

The Open Creative Project

by Creative Works.
Google

Welcome to

The Open Creative Project

A pandemic. War in Europe. Social unrest. Polycrisis — and permacrisis. The mass adoption of disruptive technologies at scale. Rapid breakthroughs in AI technology. No one will ever say these were predictable times.

It means we've all had to adapt, and change at least some of our ways. No matter what's going on in the world around us, we're tapping into our creativity to re-envision how we work, learn, collaborate, and celebrate, helped by a growing set of digital tools.

While people are out there creating new ways of living, a structural shake-up in marketing is forcing brands to **reconsider their approach to creative work** — mainly, what is its role, who makes it, and how?

For years, brands have relied on a fairly predictable playbook: make a product, ship it to retailers, hire an agency to craft a story, then sell it. But advances in technology and changing consumer behavior have upended all of that, shattering the neat little purchase funnel into a million pieces.

Technology analyst Benedict Evans calls this shift the **Great Unbundling**. Today, the gap between discovery and purchase can be as narrow as one click, and a physical retail presence isn't always required. At the same time, audiences are segmenting in increasingly granular ways, and new technologies are leading to disruptive business models at an incredible pace.

Throughout this period of uncertainty, we at Google have been looking at what this burst of innovation means for the creative ecosystem. To better understand, and try to anticipate the changes to come, we turned to some of the industry's brightest minds to help answer the most pressing questions.

The result is The Open Creative Project, a report that brings Google together with some of its most forward-thinking partners — creative intelligence service Contagious, analyst Benedict Evans, and management consultancy Bain & Company, along with 25 creative industry trailblazers — to explore how the energy created by combining technology and creativity can propel our industry forward.

What we've found is exciting: Not only is open creativity thriving, it's also growing increasingly important. The global market for creative advertising services and tools is worth around \$140 billion, annually, and is poised to grow faster than the market has historically — around a 9% increase each year.¹ As platforms phase out cookies and consumers share less of their data, great creative is key to connecting with audiences. And when spending tightens during economic downturns, creative messaging will work double time to draw people in.

At this moment, every facet of uncertainty offers a glint of **opportunity**, whether that's in harnessing the creator economy, embracing AI-driven creativity, or using the entire internet as a canvas for e-commerce.

This report touches on 4 major areas of opportunity to ask:

- 1 Who is a creative now?
- 2 How can brands reach the right people with less customer data?
- 3 What does the rise of AI mean for the creative industry?
- 4 How can e-commerce help build a brand?

Our goal is to spark a conversation that will continue in the coming months and years. And as you chart the future of your brand, we hope it will inspire your own experimentation.

Everyone is a creative — really

A guide to fostering organization-wide creativity

In 2020 the internet became our lifeline to the outside world. People yearning for connection flocked to digital spaces where their interests and passions could flourish. We all got more creative, and when more creators tapped into the existing culture of content, something magical happened.

At-home chefs became influencers, with global audiences devouring their YouTube videos every night. Gamers live streamed their adventures to thousands — sometimes millions — of rapt fans. And from a teenager's living room to yours, the latest dance routines went viral ... in the good sense.

The scale and reach of those videos has been staggering. In a world where more than 5 billion people are connected online,² there's no such thing as niche. From fashioning outfits to foraging for edible plants, shared passions are creating ever more vibrant online communities.

As a result, there's now more content, and competition for attention, than ever before. Between 2020 and 2021, there was approximately 40% growth in overall content volume, and that explosion has continued.³

To capture attention in a space brimming with all of these delights, brands need to show up in ways that speak to people's lives and interests, and with content made for the platform where it lives.

“U.S. advertising has declined by a third as a share of the GDP since 2000. But that's not the full picture: There are now different ways of telling stories and talking to customers that aren't a part of 'advertising' as it's traditionally defined. So what are we trying to do with those budgets?”

— Benedict Evans,
Technology Analyst



Lorraine Twohill,
CMO, Google



"A trend I'm personally excited about is co-creation. It's not just us as marketers putting work out in the world and letting consumers digest it. It's actually how real people are reacting to your work, or your products and services. How do you respond to that? How can you create a conversation?"⁴

* Stay relevant and nimble through creative partnerships

When culture and trends evolve in an instant and the world can change in the blink of an eye, marketers cannot always follow lengthy sign-off processes with multiple stakeholders. The good news? Investing in less "polished" spaces like YouTube can be a way to stay agile and engage audiences in meaningful ways.

This is an exciting and potentially daunting task for advertisers that are used to controlling their messages down to the last comma in a script. When brands no longer exclusively "own" their voice, brand building becomes a collaboration between brands, creators, and communities.

"I see many brands that are not clear enough and therefore the quality of creativity is variable. But when you have clarity about what your brand stands for, it's very easy to play with creativity, as well as culture and whatever's going on in life."

- Aline Santos Farhat, Chief Brand Officer and Chief Equity Diversity & Inclusion Officer, Unilever



“It’s going to be more important than ever for clients to put together brand guidelines that every single person who touches the business, products, brands, and moments should follow. Brands also have to live their purpose internally, in the products they make, and the businesses they grow into. If Kodak had lived its purpose, not its business, it could have been Facebook. But it saw the two as separate.”

- Susan Credle,
Global Chief Creative Officer, FCB Global

✦ Show up authentically and consistently with a strong brand purpose

Effective co-creation starts with having a clear articulation of your brand’s purpose, and letting those principles guide creative decision-making.

“If you have purpose and you live it every day, you’ll know where you can show up,” says Susan Credle, global chief creative officer at FCB Global. “You’ll know how to be authentic, and you’ll know where you’re allowed to be a part of meaningful conversations outside of your business.”

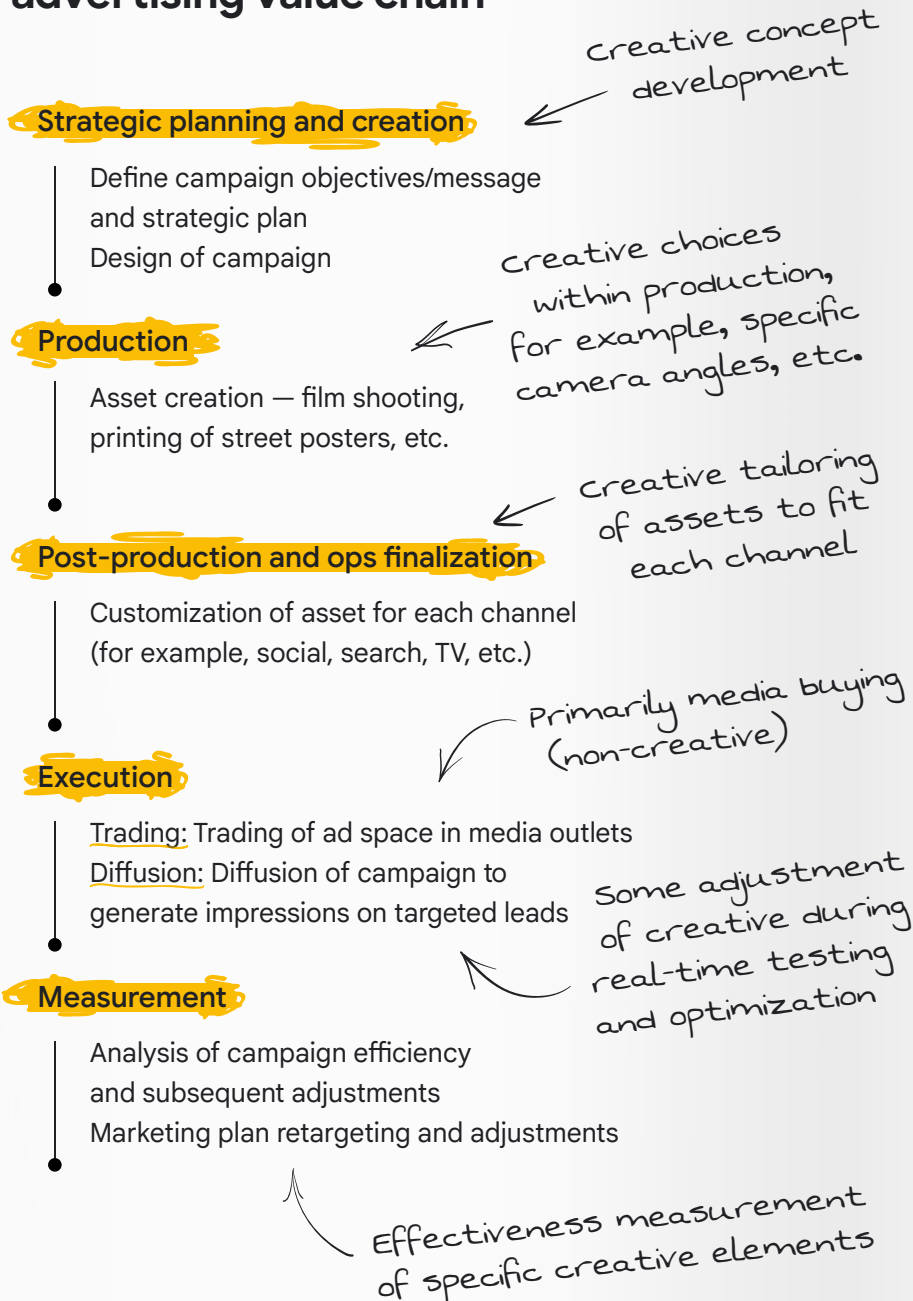
That doesn’t require a perfect pre-baked strategy; it may take some time to learn what works for your brand. It’s best to adopt an experimental mindset, ready to run tests to discover the voices and messaging that will resonate. When the brand itself is strong, there’s plenty of room to tinker with these elements.



“The most powerful brands are the ones where the community voices are as loud and as proud as the brand voice.”

- Jonathan Mildenhall,
Co-Founder and Chair,
TwentyFirstCenturyBrand

Creativity spans the advertising value chain



"You cannot outsource creativity. You are doomed if you think that's the answer. It has to be throughout your entire organization, and everyone has to feel like they can bring ideas to the table."

- Lorraine Twohill,
CMO, Google

★ De-silo creative teams for better consumer experiences

The decentralization of brand voice will continue moving forward, and creative brands that shape these partnerships with a clearly defined purpose will shine on any platform.

Creative collaboration must also extend to internal teams, uniting people with a range of skill sets around one creative goal.

Historically, creatives have worked separately from the rest of the organization, whether that's on their own row of desks, an entire floor, or through dedicated comms. And that division corresponds to a fractured brand experience.

In the words of Rob Campbell, Colenso BBDO's chief strategy officer, this means "creativity is defined as a wrapper," and applied as a veneer on top of products built by other teams. That's a recipe for trouble, he says. When you hold product and creative apart, "you get a Frankenstein."

A brand isn't just what a company sells, or even how it's positioned. It's also about an organization's culture, the values it lives by, and the impact it has in the world. Creating a unified brand experience requires you to break creativity out of its silo, focusing less on leaving creative to the "creative team" and more on empowering everyone.

✦ Drive impact by fostering a culture of open creativity

Spreading creativity across an organization helps the brand become the source of truth, not just for a company's marketing, but also for its products and even its internal culture.

"We sell creativity, but for a long time we've been using that for a specific thing: advertising," says Guga Ketzer, Partner and CCO, Loducca. "Our problem becomes 'How can we advertise this thing?' instead of 'You're creating this thing — how can we help you make something better?'"

Pumping creativity through the veins of the organization can help companies ensure they're living their brand, not just transmitting it across the airwaves. Audiences expect to see brands taking action both externally and internally, and the organizations breaking through are the ones that use their creativity to make a real impact.

"It's not just about sales," adds Jonathan Mildenhall, Co-Founder and Chair, TwentyFirstCenturyBrand. "CMOs and great creativity can engender a disproportionate share of employee loyalty, investor dollars, cultural relevance, and share of market. Creativity and brands are now starting to drive value on a much broader basis."

Global creator marketing spend reached:

\$14B

in 2021, growing

~50% YoY

✦ Encourage organization-wide creativity with the right team structure

Distributing creativity more widely is a nice principle, but what does it mean for organizational structure? It's about uniting technical and artistic talent. Having designers partner with developers. Media experts and marketers working side by side.

At a time when the customer journeys are plotted across a series of scattered touchpoints rather than on a direct line, reaching people effectively requires interdisciplinary collaboration.

"You're going to see us put more and more people in horizontal roles versus vertical roles in our organization, and I think that indicates the seriousness with which we're thinking about integrated capabilities," says Wendy Clark, former global CEO at Dentsu International. "We call it radical collaboration."

"Instead of creatives who become tech savvy or tech conscious, you may get engineers who become creatively able. But it's going to have to be a mix of the left brain and the right brain. It has to be arts and science."



- Sir Martin Sorrell,
Executive Chairman, S4Capital

Think of it as the 21st-century version of the "Mad Men" era. As Pelle Sjoenell, chief creative officer at Activision Blizzard, explains, "During the creative revolution, you put a copywriter and an art director together, and, instead of information, it became communication. What happens now is you put communicators together with developers."

And when creativity informs the technical process, technology will likewise inform the shape that the creative takes. For Credle, technology is akin to design. "Design doesn't come at the end, as a decoration," she says. "Design comes at the beginning, as a distillation of expression. Without a technologist in the room, we're going to leave a lot on the table."

✦ Build diverse teams to shift the dial on creativity

Thinking about creativity as a central nervous system, rather than a single synapse, will help brands train their eyes on individuals with more holistic skill sets. "It's not about being an art director or a copywriter," says Nic Taylor, SVP and head of the Lego Agency. "It's about lateral thinking — being able to join the dots and make leaps out of the usual."

Brands will also be able to reflect the needs of their audiences more effectively when they hire not just for skill but also for variety of life experience. "We need real diversity," says Ketzer. "How can I create something that is different by only looking inside Brazil, with one kind of creative person who wants to work in São Paulo?" The shift to remote work has opened up an opportunity to bring in people with new perspectives.

✦ Take proactive steps to reach underrepresented groups

These types of hires are vital, and it's not enough to hope that more people from underrepresented backgrounds will apply. Companies can diversify more efficiently through programs designed to find, train, and hire diverse talent.

At Dentsu, a program called The Code has trained 11,000 young people from diverse backgrounds in technical advertising skills. "These teenagers and young adults are not the ones going to college," says Clark. "We've never targeted that socioeconomic group before, and there's a huge amount of talent there."

+60%

of companies plan to
increase creator spend, with

~40%

allocating +20% of their
marketing budget to this⁵

If shaking up talent feels daunting, take heart. It is always a risk to branch out into new territory. But the risk of staying the same is just as big. In the words of Fernando Machado, CMO of NotCo, "Sometimes people don't realize that doing something plain vanilla is probably much more dangerous than being daring and doing something creative."

✦ Embrace creator partnerships to reach your audience

Another way creativity is opening up beyond traditional roles is through creator partnerships. These can help brands land a message where audiences are most receptive, while reducing the burden on creative teams — providing brands can leave some creative agency to their partners.

But relinquishing creative control doesn't mean throwing out brand standards. In fact, it makes them even more important. Brands that seed their messages with creators will need to clearly define their style, their message, and their values. This is an exercise that will empower both internal teams and external partners to make creative decisions that define the brand's perspective, rather than dilute it.

So, as brands partner more with creators, what does it mean for in-house creative teams? Their role could shift toward becoming brand guardians, setting up brand standards for partners to follow.

After all, brands who stay true to strong values will have an easier time partnering with creators — particularly younger voices — who hold brands to account for their ethics. For them, it's not just about the product. It's also about the company behind it, and how that company treats its employees, wider society, and the environment.

* Lean on third parties to find the right creators for your audience

Another imperative for brands looking to seize on moments through creators is to cultivate creator networks that will help them reach their key audiences.

Today, there are more opportunities than ever for brands to work with creators. That can mean it's hard to know where to start. But the right partners can help brands navigate and manage the complex creator ecosystem.

Brands can adopt third-party technical tools for creator discovery and management, and also lean on agencies and other partners for support. Our research found that the number of platforms and agencies specializing in managing creators has increased by over 700% since 2015.⁶

This explosion in creator partnership has been fruitful not just for brands, but for creators and their artistic processes as well.

"Partnering with brands is critical not only to sustaining my business, but also to helping me push creative forward," says Joey Helms, a travel and film creator. "The revenue I gain through brand work enables me to bring bigger creative ideas and more complex video projects to life."

Helms is, of course, highly selective about the brands he'll align with his own: "First and foremost, I need to have a genuine personal connection to their products — if it's something I would talk about without the brand's backing, that's how I know it's right for my audience."

Workbook:

Key actions for brands

Unite complementary skill sets and infuse creativity throughout the organization

It's time to break creativity out of its silo. Not only should technical talent be considered part of the creative process, but companies should also empower the whole team to collaboratively create.

Organizations can't be innovative with homogenous teams, and need to prioritize hiring talent that reflects the world we live in. This will require brands to move away from narrowly defined criteria — like being located in a big city — or having a degree or prior marketing experience. Companies will also benefit from creating new talent pipelines and training programs.

Test creator partnerships, and create a clear set of brand guidelines

Brands that define their style, message, and values will be able to confidently empower creators to spread their messages. Investing in a deep understanding of your brand DNA will help both internal and external teams make the right decisions, faster, whether they're defining the right partner or approving content at pace.

The new value exchange

The importance of building empathetic creative at scale

After years of people sharing more and more of their data online, we're entering a new era of data minimization, and a model that we're calling "radical reciprocity" is emerging. Relationships between digital platforms and users are being reshaped around what data people are willing to share, and what can be used to enhance their experience online.

This is both a nail-biting moment for brands, which want to deliver targeted, personalized experiences, and a massive creative opportunity to make sure audiences gain value from the data they share.

Technology platforms like Google, Apple, Meta, and others are taking the lead. Google is phasing out third-party cookies and working alongside Apple to offer people more choices about what personal information is shared with apps. But this moment is really about empowering people to make more active choices about how, whether, and when they share their data online.

In a world where brands have less immediate access to personal data for ad targeting and personalization, they'll need to find new ways to deliver the right messages, to the right people, at the right moments. That's where creativity comes in.

"The advertising industry has for decades built itself on being uninvited. We forced ourselves into places where consumers weren't necessarily happy for us to be. Today, we should hold ourselves accountable to being invited. If that's our benchmark, we're going to create an incredible ecosystem and industry that continues for many decades."

- Wendy Clark, former Global CEO, Dentsu International

"We have to remind ourselves it's not about quantity, it's about quality," says Credle. "Are you putting things out in the world that make people go, 'No, no, stop!' Or are you creating what I call fairies, something that lands in my email or pops up during what I'm watching, and I think, 'Well, that's interesting, this little twinkly thing, I want to follow it and see it again'."

56%

of consumers expect offers to always be personalized

88%

of consumers say they're more likely to shop with retailers that deliver personalized and connected omnichannel experiences⁷



"Until now, using data has been more about 'How do I reach as many people as I possibly can?' as opposed to 'How do I use data to reach the people I want to reach, with what they want to be reached with?'"

- Marc Pritchard, Chief Brand Officer, Procter & Gamble

* Personalizing at scale takes quality, consented data

People know that volunteering some of their data can lead to more targeted, relevant online experiences. Brands that serve engaging content at the right time will earn the right to more details from their users. But to do it well, brands need to invest in new strategies for content production.

"In a personalization model, you need to be very good at data analytics, have an extremely strong media organization, and have a production model that can produce the volume of what you need," says Jon Halvorson, global SVP consumer experience at Mondelez International.

Before moving forward with a personalization strategy, marketers should ensure they have the right data to work with. Sulin Lau, regional head of marketing and brand at Grab, believes that without it, the results will be as predictable as flipping a coin. "Personalization absolutely works on our own media because we're working entirely with first-party data," she says. "But when you can't be extremely data-informed, there's a fifty-fifty chance you'll do it worse."

That means empathy needs to span the entire team — from data scientists to designers and creative directors. As platforms phase out cookies, planners will need to unlock meaningful targeting to get a return, and the way to do that is by getting to know individual customers deeply. That's now possible thanks to automation and online experiences — and it's crucial.

* Show consumers that you use their data to bring value

Trading data for personalization is increasingly becoming the norm: Research has found that half of all consumers expect personalization everywhere, and almost 90% invest more in personalized retailers.⁸ But when people don't get value out of sharing their data, they may turn away altogether: Already, about 32% of consumers have switched companies due to data policies.⁹

That doesn't mean people are rejecting data sharing — it means they're investing in a future of content personalization by expecting value in exchange for their information.

Advertisers are preparing for these shifts by gathering their own first-party data and investing more in creativity:

~65%

of advertiser respondents have a strategy to gather first-party data¹⁰

"I look at some of the creative that consumers make about our products and services, and it's exciting and fun. We should engage with that, comment on that, and share that. We should co-create and be open to very different ways of doing things."

- Lorraine Twohill,
CMO, Google

“Technology has created an opportunity for audiences to exist without commercial messages. I can pay to have ads blocked from my phone and the content I stream, and for my media to be served to me without ads. The idea of being additive to the content that somebody consumes, for me, is the holy grail of brand marketing. How can we, as a brand, enhance culture and be sought out?”¹¹

– Jonathan Mildenhall,
Co-Founder and Chair,
TwentyFirstCenturyBrand

Is your target customer expecting a baby? Add value with a video about infant sleep behaviors. Are they moving toward retirement? Quell their anxiety with stories about the ventures of fellow retirees. Creative performs best when its message fits seamlessly into a person’s headspace, making them feel seen, understood, and attended to.

Brands that deliver relevant content will be rewarded with higher loyalty, advocacy, and financial return: Personalized customer experiences are currently driving a 5-15% revenue uplift for the brands and retailers that offer them.¹²

* Creating with empathy allows for personalization at scale

When they can’t rely on data for personalization, brands can move to a cohort-based targeting strategy where campaigns lead with one big idea that’s timely and broadly accessible.

At Mondelēz International, the team under Jon Halvorson, global SVP of consumer experience, have adopted an approach they call “empathy at scale.” Here, “the big idea comes first, and then we figure out how we unlock that empathy through personalization,” says Halvorson. And it’s a strategy that’s poised to grow. “Today, 30% of our creative work for digital media is personalized,” he says. “Next year, it’ll be 45%, and the plan is to be at 70% by 2024.”



- Sir Martin Sorrell,
Executive Chairman, STCapital

"The era of mass communication has not gone, but it's being eroded by an era of personalization at scale, which modern technology enables us to do."

When marketers use their brand's identity and values to breathe life into each personalized message or piece of creative, a cohesive story will shine through, no matter the number of assets or platforms.

That kind of empathy helps people feel seen and understood — prerequisites for inviting the brand into their lives. In this moment, creativity is a two-sided tool, helping brands navigate through their blind spots, and earning them the right to more insights along the way.

Workbook:

Key actions for brands

Make every interaction meaningful using creativity and personalization

Audiences are making active decisions about how, when, and where to share their data. Half of all consumers expect personalization everywhere, and almost 90% invest more in personalized retailers.¹³ But if people don't get value out of sharing their data, they may turn away altogether. To invite users to share their data, offer up relevant, surprising, delightful content experiences.

Develop new strategies for content production, and adapt existing creative skills

As you pursue personalized messaging, ensure that you have the right data to work with. That means the entire team need to join the creative effort. A great personalization strategy makes the most of integrated capabilities, where data analytics and media join with creative to translate a "big idea" into targeted executions.

Where brain power meets processing power

Using AI to build stronger human connections

Although people have long feared that technology might erase humanity, thousands of years of technological advancement have shown the opposite. From the printing press to the smartphone, technology continues to open up access to creativity and connection.

At its core, advertising is, and always will be, about connecting through human emotion. But it's also an industry that evolves rapidly alongside technological advancement. It's constantly shape-shifting into new formats, keeping creatives on their toes. But AI, the latest blockbuster innovation, is causing a shift in how we think about creative production.

While generative AI can come up with taglines, create artwork, and even write songs in the style of your favorite artist, the role of creative teams will still be essential in telling brand stories. After all, nuanced human connection will always rely on humans. By embracing AI as a collaborator rather than a competitor, brands can streamline and supercharge the creative process by uncovering new insights, freeing up time across teams, and infusing even more creativity into organizations.

“Creative and technology pull each other forward like a rubber band. Technology gets out in front and inspires new creativity. And, all of a sudden, creative gets out in front and inspires new technology. I think that cycle will start going faster. Right now technology is ahead of creative, which is good because any idea you come up with you can actually create in the world. The question is: What’s going to be that big jump in creativity that inspires the next technology revolution?”

– Jon Halvorson, Global SVP,
Consumer Experience, Mondelez International

“When there are more touchpoints than there have ever been previously, and brands want to be in all of those spaces in the right way, and in the way that consumers expect them to be, then the expense of that model, if it’s purely human-based, is not feasible.”

– Wendy Clark, former global CEO, Dentsu International



* Using AI for everyday tasks leads to stronger creative work

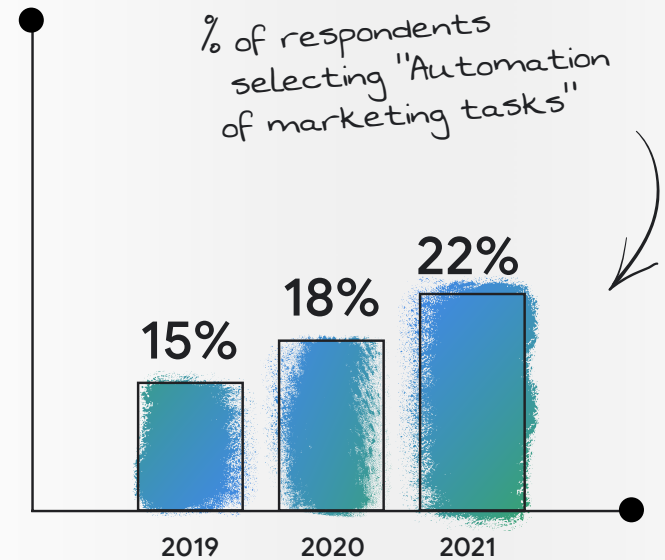
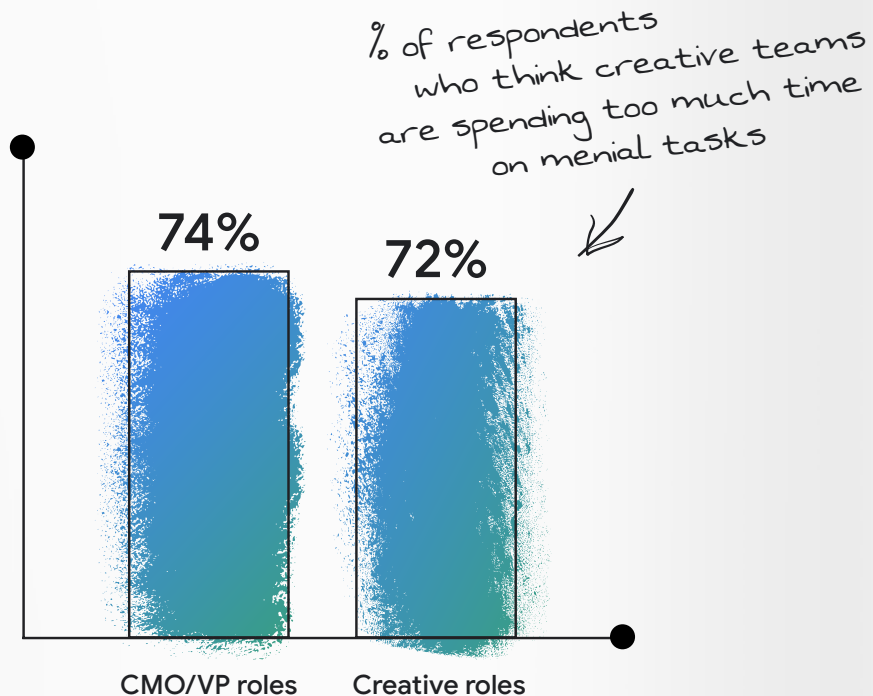
At the most basic level, automating manual or repetitive tasks like asset adaptation and workflow can help free up space and time for creativity. Putting those tasks on autopilot can assist across the entire lifespan of a campaign, from production to measurement, and help teams get messaging out faster, and with more precision.

Most of the largest technology platforms, including Google, YouTube, Facebook, Snap, and Instagram, have AI tools to make ad delivery more efficient. They’ve got programs to support production across new channels — including augmented reality, live streams, and NFTs — and others that help automate the process of resizing assets to fit platform-specific requirements.

Advertisers will benefit from automation tools — for example, to help manage the creative deficit

There is demand for automated tools for asset adaptation

- If you're launching a new car campaign, you need 4,000 new assets today versus 200 20 years ago. You will need automated tools to iterate and create assets fast to manage this creative deficit.
- If I want to run a campaign across all platforms, tech platforms should have offerings to automatically adapt assets.



Marketers increasingly see automation as a top digital priority

Which elements of digital transformation will be most important to your business?

However, some hesitancy to ensure "humanity" is preserved

- How can you humanize these tools in a way that the creative feels like it went through a process of empathy and oversight that's qualitative?
- Media platforms have pushed automation really hard. When we allow automation to take over, there's an uptick in speed to output, but you lose control over the campaign.
- If you are an authentic brand, be careful about automation. Every big brand should have some level of automation that sticks to key brand principles, but you need to put in gates at every step. This is where creative plays a role.

* AI tools can enhance human creativity

So where does that leave creative teams? Well, for the designer who no longer has to spend time resizing assets, it could mean longer to focus on big-picture thinking or conceptual development.

Nic Taylor, SVP and head of the Lego Agency, believes that machines will never replace the work of human creation. But they will help make the job easier and more efficient, and the work higher quality.

Mathilde Delhoume-Debreu, global brand officer at LVMH, agrees. "We should use AI for everything where humans don't add real value," she says. "Defining what should stay with people and what should be automated will be an interesting choice."

74%

of CMOs think creative teams are spending too much time on automatable menial tasks like asset adaptation

"The canvas has changed, but the fundamentals of creativity have not."



- Aline Santos Farhat,
Chief Brand Officer and
Chief Equity Diversity &
Inclusion Officer, Unilever

* Build a stable foundation for creativity with AI tools

Whether they're just dipping their toes or they're deep in AI, creative teams will need to approach these technologies thoughtfully to produce good work.

Because without careful consideration, AI can produce bad results — at lightning speed. For example, by training itself on examples of past successes, an AI-driven measurement tool could dilute a brand's creativity by recreating the type of work that's already been done.

But when approached with care, **AI can spark imagination** helping surface new insights that otherwise could have remained hidden.

"I know that AI can help us be a lot more creative, because it can help us to find out things that we'd never know without it," says Guga Ketzer, CEO at Suno United Creators. "It can offer us new insights and new ways to see."

22%

of marketers saw automation as a top digital priority in 2021, up from 15% in 2018¹⁴

✦ Adapt your workflows to benefit from AI tools

AI makes it possible to process massive amounts of data quickly to identify patterns and surface insights. But it's still up to the people within an organization to interpret that data, and build the tools and systems that make it actionable — all functions that require deep creativity in their own right.

"You have a key asset and you need it turned out in 25 different sizes? No problem — we have these tools and we use them pretty regularly," says Sulin Lau, regional head of marketing and brand at Grab. "But the issue isn't the tech of turning something into multiple variations. It's actually: How usable is the platform? How can it be joined with the rest of our creative work?"

Succeeding in the age of AI isn't only about adopting the right tools. It's also about designing new workflows that allow everyone to make the most of these new technologies, and the time they free up. That may take a significant organizational investment, but it's likely to pay off.

✦ Use new metrics to prove the value of your creative

There's a great opportunity for brands that shake their fear of AI and instead embrace it as a superpower.

In the words of Dentsu International's former Global CEO Wendy Clark, "You can't even imagine creativity existing without that insight and data and understanding. I think it would be almost impossible now to deconstruct the two. It's really a case of one plus one equals three — you get to an exponentially better place because you have both working in tandem."



"As I go farther in that scope toward 2030, I start seeing other factors become bigger around data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. But I still think creative will be at the core of how you crack them."

— Jon Halvorson, Global SVP, Consumer Experience, Mondelez International

* Fortunately for marketers, there are more ways to gather engagement data than ever before. And they extend far beyond clicks and views. Brands can now keep track of rates of purchase, subscription, app install, and cart addition. You can even see how many people open your app after they install, and how much people are buying offline.

And that's just sales data. Marketers are also tracking longer, less linear sales journeys that span multiple touchpoints by measuring softer cues, including view-through, view-content, estimated ad recall lift, video playback, landing page rate, and cost per three-second view.¹⁵

This increasingly granular measurement comes at a critical time. Not only is branded creative populating more platforms and mediums, but marketers are also under pressure to prove the ROI of their creative decisions.

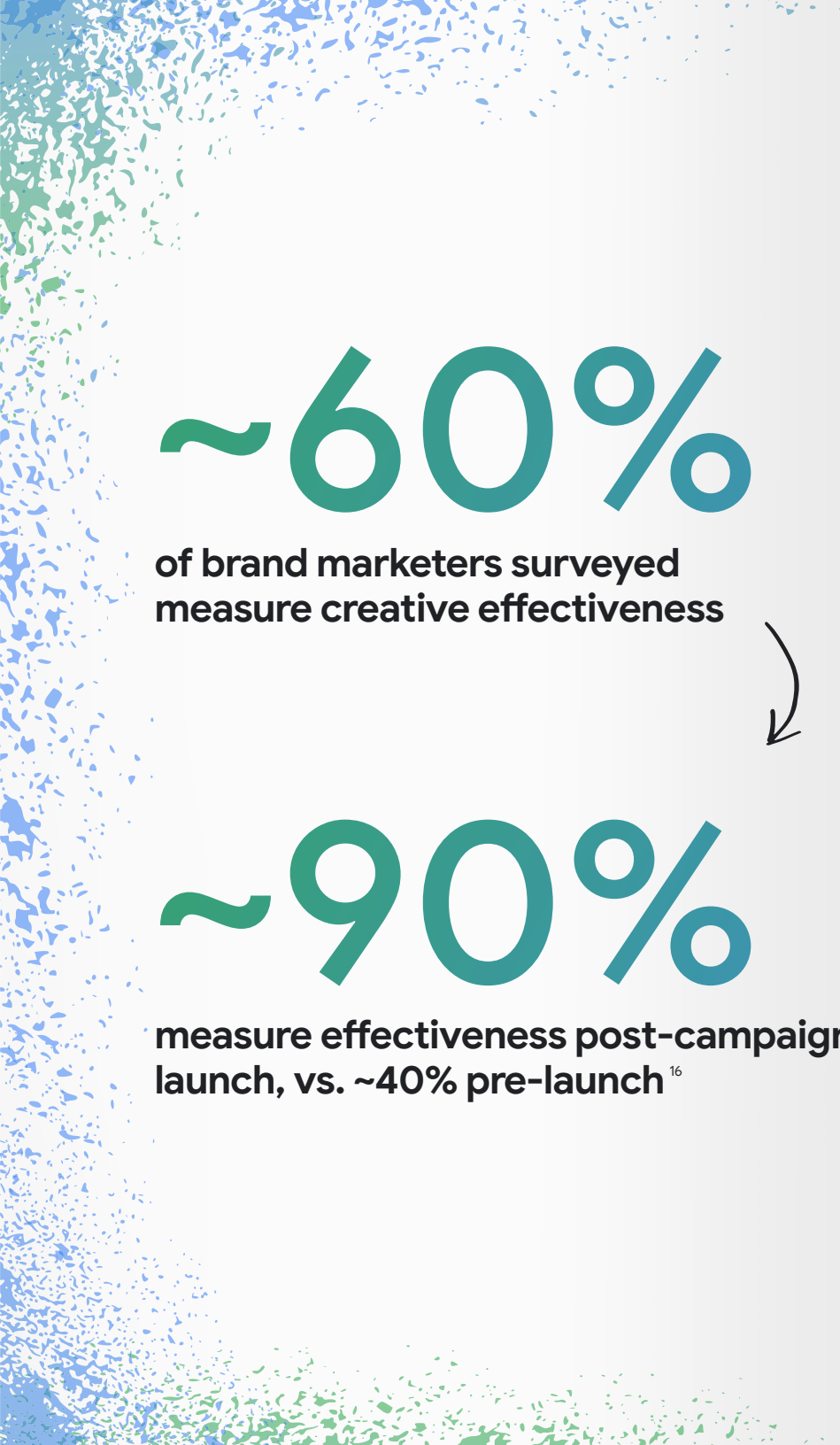


The famous John Wanamaker quote is a classic for a reason: "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don't know which half." Over a hundred years after Wanamaker's words, "We've gotten to, 'I know I waste maybe 15% of my budget, but I don't know which 15%'," says Sir Martin Sorrell, executive chairman at S4Capital. "As we get more scientific and more data-based, we'll narrow it down even further."



"Imagine we're going on a fishing trip and there are two boats. One has a fish finder and one doesn't. Which boat are you going to choose? If you want to catch a fish, I'd get on the fish finder boat. That's data: it helps us get to the right thing faster."

- Susan Credle, global chief creative officer, FCB Global



~60%

of brand marketers surveyed
measure creative effectiveness



~90%

measure effectiveness post-campaign
launch, vs. ~40% pre-launch¹⁶

* Focus on the most useful data, not the greatest volume

Data is only as helpful as our ability to interpret and apply it. And as more and more pieces of the customer journey become trackable, it's easy to get lost in the deluge, track everything, or focus on the wrong signals.

Jonathan Mildenhall, Co-Founder and Chair, TwentyFirstCenturyBrand, says marketers should determine which data is most valuable to them, and use it to spark strategy and creation, not direct it. "If you use data to inspire and still leave room for surprising strategic and creative leaps, then you can create content that's of value to your audience," he says.

Brands should also take care not to become so data-driven that they miss out on trying something new.

"Any piece of data is a consequence of something that has already happened, which means that if you're doing something new, you probably don't have data on it," says Pelle Sjoenell, chief creative officer at Activision Blizzard. "Because of that, you have to use data carefully."



"Having proper data and measurement in place ensures you're making data-driven decisions and not succumbing to truisms. If you're not reflecting and refining based on data, there's a high chance that you will carry forward your own biases and judgements. And very often those are not mistakes that you can rewind or return."

– Umesh Krishna, Head of
Marketing, AOT Technologies



←
"To measure creativity, we need to give a creative definition to the word measurement."

- Umesh Krishna, Head of Marketing, AOT Technologies

* Reconsider measurement as a creative driver

The brands that use metrics to feed their imaginations will be in the best position to form authentic connections, thanks to the space they allow for creative lightning to strike.

Of course, that doesn't mean taking creative license with the numbers. Global Chief Creative Officer at FCB Global Susan Credle believes it's time for marketers to get honest about their KPIs, especially when it comes to metrics like impressions. "It's like saying that every car that drives by a billboard is an impression — 99% of them didn't see it or didn't care," she says. "I think we're misinterpreting the word 'impression'."

Although they've historically been held apart, creative and measurement aren't at odds; measuring creativity well can be a creative endeavor itself. It takes imagination to gather the right kind of data, and use it in ways that are impactful to your organization.

"We might have to think in terms of cohorts as opposed to individuals, but to my mind that's a simpler task. There will be some limits on the data you have for privacy reasons, but you will have a good idea, at scale — whether it's through a cohort analysis or an individual consented piece of first-party data, plus the signals from the platforms — of what individuals can do. The definition of creativity will change, because it will not be about mass communication. It will be about individual communication. It gets more effective and your ability to measure is much better."

- Sir Martin Sorrell,
Executive Chairman, S4Capital

* Be brave when it comes to creative measurement

When done right, creative approaches to tracking metrics can unlock new ways of thinking.

For Merkle Global CEO Michael Komasinski, creative measurement starts with setting goals and creating your own frameworks, rather than being tied to an existing one.

"We see a lot of our clients measuring what's available, and not necessarily the outcomes they want," says Komasinski. He suggests working backwards to create either the data or the systems that can measure the KPIs that align to clients' priorities.

* Use measurement to test, not prove

For some teams, measurement is a way to test a hypothesis, rather than prove it. Unilever, for example, developed an internal "creative scale" that helps define the ambition of each creative brief. "We want unexpected and provocative advertising," explains Unilever's Chief Brand Officer and Chief Equity Diversity & Inclusion Officer Aline Santos Farhat. The brand's creative scale holds them accountable to this bold ambition before it releases its work into the wild, where "the real check comes with consumers," she says.

Ultimately, it comes down to making informed creative choices. Not using any data at all is risky, but so is letting it define everything. As Credle puts it, "Bravery is not jumping off a cliff. Bravery is jumping off a cliff with a parachute."

Workbook:

Key actions for brands

Embrace AI as a collaborator, not a competitor

Brands should adopt the tools and workflows they need to take advantage of AI, as it can help streamline the process of connecting with audiences by uncovering new insights, freeing up time across teams, and infusing even more creativity into organizations. But any new tools should be user-friendly, and applying creativity to data analysis is essential.

Identify the metrics you need, and approach your analysis with an open mind

Marketers need to prove the ROI of their creative decisions. But as more interactions become measurable, it's easy to be tempted to track everything, or focus on the wrong signals. Instead, brands should develop their own systems for tracking the data they need, and let the insights feed their imaginations. Data can be a powerful tool to challenge your assumptions on whether or not something will work. Just don't let a lack of data prevent you from trying something new. That is, be inspired by data, not beholden to it.

Why moving from
inventory catalog
to brand-building
experience is key

Creating for the new era of digital commerce

From the window display to the scent, creating an incredible in-store experience comes down to the details. But as e-commerce ramps up and shopping habits shift, what happens to these rich, tactile experiences?

Can a flagship store be recreated in two dimensions? While it may not (yet) be possible to spread a smell over Wi-Fi, the digital world is anything but flat, and the e-commerce we're used to — pictures of products and a price — is evolving into something entirely new.

This is a transformation that's long overdue. "Most e-commerce experiences look exactly the same," says Guga Ketzer, CEO at Suno United Creators. "Now we have a big opportunity to change that. It's a store, not a depository of products."

The most revolutionary part of today's shopping experience is that it extends outside the digital store itself. From live streaming to social, every interaction with a customer is an opportunity to convert. Yet many brands have underinvested in the creativity of e-commerce.

"We reset the channel and we reset retail. We also reset media, and advertising, and marketing. This means we have a blank canvas for new brands, and new kinds of businesses, and the stories we tell about what they might be, and what they look like."

- Benedict Evans,
Technology Analyst





"There's nothing that looks more like a website than another website. So we need to think beyond that. We need to think about it as a true omnichannel."

- Aline Santos Farhat,
Chief Brand Officer and
Chief Equity Diversity &
Inclusion Officer, Unilever

As Mondelez International Global SVP of Consumer Experience Jon Halvorson describes it, "E-commerce creative lives in a very direct response world." But as the gap between discovery and purchase shrinks down to a single tap, brands can approach e-commerce not just as a place to make their margins, but also as an avenue for brand building.

Susan Credle, global chief creative officer at FCB Global, remembers when Steve Jobs transformed Apple from a hardware company to a lifestyle phenomenon by investing in beautiful retail experiences. "He chose to show up in an unexpected way and it made all the difference in the world," she says. "If you think about e-commerce like this, are you leaving it on the table because it's just a transactional site, or is the experience of shopping in your online store building the brand?"

85%

of consumers are likely to make a purchase after participating in an event or experience

~38%

of brands rank experiential as the most successful marketing tactic (~20% and ~6% for digital and social, respectively)¹⁷

* Apply experiential principles in the digital space

Not every brand is going to redefine retail the way Apple did. But any organization can, and should, design a commerce experience that brings its brand to life.

Where to start? With the word "experience."

Experiential marketing has proved its power in sparking and deepening relationships between people and products. Audiences consistently rate events as one of the best ways to get to know a product and its benefits.

“The people who are going to win in the future are those who understand that the lower funnel is no longer only that performance marketing and transactional area. We’re going to build brands here, which means creativity is coming into play in this space.”

– Susan Credle, Global Chief Creative Officer, FCB Global



While experiential has become synonymous with in-person events, brands can apply the same principles — positioning products as they might appear in people’s day-to-day lives — in the digital world.

When the pandemic struck and shopping in person was no longer an option, brands faced a sudden need to create useful online experiences. In Buenos Aires, one grocery store created a WhatsApp group to take orders from nearby customers. In China, Louis Vuitton “closed 300 stores but opened 20,000,” according to Michael Burke, the company’s former CEO and now strategic advisor to the brand’s president. The 20,000 new stores were the WeChat accounts of sales assistants in the boutiques, who began reaching out to their own clients with personalized shopping suggestions.

The global shutdown forced brands to envision tangible ways to serve their customers from afar. Even outside of crisis time, brands that live by their purpose can look for ways to use new platforms to meet audiences where they are.

✱ Embrace unexpected shopping channels to drive growth

One non-traditional shopping avenue that’s quickly gaining steam is live streaming.

“I look at our YouTube creators, for example, and how many of them have businesses where they sell their own products,” says Lorraine Twohill, CMO at Google. “Now they have their own merch and my kids are desperate for that as gifts, and they’re always sold out. It’s a very exciting space.”

And it’s not just creators. Live-streamed shopping events from major brands like Nordstrom and Walmart have proven their ability to draw audiences and drive revenue. It’s a trend that’s poised to only grow from here.

~37%

of U.S. Gen Z online shoppers have watched a shopping live stream

~57%

of U.S. Gen Z online shoppers have purchased through or because of a social media platform this year

Live-stream commerce is expected to grow

~50% YoY¹⁸

"The way a brand message is delivered to people will be different. It will be a branded creative idea that we don't think about as an ad - but it is. Think about Roblox, Discord, Twitch. The way brands are getting into those places is more fluid. And the container in which we can reach people, where ideas are formed, is going to be more diffused. How do you create for that?"

- Rapha Vasconcellos,
VP, Product Creative Studio,
Netflix



* Bring your products to life in new dimensions with AR

Immersive formats can bring a brand to life in ways that no other medium can. And consumers are paying attention, particularly to AR, which is already shaking up how people learn about products.

Brands like Gucci and Puma have partnered with Snapchat to facilitate virtual shoe try-ons, for example, and Sephora has incorporated AR into its own app to allow fans to virtually test makeup.



72%

of surveyed shoppers purchased goods they didn't plan to because of AR

75%

of consumers are more likely to pay attention to an ad if it incorporates AR¹⁹

The early success of AR campaigns has led to even more investment from brands. Approximately 75% of the Forbes World's Most Valuable Brands are working with some form of AR or VR,²⁰ and marketers are expecting this experiential advertising to make a big impact on the industry.

"It will enable creativity to be experienced in ways that it hasn't been before," says Marc Pritchard, chief brand officer at Procter & Gamble. "Just as the internet 1.0 and 2.0 created this step change, I think the experiential internet 3.0 will take it to a new level."

Reach untapped audiences through gaming activations

While AR adds a new layer to reality, gaming creates entire worlds, and they're drawing more and more players. More than a third of the world's population is gaming. That's a staggering opportunity for brands to reach people — but they can't expect the old rules to apply in these spaces.

"Brands usually mistake players for an audience," explains Pelle Sjoenell, chief creative officer at Activision Blizzard. "It's not an audience. The players are active." That means approaching advertising with a storytelling mindset, and understanding the value you can bring as a brand.

The global in-game advertising market is expected to grow from

~\$5.3B

in 2020 to

~\$18.4B

in 2027, a ~20% CAGR²¹

* Bring gamers on side with authentic, value-adding creative

For example, Moschino collaborated with “Sims 4” on the “Moschino Stuff Pack,” which gives players access to new fashion and also unlocks new career paths. For Wendy’s first-ever Twitch stream, the brand jumped in on a “Fortnite” game mode called Food Fight, which pitted Team Burger against Team Pizza. Wendy’s broke expectations by joining Team Pizza, because Team Burger members stored their food in freezers. Then the Wendy’s avatar worked to destroy all the burger freezers from the game. The freezer feud was a success, and racked up over 1.5 million minutes of watch time.²²

These campaigns succeeded because the brands behind them have invested in understanding the space.

“My advice for people who want to know more about gaming is you need to understand the community of players really well,” says Fernando Machado, CMO at NotCo. “If you want to connect with them, you need to find authentic ways that will add value. It cannot be your typical ad. That is only going to throw off the community.”

Thanks to an up-front investment in organic brand experiences, 72% of mobile gamers say that they understand the role advertising plays in mobile games, and actively engage with ads.²³ Many even believe that in-game advertising can enhance the experience of play. This positive sentiment is exciting — it’s what the industry aims for in every context — and it’s up to marketers to maintain that relationship.

The good news? Creating — and maintaining — a relationship with audiences is possible when marketers view advertising as a value exchange.

“All brands are here for a reason: they’re really good at something,” says Sjoenell. “And you just have to figure out how that can benefit the players.”

— Fernando Machado,
CMO, NotCo



“In gaming, we’re creating worlds out there — we’re creating experiences for people. It’s amazing the level of creativity in the business. So when it comes to marketing and advertising, I think it puts a lot of responsibility on us in terms of continuing to elevate the creative, since the starting point is already so high.”

* Place brand purpose at the heart of virtual experiences

Of course, you can’t talk about immersive environments without touching on the metaverse. While VR is seeing slower growth overall, brands are experimenting with campaigns that bring their purpose to life in three digital dimensions.

For example, Topshop partnered with Inition to bring fans to the front row at its fashion show, seating them right next to celebrities on the runway. Adidas created a VR mountain-climbing experience to highlight its outdoor line.

That doesn’t mean every brand should jump on VR activations immediately. An alternate strategy is to wait and see. “I love what Malcolm Gladwell says: Don’t be first, be third,” says Credle. “That calms me down a lot. I’m going to wait a little bit.”

If you do experiment with immersive formats, the execution doesn't always have to be flashy, either. "I'm trying to look at the very mundane as well," says Pritchard. Imagine a healthcare company offering a virtual diagnostic experience, or a tutorial on how to use a product. "It connects people to a brand because it has something to do with that brand," he says. "And you trust that brand to give you information."

"No consumer's out there going, 'I can't wait for the next ad.' So the value exchange from a consumer standpoint is: What are we doing to make sure that the brand, or messaging, or experience is somehow enriching their lives, in any way possible? Why will they care?"

— Liz Taylor, Global Chief Creative Officer, Ogilvy

When it comes to e-commerce, nothing is set in stone, and there are always new ways of doing things. Credle compares where we are now with the early days of television. "When TV first came about, it was a black box that needed content inside to fill it," she says. "And we just filmed people doing radio ads. That's where it started. That's where we are in this transaction space."

In the same way that TV advertising transformed from filmed radio ads to a vibrant visual storytelling canvas that's still evolving today, the creative possibilities for e-commerce are endless. "We applied creativity to that space and it got incredible," says Credle. "That's what excites me about this."

Workbook:

Key actions for brands

Approach new formats as experiments that can turn into strategy later

In a world where every touchpoint is an opportunity to convert, there's a huge opportunity in thinking experientially and embracing new formats, including live streaming and AR. The experiences that stand out will enhance the brand narrative, not distract from it.

Approach e-commerce as a venue for brand building

An online retail presence can be just as rich as an in-person one, if you use all the creative dimensions available. Businesses should approach e-commerce not just as a place to make margins, but also as an avenue for brand building. Consider how to position your products as they might appear in people's day-to-day lives — whether that's on WhatsApp, WeChat, or on the web — to bring customers active experiences before they buy.

“We’d like to thank the many partners whose insights, collaboration, and passion for creativity have helped bring this conversation to life, including the creative intelligence service Contagious, analyst Benedict Evans, and management consultancy Bain & Company.

A special note of thanks to our colleague Roberta MacDonald, without whose tireless energy, advocacy, and enthusiasm The Open Creative Project would not have been possible.”

Our key contributors

Contagious
Interviews

Liz Taylor, Global Chief Creative Officer, Ogilvy
Marc Pritchard, Chief Brand Officer, Procter & Gamble
Sir Martin Sorrell, Executive Chairman, S4Capital
Susan Credle, Global Chief Creative Officer, FCB Global
Aline Santos Farhat, Chief Brand Officer and Chief Equity Diversity & Inclusion Officer, Unilever
Benedict Evans, Independent Technology Analyst
Fernando Machado, CMO, NotCo
Jonathan Mildenhall, CEO, TwentyFirstCenturyBrand
Jon Halvorson, Global SVP, Consumer Experience, Mondelēz International
Lorraine Twohill, CMO, Google
Rapha Vasconcellos, VP, Product Creative Studio, Netflix
Umesh Krishna, Head of Marketing, AOT Technologies
Wendy Clark, former Global CEO, Dentsu International
Gil Efrati, CMO, Resident
Guga Ketzer, Partner and CCO, Loducca
Jonny Bauer, Global Head of Brand Strategy and Transformation, Blackstone
Mathilde Delhoume-Debreu, Global Brand Officer, LVMH
Michael Komasinski, Global CEO, Merkle
Nic Taylor, Senior Vice President and Head, Lego Agency
Nick Slaymaker, Deputy Head of Global Trading, GroupM
Nacho Zuccarino, Director of Project Creative Studio LATAM, Netflix
Rob Campbell, Chief Strategy Officer, Colenso BBDO
Sulin Lau, Regional Head of Marketing and Brand, Grab
Tea Uglow, Creative Director, Google Creative Lab
Pelle Sjoenell, Chief Creative Officer, Activision Blizzard
Susanne Franz, Senior Director Global Brand Communications and CX, Audi
Ronnie Wu, Chief Creative Officer, TBWA\Shanghai

Brian Albert, Managing Director, US Agency Video & Creative Works, Google
Dave Tan, Managing Director, Performance Agency Development, Google
Alex Angelesdes, Managing Director, Media & Entertainment, Google
Allan Thygesen, CEO, DocuSign
Eric Schnabel, Co-Founder, Creative Shop, Facebook
Debbie Weinstein, VP, Google, and MD, UK and Ireland, Google
Torrence Boone, VP, GCAS, Google
Avinash Kaushik, Digital Marketing Evangelist, Google
Paul Limbrey, MD, GCAS Adapt, Google
Sébastien Missoffe, VP France, Google
Kenny Davies, Principal Architect, Agencies, Google
Dan Kaufman, Senior Director of Engineering Head of Advanced Technology and Products; and Chief Privacy Officer for Hardware Products, Google
Ben Royce, Cloud Evangelist, Google
Pedro Pina, VP, YT EMEA, Google
Adrian Graham, Chief Architect, Gaming, Google
Sapna Chadha, Vice President, Southeast Asia and South Asia Frontier, Google Asia Pacific
Karen Sauder, President, GCAS, Google
John Lee, VP, APAC Go To Market Operations, Google
Sanjay Gupta, VP, Google India
Imma Calvo, MD, Commerce, Google
Varun Sharma, Director DVA Commercials GTM, Google
Fábio Coelho, Managing Director, Google Brazil, and VP, Google Inc
Shinji Okuyama, President, Google Japan
Robert Wong, VP, Creative Lab, Google
Kristell Rivaille, Vice President Marketing, Southern Europe and Emerging Markets
Marc Nabinger, Managing Director Agency & Partners

Bain/Google
Interviews

Our key
contributors

Fernanda (Fefa) Romano, SVP, CMO, King
Tara Levine, Head of Agency Partnerships, VidMob
Rishad Tobaccowala, Author and former Senior Advisor, Publicis Groupe
John O’Keeffe, former CCO, WPP
Valerie Madon, former CCO, VMLY&R Asia, former Director of Creative Shop SEA, Meta, now CCO SEA McCann Worldgroup
Greg Swan, former Head of Creative Innovation, Fallon, now Chief Creative and Strategy Officer, The Social Lights
Scott Brinker, VP Platform Ecosystem, HubSpot and Editor, chiefmartec.com
Caroline Issa, founder, Tank magazine and Tank Form creative agency
Jax Ostle Evans, MD, Stink Studios
Alfonso Marian, former Chairman, Ogilvy Spain, now Global CEO and CCO, Mediabrands Content Studio
Guy Kawasaki, Chief Evangelist, Canva
Steve Boehler, Founder, Mercer Island Group
Robin Boehler, Owner, Mercer Island Group
Tina Allan, Global Partner, Data Science and Connections

Core Team

Abigail Posner, Director, US Creative Works, Google
Venetia Taylor, Head of Creative Strategy, US Creative Works, Google
Kevin Babcock, Head of Creative Partnerships, US Creative Works, Google
Chris McCarthy, Creative Services Design and Delivery Lead, EMEA Creative Works, Google
Daren Briscoe, Head of Product Communications, Performance Ads Marketing
Lauren Bryan, Creative Services Design and Delivery Lead, EMEA Creative Works, Google
Jodie Collins, Head of APAC GTM, Creative Works, Google
Mailine Swildens, Director, EMEA Creative Works, Google
Ben Jones, Global Director, Creative Works, Google
Patrick Jeffrey, Managing Partner, Contagious
Chris Barth, Principal Strategist, Contagious
Laura Beaudin, Partner, Bain & Company
Aaron Souza, Partner, Bain & Company
Anton Reyniers, Google, Head of Creative Partnerships APAC
Asia Borowska, Group Marketing Manager, Global Ads Brand Marketing, Google
Paxton Misra, Brand Marketing Manager - Ads, Google

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