

INSIGHTS

Vertic Insights Offers a Glimpse of Our Strategic Digital Thinking

A NEW YEAR IS LOADING....

96%



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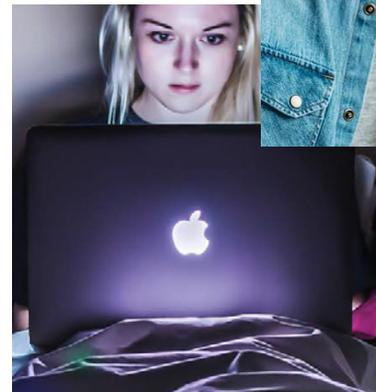
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LETTER FROM THE CEO:

The Recovery Will Be Digital



Sebastian Jespersen,
CEO and Founder of Vertic

Even when we all return to “normal,” the long tail of COVID-19 will have transformed every aspect of business from healthcare to workplaces, from finance to retail, from travel to the vast network of global supply chains. Of course, “normal” is a word that needs redefinition, and you’ll see throughout this edition of Vertic Insights that there’s nothing normal about getting back to normal. We do like the description of “new” and “normal” from Forrester’s James McQuivey as he looks at how the brain reacts to the tension between what is novel and what is familiar.

Without question, life after COVID-19 will look a lot different than life before the virus, but as we approach 2022, we will still have to manage that transition. WARC tells us that global ad spending isn’t predicted to rebound until 2022. Bill Gates believes that the next pandemic won’t be nearly as bad, because we’ve practiced with this one. And while the stock market’s performance has been astonishing throughout the pandemic, Eric Rosengren, President of the Federal Reserve, has characterized the next six months as “choppy.”

News of vaccines show great promise even if the timetable for distribution and inoculation may take many months or even longer. We will continue to live in a dramatically changed world that includes wearing masks and social distancing, which likely translates to restricted gatherings and limited travel.

While there is much we cannot anticipate, there’s little doubt that the recovery will be digital. We have seen the remarkable rise of telemedicine, and we can already foresee contactless journeys at airports, driverless delivery vehicles, and increased commerce without cash.

COVID-19 has caused many companies to respond faster to change by becoming digital, virtual, and nimble. The world seemed to advance a decade in 10 months, while some business leaders comment that long-term planning now is thinking ahead two weeks. Whether digital transformation was underway, or immediately implemented to survive, the pandemic changed all industries, while altering the way people perceive and interact with brands and companies. This issue shares our perspectives on the shifts occurring in business and the effect on the relationships with the stakeholders they serve.

Without strategic thinking, deep understanding of brands and their customers, and anticipation of the future, there is no digital transformation. Vertic Insights offers a glimpse of our strategic digital thinking as we help our clients move forward.

THOUGHT LEADER

Defining the New Normal with James McQuivey

Conversations



James McQuivey,
Vice President and
Principal Analyst at
Forrester

Vertic has undertaken an initiative to host discussions with various thought leaders throughout the world about the repercussions of COVID-19 as the virus generates fundamental business and societal change. Without question, expectations of brands and companies are shifting dramatically. Our goal is to ask critical questions as we all struggle with answers. We hope that sharing these perspectives will help as you develop new roadmaps for both the immediate and long-term future.

This conversation focuses on the “New Normal” with James L. McQuivey, Vice President and Principal Analyst at Forrester. He is a leader in delineating the impact of digital disruption on traditional business. His consumer models identify the ways in which consumers have embraced digital experiences and platforms, while and his strategy models help companies prepare to better serve those consumers.

Sebastian Jespersen, CEO and Founder of Vertic

QUESTION: Let's focus on the creation of a "New Normal." We are obviously all now forced to work in different ways, to buy our services and goods in different ways and to even interact in different ways. And it seems this is the only choice we have to move forward, be productive and live our lives. James, how do you believe the "New Normal" will manifest itself?

James L. McQuivey, Vice President and Principal Analyst at Forrester

ANSWER: It's a wonderful question, because it feels like a bit of a contradiction to even talk about new and normal in that context. Normal, of course, sounds familiar. It's something we already know. New is novel, or something we haven't experienced before. I like those two terms together, even though there's some tension between them.

Normal, of course, sounds familiar. It's something we already know. New is novel, or something we haven't experienced before. I like those two terms together, even though there's some tension between them.

Interestingly, our brains are structured so that we are constantly on the lookout for things that are new or novel. We're potentially afraid of some of those new things, but we are also looking for new opportunities. So, we have entire mechanisms in our brains that are designed

purely to look for what's new, what's different and what has changed. But at the same time, we're massively comforted by the normal part. By 'Oh, you were exactly where I expected you to be,' 'Traffic was just like I thought it was going to be today,' 'The house is as warm as I expected it.' When the things we predicted or expected are true, we feel good. They make us comfortable.

So, as human beings, we live in this tension already between the new and the normal. Right now, we're experiencing a period of tremendous novelty, which makes us wonder: 'What will remain changed forever?' Keep in mind, though, that the deep part of the brain that looks for novelty, the Amygdala, is also the part of the brain that has the job of making sure we're afraid when we're supposed to be. It does both jobs. Essentially, from the perspective of the Amygdala, fear and novelty go together. The Amygdala doesn't try to determine which is which. It just registers that something new has happened and it might make you afraid. And then the rest of the brain tries to figure it out. And I think that's where we are now.

So, as human beings, we live in this tension already between the new and the normal.

We've all now gone through this process of 'this is new' and 'this is different.' Whether in our work life or our health concerns, all that was new and different through COVID caused fear right away. However, that's appropriate to how our brain works. We need to take time recognizing that by



understanding how that influences us, how it shapes the way we talk to people, and the decisions that we're planning to make.

But at the same time, the rest of the brain must kick in and say 'Alright, how can I deal with? What skills do I have? What historical things do I already know that are going to apply here?' So, let's just say we're a month and a half into the kinds of restrictions that many companies and countries have endured. My brain has started to say 'yes, this is new.' But at the same time, a lot of the things that we are feeling we have known before.

For example, in terms of employee experience, I'm part of the Future of Work Team at Forrester. My team of analysts has been recommending to clients the following for some time: Develop an empathy-based-leadership model. Give employees the ability to personalize their experience of work—in terms of how, when and from where they work. When you go down that list of recommendations, you realize that many considerations on how we should work are not only familiar, but we would eventually have to accommodate.

COVID is accelerating the changes we've discussed for years—particularly in terms of technology and digital disruption. These considerations aren't brand new. We have actually seen them coming for some time. Perhaps we didn't have the courage to disrupt ourselves and make them happen. But that no longer matters given our current reality. What if the New Normal turns out to be some old stuff that we really should have made normal along time ago? Well, then, now is our chance.





A Checklist for the Digital Road to Recovery

As we recover from this extraordinary time, the relationship between brands and customers is becoming increasingly digital. This is a time for brands to innovate and rethink the experiences they provide in the digital space, as the post-pandemic aftermath has shown that customers' behavioral patterns are not going to snap back to what they were early 2020. This is forcing companies to undertake fundamental change in how they attract, entangle with, and keep customers.

A digital quantum leap

Major life events can cause the human mindset to change. Buying a house, having children, moving, changing jobs... all can lead to change in social habits, in spending habits and overall intellectual habits. Our habitual behavior is disrupted because the change makes us question whether multiple aspects of our life can or should be different to better adapt to the changing situation. There are only



a few milestones in life when buying habits significantly change, and a global pandemic is one of them.

The concept of loyalty may become less strictly adhered to, and our inclination to consider something 'new' or 'different' rises, as our decisions now fall in line with our 'new' life. More than one-third (34%) of U.S. shoppers are adding new brands to their consideration set during the coronavirus pandemic, with 24% adding new brands to the usual mix on their shopping lists and 13% using the opportunity to discover new brands.

As consumers, we expect companies and brands to service our needs while staying at home. As customers, we expect our vendors to empower business continuity through the digital medium. A customer's 'day in the life' has become more digitalized given the amount of time we now spend in front of screens. 'Information is power' is no longer a singular truth, but rather, information is power only when it is interpreted and used to understand people so there can be a closer relationship with them. As customers share their data with brands, they expect in return intelligent, meaningful and tailored relationships with those brands.

Brands are not responding

The issue is that despite all this change in behavior, many brands are still holding on to their old forms of communications and engagement. Consider the experience of your company's website - the spine of your brand communications to your customers in this Digital-first Age - and ask yourself, how has it changed to truly align with new behavior and expectations? It is not enough to put a rotating hero image saying how the brand is helping with COVID-19. It is now critical to literally rethink the structure, brand, communications and experience to be more relevant.

Vertic is working with leading brands to help rethink their marketing models as they turn to digital solutions to creative innovative customer experiences. Based on the successes we have seen, we have put together a check list that constitutes **five key items** critical to any company's business continuity.

1. A Digital strategy

The COVID-19 pandemic has made swift and lasting changes to how we live and work. We are collectively navigating uncharted territory, where change is accelerated, and uncertainty is widespread. As we recover from this crisis, we won't fall back into our old habits; we will evolve into a new reality.

Consider these questions:

- Is there an updated digital strategy in place that provides direction and a clear measurement for the organization?
- Is our digital strategy providing a toolset that allows the organization to prioritize between different initiatives, while ensuring a direct impact to the business?

2. Update your digital persona - it's all about the customer.

A **digital persona** represents your company, brand or product as though it were a person. It reflects your style, attitude and personality, but most importantly, it's a guide to your company's online communications with your customers. COVID-19 has accelerated digital adaptation and altered business conduct. Consequently, businesses should understand the changes in customer behavior and how to best accommodate these new needs and expectations.

- How do you make it easy and seamless to do business?
- Do you have a deep understanding and zero-degrees-of-separation with your customers?
- Can you predict customer needs at each phase of the decision journey?

Take the time now to identify and understand the new expectations of your customers.

- How have their habits and priorities shifted during this time?
- How do they like to work, communicate and make decisions?





When you have clear answers to these questions and an updated understanding of your customers and your digital persona, you can start to build a digital infrastructure that will meet your customers' newly developed habits and preferences. Lastly, make sure to create a persona in a format that can be constantly updatable, where it can be easily, seamlessly and digitally distributed.

Consider these questions:

- When did you last update your persona and the buyers' journey?
- Are they providing clear guidance for in terms what, where, when and the how?
- Is your digital persona available to the entire organization?

3. Digitally empowered demand gen.

A siloed approach to the sales process no longer works. Traditionally, marketing worked to cultivate leads, while the sales department focused on closing deals. Companies should empower marketing to take responsibility for as much of the funnel as possible, so sales can focus on closing mature opportunities with the greatest potential.

Advertising, marketing and communications should demonstrate a tangible and direct business effect. Clear KPI frameworks need to be in place so marketers are able to articulate how marketing activities are leading an increase in sales, driving leads and/or reducing the cost of sales and time to market. While such frameworks should always be in place no matter the circumstance, they are now becoming essential to any marketing initiative and business continuity. Ultimately, businesses need to be able to answer how they have made it easier for their customers to do business.

Digital Account-Based Marketing (ABM) that concentrates resources on a set of target accounts should be using the latest technology for personalization, so a marketing message can respond to the specific attributes and needs of the account. Businesses should have a clear understanding of what matters to the customer and what information they need to proceed in their decision journey.



Consider these questions:

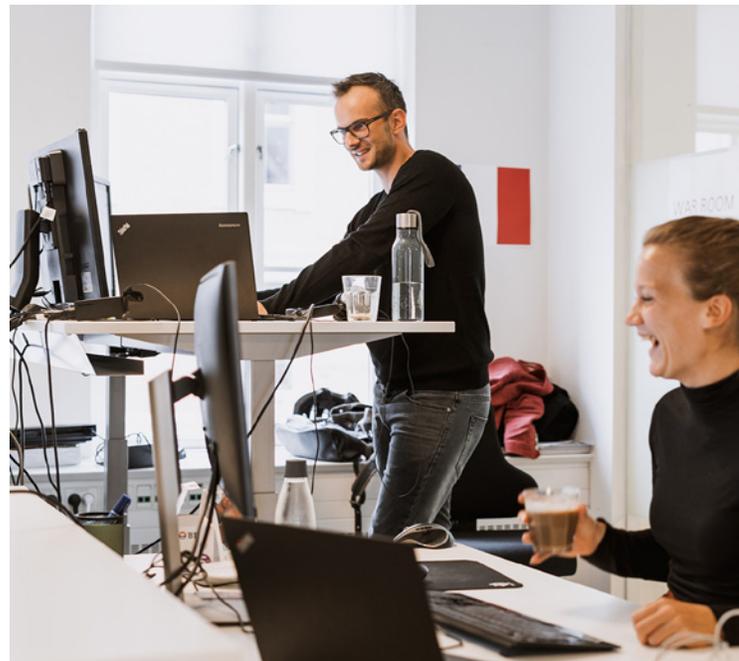
- Have we created sales battlecards that ensure consistency among the sales team by providing responses to common objections and frequent questions, as well as facts and statistics that support the company’s value propositions?
- Do we have an always-on ABM program in place or are we still creating campaigns promoting the latest products / services?
- Are we combining internal and external data sources (CRM, analytics, search, social etc.) in creating meaningful digital experiences?

Has a digital “war room” with participation from marketing, sales and IT been established?

4. The dot com.

Since the global crisis, the dot com, or corporate website, has grown in significance to be the brand’s front door, the spine of your digital ecosystem, and the entry that allows you to move away from traditional marketing engagement into a more meaningful, one-with-one relationship with customers. Even before this crisis, the buyer’s journey was already making a dramatic shift toward digital experience, with 67% of a buyer’s decision journey taking place online and 57% of the decision-making process completed before a customer contacts a salesperson.

These numbers will only grow as we rapidly change our habits to adapt to a new way of working. As we continue to work from home and become increasingly comfortable conducting virtual meetings and making more of our decisions online, we will significantly increase the digitization of the funnel. Your dot com’s role in supporting the business will only become more important.



Consider these 7 essential questions about your dot com:

- Try to search for an important topic / product using your .com’s own search function. Google has taught us to search. Is your .com search functionality able to assist the user in finding relevant information by producing relevant search results from your site?
- Has your content been audited and aligned with the buyer’s journey and been interlinked across menu structures or do you experience dead ends?
- Are you ranking for the right topics or only product / service terms on Google?
- Fill out a form on your website. How much information do you have to fill out? What do you do with it? What kind response are you getting? Follow-up with your qualification team/sales to understand what information they get?
- Try to chat with your chat bot, find a product, find a partner and/or take an assessment. Is it easy/ meaningful?
- Ask your analytical team to get a list of customers that have been to the site and what they were looking at over the past 6 weeks.
- Come back to the site several times. Is the experience changing based on your previous visits/ behavior?



5. The Agency mix.

We no longer go online, we live online. Therefore, the way we interact and optimize our digital activities should reinforce the ability for brands to provide meaningful content and relevant experiences to their customers at each phase of their journey.

As you rethink your digital strategy and operational set up, this also requires different agency partner mindsets and skills. There is now a greater need for partners and agencies that can digitally empower you with quicker turnaround time - as time is key to success in these unpredictable times. Consider a cross-partner agency and brand collaboration model, closely integrated with and acting as an extension of your core team -- providing real-time insights, recommendations and 'always on' optimizations to your digital activities.

Consider these questions:

- Do you have the right set up to make your digital strategy come to life?
- Do you have the right agency partners in place with similar mindsets, passion, and ability to execute your digital strategy seamlessly?
- Can they create new insights that become the critical foundation to inform your decision making?



LET'S RETHINK

Rethinking the Road to Recovery

As the pandemic continues, what is the best way for your brand to prosper at this strange time?

Hardly anyone is going to the malls. Only 10% of New York's office workers have returned to the city. Uncertainty rules the day. After a parade of failed predictions about the virus disappearing, people yearn for a return to normalcy. But there is no going back. We can only try to demystify what is coming next.

Most folks believe that after the pandemic runs its course a "new normal" will take over. That is not quite right. It will look more like the next step in a digital revolution that's been underway for

decades. Before the coronavirus ever reached our shores, digital technology was significantly transforming our earlier way of life.

People were spending more than half their time online. Retailers were struggling to survive the surge of e-commerce, newspapers were shutting down at an expeditious rate, and smart digital startups and technology companies were disrupting industry after industry.

We were already growing addicted to the Internet. Then, in just a few months' time, our dependence on living online intensified at an astounding rate. Cyberspace became a place

where those confined to being at home turned to gaming, shopping, fun, news, schooling, fitness training, working remotely, reliance on telemedicine and just about everything else.

As a result of the pandemic, the next phase of the digital revolution arrived five to ten years ahead of schedule. All those hours stranded indoors transformed human behavior at warp speed. The public became comfortable living with a digital economy in ways only imagined in the past.

Long before the pandemic struck, digital games had grown into a sizable business sector. When the virus-imposed shutdown took hold, gaming online experienced explosive growth. Revenue that stood at \$20 billion a year in 2010 zoomed to \$160 billion in 2020. Folks with lots of time on their hands discovered the pull of high-tech gaming - and loved it.

The sluggish COVID-19 economy crushed an alarming number of businesses. But it was the best of times for the titans of the Internet. Record stock prices were seen for, Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Amazon.

“Technology-driven lesser companies are also posting eye-popping gains. The coronavirus pandemic has accelerated trends that were building for years by forcing large swaths of the population to work from home and shop online,” wrote Matt Phillips in the *New York Times*.

Lessons from brands that grew in 2020

Rethinking the road to recovery begins with focusing on those companies that raced ahead in 2020 and are set up to prosper in 2021. It amounts to a small number of tech-driven innovators. Each operates in a whole new way. They offer a model of how to thrive in the next normal of the ongoing digital revolution.

Near the top of the list, you’ll find **Warby Parker**. In a single decade, this startup changed what it’s like to buy eyeglasses, sunglasses or contacts online and offline. Based on investor funding during the pandemic, the company has reached a valuation of \$3 billion dollars. Not bad for only 10 years in business!



Updates to our Buy a Pair, Give a Pair program

Since day one, for every pair of Warby Parker glasses purchased, a pair has been distributed to someone in need—but COVID-19 has forced us to largely pause our program.

As of April 1, 2020, we’re temporarily shifting our focus so that for the majority of glasses sold, **personal protective equipment** and **preventative health supplies** are distributed to healthcare workers and communities in need.

Due to Covid-19, Warby Parker radically revamped many aspects of its business. The Buy A Pair, Give A Pair program which brought low-cost vision services to third world countries closed down. Instead, a Warby Parker purchase now fights the spread of Covid-19 in those same countries. The brand's fans remain committed to helping the entire world become a better place.

The company closed its 120 stores in March of 2020 when the pandemic escalated. With the economy in disarray, management thought about what shopping at a Warby Parker store should look like. Then, on May 14, they began reopening. The co-founders structured some of the safest and most rewarding experiences found anywhere during the coronavirus crisis.

What has not changed is the operating system Warby Parker pioneered by selling stylish prescription glasses online for under \$100.

Trying on five frames for free at home remains a phenomenal offer. With so many people now dependent on the Internet, it is perfectly suited to the way of life dictated by the digital revolution

The brand's iPhone app provides a virtual view of how the person looks wearing various types of eyeglass frames. It takes into account how facial features interact with choosing the right glasses. The iPhone rendition is so lifelike you'll think you are actually wearing what's in the photo.

While the co-founders of Warby Parker continue to make their website's interaction fun and clever, it is the combination of an operating system – both online and offline – that sets Warby Parker apart.

Peloton, the high-tech video company selling physical fitness, turned the virus quarantine into months of spectacular growth. The demand for its seamless mix of a cycling machine and video classes became a magnet for people trapped at home. In the first quarter of 2020, Peloton achieved a 94% year over year increase in the number of subscribers.

We see three key lessons from the brand's surge in sales:

- **First, Be in the Right Place at the Right Time.** Gyms and fitness centers closed down in response to the pandemic. Peloton had the combination of an initial hardware cost and a recurring software expense that became a terrific substitute for workouts at a fitness center.
- **Second, Develop a Fantastic Operating System.** Peloton provides unlimited access to thousands of fitness classes. More than a million members experience the energy of a studio without leaving home.
- **Third, Support One-with-One Membership.** Peloton connects the brand online with "belongers." It's not just a membership. It's a community. High fives with other members and shout outs by world-class instructors add excitement and strengthen motivation.

The key to success in the next phase of the digital revolution is the ability to develop a meaningful online operating model. When the COVID-19 disaster winds down, the digital revolution will continue to evolve.

Zero degrees of separation between the interests of brand and consumer is the one trait the internet dynamos hold in common. It's what we at Vertic describe as achieving Share of Life™ with users. Think of it as the depth of a brand's presence in each person's day-to-day activity in cyberspace.

“The Share-of-Life™ metric developed at Vertic goes far beyond a share-of-wallet or even the share-of-mind metric. Share-of-Life™ proposes that the most powerful brands of the future will measure what percent of the minutes of your day – awake or asleep – they can meaningfully support.”

– James McQuivey, Principal Analyst at Forrester

You know you are on the road to recovery when your brand becomes entangled in your customer’s 24-hour day. It’s when people can’t imagine life without your product or service. Each interaction enriches and strengthens the customer connection.

You can count on the digital revolution continuing to gain momentum. The clearly marked road to recovery from the tragic pandemic is waiting. Are you going to be leading the parade once the virus is gone or will your brand be among those left behind? This is a make or break moment for just about every business.





How COVID-19 is rapidly changing customer expectations

Covid-19 is transforming the way we interact with brands. Over the past 5 months we have already witnessed a radical transformation in consumer habits through shifts to online shopping platforms, as well as a willingness to try contact-less options like “buy online - pickup in store.” While some people are returning to brick & mortar establishments in places where the virus is under control, much of the behavior consumers exhibited when connecting with brands during the pandemic will become permanent.

Seventy-five percent of consumers have tried a new shopping behavior, and most intend to continue it beyond the crisis.

Consumers who have tried a new shopping behavior since COVID-19 started¹ % of respondents



¹Q: Since the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation started (ie, in the past ~3 months), which of the following have you done? 25% consumers selected "none of these."

²Q: Which best describes whether or not you plan to continue with these shopping changes once the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation has subsided? Possible answers: "will go back to what I did before coronavirus"; "will keep doing both this and what I did before coronavirus"; "will keep doing this and NOT go back to what I did before coronavirus."

³"New shopping method" includes curbside pickup and delivery apps.

Source: McKinsey & Company COVID-19 US Consumer Pulse Survey 6/15–6/21/2020, n = 2,006, sampled and weighted to match the US general population 18+ years

Today's brand leaders are realizing that to be "liked" is no longer enough. There must be a greater value exchange between brand and customer. They must act quickly to ensure that their products become more relevant to people now – not somewhere in an undefined future.

Whether considered the "new normal" or "life in lockdown," we are living with profound uncertainty and increased challenges. It is only natural that people are rethinking their relationships with brands and what those brands stand for. Already we are seeing that shoppers will vote with their wallets by not spending with companies that treated their staff members poorly during the crisis.

Gone are lengthy marketing cycles and extensive product development scenarios. Today we must test, learn, and repeat faster than ever before

as we focus on brands and their relationships with the people they serve. Given that almost all product touch points are now online, as we come to grips with a world dramatically affected by COVID-19, brands must now simultaneously juggle both performance marketing and brand building through new means of digital storytelling. That is not an easy feat in the best of times; however, it is now the only route to successful branding in the Age of COVID.

Rethink Branding: Let's Talk About Entanglement

Brands are built from the personification of a business, which is ultimately a process of discovery and identification. A business is typically concerned with declaring who it is, what it does, how it looks and who it serves. These aspects are fundamental



pillars from which it builds a memorable identity, but it cannot end here. Too many businesses view the establishment of their identity as the be-all and end-all, without realizing that they have provided promises to people that they have not yet fulfilled. In a relationship that fundamentally involves two parties (the brand and the people), having a singular focus creates the illusion of an inherently imbalanced power dynamic and signals to the people that their priorities are less important, pushing them away.

Yet, many brands today still invest most of their marketing efforts on and for themselves. This is seen through advertising: airing TV commercials or buying display ad placements that focus on self-promotion rather than crafting the customer experience - we call this Nonvertising.

We need to remember that brands do not operate in a vacuum. They live in a space that is consistently defined and redefined by their relationship with people. This relationship is not quantified by a straightforward count of brand-people interactions - because, in many cases, that's just a click. The real unit of measurement we should be looking at is the count of meaningful interactions between the brand and its people.

We Don't Go Online, We Live Online

We presently exist in a Digital-First Age. Technology has given brands a global platform and the ability to interact with people at scale. It has fundamentally changed how people get information, communicate, and engage with one another. It has changed the relationship between brands and people.

Simple demographics are no longer enough in today's complex marketing environment. Market researchers and consumer experts are now delivering more than just numbers. They are analyzing giant data sets on behavior patterns, product usage and trend-forecasting, to provide information that can be acted upon by all company divisions that interact with customers and prospects. Artificial intelligence and machine learning are also being leveraged to provide critical insights and opportunities.

We should now realize that the old adage, "information is power," is no longer the singular truth. Information is power only when it is interpreted and used to understand people so there

can be a closer relationship with them. Through this understanding, brands have the potential and capability to create something magical and accessible.

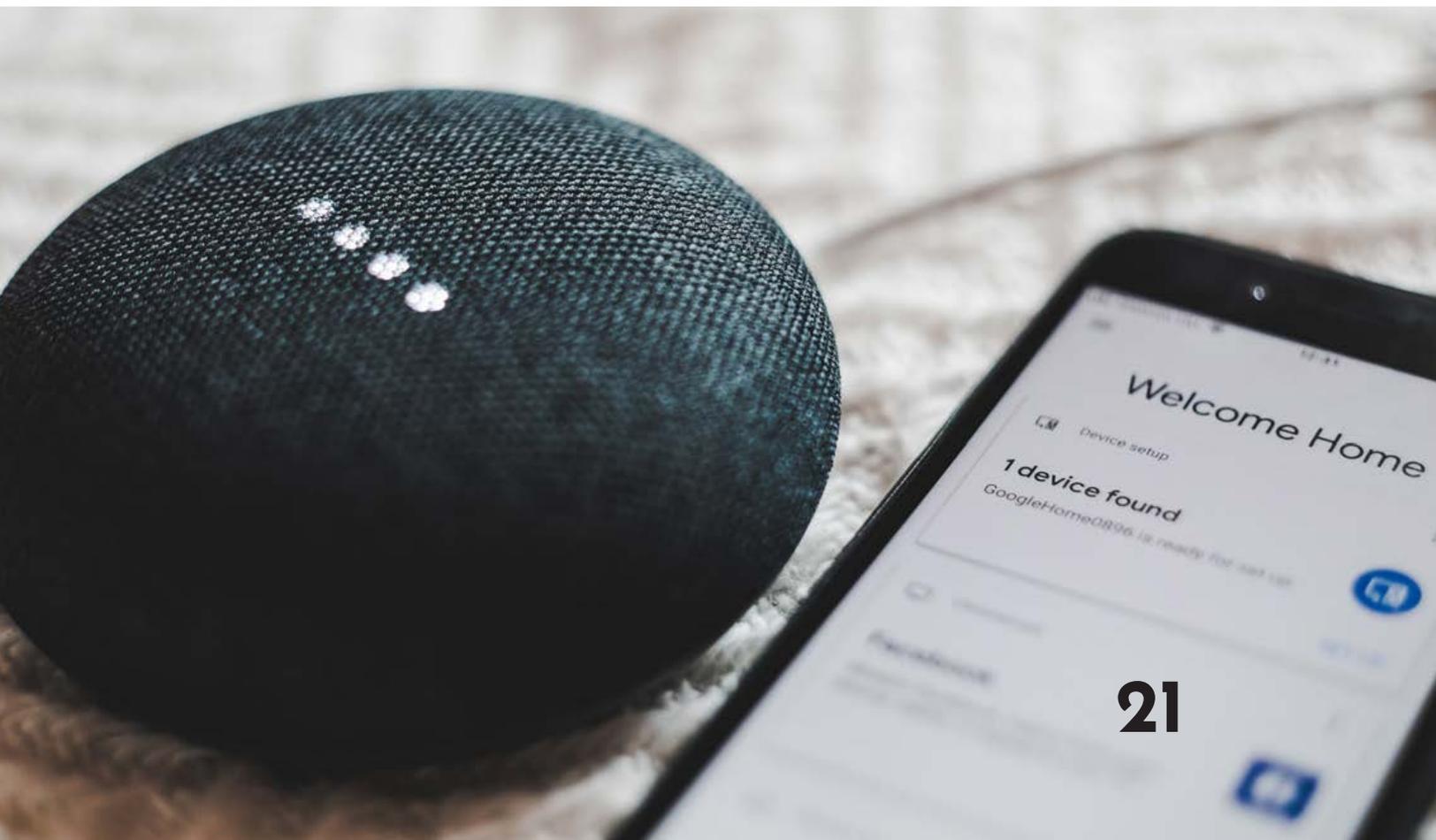
Today's winning brands are those that achieve zero degrees of separation with a customer, by incorporating the brand into the person's lifestyle and daily routine without being perceived as intrusive.

Entangling Your Brand WITH Your Customers

Instead of just spending dollars seeking new customers and focusing on campaigns shouting about how great your brand is, start by nurturing your existing relationships. Brands spend so much money on acquisition of new customers but rarely consider the experience they offer afterwards. When people take a chance on your brand, don't take that for granted. Don't impose your brand on people's lives. Rather, give people reasons to want your brand to be a part of their lives.

Remember that you can't authentically entangle with everyone but identifying those with whom you can is critical. The data and insights you gain from your current customer interactions will also enable you to reach out to new customers intelligently and meaningfully.

Learn about your existing customers, care about them, and invest in them. They will become your brand's strongest ambassadors and their experience will define your brand's finest moments. The best part is they are already here for you. All you have to do is reach out and do good by them.



Nothing Normal About Getting Back to Normal



NEW



MINDS E

All the talk about getting back to normal after living with the terrifying COVID-19 pandemic is based on an illusion. There is no normal to get back to. Before even hearing about the devastating corona virus, the economy was already reeling from the effects of the digital revolution. People were spending more than half their lives online. Retailers were struggling to survive the surge of e-commerce, newspapers were shutting down at an alarming rate and smart startups were upsetting industry after industry.

Are cars without drivers normal? Are machines developing common sense normal? Are drones dropping packages on doorsteps normal?

Spending more time at home, we are becoming more dependent on the Internet for our shopping, our entertainment, our news, and our social interactions. What will the fallout be from all this new behavior? How do humans (and brands) deal with such an altered state of being?

The need for meaningful change has been trending over the past decade. We have to ask ourselves if the projects and services we are providing truly enrich the lives of customers. More than ever, what's critical is how many minutes or hours a day a brand spends making life better for the online life of their customers.

The extent of a brand's share in the life of a customer was vital before the Covid-19 crisis erupted and will be even more so when we get back to "normal." During the pandemic people are learning how to exist 6 feet apart. In the aftermath of this catastrophe, brands will thrive by learning how to gain zero degrees of separation from their best customers.

Think of **Share-of-Life™** as the depth of a brand's online connection to believers. The challenge is to weave your brand into the fabric of your customer's existence. An "entangled twosome" can do great things together.

How do you gain Share-of-Life™ with customers in an Internet-focused society?

One of the most effective ways is to apply the tenets of the Share-of-Life™ CREED. These are guidelines for making your brand an integral part of an individual's life in the turbulent years ahead.

Gaining Share-of-Life™ with the consumer or a business customer is a five-part process. An innovative mindset is required every step of the way. The tenets of the Share-of-Life™ CREED are:

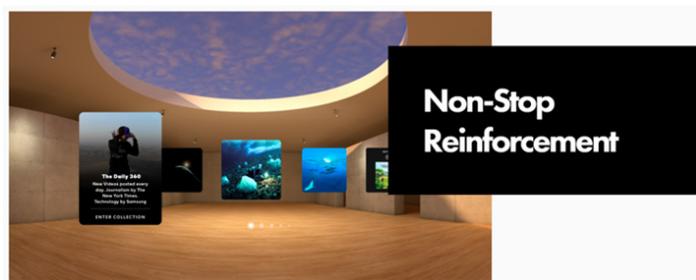
1. **Secure Ongoing Commitment**
2. **Provide Nonstop Reinforcement**
3. **Create Digital Empowerment**
4. **Renew Original Excitement**
5. **Drive Major Development**



Securing Ongoing Commitments come in many forms and include both existing customers and prospects and can be categorized by type, such as intellectual commitments and opt-ins, financial and transactional commitments or strategic partnership commitments. After defining and mapping customer commitments, the next step is to create mutually beneficial relationships with strategically important commitments. Start by giving something back to customers and prospects who have shown a commitment. This will move relationships from a single commitment to an ongoing commitment. To accomplish this, a brand needs to engage in meaningful, relevant communications and interactions that are based on data and insights.

“Buy and say good bye” was the operational model in the analog past. Digital tools make it easier than ever for brands to get consumers to “Buy and Stay” now. The strongest commitment you can get upfront is the signup for a subscription.

Amazon’s Prime membership program secures Ongoing Commitment from more than a hundred million U.S. subscribers. Netflix signs up members for unlimited entertainment, hopefully for life. Spotify does the same thing for the music you love, and BarkBox keeps your four-legged friend happy with ongoing shipments of playful toys month after month.



The second Share of Life credo is **Nonstop Reinforcement**. Consciously reinforce the strength of your customer’s commitment to your brand. Bolster whatever first attracted the consumer to your offering with a burst of beneficial surprises online. It’s critical to make the customer feel special and to build trust by always listening.

Finding ways to provide non-stop reinforcement of the customer relationship never stops. In the depths of the COVID-19 disaster, Allstate gave their auto insurance policyholders a break. With customers not driving as much, there were fewer accidents. Allstate announced a 15% monthly premium giveback. Sharing the savings with its customers reinforced feeling good about the brand at a difficult time.

When was the last time your brand sent a meaningful thank you to your best customers? How often do you reinforce the bond with your users? Without nonstop special treatment you may see your Share of Life with users slip away.

Ben Cotton, Vice President, Product at The New York Times talks about his winning strategy in an online NiemanLab interview. Cotton commented, “My team believes that by investing in the subscribers we have, and making their experience better and better, we’ll be able to help all parts of the business. By reinforcing that they’re getting things that no one else is getting, we think we’ll be able to convince them to keep paying and to boost our subscription business.”

The new digital life of customers provides a brand an opportunity to attain zero degrees of separation. Data and insights can tell us what’s important to customers. Empower today’s internet-focused customers with rewarding and enlightening online experiences that leverage those results, so they can do more with the brand’s product or services.



Creating Digital Empowerment for your customers is at the heart of boosting Share-of-Life™. Two Big Tech giants formed a rare partnership to empower one-third of the world’s population - 3 billion people - in the battle against the Covid-19 virus. Apple and Google added a technology called contact-tracing to their smartphone platforms. The app tells users when they should get tested and/or isolate themselves after contact with an infected individual.

The technology could empower people to save lives around the globe. Both Apple and Google will get a tremendous lift.

How might you empower the buyer of your product or service? Who might you partner with to tap into the most potent digital technology out there for inventing a never-seen-before experience?



The **Excitement** that first surrounded a breakthrough product or service may be long gone. So, what do you do to keep your Share of Life with customers from drifting away due to the mind-boggling distractions of the Internet? Automated communication will not create the sufficient excitement to build a bond that keeps customers coming back. The answer is obvious.

Tribalizing excitement.

Sophisticated technology and insights will help brands understand how they can authentically add value to what is deemed important in their customers' lives.

DietBet is a startup that made renewing excitement part of its business model. As the name suggests, DietBet invites members to place bets on the person's desired weight-loss. Each new game reignites the fun felt the first time a member placed a bet on herself. It's like visiting a weight-loss casino.



Last, but not least, of the creed precepts is the drive for **Major Development**. The disruption caused by the success of a new product or service inevitably leads to an onslaught of competitors. Staying ahead of the copycats by expanding what the pace-setting company has to offer is a constant challenge.

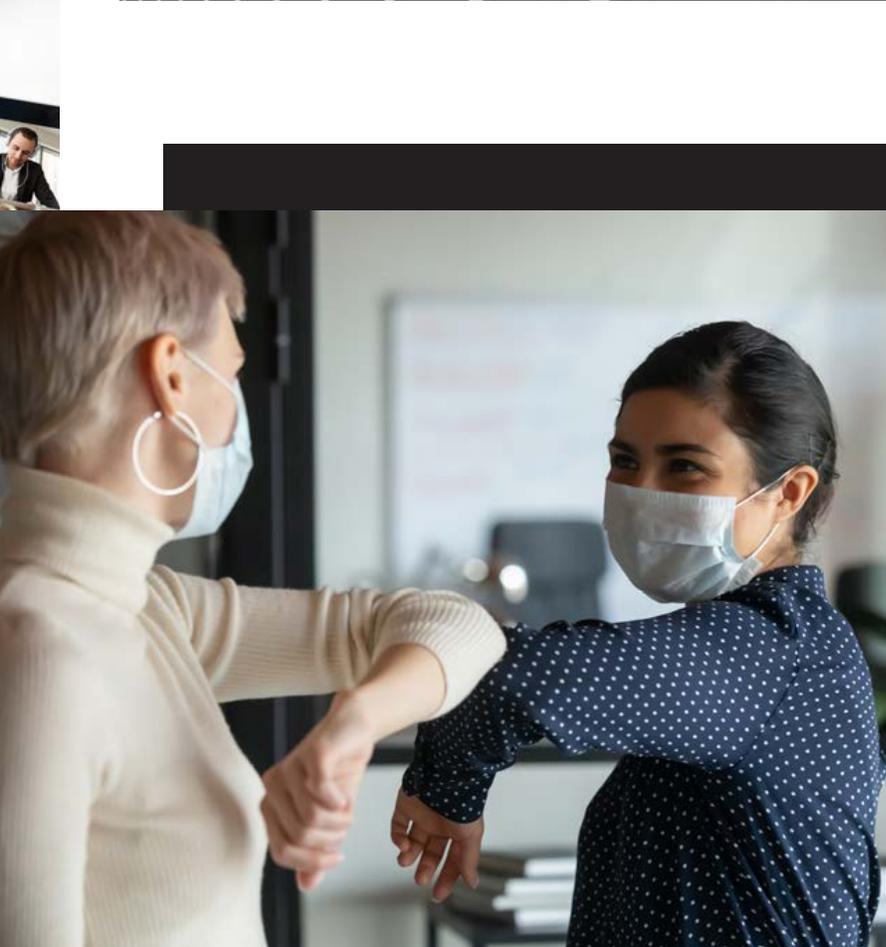
The continual shifts in customer behavior underscores the needs for the constant development of communication programs, as well as product innovation that leverages new technologies. Examples of Development include introducing new products and services co-innovated with customers or using technology to enforce interactive storytelling. Such development must be always-on and constantly provide customers with compelling opportunities that allow them to do more in their lives.

Few companies manage a brand's move into new categories as well as Disney. The latest example comes from the brand Mickey Mouse made famous. The Disney+ entry into streaming video garnered more than 50 million global subscribers in the wink of an eye. It's yet one more major development from Disney.

Using this time to rethink

Putting to use the principles underlying the Share-of-Life™ doctrine is something new for most of the business world. Very few companies outside of the Fab5 (Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft) break new ground in more than one or two of the creed guidelines.





When making our business decisions, we rarely know if the “new” is something to embrace or avoid. Nonetheless, it is best that we pay attention to it. What’s novel and innovative can be scary to brand managers comfortable with what seems normal. Unfortunately, most of what is novel at this moment makes us fearful. For those who think about Share-of-Life™ and how to weave your brand into the fabric of your customer’s existence, it can also be a time of opportunity.

There will be nothing normal about getting back to normal – but you can start with understanding how well your brand is mastering the Share of Life C:R:E:E:D.



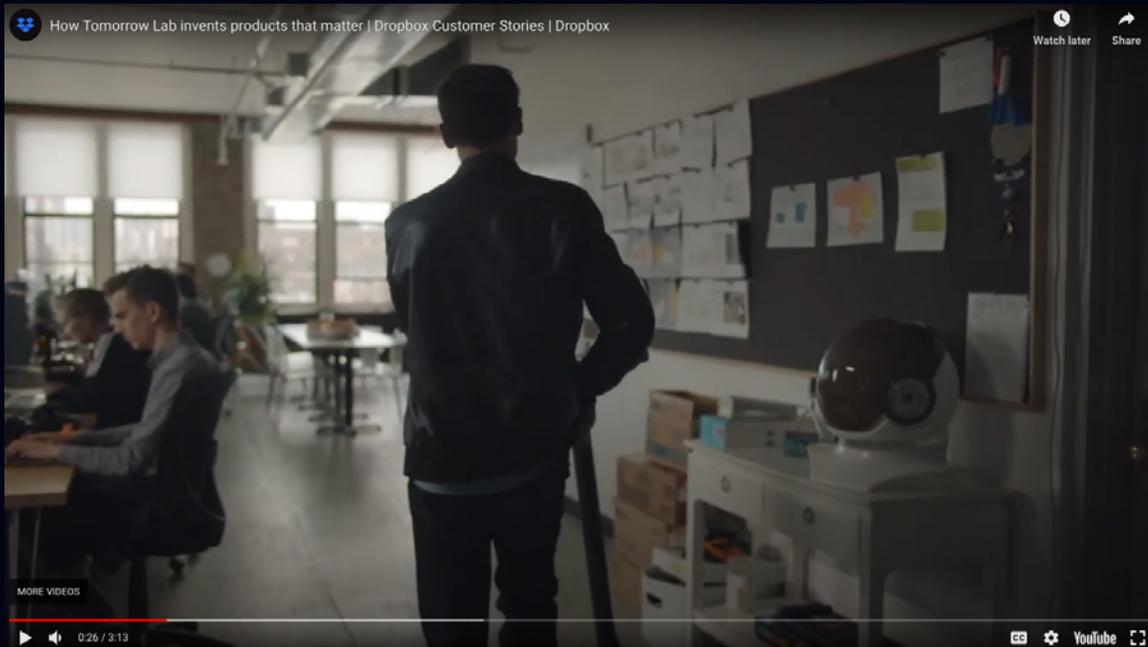
Helping Dropbox bring to life a digital platform that drives real engagement

Client Overview

Dropbox understands the flexible future of work. With more than 600 million registered users across 180 countries, the company is on a mission to keep content organized and safe, while ensuring that remote work keeps moving forward collaboratively.

The Challenge

Entirely re-thinking customer experience to solve for virtual workplace challenges



Dropbox operates at the heart of this new digital reality. And while working from home has represented the beginning of fast-tracking the future of work, Dropbox felt the need to show how workplaces, work schedules, and work cultures throughout the globe are responding to new ways of working.

It was no longer enough for Dropbox to simply outline the benefits of centrally organizing content, streamlining workflows, communicating with teams, integrating other tools, and keeping data safe. They had to DEMONSTRATE their significance through real users. Plus, Dropbox needed to let customers EXPERIENCE these benefits for themselves. And allow a new generation of remote workers to hear about the kinds of results that are indeed possible.

The Vision

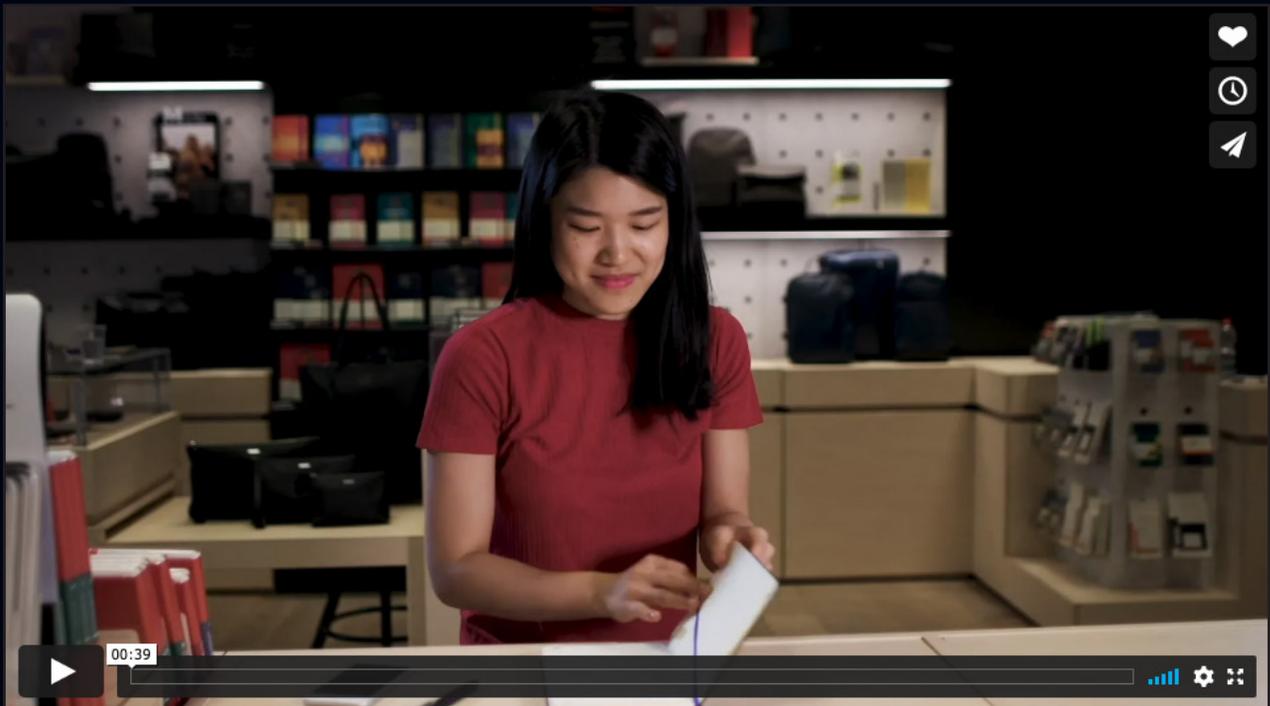
“With the rise of digital experiences, we wanted to build a platform that nurtures trust, builds connectivity, and drives engagement. Our Digital Marketing Experience Platform is more than just a destination, but a reimagined website focused on our customers”.

– Tifenn Dano Kwan
CMO, Dropbox

The Strategy

Own the conversation around the smart workplace

Dropbox certainly realizes there are many challenges in the modern workplace. Their role is to solve for these difficulties with a smarter and



more efficient way of working. As a result, Vertic’s strategy was to appeal to customers throughout their digital experience journey, aligning content to match their needs and desired outcomes. Given the remote work situation of millions of businesses today, Vertic chose to express a sense of sympathetic understanding, while also being responsive to highlighting topics—at exactly the right moment-- that would lead to provide helpful information and ensuring customer success.

It was also clear to Vertic that Dropbox had an opportunity to “own the conversation” around the smart workspace for distributed teams. This meant providing an engaging customer journey, while reassuring customers in times of uncertainty. Most importantly, the experience platform would also bring to life ways of growing a customer’s business with reliable Dropbox tools. This approach changed the tone of communications from a product-focused discussion to one that was far more enriching and consultative.

The Solution
A rich content experience based on insights of what customers need now:

Customer Insights

Vertic conducted a number of studies that underscored the impact of the pandemic on businesses in relation to remote work and distributed teams. These studies focused on those topics of greatest concern to Dropbox customers, as well as the language, taxonomy and semantics that they used.

Relevant Content

Based on these insights of how businesses throughout the world are managing amid the pandemic, Vertic created rich video content, interactive tools and articles to empower Dropbox customers to better understand how to navigate in unpredictable times.

Experience Platform

Vertic built a dynamic platform experience with relevant content personalized to potential and existing Dropbox customers throughout their information journey. Easy to update, the platform is built for ongoing development.

Digital event strategy alignment

With a future-forward attitude, the platform has also been built to act for upcoming event strategy—whether virtual events or a hybrid model of physical events that require complimentary digital components for scale.

Vertic founded by Sebastian Jespersen and Mads Krogh Petersen

In 2002, Sebastian Jespersen and Mads Krogh Petersen came together with a shared belief; through digital transformation, any firm could form a deeper and broader connection with customers than possible before. The dominant marketing trend of our time was destined to be gaining Share of Life™ with end users in cyberspace. The founders' background in management consultancy underpins the agency's differentiation of seeing creativity and technology as mediums through which business objectives are achieved – rather than the focus of our work.

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