FUTURE FOCUS 2021

BRANDS ACCELERATED

Accelerating brands at the intersection of culture, content, data and tech.

iPROSPECT
a dentsu company

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We have never been more connected. Today, technology connects us to more people and communities. It connects us to virtually unlimited entertainment, informational and educational content from the comfort of our homes. It connects us to services like transport, food delivery and shopping with a simple touch. It connects our cities and our homes to address our needs more efficiently. All these increasing connections unlock new spaces for people and brands to flourish.

In that context, growth now happens at the new connection points where culture, technology, data, content, and commerce converge. Businesses that thrive at these intersections grow fastest, and media is one of the most powerful levers at their disposal. This is why we firmly believe that growth happens at the intersection of brand and performance, that all advertising is about performance, and that all advertising can and should build brands.

Traditionally, performance agencies have prioritised short-term returns, and media agencies have left value on the table when treating performance as merely a tactical tool. Today we need a new perspective.

At iProspect, we unite brand and performance to drive growth in a way that also builds brands. Our different perspective helps companies capture the value at every touch point of the consumer journey to drive sales, build customer lifetime value, and develop long-term brand health. By applying a unique performance mindset in everything we do, we deliver results today whilst building the foundations for future success.

This is how we accelerate growth for the world’s most demanding and iconic brands.

This is how we get better, one moment at a time.

Today, we are proud to share with you the sixth edition of Future Focus, our annual report that explores trends that matter for brands and provides guidance on how to make the most of them. Building upon the responses to the latest iProspect Global Client Survey from more than 200 top marketers across 29 markets, Future Focus 2021: Brands Accelerated dives deeper into the opportunities, challenges, and intricacies of bringing brand and performance together – offering inspiration and advice for your marketing efforts.

Despite the challenging times we live in, we believe there have never been so many opportunities in media. We are firmly optimistic about the future and resolved to make it happen, today.
INTRODUCTION

/A UNIQUE MOMENT IN TIME/

In the January 2020 edition of Future Focus we highlighted the importance of digital transformation, the growing importance of inclusivity, the emergence of new forms of online commerce, and the rise of connectivity in changing urban landscapes as structural factors that would shape companies and consumption over the next ten years.1

Never would we have expected that the dynamics we anticipated to develop in the next decade would greatly accelerate in a matter of months - due notably to the largest pandemic the world has seen in a century and a series of tragic events leading many to realise for the first time the systemic discrimination endured by minorities.

The world is now quite a different place than it was fifteen months ago. Most people have experienced some form of confinement, and many have changed their daily habits and consumption choices. Governments have taken unprecedented measures with profound repercussions on the economy and individual liberties. And companies have undergone forced transformation, from remote working, to increased scrutiny of their societal stance, to pivoting their business models to face the recession.

A lot of uncertainty is still looming over economic recovery in the next months, such as potential local virus surges, speed of vaccine rollout, social unrest, and effectiveness of policy support.2 Beyond these external factors, the road to recovery and growth will also be crowded with strategic choices, trade-offs, and bets for brands.

/ INTEGRATING BRAND AND PERFORMANCE TO DELIVER GROWTH /

According to the iProspect 2020 Global Client Survey,3 the most important area in marketers’ 2021 roadmaps is the improved integration of brand and performance marketing which holds the promise of more consistent consumer experience, improved measurement, stronger insights, better budget allocation, and, overall, a more efficient marketing effort. However, it is recognised as one of the most challenging areas as well.

Bringing brand and performance together will thus be the main focus of this report. We will also cover areas that may not rank as high among the current top priorities, but we believe will play a critical role in driving transformation and success, such as privacy, inclusivity, and automation.

Most important and challenging areas of 2021 marketing roadmap

iProspect, 2020 Global Client Survey, October 2020  (Percentage of respondents selecting the answer)
In 2021, we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of James March’s pioneering article, Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning, which has influenced many disciplines within organisations over time, including marketing.

In his paper, March discussed the relationships and trade-offs between exploitation – the maximisation of present returns (typically with a focus on investment efficiency, operational productivity, short term, and lower risk) – and exploration – the investment in future returns (typically with a focus on innovation, growth, long term, and higher risks).

Both are necessary for an organisation to flourish. A company that focuses solely on exploitation may succeed in the short term but takes the risk of being outflanked by more innovative competitors and running short of opportunities to exploit in the future. Conversely, a company that exclusively counts on exploration is vulnerable to the highest risks of failure and may not have the financial stability to stay in business long enough to turn innovation into revenue.

Acting simultaneously on exploitation and exploration is difficult, yet critical, particularly in times of crisis. Throughout this report, we will provide guidance for both exploitation-oriented and exploration-oriented marketing initiatives to help you drive results today and build the experiences that will drive growth tomorrow.

In the middle of the pandemic, the necessary transformation that imposed itself on organisations led many to realise they needed to bolster their marketing capabilities to weather the current crisis and be better prepared in the future.

According to our study, more than half of marketers believe they will need to invest long-term in data (including CRM), content, online commerce, and ad tech.

Building upon the priorities that marketers shared with us, Future Focus 2021: Brands Accelerated explores how brands can make the most of their key capabilities - today and tomorrow - by uniting their brand and performance efforts to recover and grow.

### Capabilities marketers will need to invest long-term in the aftermath of the pandemic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capability</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data (incl. CRM)</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-commerce</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad tech</td>
<td>57%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Biggest focus in the next 21 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining the balance between exploitation and exploration</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in Exploration</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investing in Exploitation</td>
<td>22%</td>
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Over the last twelve months, the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have profoundly impacted the commerce landscape, testing the resilience of both stores and e-commerce in the two largest economies, China and the United States, while the offline retail sales are forecast to drop by 14% each in 2020, online retail sales are forecast to surge by 16% and 18% respectively over the same period.5

For many organisations, the crisis is acting as a transformation catalyst toward online commerce. Therefore, it is no surprise that, according to the iProspect 2020 Global Client Survey,6 57% of marketers believe they will have to invest long-term in their e-commerce capabilities in the aftermath of the pandemic. They know the road ahead will not be a scenic drive, with more than one out of four seeing expanding their commerce capabilities as one of their most difficult challenges in 2021.

Despite these challenges, commerce probably remains one of the most exciting spaces for brands looking to bring together their brand building initiatives and performance efforts into a consistent and compelling customer experience.

In the next pages, we discuss how brands can make the most of new commerce opportunities to recover and grow. First, we examine the key trends transforming our homes. With the extended confinement periods happening across the world, many of our daily activities have been moved inside, leading us to re-evaluate the central role our homes play in our lives. This includes how we shop, making home the new commerce frontier for brands. Next, we explore how the increasing possibilities for shoppable experiences can help brands bridge the gap between inspiration and transaction. We also investigate the emergence of assisted commerce and how it helps consumers find and purchase what they need, at home or in store. Finally, we use iProspect’s proprietary Commerce Success Framework to give you some advice on short-term opportunities to exploit and on longer-term considerations to explore.
The home has been undergoing metamorphosis for years, and the on and off COVID-19 confinements have definitively accelerated its transformation. It is thus critical for marketers to consider the five key dynamics at the heart of the home revolution when searching for new, meaningful ways to connect with home-based consumers.

**Homes for good**

As people increasingly question the impact of their consumption decisions on their communities, health, and environment, scrutiny arises around how the products they bring into their homes are produced, transported, packaged and recycled. We expect that this broader examination of lifestyles will lead consumers to choose companies and products that do good by design for their eco-conscious spaces. Upcycling is gaining traction, as illustrated by brands such as Discarded, which produces unique rum by combining previously wasted finishing rum used in the whisky barrel maturation process and banana peel.7

**Home as a polymorph**

Work, learning, downtime, fitness, dining, childcare, socialising, romance, cultural nourishment: the role of home is expanding as we bring in more activities. By making the most of these redefined personal indoor spaces and routines through multi-functional and personalised products and services, brands can provide lasting value. For instance, CookingPal’s Julia is a smart multi-functional cooking appliance that can be controlled by voice and lets users keep an eye on their cooking, get recipe inspiration by snapping a picture of an ingredient, or purchase new ingredients online.8

**Home as a playground**

Consumers’ in-home access to entertainment has increased exponentially over the last few years, from on-demand video streaming to personal development options to casual gaming and virtual reality. To find their place, brands need to develop innovative content-led integrations that add value to these experiences. For example, Louis Vuitton has designed several skins (i.e., outfits) that League of Legends players can acquire to personalise their in-game characters, enriching their gaming experience as a result.9

**Home as a smart hub**

From TVs to lightbulbs, thermostats, and doorbells, the growing list of available and affordable connected devices turns homes into smart hubs and brings new levels of convenience to our fingertips. Brands that do not manufacture smart devices themselves can find their places through services designed to take advantage of in-home technology, which in the short term will be mainly through the means of virtual assistants. They must do this while cultivating strong privacy practices, as the growing presence of sensors, cameras and microphones connected to the internet inside homes triggers legitimate concerns from users.

**Home as a place for new connections**

An increasing number of our day-to-day activities at home are becoming socialised, facilitated by the growth of video communications, streaming, social and messaging platforms. Brands need to understand specific groups’ dynamics and local communities’ contexts to be accepted and thrive. For instance, Walmart has partnered with Nextdoor to enable the private social network’s users to ask their neighbours for grocery shopping assistance at their local Walmart,10 which helps build a heightened sense of community.
In order to future-proof their online and in-store strategies, brands must understand how the structural dynamics described above intersect with the commerce landscape and shape consumers’ shopping decisions.

The emergence of smart commerce

Technology is the main driver of reducing friction in consumer journeys. As it becomes more prevalent within households, we see the emergence of a new form of commerce where smart devices and appliances create new interactive points of sales in every room. The convenience of this contextualised commerce not only improves the at-home shopping experience, it could also influence consumer brand loyalties in the future through personalised recommendations. For example, the FridgeCam by Smarter™ is a wireless camera that can be installed in any refrigerator. Every time the refrigerator door is closed, the camera sends a picture of the shelves to its companion app. Users can know exactly what is in their refrigerator when shopping in store or see their Amazon Fresh cart automatically updated for easy replenishment.

Life as a subscription

There is a change at play is the nature of ownership, either desired by consumers or imposed on them by economic factors, and brands need to understand the readiness of their customers to try new ownership models. Subscription-based models and on-demand rental solutions are on the rise and now encompass a wide range of product categories. For instance, Clothing as a Service has boomed over the last few years, enabling consumers to change their wardrobe more frequently from the comfort of their homes without paying the full purchase price and brands to be tried out by consumers that may have been hesitant to buy their items. Additionally, as almost eight out of ten Gen Z and Millennials now declare they have purchased or want to purchase pre-owned, repaired, or renewed products,12 more retailers are exploring forms of ownership that encourage refurbishment and recycling. For example, in line with its circular economy ambition, IKEA aims to develop subscription-based leasing offers for furniture,13 through which customers may lease a piece of furniture for a while and then upgrade, with the old piece being refurbished for other users.

Stores as experiential stages

As technology creates more opportunities to buy from home, consumers expect stores to offer more than what they can order online in their living rooms. Retail spaces need to become more than merely transactional spaces to keep their attractiveness as regular shopping destinations. Brands invested in brick-and-mortar spaces have a unique opportunity to reallocate their square footage, moving from purely logistic considerations, such as storing stock, to new approaches for enticing customers, such as real-world product tests, specific classes for advanced users, community events or even art installations. Nike is leading the way in that sphere. In July 2020, the brand introduced in Guangzhou its newest store concept: Nike Rise. Sitting at the intersection of sports and digital, the store aims to unite local communities through sports. It offers in-store workshops with local athletes and influencers, opportunities for members to easily join local basketball games, and a personalisation bar showcasing Guangzhou’s sports culture.14

As home becomes the new commerce frontier, brands investing in personalisation, experience, and convenience will be the best positioned to build long-lasting connections and win in the home space.
Shoppable media is nothing new for digital advertising which has embedded interactivity since its infancy. One could also argue that traditional channels have had shoppable mechanisms for a long time (e.g., newspaper coupons, direct response TV). However, technology is now driving an acceleration in this space, bringing commerce features to media without compromising brand experiences.

All the main digital platforms have recently intensified their efforts to create more shoppable formats. For instance, people can now use the Google App to simply tap and hold any image in order to shop the exact item featured in the image or similar items. On YouTube, brands can pair their video ads with a browsable catalogue, so that while the video showcases the brand key message, the catalogue facilitates navigation towards the product page that matter.

The TV industry is also active in this space, and networks have been leading the charge. Following the launch of ShoppableTV (a QR code-based solution for letting viewers shop products featured in shows they’re watching), NBCUniversal has announced Checkout, a unified shopping cart across its TV and digital properties, and recently partnered with PayPal to facilitate payments on the platform. TV manufacturers are keen to get their share of the shoppable media pie as well. For example, LG has announced a solution powered by artificial intelligence enabling its clients to easily purchase what they see on screen.

These types of solutions could improve how brands measure the profitability of product placement and TV ads, and lead to new product personalisation opportunities (e.g., selling a limited edition tailored to what is happening on screen). In the long run, they may also change the nature of TV investment through the development of commission-based business relationships alongside the more traditional GRP-based trading. In the meantime, brands should focus on collecting insights through testing and building consumer habits through clear instructions when content is shoppable.

According to the iProspect 2020 Global Client Survey, the main advantages of a better integration of brand and performance are a more effective measurement of marketing ROI (60% of respondents), more consistent consumer experiences (54%), and more efficient touchpoints that build customer relationship (38%). On the flipside, one out of two marketers (51%) sees the difficulty in measuring the contribution of brand initiatives to business performance as a key barrier to brand and performance integration.

In the context of less predictable shopping patterns, a shoppable-by-design approach, wherein brand interactions offer consumers a convenient path to transactions at any given time, can help marketers make the most of both their brand and performance efforts to elevate the consumer experience, maximise impact and track business results.
Livestreaming is an important growth opportunity for brands selling through third-party commerce platforms as well. In China, Taobao Live (Alibaba Group’s livestreaming channel) alone generated roughly $48B in gross merchandise value in twelve months. In Japan, the department store Isetan used Instagram and YouTube livestreams to introduce products to a user base larger than what would show up in-store.

As livestreaming continues to grow, marketers should explore how they can make the most of this format that connects entertainment and commerce to design experiences improving both the image and sales metrics of their brands. The most emblematic example of this convergence is TikTok, which has seen a spectacular audience growth over the last twelve months and is now expected to join the very exclusive club of +1B monthly active users in 2021. TikTok’s platform has rolled out a series of shopping features that natively fit the content from creators, such as Shop Now buttons, shoppable livestreams with in-app transactions, and shoppable ads in partnership with Shopify+ - all of that while tapping the other major digital platforms in terms of ad equity according to Kantar. It is no surprise that brands targeting Gen Z are investing in TikTok. For instance, Levi’s tapped into the #oddlysatisfying movement and partnered with TikTok influencers to create customised denim products that consumers could buy for a limited time.

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Another exciting technology, Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR), is gaining increasing attention. It uses laser pulses to scan the environment around the device and create high-fidelity three-dimensional maps. While most of its applications to date have been reserved for professionals, it is now literally at our fingertips, with the latest iPhone flagship models featuring a LiDAR scanner. For consumers, it is an opportunity for more accurate augmented reality (AR) experiences, which can help visualize items at scale before purchasing. For instance, Apple announced that the IKEA Place app (which enables users to place furniture in their home in AR) will feature a new Studio Mode harnessing its LiDAR scanner. Tech platforms are also seizing this opportunity, with Snapchat now enabling brands to create LiDAR-powered lenses.

These examples are only a glimpse of the various technologies that already, or will soon, make it easier for consumers to shop and easier for companies to create compelling experiences that bring brands and commerce together. Now is a good time for marketers to examine how they can make the most of these opportunities in the near future to bolster their commerce capabilities.

E-commerce has long been derided for giving an inferior consumer experience to retail locations. Compared to the robust experience of visiting your favourite shop where you are greeted, remembered, and assisted to find the perfect fit, e-commerce felt as if you were handed a product catalogue and wished good luck. This is changing. The one-way communications of banner ads and product pages are being progressively enhanced by mediums designed for conversations. Voice technology is gaining considerable momentum. Text messaging has become sophisticated. Businesses and buyers can now easily connect and transact through various messaging apps.

As 61% of marketers believe building a highly convenient experience for the consumer is the most powerful lever to generate business growth, assisted commerce is an efficient way for brands and retailers to engage with online shoppers by getting closer to the in-store experience through conversation, listening to the consumers and iterating on their needs. We believe it is set to become the new standard of digital commerce across the world, as it already is in many markets across APAC.
THE EMERGENCE OF ASSISTED COMMERCE

ASSISTANTS AND VOICE BECOME VAILABLE COMMERCE CHANNELS /

Until recently, people have communicated with machines mostly on the machine’s term, using a mouse and a keyboard. By learning how to communicate in human terms, Google Assistant, Siri and Alexa have introduced millions to the idea of talking with a machine. Phones, homes, cars, all our daily environments are now embedding voice-enabled devices. Interactions have become more fluid as well, due to advances in Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Natural Language Understanding (NLU).

As assistants become ubiquitous and grow smarter, their usefulness and convenience increase, changing how people search for information and interact with brands, including how they shop. Assistants can suggest products, remind you of what you have already purchased and your recent searches, and even take orders. Additionally, brands can build their own apps to provide even more personalised purchase experiences. All of this turns voice, assistants and bots into increasingly more interesting options for commerce. On Singles’ Day 2019, more than a million orders were placed and paid via Alibaba’s Tmall Genie’s voice-shopping feature.31

Adoption is not only a matter of improvements in software and hardware. Bots and skills have no audience on their own, while social platforms, livestreaming channels, messaging apps and digital media can command large audiences. Their association is mutually beneficial, bringing assisted commerce to more people and making media more engaging and interactive.

For instance, State Bank of India used chatbots and chatable display banners to answer clients’ more urgent questions when lockdown prevented people from visiting their local branches. This interactive campaign generated more than 168 million engagements, and more than 96 million instructional videos were viewed in chat. In the UK, the makeup brand NARS has developed a campaign enabling people listening to Spotify on their smart speaker to simply say “Ask Send Me a Sample for NARS” to receive a complementary lipstick, blush or mascara sample at home.32 It is a clever way to let consumers test products when stores are closed due to the pandemic.

In the future, we expect to see more voice-powered unboxing experiences, where conversational interaction helps educate consumers about the product they have just received. This personalised guidance at a critical moment of the customer journey – the first in-hand impression – could have a major influence in lowering returns and negative reviews caused by a lack of understanding. Additionally, we anticipate an increase of content strategies repurposing existing material into interactive experiences combining voice, chat and visuals to capture consumers’ attention.

REMOTE INTERACTIONS, REAL PEOPLE /

Although virtual assistants and bots have come a long way since their beginnings, not all users are comfortable with the idea of interacting with machines. Today, technology can also help brands put human interactions at the forefront of their experience when physical presence is not possible.

For instance, platforms such as Salesfloor facilitate how online shoppers on the brand’s website receive assistance by enabling them to interact in real time with associates from their local stores. Associates and customers can then communicate through the most convenient channel for them (e.g., chat, video, text message), and associates can even livestream from the store.33

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KEY CONSIDERATIONS

As we have seen, assisted commerce provides three main benefits to brands:

Be always there.

Chats and bots act as an extension of the sales team, enabling 24/7 customer service, and providing support on the go without interrupting the shopping experience.

Facilitate decision making.

Associates and bots can push images, seasonal offers, and various types of content through chats to influence the shoppers by helping them make the right choices and reach the right pages.

Create closeness.

One-on-one conversations bring the attention and expertise of an in-store associate to the digital experience in a way a website could not match on its own. They enable a more informal and personal tone and offer more options to users who are not ready to buy.

Many brands are seizing this one-on-one virtual interaction opportunity to get closer with their consumers. This is especially prevalent in the beauty and fashion industries, where virtual consultations are booming. For instance, in Canada, consumers can book 20-minute Zoom consultations with Caudalie Beauty Experts from across the country to discuss their beauty routines and receive skincare advice.34 In the Netherlands, the footwear chain Onyva offers people styling sessions with a local personal shopper through WhatsApp or Facetime.35 Large platforms are also betting big on one-on-one interactions. Amazon launched Explore, an interactive livestreaming service where people can book one-on-one virtual local shopping sessions with hosts from all over the world.36 As purchase experience and customer service are among the main sources of dissatisfaction among customers according to marketers,37 assisted commerce solutions can help reduce consumers’ frustrations and facilitate transactions. It can also help brands reinvent their retail model, offering new perspectives to store associates affected by a decline in their brick-and-mortar locations footfall.

Additionally, assisted commerce could play an increasing role in the future, in light of the sunsetting of third-party cookies. As chats can be linked across every platform, they could enable brands to pick up the conversation with consumers wherever they left off instead of relying on techniques such as retargeting.

Marketers aiming to enter the assisted commerce space need to keep in mind the following considerations. First, they should have a clear picture of the value they can generate for consumers, as focusing mostly on the backend efficiencies may result in a cumbersome user experience. Second, they should build privacy-focused experiences to build and maintain trust. This is particularly important as people are still figuring out how to use these new ways of interacting with brands. Finally, they need to assess the balance of human vs. automated interactions that make the most sense for their clients and their brands.
WHAT BRANDS CAN DO:

EXPLOITATION & EXPLORATION

The commerce landscape is vast and complex. The five dimensions of the Commerce Success Framework (CSF) provide marketers with a useful compass to prioritise the key brand and performance actions necessary to build a robust commerce presence. Start your individual assessment today at commerce.iprospect.com.

/ DESIRABILITY /

EXPLOITATION:

Desirability, by nature, is not something you can increase instantly with the flip of a switch. Each consumer interaction with your brand, from media exposure to peer recommendation to purchase experience and customer support, influences how consumers perceive your brand. It means there is no shortcut to desirability, and that meeting consumers’ needs across the other dimensions of the CSF every day is critical.

EXPLORATION:

New societal, environmental, and technological trends are changing how people live, communicate, and consume. While some brands have the agility to quickly evolve their proposition to adapt to these trends, for others it requires structural changes or even pivoting their business model. Ensure that your company allocates time and resources to detect and understand the key dynamics influencing your customers so that you can anticipate change and stay relevant in the long term.

/ AVAILABILITY /

EXPLOITATION:

Lockdowns have driven consumers in record numbers to shop online more than they ever have before. Ensuring you are just as readily available online as you are on the store shelf is critical to your commerce success. Identify the models that work best for your brand, whether in marketplaces, direct-to-consumer platforms, social commerce, or otherwise.

EXPLORATION:

Marketing has long been a one-way communication from brand to consumer. This does not have to be the case anymore, as mediums like chat provide a two-way dialogue with the consumer. Consider building out this channel with a combination of artificial intelligence and human operators to support consumers whenever and wherever they need assistance. Explore how you could enable your store associates to assist your customers online as naturally as they would in-store.
WHAT BRANDS CAN DO:

EXPLOITATION & EXPLORATION CONT.

/ FINDABILITY /

EXPLOITATION:
Reaching consumers at scale can be a tedious task, which is why we recommend utilizing technology where it makes sense. Scripts, bidding algorithms, and auto-reporting are a few ways automation can make media management more efficient and help you focus on more strategic and creative work, leading to greater performance all around. Audit your media management process to map opportunities for quick automation implementation.

EXPLORATION:
The explosion of livestreaming presents a massive opportunity for brands. This format is a powerful vehicle for brand awareness through its scale, audience engagement through its interactivity, and sales stimulation through its shoppable features. To discover how your brand could enter this growing space, start by analyzing how your audiences consume livestreaming from the type of content they watch to the platforms they use.

/ BUYABILITY /

EXPLOITATION:
In the short term, focus on areas where you can simplify the purchase experience. Start with a review of your e-commerce assets to ensure answers to the most pressing customer questions are easily accessible and the content is regularly refreshed to reflect seasonal offers. Additionally, identify opportunities to collapse the purchase funnel by including shoppable media in your marketing campaigns. Think beyond digital to TV, magazines, newspapers, and audio spots. All can be turned into interactive commerce opportunities.

EXPLORATION:
As consumers spend more time at home, recreating a shopping experience as close as possible to the physical one will increasingly give you a competitive edge. Today, AR is not only good for fun one-time experiences, it can offer consumers actionable solutions, such as a virtual try-on. For brands, it could mean convincing hesitant customers and reducing the volume of returns. Explore areas wherein the use of AR could benefit your customers.

/ REPEATABILITY /

EXPLOITATION:
About a third (33%) of marketers declare the purchase experience is a source of dissatisfaction for their consumers. This dissatisfaction represents a double risk: customers not returning, and a tarnished brand desirability in the eyes of potential customers reading negative reviews. To abate customer dissatisfaction, do not overlook what happens after people hit pay. For instance, develop rich content to guide their first-time use of your product, use home deliveries as a marketing channel for sampling, and ensure your support team responds to negative reviews.

EXPLORATION:
Where people buy today may not be where they buy tomorrow. Often consumers make an initial purchase on a more trusted channel, but then make repeat purchases where it is more convenient. Always monitor the evolution of platform retention and engagement metrics (e.g., repeat purchases) to analyze consumer shifts. Explore the opportunity to develop subscription-based models to increase the convenience of your offer and secure revenue streams.

/ DESIRABILITY /

/ AVAILABILITY /

/ FINDABILITY /

Commerce Success Framework

/ WHAT BRANDS CAN DO: EXPLOITATION & EXPLORATION /

WHAT BRANDS CAN DO:

EXPLOITATION & EXPLORATION

CONT.

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We live in an era when media, entertainment, and brands are constantly redefined, converging and overlapping. While major studios and TV networks are venturing into the streaming space, as illustrated by Disney+ and Peacock, Netflix is testing linear TV with its new Direct channel, and is experimenting with video formats borrowed from social platforms. On the latter, conversations around gaming have never been as high, while on Twitch – a platform mostly known for gaming – the most streamed channel is paradoxically all about... conversations!

As for Twitch’s parent company, Amazon, it is now not only a commerce giant and one of the fastest growing advertising platforms, but also the biggest advertiser in the world itself.

For brands, this ever-moving media landscape is a source of opportunities for growth, but it also means the fight for capturing consumers’ interest has never be so intense.

In this section, we will cover how brands can capture and convert consumer attention. First, we will look into the key components of effective attention in advertising. We will then explore some examples of brands building powerful experiences that capture attention and discuss the growing importance of inclusive marketing to engage diverse audiences. We will also consider how brands can leverage consumer intent to turn attention into transactions. Finally, we will conclude with some opportunities to seize today and recommendations to continue winning tomorrow.
The entertainment, information, and shopping options at our fingertips today are almost unlimited. As a result, our attention has never appeared as atomised. Additionally, with virus confinements blurring the lines between work, family and social life, constant partial attention has seemingly become a default state for more and more of us.

In order to better comprehend the evolution of people’s attention and understand the relative value of advertising across environments, dentsu is conducting a multi-year research initiative, The Attention Economy.48 The current findings offer interesting leads to marketers looking to move from optimistic exposure to tangible outcomes.

**What does it mean for brands?**

*Context matters:* as marketers, we need to develop a clear overview of attention per platform and format. For instance, when compared with in-feed social videos and pre-roll videos on mobile, commercials seen on TV deliver the most volume of attention (i.e., most seconds played). On the flipside, they also have a higher avoidance rate (i.e., people walking away from the TV) than pre-roll and in-feed videos on mobile (i.e., people looking away from their screen). This understanding at the platform level is important to better optimise ad presence throughout people’s daily routines (e.g., when they quickly scroll through social feeds in the morning or cook dinner with TV on in the background).

The strongest opportunity lies in avoiding avoidance. Attention is a curve. The biggest jump in Short Term Advertising Strength (an indicator measuring advertising induced uplift in sales) is when moving from no/low ad gaze to peripheral ad gaze. This suggests that reducing full avoidance may be a more efficient strategy for brands to increase sales than trying to achieve full gaze at all cost – an important consideration to optimise the media mix.
Besides media, marketers have two additional levers at their disposal to increase attention: data and creativity.

Data:
Previous findings by the Centre for Amplified Intelligence, a research partner of dentsu for the Attention Economy project, suggest brand disposition influences attention. People who don’t use a specific brand have a more passive response to its ads (i.e., higher proportion of peripheral gaze) than people using the brand (who are either more attentive, or, on the contrary, avoiding the ads due to familiarity). For marketers, it means that varying messaging according to brand disposition can make the most of the attention level of each segment. To do so, brands can leverage CRM data to address people who have already purchased their products with specific ads. They can also use data from digital platforms, such as audiences of users who are researching or have shown interest in the brand through a search query. For example, a leading brand in the home space used search audiences to introduce its new brand imagery and products on YouTube to people who were already aware of the brand and in the process of researching home goods. Using this tactic, the brand saw a 48% increase in completion rate when compared to their other video campaigns.

Creative:
Creative cut-through is a powerful way to avoid avoidance. It is important for brands to understand the specific platform codes and formats to optimise their message and content length accordingly. Experiential ad units can help increase time spent with the branded content. For instance, Jack in the Box partnered with the Sonic the Hedgehog movie to launch their Tiny Tacos campaign. Snapchat users were served a video that led them to a gaming unit wherein they could control Sonic’s trajectory through the movements of their head, which were captured by their smartphone front camera. If Sonic collected enough virtual tacos, users were rewarded with an Uber Eats delivery code to use for their Jack in the Box order. By making the most of Snapchat codes (i.e., interactivity and camera-first), the brand saw an average play time of 1 minute and 16 seconds.

UNLOCKING CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE
dentsu’s Attention Ads Lab has partnered with VidMob to apply computer vision, optical character recognition, and machine learning to yield deeper insights about the creative impact across social and programmatic campaigns. Get in touch today to learn how you can benefit from this new level of creative intelligence.

ATTENTION TRIGGER

QUALITY BRANDING

The Attention Economy research highlights that branding doesn’t have a detrimental impact on attention – quite the contrary! It is often aligned with attention peaks. Therefore, marketers should ensure their creative assets feature distinctive branding elements and try different branding integrations during creative testing. This is particularly important for ads designed for feeds where sound is off by default.

Effective attention is a layered construct that requires all three elements to pay off. Exclusively leveraging ad visibility and quality branding would end up in limited cut through. Combining only quality branding and attention triggers would limit ad visibility. Simply counting on ad visibility and attention triggers would lead to potential misattribution to competitors.

Marketers should also remember that attention levels vary over time as consumers discover new interests, try new devices, switch platforms, and are exposed to new offers from competitors. Adopting an always-learning mindset and a robust iterative testing process is key for securing sales today and building brands in the long term.

THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

To dig deeper about the factors influencing people’s attention and the implications for brands, download the report ‘The Attention Economy: Exploring the opportunity for a new advertising currency by dentsu’ on dentsu.com.
Desire, confidence, shock, delight. Emotions play a critical – if not the most important – role in communication. They capture hearts and minds, build relationships, and urge action. Yet, according to the iProspect 2020 Global Client Survey, a third (34%) of marketers declare the lack of emotional connection is a challenge for increasing long-term consumer trust in their brand.

Here are three inspiring and recent examples of companies embedding emotions such as excitement, fascination, and surprise at the heart of their communications to build attention-grabbing experiences.

/ ENHANCED REALITY /

Brands able to add a new layer of reality to everyday experiences and provide a new perspective, as a result, can deliver a deep yet scalable immersion into their world. Not all experiences have to be grandiose and high tech - simple ideas with impeccable execution are often the best.

To promote tourism amongst New Yorkers, the Austrian Tourism Board designed an immersive AR audio wherein Vienna’s most famous son, Beethoven, guided users through specific Manhattan locations that are related to Austria. Through the combination of geofencing, 3D sound effects, and exciting stories, people were able to discover the Austrian connection of locations such as Aldo Sohm Wine Bar, Café Sabarsky and Carnegie Hall. By letting New Yorkers experience their city in a whole new way, this campaign created five times more impressions through owned and earned media than paid media budget.

/ WHERE MUSIC AND CULTURE MEET /

Sonos have always focused on ensuring their products deliver greater sound quality than the competition and wanted to showcase this in a campaign that would deliver premium sound messaging through environments where music and culture meet.

To do so, Sonos used out-of-home (OOH) advertising to deliver visual impact across iconic locations with a connection to music such as the Opera station in Paris and the Hamburg docks. To own relevant cultural environments, Sonos also used OOH during an audio exhibit at Barbican station in London and around the major music complex Philharmonie in Paris. This OOH strategy increased aided awareness by 82%.

Additionally, Sonos partnered with popular podcast hosts, specifically those who were Sonos fans, to give authentic testimonials to their audiences about the sound quality of Sonos products. This strategy delivered a 19% uplift in consumers’ association of Sonos with superior sound quality and a six-fold increase in unaided awareness vs. control.

Sonos also created a bespoke “Brilliant Sound hub” on Amazon Prime offering discounts on select films with quality sound and connecting their brilliant sound proposition with the big screen. More than 40% of Prime users clicked to view the hub, and that increased consumer searches for Sonos products on Amazon.

/ MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCES /

As most brands mainly rely on visual cues to communicate their messages, the ones leveraging other senses as well stand a much better chance of creating deep-rooted memories. Sound drives brand recognition like nothing else, while smells are a shortcut to emotions.

Hendrick’s Gin wanted to offer a surprising and refreshing detour to Londoners during the dullest time of the day: their commute. The brand used a 1,000-square-metre vinyl wrap to cover the floors and walls of the 74-meter-long tunnel in the capital’s busiest station with illustrations from its imaginative world, such as floating beluga whales, hot-air balloons, and dapper gentlemen atop unicycles. The installation featured 20 scented posters immersing commuters in Hendrick’s signature scent, a rose-and-cucumber infusion.

More than 400,000 people experienced this multi-sensory and distinctive campaign, and five times as many through the pictures shared on social media by delighted commuters. Guides such as Lonely Planet even featured the experience as a must-visit in the city.

These examples show how brands can build powerful experiences to capture the attention of new and existing consumers. By combining emotional value for people and fidelity to their brand territory, marketers can turn attention into memorable experiences that build their brands, one moment at a time.
One of the most important considerations in building experiences that truly capture attention is to make sure everyone feels included. It may sound obvious but is yet to be a reality for many population groups, despite their growing economic influence (in the US alone, the buying power of racial and ethnic minority groups is close to four trillion dollars).  

Like attention, diversity and inclusivity should not be taken for granted and require continuous effort. Brands have a critical role to play in that space. According to dentsu and SeeHer, 81% of US consumers agree media plays a crucial role in shaping gender roles, but less than a third (32%) think media usually portray women accurately. 

Brands can no longer neglect diversity and inclusivity. It may lead to uncomfortable realisations, difficult conversations and mistakes along the way, but embracing inclusivity is now an imperative for brands to become or stay relevant to population groups that have been overlooked for too long.

According to the iProspect 2020 Global Client Survey, 96% of marketers now believe inclusive marketing is important, most of them (63%) seeing it both as a moral imperative and a business opportunity. Interestingly, the percentage of marketers who believe it is only important for the business potential it represents is decreasing (-7% YOY), while the percentage of respondents seeing it as important solely on moral grounds is increasing in the same proportion. It could be a sign that more companies are growing more comfortable with embracing a societal role.

Reflecting on the campaigns they ran over the last six months, 55% of marketers declare they featured people from a different ethnicity/caste than the dominant one in their market at least once in a positive way. This increasing figure (+3% YOY) could hint that the increasing visibility of movements like Black Lives Matter progressively change perceptions and actions around social justice.

However, not all population groups follow the same trend. For instance, we observe the percentage moving down for people with disabilities (-4%), which makes them underrepresented compared to the global share of people living with some form of disability (15%).

These figures show that, although inclusive marketing is gaining traction, there is still a lot left to do to improve the visibility of minorities in media and advertising and to build authentic stories that accurately reflect minorities’ experiences. Although there is no inclusive silver bullet, there is definitely a starting place: the diversity within the organisation. Building inclusive marketing campaigns requires inclusive marketing teams wherein diverse voices can be heard. This is a sine qua non condition for brands to resonate with all their potential customers.
Advertising campaigns are not the only ways for brands to get consumers’ attention. Guiding them when they search for information, helping them to learn more about a topic, and assisting them in accomplishing what they want are powerful means for brands to capture their interest and to influence what happens next.

To design valuable, consumer-centric experiences that will be noticed by their audiences, marketers should focus on three priorities: correctly interpreting intent, solving users’ problems and delivering on expectations.

Correctly interpreting intent is not just about observing consumers’ search activities and the various tasks they perform throughout the day, but also about understanding their reasons and the context around them.

First-party data is a good place to start. For instance, website analytics inform about the kind of audiences you attract, CRM data show who buys your products, and customer support data cast light on consumers’ struggles.

To complement these data sources, ad hoc surveys can capture consumers’ attitudes, motivations and triggers. For example, running a large-scale quantitative survey of first-time moms helps understand what their everyday looks like, where they are seeking advice, and how they handle caregiving issues. To give voice to that data, small-scale user studies enable you to hear directly from first-time moms (e.g., the types of searches they perform). As privacy regulations give consumers more control about how their data is used, we anticipate that consumer surveys will see renewed interest from brands.

By encompassing what audiences express and how they interact with your brand, this approach makes it possible to truly know audiences as people. You can then develop actionable portraits rooted in data which help identify areas where your brand is well positioned to win with content and develop content roadmaps that truly address your audience needs.
To help consumers solve a problem, start with a shift in focus from the brand to the consumer. It is about adapting the brand response to the consumer moment, and recognising that all these moments are not necessarily about purchasing a product. For instance, Google has identified four pivotal micro-moments: I want to know, I want to go, I want to do, I want to buy.

When first-time moms look to soothe their crying infants, they will often turn to search engines. The keywords they use carry a lot of intent and emotion. A search for “swaddle” may be about looking for a product, while a search for “swaddling” may be about looking for information on whether it is safe. In both cases, these keywords are proxies for the underlying problem: how to get a baby to sleep through the night.

In the search engine result pages, results for the “swaddle” query are centred around products – which only partially addresses the bigger problem at play – and there is a lot of advertising competition. Conversely, the query “how to get a baby to sleep through the night” returns the “Interesting finds” component, which provides users the option to land on a content page. For brands, it is an opportunity to demonstrate they understand people’s intent and context, and to provide a valuable solution rather than focusing solely on the product and transaction. From telecom companies developing guides around improving Wi-Fi reception to water treatment companies educating consumers about contamination of water, this approach using value as the key factor to capture attention is applicable across all industries.

By understanding intent and assessing the search engine results page and content types delivered, brands can much better assess not only the problem, but the best suited format for delivery, too - whether that is a video, an article, an image or other.

As one marketer out of two (48%) declares that not being consistent across every element of the consumer experience is a main challenge for long-term trust in their brand, strategic use of content presents a true opportunity to bring the experience together - from attention to transaction - by making the most of consumer intent and context through value.
WHAT BRANDS CAN DO: EXPLOITATION

/ FACTOR ATTENTION INTO YOUR MEDIA EFFORTS /

In this age of noise where people are easily distracted, the metrics used by the advertising industry to plan and trade media across platforms are no longer sufficient to capture the true attention levels of audiences. While dentsu’s Attention Economy project is currently leading the charge to define the trading currency of tomorrow, there are some steps marketers can take today to optimise their campaigns for attention.

Review and optimise your current campaigns with a specific focus on visibility (e.g., Are my ads viewable? How much clutter is surrounding my ads?), attention triggers (e.g., Am I using the audience and contextual data available to me to refine messages? Are my creative teams adapting the copy and visuals to the specific codes of each platform?) and recognisability (e.g., Are my ads easily attributable to my brand? Even in peripheral view or in the absence of sound or image?). Eye-tracking technology can help you see your campaigns as your audiences actually experience them.

/ BUILD INCLUSIVE AND IMMERSE EXPERIENCES /

Physical, virtual, augmented, collective, personalised… the variety, quantity and quality of experiences at people’s disposal have never seemed as vast as today. Immersion and innovation are powerful ways for brands to build experiences that can compete in a cluttered landscape. Experiment with experiential content and ad units to surprise and interest your audiences.

Keep in mind that for people to give you their attention, they need to feel represented and included in your communications and experiences. Today, brands that do not put diversity and inclusivity at the forefront of their priorities risk missing out on the growing purchasing power of minority groups, and tarnishing their image in the long term. Ensure that this question is always top-of-mind for anyone involved in developing your marketing campaigns, from the brief stage to sign off.

/ ALIGN UX WITH CONSUMER INTENT /

Six out of ten marketers (60%) believe they will have to invest long-term in their content capabilities in the aftermath of the pandemic. Developing a content approach rooted in consumer intent and problem-solving is a winning strategy to maximise the value for your audiences.

Start with analysing the data at your disposal to understand the intent, the context, and the motivations of your audience. Identify the relevant micro-moments and think about problem-focused searches for which you could develop valuable content around tangential but relevant topics. Then, optimise your UX in light of consumer intent, focusing on the helpfulness of your content and the ease to navigate from content to product to check out. Do not overlook the technical side, such as site speed, which influences how you rank in search results, and thus your ability to capture attention.
To continue capturing the attention of consumers and stay relevant in the long term, brands need to detect, observe and understand the growing cultural trends that matter to their audiences. Here are three dynamics we believe will open new growth opportunities for brands in the future and that we invite marketers to examine closer.

/ FUELLING FANDOMS /  
Most relevant sectors:  
Technology, Beauty, Entertainment

Technology has made connecting those with likeminded interests much easier, turning fandoms into a more involved pastime. Previously niche interests like gaming have given way to behemoths like esports, successful new gaming sub-genres, or even fandoms for game developers themselves. Digital platforms continue to enable fandoms to develop further, with platforms such as Reddit where communities can define their own governance rules or Patreon and Kickstarter that allow communities to finance projects they support.

Brands need to understand how these fandoms function, what services or platforms they need to thrive, and ultimately how to communicate to them in a nurturing way.

/ RISE OF THE DIGITAL SELF /  
Most relevant sectors:  
Entertainment, Fashion, Retail

As connectivity and digital capabilities increase, there has been a growing convergence in people’s physical and digital selves. From areas to socialise and interact online to the idea of Metaverses within games, online personas are becoming just as valid as real-world counterparts.

This has significant ramifications to advertising and e-commerce, creating whole new spaces that allow for greater interactivity and closer replication of brick-and-mortar stores with added flexibility and without significant overhead. The digital content and products mimic their real-life counterparts such as digital fashion collections, VR storefronts, in-game concerts, and entertainment releases.

/ MULTI-SENSE INTERFACING /  
Most relevant sectors:  
Retail, FMCG, Beauty

The integration of virtual assistants in people’s daily environment foretells the emergence of ambient computing, where devices sit more discretely in the background, and of natural user interfaces, which can be used intuitively through multi-sensory inputs.

As these trends become more commonplace, consumers will expect technology to react efficiently and naturally to their instructions regardless of how they give them, via sound, gestures, sight, touch or even thought. This means brands will have to adapt and be readily recognisable even if there’s not a visual component to the transaction, for instance, through sonic identities.
The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed disparities between brands when it comes to data maturity. For instance, we have seen clear differences between industry categories able to leverage their customer data and those with deficits in direct access to customers due to intermediation. According to the dentsu COVID-19 Global Client Survey, while more than 40% of respondents in the Finance & Insurance sector have increased their CRM activity to respond to the consequences of the crisis, only around 20% in the FMCG and F&B categories have done so.

The race is now on to (re)gain control over customer relationships through better usage of data. According to iProspect research, about six out of ten marketers believe they will need to invest long-term in their AdTech (57%) and data (61%) capabilities in the aftermath of the pandemic.

However, data can be a double-edged sword in the context of marketing. Used properly, data can enable stronger customer experiences in many ways, from more personalised offers and up-to-date product information to better insights for developing products and messages. Used improperly, data can backfire and seriously hurt the brand credibility and business: 65% of consumers whose data were compromised in a data breach declare they stopped doing business with the company involved.

In the next pages, we first delve into the new data context brands need to navigate, shaped by evolving consumer expectations around privacy and by more restrictive policies around data collection. We then explore the shape-shifting nature of bias in data and what marketers can do about it. We also discuss the renewed importance of structured data, which can help brands differentiate themselves while harnessing the full potential of automation, before looking into the need for new ways of working. As in the previous sections, we conclude by recommending measures to activate today and opportunities to explore to prepare for tomorrow.
NEW EXPECTATIONS EMERGE AROUND DATA PRIVACY

In recent years, data privacy has become an increasingly significant issue for people and brands. In the wake of publicised privacy scandals and heavily discussed regulations such as the European Union’s GDPR and California’s CCPA and CPRA, consumers have grown more aware of the importance of protecting their data privacy. Some of the world’s most famous and beloved brands like Apple have even made privacy a key differentiator at the core of their strategy, bringing major attention to this topic.

Brands cannot ignore these concerns. It is not only a matter of complying with regulations, but also a critical consideration to preserve their image and business over time. Today, an increasing share of marketers understand that data privacy should not be an afterthought of their strategy, with 68% believing they should make proactive compromises in how consumer data is used to build consumer trust. Although the traditional value for money equation is not obsolete, it needs to be revisited to factor data privacy as a new variable.

Finding the right balance in the value exchange between data and privacy is no easy feat. According to our research, marketers generally tend to overestimate the value of the benefits they provide. Half (49%) believe they offer a fair exchange to consumers for the value of their data, while only 37% of consumers agree.

NEW EXPECTATIONS EMERGE AROUND DATA PRIVACY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In exchange of what incentive would your consumers/be willing to share their/personal data with your/a brand? (% of respondents)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARKETERS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalised rewards or discounts for frequently bought items or services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personalised pricing (% off, money back)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personalised recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>More personalised customer service</td>
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<td>Free access to a service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free samples of products or services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personalised alerts and notifications</td>
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<td>Free or upgraded shipping options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free access to content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expedited purchasing/checkout options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to purchase history</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automated reordering of frequent purchases</td>
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<tr>
<td>To help a company improve products or services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service or appointment notifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automatic and recurring payments</td>
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However, as illustrated in the opposite table, marketers tend to underestimate consumers’ motivations to share their data. Interestingly, only 9% of marketers believe helping a company improve products or services is an incentive for consumers, while 44% of consumers believe so.

These disconnections can create a perceived imbalance in the value exchange, which can result in distrust from consumers or missed opportunities for brands. For that reason, it is important for brands to develop a clear understanding of the specific factors influencing their audiences’ attitudes and behaviours around privacy, and to build upon these insights to adjust the value exchange they propose to consumers.

It is equally crucial to keep in mind the consumer perception of the value exchange is not shaped only during transactions. It is the sum of all the interactions people have with the company and is conditioned by the company’s credibility regarding privacy issues. With two thirds of consumers (67%) having little to no understanding about how their data is used by companies, brands that proactively reach out to customers about how they approach privacy can help alleviate concerns, explain the value they deliver in exchange for data, and seize the opportunity to differentiate from the competition.

As only 22% of consumers declare they always read privacy policies, regularly educating your customers about your privacy practices in clear and concise language can demonstrate greater attention to consumer privacy needs compared to competitors reaching out sporadically and in legal jargon when they update their policies. Additionally, brands should not look away from the worst scenarios. No company is fully immune to data breaches, which is why now is a good time to review your response plan in order to be better positioned to conserve or regain your customers’ trust in case of a breach. Assembling a response team, training your employees about the key actions to take in face of a breach, documenting a plan of action and preparing templates to swiftly disseminate communications are best practices to be prepared to respond to a breach transparently and effectively, and doing so, mitigate the damage.

Building trust is a long-term endeavour and protecting data privacy is an integral part of it. As such, data privacy should underpin every action brands take today and tomorrow.

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As consumers look for more privacy, they are increasingly enabled by technology to escape tracking. Since 2017, all the main web browsers have put in place or announced initiatives to make online user tracking more difficult and transparent. Although the specific policies of these initiatives - commonly referred to as tracking prevention - vary between browsers, they all undermine the use of cookies for marketing purposes.
Third-party cookies, tracking codes used for targeting audiences across websites, are particularly challenged by tracking prevention. For brands, it means a wide array of marketing techniques, such as remarketing or multi-touch attribution, are affected.

Not all organisations have been impacted in the same manner by tracking prevention so far. Factors such as in-market penetration of each browser and the sophistication of each brand’s digital marketing strategy all play a role in how companies have been absorbing the tracking prevention shock. According to our 2020 Global Client Survey, about one marketer out of four (23%) declares that tracking prevention has already had an impact on their marketing to this point. One in ten (11%) declares no impact. More worryingly, 60% declare they are not familiar with tracking prevention or are unsure about the consequences on their business, showing that this fast-changing landscape is not completely understood by everyone.

If there is one simple truth for brands to remember, it is that third-party cookies will be obsolete by 2022. Therefore, the clock is ticking to reassess the data strategies powering their marketing efforts. In light of this privacy targeting shift, marketers can have the most confidence in the long-term usability of their own first-party data, as well as data leveraged in partnership within closed ecosystems.
/ BUILDING A FIRST-PARTY DATA INFRASTRUCTURE /

This approach aims to shore up your first-party data (i.e., data that you collect directly through loyalty logins, in-store signups, lead forms, etc.) in place of existing cookie-based programmes. By building and cultivating rich sources of user identifiers, companies can get a better understanding of their audiences and leverage one-on-one targeting opportunities, all without relying on third-party cookies.

As you develop bespoke segmentation models, you can pass lists of known users between Customer Data Platforms (CDPs) and Demand Side Platforms (DSPs) to target users with personalised creatives across media channels like social and paid search. You can also build lookalike profiles that you can then incentivise to join your loyalty programme in order to grow your first-party data set and CRM.

Although this approach can be costly, the deep understanding of customer lifetime value (CLTV) it enables is highly beneficial to brands looking to drive engagement over time. All customers are not equal and should not be valued as such.

/ LEVERAGING CLOSED ECOSYSTEMS /

In lieu of cookies, a closed ecosystem approach relies on signed-in users of platforms such as Google or Amazon, often referred to as walled gardens. This approach allows brands to upload their own historical audiences in the form of CRM data into the platform. This can be a straight upload, or it can be a more complex integrated solution, for instance, Google BigQuery. Within BigQuery, advertisers can cluster audiences into segments based on behavioural and purchase history (e.g., top spenders), look up similarities across Google’s own data, and pick out key similar attributes within those segments (e.g., 40+ men in market for dating services). From there, advertisers activate by applying both CRM and Google owned audiences like lookalike. Similar audiences to existing Google marketing campaigns (e.g., search, YouTube) and optimise visibility, investments and performance according to data.

Leaning into closed ecosystems has its own set of benefits. It starts with ease of activation, thanks to integration with the platform’s native activation products. It is especially interesting for brands that are both comfortable sharing their first-party data and already rely heavily on components of those ecosystems. Additionally, this approach is particularly useful for brands with CRM data that are unable to immediately invest in a nurturing program.

Although the choices you make now will impact long-term modelling projects and your eventual source of truth, the two paths are not mutually exclusive. For instance, a better handle on your first-party data will enable you to make more informed decisions about what is needed from a closed ecosystem down the line.

/ THE TRADE-OFFS BETWEEN THE PATHS TO ACTIVATION /

Which path is the most advantageous for your brand?

A few considerations can help you make an educated choice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USER LEVEL:</th>
<th>BUILDING A FIRST-PARTY DATA INFRASTRUCTURE</th>
<th>LEVERAGING CLOSED ECOSYSTEMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there an advantage in activating against individual consumers or would lifetime value-powered audience-first strategies fit the bill?</td>
<td>Person level</td>
<td>Audience level</td>
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<tr>
<th>TRANSPARENCY LEVEL:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is matching and modelling transparency a priority or is a less transparent approach acceptable if it meant deeper insights into lesser known target audiences?</td>
<td>Owned ID &amp; modelling application</td>
<td>Matched ID &amp; proprietary modelling</td>
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<tr>
<th>DETAIL LEVEL:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the macro view of user journeys important, or would a zoomed-in view of the closed ecosystems of partners have a larger impact on your media plan?</td>
<td>Macro view with known blind spots</td>
<td>Zoomed-in view, but more comprehensive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSIBILITY LEVEL:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is being the primary owner and operator of the platform a priority relative to sharing information with a partner?</td>
<td>Custom audience built in CDP and routinely pushed to DSPs</td>
<td>Custom audiences modelled and activated in-platform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A robust CLTV perspective can drastically change how brands drive their business. It influences performance indicators and bidding strategies (e.g., the target ROAS is not only based on the revenue from the most recent purchase). It influences predictive modelling and targeting (e.g., building and targeting lookalike profiles with the highest profitability over time). For public companies, CLTV can also impact their stock market valuation, with new analytical companies such as Theta Equity Partners specialising in analysing customer behaviour over time to inform investors. A first-party data infrastructure is therefore a robust foundation for truly understanding the data you currently own before making other structural data-based decisions.
Bias is everywhere in society, and technology and data are no exception. Far from being neutral, technology and data can perpetuate and exacerbate disparities, prejudice, and discriminatory patterns. Many fields at the core of data marketing can be subject to bias, from insights to algorithms to targeting and performance analysis.

However, tackling bias is a difficult challenge as it can appear in many forms and on multiple occasions.

It can be intentional (e.g., a decision to exclude a certain ethnic group from a campaign) or unintentional (e.g., combining multiple data targeting dimensions such as income and location that could de facto exclude minorities living in certain areas).

It can play out at an individual level (e.g., due to the personal values of an employee) or at a company level (e.g., due to a lack of diversity in a product development team).

It can stem from organisational inertia, negligence, or ignorance. (e.g., if a community was never targeted by the brand, a predictive model using historical data can incorrectly conclude the community is less likely to purchase its products and thus that the brand should not target this community in the future).

It can emerge from within or be imported into the organisation (e.g., by using incomplete or poor-quality data from third parties).

It can be a combination of the factors listed and more, which makes bias detection even harder.

Because of the omnipresence of bias across organisations, it is crucial for companies to actively seek to identify and eliminate bias through various, overlapping strategies.
According to the iProspect 2020 Global Client Survey, a majority (52%) of marketing teams are now diverse and inclusive (+9% YOY). This is an important milestone as minority groups should not only be visible in consumer personas, but also around the marketing table.

Guidelines and best practices on diversity and inclusion are the second option favoured by brands (44%), followed by multidisciplinary bias training (32%, +8% YOY).

From the results, it seems that brands are increasingly concentrating their efforts on the people within the organisation (e.g., through recruitment, training, committees) to drive change, rather than relying on external partners or focusing on processes. However, the latter should not be overlooked. An external perspective can be useful for organisations to look beyond their filter bubble (e.g., through advanced analysis of data and algorithms, hiring process testing, or consulting on website design accessibility), and a systematic audit of product development and marketing campaigns can prevent oversights.

"Minority groups should not only be visible in consumer personas, but also around the marketing table."

What practices does your company follow to ensure your marketing effort is inclusive? (percentage of respondents selecting the answer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our marketing team is diverse and inclusive.</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our company provides official guidelines and best practices on diversity and inclusion.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our company provides periodic training about inclusivity and unconscious bias across the various departments (e.g., creatives, data analysts, software engineers).</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a diversity and inclusivity committee within the company.</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our company employs an external partner for auditing and consulting on diversity and inclusivity matters.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our company includes an audit to review for inclusivity as a standard part of product and marketing campaign development.</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marketers should keep in mind these additional considerations to reduce bias specifically in data marketing:

01
As with the move toward privacy and Intelligent Tracking Prevention (ITP), the fight against bias calls for better data. Question the quality of the data you use in your marketing campaigns to prevent bias from spreading into data-powered activities.

02
Your teams are not the only ones who should have frequent bias training. Your predictive models should be retrained regularly as well to learn from new, real-world data. Tools such as the AI Fairness 360 by IBM and The Linux Foundation can help you understand the bias in machine learning models.

03
Keep investing in diverse teams. Human critical thinking is an essential safeguard to remove blind spots automation can generate.
The Renewed Importance of Structured Data

As automation is increasingly accessible to brands, with increasing numbers of automation focused solutions made available by vendors and tech platforms, it is relatively easy for brands to launch decent campaigns - but it also makes differentiating from competition more difficult.

This is why structured data and feeds continue to grow in importance.

Structured data and feeds are collections of data (e.g., price, product availability, weather) with useful associations that can be used consistently across a large array of marketing channels (e.g., search, social, email). By organising information to be understood and utilised by various systems, structured data is the true cornerstone of automation, powering the brands’ ads across many verticals, such as airlines (e.g., flight rates), hospitality (e.g., hotel listings) and automotive (e.g., nearby dealerships).

Structured data is becoming increasingly important for three reasons:

01

Structured data can be used to automate the integration of any data signal into the media ecosystem, especially the brand’s products and service details. Products and service data sets do not include personally identifiable information (PII) data and are not impacted by data privacy concerns, which means marketers can confidently invest in these specific structured data to deliver the best value for audiences regardless of the ever-changing privacy landscape.

02

Six marketers out of ten (61%) declare the most powerful lever to business growth is building a highly convenient experience for the consumer. Feeds enable marketers to make the most of shoppable media opportunities, which make the consumer path to purchase more convenient. They also improve the relevance of ads through more personalisation possibilities. For instance, iProspect helped a retail apparel company to dynamically adjust which product image to use for each product via the feed and connect it to media campaigns. Analysing performance data, we realised that for women’s products, images featuring models performed much stronger than images of the product by itself. For men’s products, it was the exact opposite. We were able to increase the relevance of ads by optimising the images featured for each product, resulting in stronger engagement and increased average order value.

03

With the current recession putting marketing budgets and resources under pressure, structured data and feeds can make media management more efficient. For example, campaigns can automatically be paused when a product is momentarily out of stock, reducing media wastage. They also make maintaining ad accuracy of large catalogues more efficient. For instance, we augmented the feed of all the properties managed by a real estate client with point-of-interest data and neighbourhood data - both critical to how people search for properties - so that the ad copy could be updated automatically with minimal human intervention.
There are three challenges most marketers will face when exploring how to use structured data and feeds to create a positive value exchange: identification, access and execution. The following considerations are key to overcoming these challenges.

01 Data signal audit (People)
Conducting a thorough data audit to understand what data sets are available to you and what signals are relevant to your brand is the first step to tap into structured data. When it comes to automation, bad data input can quickly turn into a very bad output, which is why collaboration is critical at this stage. Involving internal stakeholders (e.g., IT department) to align on how to structure data sources and setting quality standards for third-party feeds is a good practice to prevent potential issues later.

02 Data acquisition (Platform)
Securing continuous, real-time access to the right data signals requires identifying a technology platform able to both connect to your own internal data systems to pull in relevant data and ingest third-party data sources into a single data environment, such as iProspect’s FeedConnect and iActivate.

03 Data management activation (Process)
Connecting structured data to active media programmes can be challenging, as each platform has its own technical integration, and each channel its own requirements. For instance, paid search keyword campaigns typically call for short titles of products without brand names, while product listing ads and organic search require longer titles and descriptions. On top of technical know-how, it is important to include a complete testing strategy to make the most of each data signal in the feed and inform campaign management decisions, for instance, by factoring product seasonality to adjust bids throughout the year, or by including margin data to the feed to optimise against bottom-line performance.

The possibilities offered by structured data and feeds are endless, but it is crucial to coordinate between departments to create models with tangible applications.

The possibilities offered by structured data and feeds are endless, but it is crucial to coordinate between departments to create models with tangible applications.

We believe the future of structured data leans toward optimising how likely a given audience segment is to purchase a specific product, and we predict there will soon be an opportunity to use additional data signals to maximise the affinity at the product level.

It could mean using analytical data at the CRM and product SKU levels to determine which products drive the highest contributions to a consumer’s lifetime value, looking at the types of products that most often drive a second purchase to boost them through advertising and drive customer retention, etc. For instance, a smartphone brand will be able to use structured data and feeds to increase the bid of ads featuring their most recent device - and not the bids for its entire smartphone range - when communicating specifically to early adopters.

The possibilities are endless, but it is crucial to coordinate between departments to create models with tangible applications.
ADOPTING A GROWTH APPROACH

We believe instead of working within rigid frameworks, brands need to develop clear working principles to make the most of the data available to them. Here is a good three-part preliminary data strategy.

**Be data-informed, not data-driven.**

Organisations should move away from the chimera of pure data-driven decisions, where supposedly perfect data meet supposedly perfect algorithms. Investments in data should be made with the clear objective to only inform decision making, enabling us – not machines – to better assess opportunities and risks, and imagine more valuable consumer experiences.

Marketers also need to learn to do better with less or different data. For instance, we are observing a renewal of interest in search data as a key source of insights. Search data can be used as a proxy for market share, to evaluate the effectiveness of advertising, or to predict demand levels. All of this is available through relatively simple modelling that does not require massive data science capabilities or large first-party datasets – a characteristic particularly important in turbulent times.

**Focus on high-value tasks.**

Technology plays a critical role in helping us focus on higher value areas by removing repeatable tasks. According to our research, with increased improvements in marketing automation, marketers are keen to focus on becoming more analytical in decision-making (64% of respondents), improving the creative message (44%), building consumer empathy (42%) and understanding culture (25%). By using automation where it matters to give their marketing teams time to solve new challenges, organisations will be in a better position to improve every single consumer interaction – delivering value for all stakeholders, simplifying transactions, nurturing relationships, and building brand resilience.

**Nurture an ever-learning mindset.**

In light of the new expectations around inclusivity, increasing privacy demands and an ever-changing technological landscape, marketers need to reconsider their ways of working and move beyond simply reviewing how they collect, process and use data. Marketers should reflect on the role data plays in their business strategy and its potential to compound daily progress into sustainable success. They should ask themselves, “How can we use data and technology to transform our brand?”
Data is one of the most powerful connectors between brand and performance – on many levels. For instance, analytics, search, and social data can reveal under-served needs or changing consumer sentiment that can represent opportunities for brand strategy. Data can uncover changes in people’s media consumption, opening new trading opportunities to maximise brand share of voice. It can inform creative teams with new insights to build messages more aligned with customer priorities. As more channels such as TV and OOH are digitised, data enables more personal and consistent experiences. And by powering automation, it can help marketers focus on the core of their mission, building brands and driving sales. This is why data strategy should be a cornerstone in each of your marketing efforts.

/ PROACTIVELY ADOPT A PRIVACY-BY-DESIGN APPROACH /

With almost nine consumers out of ten considering data privacy as a right, organisations should not only fulfil their compliance obligations, but also spearhead a proactive privacy approach if they are to retain consumers’ trust.

It starts with a genuine assessment of your customers’ perception of the data value exchange you offer. This audit will help you understand whether you should focus on adapting your product or service to rectify the value imbalance, or better communicate the value you provide, which would call for a specific effort in client education. These actions will make consumers feel more comfortable about the usage of their data, which can give you a competitive edge and make your brand more resilient in case of a data incident such as a breach.

/ ADAPT YOUR INFRASTRUCTURE TO THE NEW PRIVACY-CONSCIOUS WORLD /

Third-party cookies will soon be obsolete. This is a game changer for many brands who have based their digital marketing strategy on cookie-based engagements for years.

With browsers regularly introducing new tracking prevention measures, your first concern should be to keep yourself informed of the latest changes to limit the immediate effects on your ongoing marketing campaigns, for instance, by making sure your cookies are always labelled in accordance with browsers’ specifications. Your second concern should be to make your organisation future-proof before the third-party cookies disappear for good. This means deeply understanding how your existing activation strategy will be impacted and investigating non cookie-based alternatives that make sense for your business infrastructure and ambition. Get your first-party data in order. Regardless of how you decide to approach data driven activations (first-party infrastructure, closed ecosystem approach, or both), you will benefit from cultivating rich first-party datasets to decrease reliance on third-party data.

/ OPTIMISE YOUR STRUCTURED DATA TO IMPROVE YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE /

Structured data and feeds can help brands make the most of automation, gain competitive advantage through more relevant customer experiences, and reduce wasted media spend.

To start leveraging structured data and feeds in more nuanced and strategic ways, start with conducting a data audit of the data sets directly available to you inside your organisation, and of the relevant third-party data signals that could enrich you first-part data. Then, select a technology platform capable of continuously bringing all these various sources of data into a single place by connecting to your tech stack and third-party APIs. Before activating this structured data through media campaigns, remember to develop a robust testing plan to be able to measure and optimise performance.
WHAT BRANDS CAN DO: EXPLORATION

/ RECONSIDER YOUR ANALYTICS ROADMAP /

With the end of third-party cookies, it is not only the capacity of brands to engage with consumers online that is disrupted, but also their source of truth in measuring business performance. Explore how to evolve your measurement strategy to a more future-proof approach to ensure business continuity.

The difficulty reconciling impressions to a single individual will have the largest impact on Multi-Touch Attribution (MTA) as we know it, making the path to conversion murkier.

Given data availability, we anticipate that Lifetime Value (LTV) modelling will likely become the most viable optimisation option moving forward.

Additionally, we believe Media Mix Modelling (MMM) will see a resurgence. Because they use aggregated spend impression volumes to determine each tactic’s business contribution, these models will not be impacted by future privacy regulations.

/ SEEK AND REMOVE BIAS FROM YOUR DATA MARKETING EFFORTS /

Bias is everywhere in organisations. It can be found in the company’s past and present actions, but that does not mean it is a fatal flaw. Companies should proactively seek to identify sources of bias and course-correct them. Fighting bias is a long-term endeavour that brands need to address every day.

Removing bias requires acting simultaneously on its two main sources: people and data. For people, it starts with assembling diverse and inclusive marketing teams, wherein all voices are empowered and heard. It also means regularly educating teams on the multi-faceted nature of bias and how to mitigate its effects. Regarding data, the rule is simple: bias in, bias out. Question the data used across the organisation. Whether first- or third-party data. Poor or incomplete data can skew machine learning to the wrong conclusions. Regularly examine predictive models to ensure they do not create blind spots for bias.

/ ADOPT A GROWTH APPROACH /

The current societal and technological changes at play present an opportunity to question the role of data in your organisation. Define or revisit the key principles guiding your ways of working in light of the new data playbook.

As marketers will have to do better with less or different data, reassess the tools, technology, data, and skills at your disposal to support your decisions. Enable your teams to focus on high-value efforts by automating low-value tasks, so that they can design novel solutions to propel growth rather than spend their valuable time and energy organising data. Nurse a culture of constant learning within your organisation by facilitating the emergence and trial of hypotheses and applying the outcomes to inform and refine decisions, drive priorities and investments, enable new skills and reinforce purpose. By growing better one moment at a time, brands can make the promise of tomorrow become the reality of today.
As we have seen in this report, the benefits of uniting brand and performance are legion, from building more consistent and compelling consumer experiences to maximising the value of each touchpoint to hitting short-term revenue target while building brands on the long term.

Ultimately, uniting brand and performance drives growth across every facet of the marketing spectrum.

Organisations should strive to build and maintain an accurate picture of their commerce capabilities across five key dimensions: desirability, availability, findability, buyability, and repeatability. This will help them define the most profitable commerce model for their brand, better integrate their e-commerce and stores into an actionable omnichannel strategy, explore new growth channels, and turn media opportunities into transaction opportunities.

They should consider factoring attention into their media optimisation and measurement efforts to elevate the impact and efficiency of their investment. To maximise audience attention, they should ensure the content and experiences they design truly align with consumer intent, and that the campaigns they develop do not relegate diversity and inclusivity as afterthoughts.

On the data front, organisations should embrace the new privacy-conscious world by reevaluating the value exchange they offer to their audiences, and anticipate technological changes to minimise business disruption. This is the occasion to explore opportunities for automation, evaluate the quality of the data they collect and process, and more broadly reflect upon how data is effectively used to inform decisions.

**CONCLUSION**

This ambition calls for a performance mindset.

A mindset that places the consumer at the heart of every initiative.

A mindset that focuses on using each moment and opportunity to refine our skills and improve outcomes.

A mindset that welcomes bold ideas and fosters innovation to unlock the next driver of growth.

At iProspect, we believe this learning-by-doing approach is the most efficient way to deliver daily progress that compounds into sustainable success. It is at the heart of who we are and what we do.

This is how we accelerate brands.
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iPROSPECT

iProspect, a dentsu company, is a global digital-first end to end media agency. Its unmatched mix of media strategy and storytelling with digital expertise and audience knowledge defines the new territory of performance-driven brand building. By delivering human-centric solutions, iProspect accelerates growth for the world’s most iconic brands including Sonos, Cox, LG, Hilton, Levi’s, Budweiser, Microsoft, and Procter & Gamble. The iProspect team works across a network of more than 8,000 media and performance specialists spread across 91 global markets.

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