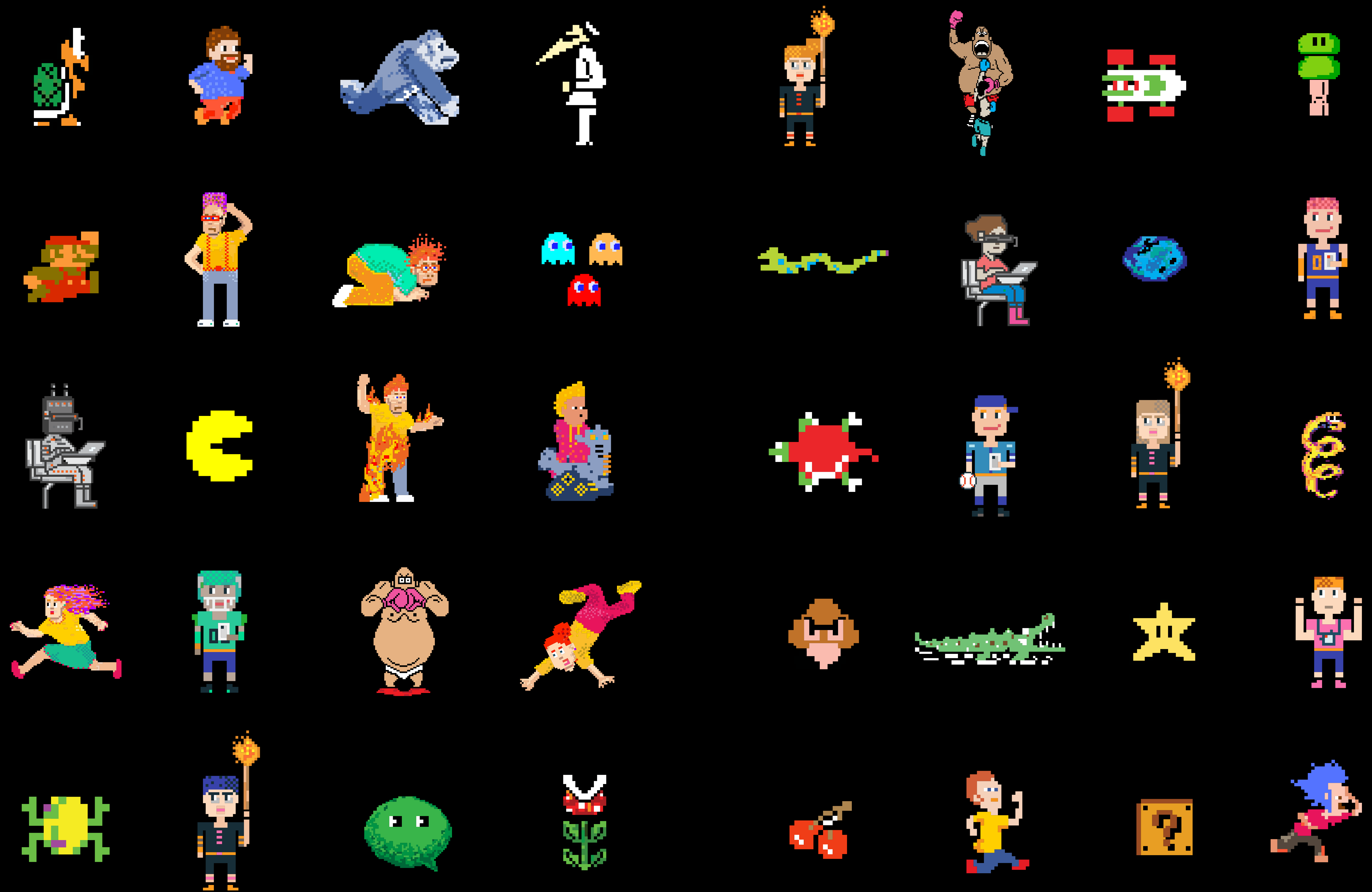
**4:45 PM:** I'm back in a car. Two clients had events pop up, so I call Eliza, manager of my New York office, to make sure the team has it handled. I make time to run into Hugo Boss for my own fitting for an event I'm hosting for them, and I post on Instagram. I like to post two to three times a day.

**5:45 PM:** I'm back at my office. My team and I finish packing a couple clients for their international press tours, and then we focus on the Oscars. Already, there are seven racks of clothes, several bookshelves filled with handbags and seven full shoe racks, each 10 shelves high.

**8:00 PM:** Finally home. Other weeks, I'm home by 7 for a meditative walk, but tonight, I start dinner right away. I eat a pretty simple ketogenic diet: veggies, fruit, protein. If we go out, it's usually Waverly Inn, The Polo Bar or Le Coucou. Sometimes, I'll change and go to a designer's party or fashion show afterward.

**9:15 PM:** I draw a bubble bath and light some candles by Diptyque and Manolo Blahnik. Then, I get into pajamas. I'm a silk pajamas girl; I have a drawer full of them, and I like a set — everything from La Perla to J.Crew. Finally, more emails because we work with clients and brands based in California.

**11:00 PM:** I'm in bed with my boyfriend. We either watch a show or film one of my clients is in, or binge on a series. Right now, it's "Law & Order: SVU." Lights out. Offseason, I get at least eight hours of sleep. This week, sleep is for wimps; it's five hours — six, tops.



# FINAL WORD

*Start a new game.* ***BY BRIAN MORRISSEY***

**"Facebook doesn't give a shit about us," the publishing executive told me.** There was a hint of resignation in his voice, but more the feeling of acceptance. For many publishers, the word that Facebook would deprioritize news in the now weirdly named news feed came as less of a shock — Facebook has been cutting off publishers for over a year now — and more of a confirmation.

The collateral damage of Facebook's move will continue. The first casualty came in the form of LittleThings, a former pet supplies site that used its adeptness at Facebook to build an audience of 50 million in just three years. It was an overnight success story, and like most overnight success stories, LittleThings was too good to be true. The company shut down after it saw Facebook referral traffic drop by 75 percent. Many Facebook-addicted publishers are putting up a stiff upper lip, pointing to progress made in diversification to new opportunities like video programming on the mushrooming group of over-the-top players. But LittleThings won't be the last flimsy media brand to fall by the wayside. There's a parlor game in picking out the most vulnerable.

Yet for many media companies, this reckoning was not only unsurprising but inevitable. Facebook has by now established its modus operandi. It built up the social gaming industry only to wipe it out. It fueled clickbait until it took a weed wacker to those most adept at the dark arts of luring clicks from those simply too curious to not know what happens next. Bloomberg Media CEO Justin Smith, who has long warned of dependence on Facebook, told me the distancing of media from Facebook is fundamentally a good thing.

Now, media companies can return to the slower growth tactics of yesteryear: Building strong brands with valuable audiences, then making money in a variety of ways. None of this, of course, is easy. Publishing executives are still too eager to point the finger at platforms like Google and Facebook, which, to be fair, are simply doing what's best for them, not for publishers. It is far too easy to blame a rigged system for the atrocious user experience afforded by most websites — multiple sound-on autoplay video ads, clickbait content recommendation widgets, persistent retargeting — instead of doing the difficult but necessary work of constructing a business model that is both sustainable and treats an audiences with respect. Unless that's fixed, people will wonder what's so bad about a duopoly if it means fewer annoying ads, slow-loading pages and sudden redirects to app stores.

What's likely in the interim is publishers rushing to reader revenue as the newest silver bullet. To be clear, direct reader revenue is a big part of the sustainability of many publishers. But just like Facebook or the pivot to video, subscriptions are not the answer for everyone. Many will try and fail. And it's no wonder because asking people to pay is exposing publishers to the reality that they are often middling players in a sea of sameness. Those that succeed will nail the basics of building strong brands — and executing on diversified audience and revenue models. As Warren Buffett once said, "You only learn who has been swimming naked when the tide goes out."

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