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MediaPost has selected GroupM's Wavemaker as our "Media Agency of the Year" for 2021, because it made a compelling case that it also is the "Creative Agency of the Year." No, not "creativity" in the sense of copy, images, video and other forms of content that agencies create as part of the campaigns they produce for their clients, but another form that is becoming increasingly vital if any of those assets are ever going to make it in front of the right consumers, in the right place and at the right time.

> We picked Wavemaker because it has demonstrated the best creativity in how it is applying the art and science of data in a way that enables all the other components of their clients' campaign work,

starting with identifying how to reach the consumers they want and following all the way through to the outcomes they want their campaigns to elicit.

The core of that creativity is centered, ironically, in a Wavemaker unit called MIS. No, not the old school "management information systems" connotation of the acronym, but a new meaning "marketing intelligence & science."

The unit, which was created by Delphine Fabre-Hernoux, who joined Wavemaker as Chief Data & Analytics Officer in April, after years toiling at Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft, and rival holding companies Publicis and Dentsu, was rebranded in order to differentiate it from other big agency analytics units, but also to provide greater transparency and clarity for what its mission actually is.

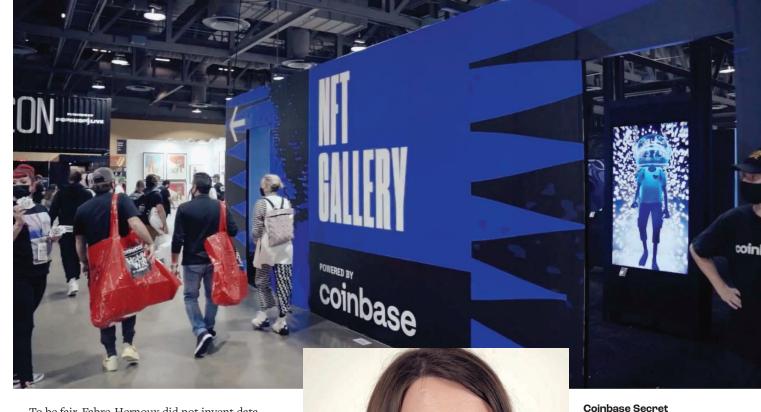
"When I joined, people would ask me how many data scientists I have on my team, which made me realize that there was a misunderstanding of what we do," Fabre-Hernoux explains, adding: "We don't have hundreds of data scientists."

In fact, Wavemaker's MIS unit has only a handful of pure-play data scientists, but that is more than sufficient for what the unit has set out to accomplish, which is to combine data science with marketing science and apply it in ways that create new data signals and analytics that help develop new models for understanding and even predicting outcomes that should happen when those elements

come together in the right way.

Yes, it's a combination of art and science, but to Fabre-Hernoux, the process of bringing them together is a new form of creativity that will define the success of marketing well into the future, especially as new and evolving technology — deep learning, machine learning, artificial intelligence, etc. — enable the department's "creatives" to think of new ways of putting the elements together to create what, in effect, are Madison Avenue's new "Big Ideas."

"The fact that I wake up every morning knowing that I will create something new that day is what gets me excited and keeps me going," she says, adding: "It's a combination of art and science, but it's also a combination of math and creativity."



To be fair, Fabre-Hernoux did not invent data creativity at Wavemaker — an agency that has always prided itself on its ability to understand and leverage data in ways that differentiated it from other agencies, and its clients from other marketers.

Last year, Wavemaker was a close finalist for Agency of the Year for a variety of campaigns it executed utilizing superior data analytics and application. In fact, its work was behind the successful execution of a data-centric effort by the U.S. Census Bureau that earned it our 2020 "Media Client of the Year" award.

But in less than a year, Fabre-Hernoux has restructured Wavemaker's entire approach to data analytics and application, and simultaneously began building a new, as-yet-unnamed tool, that will be the basis of GroupM's entire consumer data identity resolution framework for its clients.

The new solution, which is expected to be formally unveiled shortly (if it hasn't been already), was designed and built by Fabre-Hernoux's team and enables all of GroupM's agencies to essentially audit and assess where each of their clients fall on a spectrum of consumer identity resolution, how prepared they are for changes that have already been made by Apple, Google and others, and how well positioned they are for future developments including privacy regulation, as well as the erosion of identity signals over time as many of the sources they were most dependent on, begin "backing out" empirical consumer identity data for compliance and other reasons.

Importantly, the solution — which Fabre-Hernoux worked on with GroupM Chief Innovation

Officer Krystal Olivieri — adheres to an ethical use of the consumer data framework that GroupM also developed for itself and its clients during 2021

(see Media Holding Company of the Year, page 8).

To be sure, just about every agency we considered for this year's awards also has or was in the process of developing a consumer identity resolution solution — but what makes Wavemaker's approach different is that its approach is borne out of a new spirit of creativity that Fabre-Hernoux has brought to the organization, along with some new talent on the team.

It's no secret that data scientists have become Madison Avenue's new "rock stars" in recent years, replacing copywriters, art directors and consumer planners and strategists, but what differentiates Wavemaker's new approach is that it's not reliant purely on science, but also on the creative imagining of data signals, sources of data,

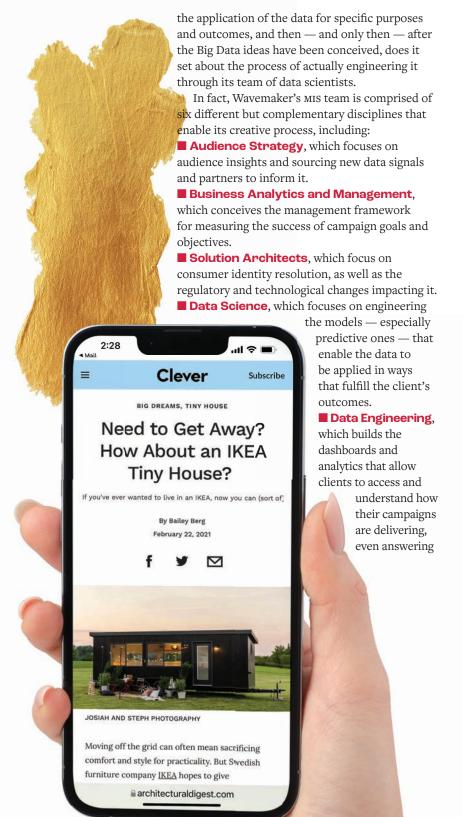


Walls installation

at Complexcon

2021; Delphine Fabre-Hernoux

(inset)



seemingly simple questions like how much they are spending, what they are paying and what their returns are on those investments.

■ Marketing Intelligence and Science, which are the department leaders that are essentially its account people working directly with clients to understand their problems and create new solutions for them.

It's that last discipline that Fabre-Hernoux says she likes best, because in the end, none of the art and science matter if it isn't applied in a way that moves the needle. And while the needle often is its clients' bottom lines, it also can be objectives that impact consumers, or even greater society in a much bigger way.

To illustrate this, Fabre-Hernoux cites a solution it recently created for a big unnamed pharmaceutical brand that markets a prescription drug for treating a common disease.

Importantly, the solution does not rely on any consumer identity data, but is a new predictive model powered by a unique blend of data signals enabling the brand to personalize information for people likely to be in medical need of it. The signals include consumer search queries for the disease symptoms, as well as remedies, and combine it with data from the U.S. Census and the Centers For Disease Control.

The model is confidential and proprietary to the client, so Fabre-Hernoux couldn't share it explicitly with MediaPost, but she used it as an example to illustrate the creativity that can be brought to bear when a client is in need of a solution.

And just like the conventional creative intellectual properties Madison Avenue historically creates for its clients, the models Wavemaker creates for its clients are owned by them, not the agency.

And just like the ad agencies of old, in Wavemaker's new approach it is the modelers and not the models that are its secret sauce, because it all comes down to the people, the teams and the unique culture of its organization that allow those models to be created in the first place.

"At the end of the day, there are an infinite number of models that can be created," Fabre-Hernoux explains, adding: "Our creativity comes from understanding how to find the best signals from the right partners in order to create them." Joe Mandese



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Like the year before it, 2021 was a year of multiple transformations for society at large, and for the advertising, marketing and media industries within it. It also accelerated a trend that has been manifesting for years, but which gained real traction in the past year, because of the multiple crises the industry has had to grapple with - including a global pandemic, the "Great Resignation," media toxicity, social justice, and our ability to sustain human life on planet Earth.

> But if 2020 was the year in which Madison Avenue discovered and embraced empathy, compassion and a hunger to "do the right thing," 2021 was they year it began doing it in earnest, looking beyond its own and its client's organizations to understand and change how the ad biz works in a way that will benefit all of us.

Or as a GroupM spokesperson described it after we named the WPP unit our media holding company of the year: "We got serious about aligning our business with our mission to define a new era of media where advertising works better for people."

To be sure, it was a close race, because most of the majors — as well as some sizable and mid-size independents — embraced similar change. And if we bestowed an "Industry of the Year Award," we would give it to the ad biz overall, but that would be redundant, right?

Instead, the highest order we acknowledge is at the holding company level, and while its peers also rose to the occasion, it felt to the editors of MediaPost that GroupM more than others had both a mission and a plan for executing it, and took on some very material steps in that direction.

Since the roots of GroupM are fundamentally as a "media investment" organization, it not surprisingly framed the overall mission around a project code named the "Responsible Investment Framework" that looked not just at the direct return on the media buys it places to drive its clients' businesses, but on a much bigger ROI.

The GroupM framework is built on five key pillars, including "safety" (for both consumers

> and brands, "data ethics" (including the ethical application of data, algorithmic processing and artificial intelligence to advertising), "diversity and inclusion," "responsible journalism" (including the overall health of the media ecosystem), and "sustainability" (including how GroupM agencies and clients impact the planet).

While other holding companies have committed

to similar missions, GroupM approached it in an organized and tangible way that sets a bar for the industry overall, hitting all three of our annual awards main criteria: vision, innovation and industry leadership.

In fact, GroupM hit the ground running in 2021 and didn't stop innovating and leading, beginning

with the launch of its "Data Ethics Compass" in

The compass, which functions more like an operating system for GroupM agencies and client teams to assess, understand the implications, and if necessary, course correct and even scrap what it deems to be unethical uses of consumer data.

Engineered by a team led by GroupM data strategist Krystal Olivieri (who was named GroupM Chief Innovation Officer shortly after its launch), the compass offers a simple, binary yes/no decision-making process for GroupMers to work through whether a specific data application even raises a red flag and then how to vet its application if and when it does.

The compass is rules-based. It isn't a rigid set of rules, but is designed to be nimble, adaptive, and human-based decision-making. It is the perfect response not just to the potential regulatory and legal risks and liabilities associated with applying consumer data to marketing, but is a perfect Madison Avenue answer to critics of "Surveillance Capitalism."

Importantly, the compass isn't just a feelgood system for doing the right thing, but also enables GroupM's people to do things right. Among other things, it acknowledges that there are times when acquiring and storing data isn't

just unnecessary, but is a drain on manpower and system resources.

GroupM's framework took on even more life in April with the unveiling of its "Media Decarbonization Program," which included a WPP commitment to neutralize its own operational carbon footprint by 2025, and its entire supply chain by 2030. As part of

it, GroupM vowed to become the first media holding company to commit to complete media decarbonization within the next eight years.

Like other agency advertising and media decarbonization initiatives, the program includes development of proprietary carbon calculators enabling planners, buyers, strategists and others to understand what the explicit carbon footprint of their campaigns actually are, and how best to offset them.

Part of GroupM's mission for 2022 is to embed these carbon calculators directly with its media partners and to provide them with incentives for embracing them. It takes the concept of "brand safety" filters routinely utilized by agencies and their media partners, and applies them to make the world a safer place by reducing the direct carbon footprint of advertising and media.

In May, GroupM expanded its framework to tackle diversity, equity and inclusion, launching its "Media Inclusion Initiative," a multi-pronged approach by GroupM to support diversity and inclusion in media, including explicitly boosting investment in Black-owned media properties and supporting the development of diverse content creators. Importantly, GroupM put its clients' money where its mouth is, securing commitments from them to invest at least 2% of their ad budgets in incremental spending on Black-owned media properties.

"I love our clients who are likewise managing their own challenges," said GroupM Global CEO Christian Juhl, when asked what he is most proud of accomplishing over the past year. "They represent some amazing brands and they have stuck with us."

Not surprisingly, Juhl is also most proud of

While other holding companies have committed to similar missions, GroupM approached it in an organized and tangible way that sets a ban for the industry overall, hitting all three of our annual awards main criteria: vision innovation and industry leadership.

> his worldwide team, which responded during the pandemic by adapting to new ways of working and servicing their clients' businesses.

"And that's up to and including today, what with the Omicron variant and being forced to work from home yet again," Juhl noted at year-end 2021, adding: "There's a lot of uncertainty. With that comes new business." Joe Mandese

If there has been any agency that embodies the spirit of independence that this particular award is designed to recognize, it is USIM — which wins it for the second time, because its management team figured out how to push the boundaries of what an independent media-buying service could actually do — and in the process, innovated new ways of servicing not just advertising clients, but other agencies as well.

The agency — which last won this award in 2019 for punching above its weight and taking on new strategy work and innovating new proprietary research methodologies that brought more precision and efficiency to advertisers, especially local retailoriented ones battling for share in local trading areas

with products like 3Di and Purview — doubled down in the past year to help local marketers turbocharge those efforts via a unique integration with credit bureau giant TransUnion's new TruAudience database. This enabled the agency to target and reach in-market consumers in magnitudes greater than what it was doing just two years ago.

"What we were able

to do differently was to integrate

TransUnion's massive database, which made it much more actionable and accountable," USIM Eastern President Russell Zingale said of the progression.

Whereas in the past, USIM was relying on a sizable but comparatively smaller opt-in panel powered by MFour, the TransUnion data expanded its targetability like it was on steroids.

"In the past, we were able to use MFour to identify maybe 300 to 400 people in a DMA (designated market area). By integrating it with TransUnion data we got the ability to target thousands and thousands

of people," Zingale explains.

Using a client like Southeastern Grocers (SEG) as an example, Zingale said there might only be "eight to 10 people" in the panel representing Winn-Dixie customers in the "outskirts of Jacksonville, Florida, but now it's a sizable and

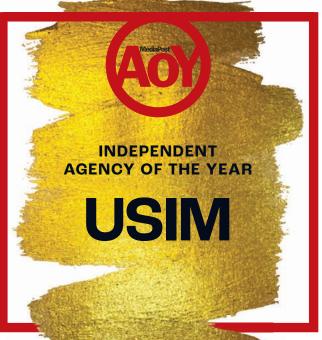
> stable sample we're targeting. That makes their media spending more accountable and actionable."

Sticking with the seg/Winn-Dixie example, usim also leveraged connected TV giant Roku to help solve the problem of generating foot traffic during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing a new ecommerce strategy to offset the reluctance of consumers in the market to return to in-person shopping.

By leveraging its proprietary sales trading zone and targeting data, USIM

was able to develop a TV streaming campaign with Roku based on grocery and shopping app behavior tied to Roku's automatic content recognition (ACR) technology that detects competitive ads and retargets them with an ad for a Winn-Dixie site.

"With our diverse store fleet, localized campaigns are a keystone to our success, a cookie-cutter approach to media planning simply is not as effective when looking at a specific community," explains SEG Brand Manager Lyle Griesemer, noting: "USIM takes the time to



understand a store's individual trade area, its customer and their media receptiveness scores. This ensures we reach the right customer with the right message. Customizing tactics by store has led to successful localized campaigns time and time again."

While constant innovation in the application of data, insights, and application have become part of USIM's secret sauce, it is the agency's fiercely independent spirit that allows it to do things differently than big agency holding companies, as well as other independents, both of whom have also become its customers, largely because USIM is independent, and therefore neutral.

While we cannot name names for obviously political reasons in a profile like this, USIM was brought in as the media execution partner on assignments related to at least two major agency holding companies over the past year, when they were in need of outsourcing critical components of their media execution, but didn't have the internal resources to manage it.

Conversely, USIM, as well as a new, innovative management consulting practice spun off by the four top members of its management team — MatrixPoint — have become a winning tag team affiliation that enables them to service certain kinds of clients, especially other independent agencies, that might not otherwise want to work with peers.

MatrixPoint focuses almost entirely on strategy, as well as tactical services such as sourcing and recruiting talent, which during the COVID-19 inspired "Great Resignation" of the past two years has become a major obstacle for many agencies, big and small, as well as client in-house media services teams.

"What's happening now is that big agencies like IPG, Pubicis and Omnicom are going down into the smaller marketers to recruit people," explains USIM's Zingale, who along with founder Dennis Holt, and partners Doug Livingston and Eran Goren founded MatrixPoint explicitly to take on business and provide services that USIM would be conflicted from handling directly.

Talent recruiting is one of them, says Zingale, noting: "In the past, if one of our smaller agency partners was based in a market like Jacksonville, they pretty much owned the talent in that market. Now IPG will hire anyone from anywhere — from the Ukraine to Jacksonville — so there's a big

crunch. While the holding companies aren't paying them New York-level salaries, they are paying them something that's between New York and Jacksonville. It's become a big problem and it's happening everywhere."

In other words, the timing couldn't have been better for MatrixPoint's executive search capabilities, but that's not where the symbiosis ends. One of the big advantages of spinning off a strategic consulting practice is that it enables the companies to work together to service both strategic and tactical assignments that would have previously blocked one or the other from taking on.

The best way to envision this relationship is to look at problems that arise with many of the franchise-oriented retail businesses USIM is known to specialize in servicing clients like the Crunch fitness centers or the Goddard charter schools. Often there are tensions between the corporate entities and the franchisees over control and execution of marketing budgets that USIM might otherwise be conflicted from helping one side or the other work out. That's where MatrixPoint comes in, helping them with their strategic goals, but also serving as something of a marriage counselor to fix some of the baggage hurting the relationship between the two sides.

Zingale describes it as a new kind of "relationship management" service that helps both sides by providing a neutral strategic direction in which both achieve their goals and the overall brand comes out stronger.

And while the younger guards on the team keep pushing in these new directions, it's still very much in founder Dennis Holt's spirit to continue to take risks and push for innovative change. One of the pioneers of the independent mediabuying service concept in the early 1970s, Holt continues to reimagine how advertisers, agencies and independents can do business. Earlier this year, he became the first major agency founder to announce publicly that his organization would accept Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies as payment for media buys.

He said he agreed to do it because his clients asked if he would. Importantly, he noted that it was usim's independence that enabled usim to be a first-mover.

"We're privately held and not publicly traded, so it's something we can do," he said. Joe Mandese



Over the past year Cincinnati-based agency Empower rolled out a new customer journey platform called EMerge. It's a strategic framework for planning, creation and activation that enables the agency to combine and analyze first- and third-party data, primary research, syndicated research, and data from search, social and web analytics.

> EMerge is just one of several innovations devised at the agency over the past year that has helped it remap the consumer path to purchase with far greater precision and glean a better understanding of the importance of the middle part of that journey. With that knowledge the agency has adjusted client plans and activations, often driving double-digit gains in business metrics.

The platform also addresses the missioncritical industry issue of how to market in a world where tracking consumers is becoming far more challenging.

For deploying EMerge and creating other innovative techniques, including a proprietary tool for combating bias in media planning, Empower has been named MediaPost's 2021 Creative Agency of the Year.

The antibias tool, which is integrated into the EMerge platform, scores media plan outputs as a comparison to market demographics and audience psychographics. That takes the planning process from a general market approach to an approach inclusive of all consumer journeys and properly accounts for and reaches audiences at optimum times and places with effective messaging.

The tool was utilized as part of a strategic makeover for client Conn's HomePlus and is credited with helping it achieve record earnings over the past year, in part by helping to define more precisely the Hispanic consumer journey.

The company has also developed a twopronged plan to help clients deal with the fadeout of unauthorized digital tracking. It includes reprioritizing contextual advertising, "where the context of the user's media experience serves as the bridge to that consumer's state-of-mind," as the agency's Chief Product Officer Ryan Derrow

put it in a recent report.

"It's a simple concept that feels like a relic of the past," Derrow says, "but technology is making this easier to do at scale and across formats (text, image, and audio/video)."

The second prong is building up the depth and breadth of first-party assets, specifically gaining consumer consent to tracking and using their data as walled gardens grow and multiply in the postcookie world.

First-party data from website visitors, app users, and customer lists "will be critical to the future capability of each individual advertiser," Derrow said. "First-party data will work like a currency, enabling the secure comparison of audiences from the advertiser to other publishers, platforms, panels, or other advertisers. With this first-party data currency, the full set of digital capabilities are

reborn in new and potentially differentiating ways for the advertiser."

Empower created another new product, called Culture Tap, a proprietary platform that uncovers trending content, topics and themes. Unlike social listening tools, it allows brands to react with fresh creative content to realtime moments, instead of creating strategies around moments that have already passed.

The agency leveraged the new tool to help client American Standard intersect with DIY trends and boost engagement rates for social content.

Culture Tap revealed that consumer search queries for "Matte Black" finishes for kitchen and bathroom hardware increased exponentially during the pandemic. The insight led the brand to prioritize trendy product features within Instagram and Facebook content which helped grow organic engagement.

And content that featured black faucets and shower accessories earned engagement rates that were 30% to 110% above average.

Matte black faucet creative was also put into rotation and tested against American Standard's core product. It earned 2.3% higher engagement, 145% more site visits and 10% lower CPMs.

The tool was also used this year to positive effect by other clients like GNC.

The agency has also leveraged databases and machine learning to automate media planning algorithms for an offering it calls Media Agent. It provides fast, data-backed media recommendations with a resulting boost in ROI and lower agency fees.

Media Agent is housed within an interactive technology platform. Starting with some basic information provided by the client, Media Agent teams plan and buy advertising across multiple media channels (Television, Radio, Digital Display, Facebook, YouTube, Google, Pandora, and more). The platform utilizes automated intelligence built from decades of media and performance data to calibrate recommended media mix.

It has proven to be a great fit for clients that may at some point migrate to Empower's full-agency service as their business grows and becomes more complex.

Client Ashley HomeStore has had great success

with the service, said Anthony Bakken, director of licensee marketing at Ashley HomeStore Retail. He calls it a "game changing tool for our licensee community," which he credits in part to the technology and the fact that the Empower team "knows our retail business and dynamics."

And with search and social capabilities

rapidly growing in demand, Empower has developed centers of excellence (COE) for the Food, Home and Retail/ CPG categories that are designed to drive innovation. The coes deliver competitive landscape analysis, trends and potential opportunities in media and commerce.

While MediaPost AOY awards focus on innovation, vision and thought leadership, Empower's work in those areas has also led to significant business growth as well as a record year for industry creative award recognitions across major shows like the Webbys, National Addys and The One Show.

The agency achieved record revenues in 2021 — up more than 30% — driven by an 18% organic growth spurt and new business awards from clients including RoC Skincare and Newell Brands among others.

In fact the agency has achieved double-digit revenue growth over the past five years growth that recently led to its opening a new hub in Atlanta where client Newell Brands is headquartered.

Other new offices are also in the planning stages. Steve McClellan

Culture Tap revealed

that consumer search queries for "Matte Black" finishes for kitchen and bathroom hardware increased exponentially during the pandemic. The insight led the brand to prioritize trendy product features within Instagram and Facebook content which helped grow organic engagement.



It's difficult for an independent search and performance agency to compete against others owned by major holding companies, but during one of the most chaotic years in recent history, NP Digital managed to stay one step ahead in terms of the percentage of growth and the way it supports a variety of brands.

> NP Digital, a service-based agency, increased revenue by 169% year-over-year (YOY) in 2021, currently forecasting more than \$70 million in revenue for 2021 — up from nothing in November 2017, when Neil Patel co-founded the company. Non-U.S. revenue in 2021 compared with 2020 rose by 2,862%, and paid-search spend increased 372% YOY.

> "We've added many clients this past year," said Mike Gullaksen, CEO at San Diego-based NP Digital.

NP Digital signed on many high-profile companies this year, such as the financial institution SoFi, helping the brand achieve 509% organic growth for

> a new product launch. NP Digital helped SoFi, which has worked with the agency since July 2020, enter the investment space and compete with companies like Robinhood and Fidelity Investments. The initial campaign focused on cryptocurrency.

> NP Digital also helped Party City increase sales by 175% through the COVID-19 lockdowns, and helped Hickory Farms, a traditional company,

go through a digital transformation.

NP Digital's co-founder Patel, a New York Times bestselling author, also founded Crazy Egg, Hello Bar, and KISSmetrics. He was recognized as a top 100 entrepreneur under the age of 30 by President Obama and a top 100 entrepreneur under the age of 35 by the United Nations.

About 500 employees support more than 750 clients such as BMW, CISCO, Fiji Water, Indeed, and





Servpro from eight offices worldwide.

NP Digital has experienced explosive growth during the past year. In the past 12 months, the company has hired 282 employees in six different countries. NP Digital is a minority founded and minority owned agency. Diversity has been a major focus. Of the 514 employees, 40% are Caucasian, while 25% are Asian; 24% are Hispanic or Latino; 7% are Black/ African-American; 3% are two or more races; and the remainder are Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

Technology is the foundation for performance. The agency invested \$6.2 million in 2021 on technology, with 40 full-time employees supporting product development. About 371 new features were added in 2021, including Google Search Console integration and Campaign Audits. Ubersuggest, a development platform and free Chrome extension for search engine optimization, reached 3 million active users in 2021, with 600 million monthly queries. The company has more than 6 billion keywords, 2 trillion links and 1 billion pieces of content indexed.

"The tech-stack buildout next year around first-party data will become the aha moment when customers see the power of the data," Gullaksen said. "I've had the luxury of being part of Dentsu, where Merkle was the forward thinking, they were first, Merkle and LiveRamp."

Gullaksen said it took Merkle and LiveRamp years to get it right. Everyone has talked about personalization for years. Companiers that can get the first-party data in place and make connections with partners and platforms to eliminate cookie tracking, can truly start to personalize the experience, he said.

"Some major advertisers are still not prepared to eliminate tracking cookies," he said.

NP Digital also plans to launch NP University, a training and certification platform to help the industry earn certifications on a variety of subjects. The agency partnered with Ambra University, an online educational institution, to develop the course curriculum and structure using NP Digital content.

"NP University is another way we're giving back to the marketing community - and a great recruiting tool, too," Gullaksen said. Laurie Sullivan In late 2021, Havas New York changed its certification from a B Lab to a B Corporation. The difference is that a B Lab aims to transform the global economy to benefit all people. A few months prior to that decision, Havas Media Group announced a new role overseeing "ethical media" and the company named Ben Downing to run it.

Downing, who has been with Havas for about eight years, has previously led the rollout of the Social Equity Marketplace and was the global head

of biddable, where he sought to remonetize hard news.

Based in London, Downing represents what some (including Downing) would consider a good fit for the job. Downing has said that his background in product management and technology make him wellsuited for a post overseeing ethical media.

"I used to

be head of programmatic and then used to run programmatic and paid social globally," he said. "I spent an increasing amount of time actually doing a lot of work sort of untangling some of the problems in the programmatic ecosystem."

Downing acknowledged that his background is a bit unusual for the role because he was so deep on the mechanical side. "I was sort of a real plumber," he said. "I was kind of in the systems in the weeds in the tech."

But it was during that time that Downing realized that "we were spending more and more time actually trying to remove a lot of garbage from the supply chains." He also realized that the technology was getting in the way of building media experiences.

Complicating matters further, one of the impacts of COVID-19 was the demonetization

> of news by some automated systems. For Downing, that issue hit close to home, since he had been working at Havas for the previous two years on brand-safety technologies that ended up stripping out COVID-19 terms.

launched BIPOC Media Connections, a program that more revenue radio stations. That followed Havas' launch of Havas'

In response, Havas attempted to direct toward Black-owned and Hispanic-owned

Social Equity Marketplace in summer 2020.

"If you look at the kind of framework the IAE was putting together in terms of ways that we should think and act when it comes to advertising, it became apparent that there was an opportunity and a need for this role," he said.

Downing said he was particularly struck by the gulf between the average consumer's expectation of how brands should act and how they actually do. The Havas Meaningful Brands report, released in May 2021, found that 71% of respondents had little faith that brands would deliver on their promises. That same survey found that 75% of brands could disappear and would be easily replaced.





Ethics is the key to addressing this. Downing said that brands are requesting it and there is a social impetus globally. "This idea of ethical framework and ethical practice is key to meaningful media, meaningful media as ethical media justice, good businesses, ethical business. That's why I think the time was quite right for this role," he said.

As part of his new job, Downing has returned to the University of Cambridge to undertake postgraduate study in sustainable business.

Downing said he sees his first guiding principle as doing no harm. That means taking a hard look at whether ad tech inflicts any harm on the public. He has decided that there's a hidden downside hiding in the complex chain of reactions involved in a programmatic transactions. "The data transfers in the electrons powering data have a carbon impact," he said, adding that Havas is looking into that.

"That's one of the things I'm working on at the moment, in terms of doing no harm," he said. "Making sure we do no harm." Todd Wasserman

The ad industry has always had problems with fraud, transparency, trust and brand-safety issues, but the explosion of digital media has created unintended consequences that go well beyond the implications for individual brands and their agencies, including how it impacts society at large. That's because one way or another, brand advertising budgets underwrite much of the content that is seen by consumers, including the less-than-wholesome kind. You know - fake news, misinformation or hoax sites with ulterior motives ranging from social harm to just making a quick, illicit buck.

Even worse, some of the ways brands and agencies defend against their brands showing up in "unsafe" environments rely on automation — so-called keyword "blocklists" that prevent their ad budgets from supporting responsible journalism, or news and information sites serving underrepresented segments of society.

MEDIA SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR NewsGuard

But until last summer, no one understood just how big a problem it was. That's when NewsGuard teamed up with Comscore to put some dimensions around the amount of advertising budgets that were being spent on sites publishing misinformation.

The study found it's currently about \$2.6 billion in annual ad spending, raising some big questions for the ad industry, including how to avoid funding the harmful effects of misinformation, and how to redirect their budgets in support of fact-based journalism or publishing serving diversity audiences that were being blocked from it.

It's not an easy problem to solve for. And as it turns out, NewsGuard, our 2021 Supplier of

the Year, didn't actually set out to do that. But it nonetheless pivoted in that direction when it understood the

magnitude of the problem and who would best be served by fixing it. "It's a little embarrassing," recalls Gordon Crovitz, a former publisher of The Wall Street Journal, who teamed up with serial media entrepreneur Steve

Brill to co-found NewsGuard in 2018.

"When we started, our idea was that it was becoming impossible for consumers to get the difference between trustworthy sites and misinformation sites when they were coming through their Facebook feed, or looking at a search result. So our original focus was on news consumers," he says.

But as Crovitz and Brill began raising money to start NewsGuard, an investment banker suggested they begin talking to the big agency holding companies as potential clients.

"We said, What does that have to do with misinformation?' And he said, 'Well, they're worried about brand safety.' And then we said, 'What's brand safety?"

The pivot worked, because after explaining the concept to Maurice Levy, Publicis signed on as NewsGuard's lead strategic investor and soon the other big agency holding companies followed, because while many of them already were working with various forms of artificial intelligence and/or programmatic brand-safety technologies, they learned that NewsGuard's approach of using professional journalists to vet and rate the trustworthiness of content sites simply worked better.

It also solved the corresponding problem of so-called "exclusion" lists — those automated keyword blocklists — that prevented advertisers from making buys on sites that generated certain words or phrases that, when taken out of the context of actual human beings, meant that advertisers were effectively boycotting some of the best news and information sites.

"There are some days when The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times have half their inventory deemed brand unsafe," Crovitz notes, adding: "But for sites servicing the Black community, Hispanic, Asian LGBTQ+ communities, some days 80% of their inventory is deemed brand unsafe because of the keywords being used."

By working with agencies to use its ratings as part of "inclusion" lists, NewsGuard has helped redirect ad budgets from nefarious publishers into ones that are truly serving their communities.

In fact, an analysis conducted by IPG Mediabrands — which along with Publicis and Omnicom — has become one of NewsGuard's biggest customers — showed that by utilizing NewsGuard's inclusion lists it was able to decrease the CPMs it paid for news and information audiences, while more than doubling the clickthrough rates for their ads.

"It makes sense that if you stop advertising on crazy hoax sites you're bound to have greater engagement and a lower CPM as a reflection of the pricing for even the highest price news sites," explains Crovitz.

The timing of the solution couldn't be better for the ad industry, which has also come under scrutiny from consumers, advocacy groups and even regulators and lawmakers for helping to fund questionable information.

A variety of studies from Edelman's Trust Barometer to Ipsos MORI and others has shown that consumers are holding brands more accountable for the media they support with their advertising dollars. And while big social platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube take much of that heat, a study conducted by Advertiser Perceptions in September found that advertisers and agency executives now consider the overall harmful effects of a publisher's site to be a bigger reason for cutting their ad spending than specific brand-safety issues.

And while some of the "fake news" debate might seem to be related politically partisan issues, NewsGuard has documented that from an economic point of view, hoax sites related to

things like misinformation about healthcare are an even bigger and more pervasive problem that is also likely harming society.

On average, about 40% of all the news and information sites assessed by NewsGuard get a "red rating" categorizing them as "untrustworthy," but the most prevalent ones are related to health, not politics.

"Even before COVID-19 we found that the highest category of red sites were related to health care, not to political propaganda," recalls Brill. "It's not that RT and Sputnik aren't important, but health hoaxes were all over the place and this was before COVID. Post-COVID, it's obviously accelerated.

"And that's when we realized this wasn't just a matter of people using it for propaganda, it was that misinformation is a business. And it's a \$2.6 billion business when it comes to advertising."

NewsGuard continues to work with its agency partners and advertisers, as well as the entire daisy chain of ad-technology companies that power brand safety, and it has begun moving into social media and even browser software in an effort to also fulfill its original promise of helping news consumers understand the veracity of the information they are accessing.

It's also moving beyond digital, announcing an exclusive deal with IPG Mediabrands to launch a product in time for the 2022 upfront media-buying season that will rate the trustworthiness of news networks and their programming. Joe Mandese

"We said, 'What does that have to do with misinformation?' And he said, 'Well, they're worried about brand safety.' And then we said, 'What's brand safety?'"



MEDIA CLIENT OF THE YEAR

"client" can mean two things.

Yes, when it comes to these annual award recognitions, we always mean it as a marketer who is a client of agencies and/or media and utilized the latter in a way that innovated and transformed the way they, and possibly others, use media to connect with consumers. But it is the second meaning, the digital media one defining most of Apple's products — "hardware or software that accesses a service made available by a server as part of a client-server model of computer networks" — that truly transformed the way many others used media to connect, or not, with consumers in the past year.



— as part of the rollout of its new-and-improved privacy framework that at once gave its brand's consumers unbridled control, but also caused some powerful third parties that exploited its old ways of doing business some serious conniptions.

The rollout of Apple's app-tracking transparency (ATT) privacy framework, in particular, sent thirdparty applications into a tizzy, as well as one powerful walled garden — Facebook — that monetizes them as part of its identity-based ad targeting.

Facebook kvetched and did a fair amount of lobbying — especially to small business advertisers

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— that Apple's moves would hurt their ability to efficiently target consumers who opted out of letting third-party applications track their identities for, among other purposes, advertising to them.

Facebook even launched an aggressive paid advertising campaign featuring small business owners in testimonials slamming Apple's move for hurting their businesses.

Despite the heavy pressure, and predictions of many analysts that Apple's privacy enforcement would lead to a Chicken Little-like devastation for advertisers and digital media outlets, the net effect by year-end was, well, not so much.

With the exception of Facebook, and at least one quarterly earnings report from Snap, few advertisers or digital media outlets attributed much, if any, impact to their bottom line from Apple's moves.

"I think Apple probably stands to benefit a lot," GroupM Global President of Business Intelligence Brian Wieser noted during the annual advertising panel at ubs "Media Week" conference in December. "If there's any one player that benefits more from all the changes going on, [it's Apple]," he said.

In addition to the obvious consumer privacy bump for Apple's overall brand, Wieser and other

Whether you think about it that way or not, Apple has branded "media clients" both hardware and software — that enable people to access things via the world's most distributed computer networks (fixed and mobile

internet, and a variety of applications), including utilities, content and, yes, even advertising.

But it was the way Apple leveraged the two meanings of the word in 2021 that truly makes it our "client of the year."

One of the biggest and most disruptive stories of the past year was a series of technical updates Apple made on its clients — both hardware and software

ad industry economists on the panel concurred that the move wasn't hurting advertisers — or ad spending — but likely is shifting budgets around in a way that may not be so bad for the industry overall. "I don't think you're seeing Apple's privacy

push really changing any macro budgets," added Lauren Hanrahan, CEO of Publicis' Zenith, Moxie and MRY agencies. "It's more shifting tactics," she explained, adding: "If anything, it's encouraging brands to diversify their spending more."

> The likely impact, the experts said, would mean more money that otherwise would have gone to big walled gardens like Facebook being spread more broadly among smaller players, or other media alternatives providing valuable audiences that are not dependent on personal identity tracking.

So in a direct or indirect way, Apple's privacy moves have served two concurrent positive agendas: 1) Giving consumers more explicit control over who, when, why and for how long third-party apps and platforms can access their personal data; and 2) Encouraging the ad industry to become less reliant on big platforms that have been exploiting personal consumer identities behind their own, lessthan-transparent walled gardens.

While Apple's long-term privacy framework play may only be understood by CEO Tim Cook, and a handful of his top engineers

and product design people, some ad industry experts view it as an ingenious, progressive rollout of controls giving consumers superpowers to deal with an omnipotent digital universe that has already been characterized as a "surveillance economy."

Another far less discussed change that Apple made effective with its ios 15 rollout ostensibly is just as — or maybe even more — disruptive than its app-tracking transparency reboot. The new feature, which allows iPhone users to turn off and disable their location tracking, could wreak havoc for marketers and media that depend on

geotargeting. At presstime, Apple was still rolling out the "turn off private relay" feature relatively slowly to determine its impact on users, as well as advertisers and media that have been depending on that form of targeting.

And while it is yet another potentially disruptive development for advertisers — especially so-called "performance marketers" that utilize location to test campaign effectiveness and performance — it is a potentially powerful Apple branding move, says Matt Zeiger, vice prescient of technology at performance agency Adlucent.

"It's clear that Apple's push for privacy has been more of a push to keep user data proprietary, and it is reaping the financial benefits," Zeiger explains, adding: "By keeping their users' data within their own platforms, they are strategically capitalizing on being the gateway to other businesses.

"Amazon has been able to compete by owning the payment and 'last mile' connection to consumers, but companies like Facebook, who don't own a hardware and app ecosystem outside the metaverse, will continue to struggle to efficiently serve targeted ads at the level of accuracy Apple, Google, and Amazon can."

While some of these technological and media innovations may be fodder only for the nerdiest among us, one long-time observer of brand marketing believes they will also serve to build on the emotional connection many consumers have to the Apple brand, even if they don't understand all of the implications of it.

"Sure, the privacy framework is a good thing, but that's the rational side of their marketing success," says Robert Passikoff, founder and CEO of brand researcher Brand Keys, adding: "They've been No. 1 in customer loyalty for as long as I can remember. And that's almost entirely due to the emotional connection they've been able to create between the brand and the consumer.

"Yeah, they're 'smartphones' and 'tablets,' and 'computers,' but they've managed to transcend the sector. They've moved the brand beyond technology and have created a bond having to do with imagination."

In other words, Apple is more than just a media client. It may be the world's greatest media client. And we mean that in the truest sense of both meanings of the word. Joe Mandese

"Sure, the privacy framework is a good thing, but that's the rational side of their marketing success. They've been No. 1 in customer loyalty for as long as I can remember."

ROBERT PASSIKOFF

FOUNDER & CEO, BRAND KEYS

MediaPost SEAS 2021



President, Mediassociates

The only surprising thing about MediaPost's selection of Jeff Larson as one of its 2021 All-Stars, is that he is being inducted for media, not marketing. But that's because after two decades working inside some of the world's greatest brands — Subway, Procter & Gamble, and as CMO of the tri-state area's Stew Leonard's supermarkets — Larson took the leap to the agency side.

"If you'd asked me five years ago, would I be sitting here talking to you today in this context, I would probably chuckle," Larson says of his decision in 2017 to become president of Sandy Hook, CT-based agency Mediassociates.

No one's chuckling now. After taking agency founder and CEO Scott Brunjes' offer to take the reins of what was then a highly regarded and

fast-growing regional shop, but one that was also dependent on one very large client -Southern New Hampshire University — Larson set out to do what he did for years as a brand manager for some of the world's greatest marketers. He set out to manage it like his own brand, focusing

on the qualities that both attracted him to Mediassociates, but which he believes also differentiate it in the marketplace.

"The mentality and ethos of this place were holistic and based more on the principles of outcomes, and not media for media's sake. It's about using media and analytics as a tool for solving business problems, which was always how I applied it to marketing," Larson recalls about his decision.

In particular, it was his years in retail marketing at Stew Leonard's and Subway, and the "roll-up-your-sleeves sense of urgency, and to be tactical and flexible to figure it out" that he brought to Mediassociates, especially in terms of impacting its culture.

"The culture-building has been a big part of this," he says. "Of course it's about making sure we have the right strategy and the right people to get the work done, but it's also about recognizing that how we get there is just as important as

After assessing the team and its culture, Larson developed a strategic plan to reposition the agency around a "measurementfirst approach" it calls "Precision Branding," which is based on applying a performance media discipline to top-funnel brand media.

getting there."

By placing an emphasis on the agency's unique culture, and recruiting the best people to round it out, he began investing heavily in technology to support better outcomes for the agency's clients, something he describes as a "working smarter" internal approach.

He characterizes Mediassociates' organization as a team of experienced media agency practitioners who don't have time for "craziness and bullshit," because they're focused on their clients' results.

The timing of the reboot couldn't have been better, because in 2019 its top client — Southern New Hampshire University — decided to bring its media in-house.

Instead of focusing the agency's energy on pitching a replacement account, Larson focused on defining a new path that devoted its resources to developing unique analytics — especially ways of mining new data signals to identify the best prospective consumers online — and use the new capabilities to attract new business.

He brought in top research and analytics talent, including former modeling executive Jim Santa Barbara to develop a proprietary attribution model built not for the kind of mega clients that usually leverage them, but for mid-size brands.

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and the right people to

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we get there

is just as important

as getting there."

Leveraging the model's secret sauce, Larson focused on developing a new approach to planning and buying based on what he calls "holistic" data

have the right strategy reorganizing his teams based on an integrated digital/TV/video measurement on an accountspecific basis, he invested in realtime measurement systems the teams could use to look at and manage their brands' performance as it was happening, enabling them to adapt media plans and buys on-the-fly.

By recognizing that middle-market clients don't hire agencies based on their specialities, Larson developed a holistic approach enabling Mediassociates to work as partners with creative agencies ranging from DNA to Mojo Supermarket.

The results speak for themselves. During 2021, Mediassociates grew its revenue by 70%, on top of 2020's 33% increase, with gross billings now topping \$200 million annually.

And the Sandy Hook-based shop, once dependent on one big online university client, now boasts a roster including Ziply Fiber, University of Phoenix, Mount Sinai Health System, Fannie Mae, Citizen Watch and the Strava fitness app, with no account representing more than 12% of its total business. Joe Mandese

signals. And after

Media All-Star

Christian Juhl

Global CEO, GroupM

When Christian Juhl was a kid, he actually loved watching ads on TV. As an adult, he came into the world of advertising via the e-commerce side and programming, interested in finding out what one could order online.

"I remember telling my dad, 'I promise you you'll be able to order something on your phone one day," Juhl recalls. "And he told me I was an idiot." As digital advertising and technology grew, it put him on the path that led him to become Global CEO of GroupM, which holds three of the top five global media agencies. "I saw that creative and media could work together," he says. "It wasn't just :30s and :60s but what technology can do for the brand experience."

Today, Juhl leads 36,000 people ushering in the next era of media, wherein advertising works better for people. This includes instilling a responsibility to help clients assign media dollars as a force for good.

With more than \$50 billion in media investment billings across 80 markets worldwide, GroupM uses its scale as the largest media investment group to bring about positive and meaningful change through its Responsible Investment Framework and its work with industry partners.

During Juhl's tenure, GroupM has evolved into a data-centric, technology-focused operating system for the group's media agencies — Mindshare, MediaCom, Wavemaker, and Essence — as well as a range of businesses innovating in addressable media, AI-driven programmatic, commerce, and more. In addition, he leads the

purposeful application of GroupM's scale across partnerships, data, and technology, so the clients of WPP's media agencies benefit from breakthrough intelligence and capabilities.

The 4A's has called Juhl one of the "100 people who make advertising great. Before taking his current position, he served as global CEO of GroupM's Essence, a data and measurementdriven global agency. There, he was instrumental in driving the agency's meteoric growth that saw its billings increase more than five-fold. Juhl joined Essence in 2013 to lead North America after spending 14 years at Razorfish."

Advertising, says Juhl, should be great, as well as relevant, truthful, entertaining and emotional. It should also be a force for good, and GroupM's Responsible Investment Framework shows clients how it measures and values media, taking into consideration the carbon footprint, the sustainability commitment, independent journalism, authenticity and waste.

"We change metrics beyond what might just be conversion or reach point or viewability," he says. "We score our partners on those elements. Some have leaned in, some not as much. On a global basis, it is something people can get behind."

Next up for Juhl and GroupM? Connected TV. "We've been saying it's the year of mobile for,



what, eight years.? This might actually be the year in connected TV when analog moves a massive amount into that. Then we can reach a linear audience in a more connected way with cross measurement and frequency managers."

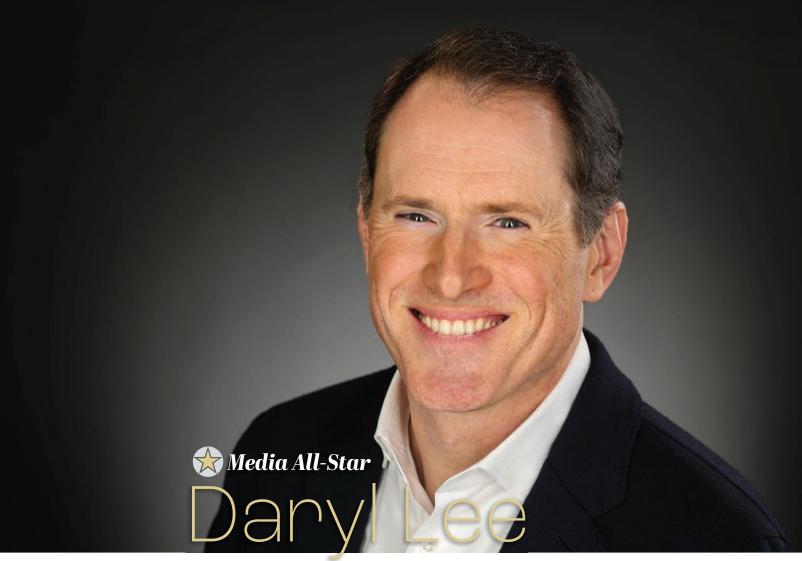
Recently, GroupM teamed with WPP sibling production agency Hogarth to launch an Addressable Content Practice (ACP), combining the group's addressable media offering with Hogarth's content creation capabilities. It's designed to help clients deliver more data-driven, personalized ads to consumers at scale and speed.

Integrated within each agency's media planning and strategy process, the ACP's core function will be to create and produce omnichannel creative content delivered through technology across

channels, platforms and devices.

"Campaigns are increasingly becoming outcomes-driven, especially as audience-first planning becomes the standard," says Juhl. "This reality, in addition to the pending deprecation of third-party cookies and the growing number of adlite or ad-free platforms, means we will have fewer opportunities to reach consumers in the future. A powerful and precise addressable strategy, across media and content, will help brands realize more fully the potential and performance of their message and investments."

Juhl serves as Mediaweek's Council Chair and as a media advisor on partner councils and boards for Amazon Advertising, Twitter, and Snap, where he helps ensure a healthy ecosystem for brands and where he shares his passion for making advertising work better for people. Nina Lentini



Global CEO, IPG Mediabrands

Under Daryl Lee, IPG Mediabrands has become a leading force in creating transparency, fighting misinformation and focusing on ethics in advertising and media buying. In particular, its work with NewsGuard, wherein Mediabrands is able to redirect ad budgets away from disinformation and toward quality news publishers, has stood out.

For one client in particular, Lee says, the media holding company identified "1,000 high-quality news sites and drove 9% pricing efficiency and 123% better conversion by supporting quality journalism." Going forward, Mediabrands is looking to extend its work with NewsGuard beyond digital publishers. Early next year, it will become the first media holding company to apply quality standards to television news, "helping clients prioritize investment in truthful news content and away from environments of misinformation and potential brand harm," he says. The new rankings will encompass 117 shows on 27 networks and will

launch in the spring, in time for the Upfronts.

Separately, Mediabrands undertook a comprehensive study of the disinformation and misinformation ecosystem as part of its focus on media responsibility, and Lee happily reports that the study's release has resulted in ending the monetization of climate change denial content at several platforms

A native of South Africa, Lee is the global CEO of IPG Mediabrands, the media and marketing solutions division of Interpublic Group, made up of global media agencies UM and Initiative, and a portfolio of marketing specialist companies, namely Reprise, Magna, Orion,

Rapport, Healix, Mediabrands Content Studio and the IPG Media Lab.

Lee is responsible for the strategic and commercial leadership and performance of the Mediabrands global network. He has held a series of roles with increasing responsibility there. Most recently, he was the global CEO of UM, which he joined in 2006 as head of global strategy. It became an award-winning global powerhouse under his guidance with a roster of iconic and fast-growing clients.

His strategic vision positioned UM at the forefront of media transformation, attaining industry leader status on Forrester's first-ever Wave report on the media agency landscape in 2018. Between 2010 and 2013, he was chief integration officer and then chief strategy officer at McCann Worldgroup, responsible for working across all McCann offices to ensure clients received integrated brand solutions customized to their

business challenges. In 2013, Lee returned to UM in the role of global CEO and then joined Mediabrands in 2019.

Relentlessly client focused, Lee fostered a culture at UM that believes "Better Science and Better Art delivers Better Outcomes." His inclusive leadership style fueled UM's momentum, resulting in countless new and expanded client relationships with globally recognized brands including American Express, BMW, Coca-Cola, Johnson & Johnson, Sony and Spotify. In 2019, UM Studios won the Cannes Lions Gran Prix in Entertainment, a big win for the media agency's content studio.

Lee also spent six years at Ogilvy, where he was group director of the Marketing Strategy Group and the 360 strategy director for the global IBM account. Lee began his career as a consultant for McKinsey & Company in the New York office.

His focus on inclusivity comes from a deepseated desire to help people grow and blossom in their careers. "I am deeply committed to mentoring people as much as I can," he says, "as I learn so much from the experience, too. It is

truly the most nourishing part of my career."

He learned about the power of media and storytelling as a student activist in apartheid South Africa, "where we used every medium to tell the truth about the horrors of apartheid," he says. "Everything I have done in my life, and my career, stems from that idealism and a belief in the power of media to help the dreams of democracy come true."

And, he carries that idealism forward. "I am hopeful that media in the u.s. will play the same role by exposing bigoted propaganda as false and telling the truth to people," says Lee. "In the middle of a global pandemic, having media sources that tell the truth is a matter of life and death for us."

Lee's career is driven by his passion for marketing, endless curiosity, respect for the power of storytelling and commitment to positive social change. He is a vocal champion for diversity, equity and inclusion in the world and the workplace.

He currently sits on the board of the economic empowerment non-profit STRIVE and is a former board member of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). He is also on the Board of Directors of Effie Worldwide, sits on the Facebook Client Council and Twitter Influence Council and has been a juror for multiple awards including the inaugural Creative Effectiveness Cannes Lions.

As for what's next, Mediabrands' Rapport is out with a new green technology for outdoor advertising. Lee's excitement about this ecofriendly OOH signage is apparent as he reports that a single "Rapport Beyond billboard has the capacity to offset 12 cars averaging 10,000 miles per year, the equivalent of planting 88 trees. Imagine the environmental impact when this becomes the new standard."

And, Lee will serve as the 2022 Media Lions jury president. "There has never been more opportunity for innovation in media," he says. "Media today presents a vast creative canvas with which to grab the attention of fleeting audiences. By updating the category to emphasize the role media plays in creativity, the Media Lions are recognizing how the scope and impact of media has broadened." Nina Lentini



That leaves many ad execs scrambling for a replacement. Mark Book, the head of content for Digitas, has worked on some viable replacements. There's "A Woman's Place," a film made in partnership with KitchenAid and Vox Creative; "Eat the Book," a four-part digital series made with Hello Sunshine, a media company founded by Reese Witherspoon; and "Beauty of Blackness," a film currently being produced with global retailer Sephora.

of the advertising universe.

Creative All-Star

Book, a 15-year digital media veteran, said he's just trying to tell stories, and the format whether 30 seconds, 2 minutes or 30 minutes — is irrelevant. "I'm coming from a place of — let's tell the most impactful, larger story," he said.

Book said that a lot of "derivative content," like spinoffs of existing TV shows, is being served up by the streaming platforms "because they know it works."

"It's intellectual property — whether it's Marvel, or whether it's DC Comics, or whether it's whatever, that you know, will get people to tune in — and they sort of understand what they're signing up for," he said. "What brands have the option to do, though, is to underwrite these projects that I think could be more innovative or interesting or different or purpose-driven."

Book has been working on these types of

projects for some time. A few years ago, he worked on a Taco Bell program in which he curated influencers on Instagram and other platforms like TikTok. "We did a year-long program where we contracted these six creators, and we took them to the brand, we had quarterly meetings with them we downloaded them on the products, the ethos of the brand — all of them were super fans and we created this really interesting content engine that lasted for three or four years," he said.

Such projects, like "A Woman's Place," break through the 2022 viewer's perceptions of what advertising is and carve a unique space that acknowledges a corporate sponsor, but seek to entertain or inform. "A Woman's Place," from Academy Award-winner Rayka Zehtabchi, is a 29-minute film showing young women trying to establish themselves in the restaurant industry. KitchenAid commissioned the film, which was produced by Digitas, Ventureland and Vox Creative.

That film follows butcher Etana Diaz, chef Marielle Fabie, and restaurateur Karyn Tomlinson after they graduate culinary school and start working in the restaurant industry. "There was a freedom within cooking that I wasn't getting with pastry," Diaz says in one of the interviews. "Pastry was more precise, more rigid, but with cooking it was 'a pinch of this,' 'a little bit of that."



"What brands have the option to do, though, is to underwrite these projects that ... could be more innovative or interesting or different or purpose-driven.



The film goes on to detail the exclusion they felt as women in restaurants. "In the very beginning, I was the only woman in the kitchen," Fabie says. "I think that they weren't taking me for skill. I was like something pretty to look at in the kitchen."

If a sponsored film sounds a bit like the early days of TV advertising, then Book agrees with this. "I feel like it's one of those things where I have this sort of thought around like what's old is new again," he said. "Like this whole idea of being part of the cultural zeitgeist continues to have kind of these life cycles where brands will adapt to what's going on and they will then create something and then they'll figure out a formula. They'll use that for five years. And then they'll, you know, sort of continue to mix and match and play."

Book is looking forward to re-premiering "A Woman's Place" at Sundance in 2022. Book said he sees that project setting the standard for Hulu for those types of branding deals. "They hadn't done any of those before. Some of that timing was serendipitous," he said ... "Scott Donaton, who had worked on the project in 2018, had gone over to Hulu in 2019, and was able to see that come full circle and launch there as their first branded film." Todd Wasserman



Agency veteran Rob FitzGerald hit the ground running when he joined Empower three-plus years ago as president and Chief Operating Officer, quickly becoming a key player in expanding the agency's creative and media capabilities and reimagining how Empower could drive results for clients.

Almost immediately upon his arrival he spearheaded the development of a content studio and the hiring of its creative team. The 3,500-square-foot state-of-the-art facility transformed the agency's creative offering, enabling it to produce content nearly as fast as the creative team and clients can come up with ideas.

FitzGerald was also a driving force in the development of Empower's proprietary EMerge platform, a strategic framework for planning, creation and activation that was rolled out during the past year. It was an innovation that in part led to Empower being named MediaPost's 2021 Creative Agency of the Year.

FitzGerald has also brought a decisive leadership style to the agency that helped it thrive during the COVID-19 pandemic when other shops floundered. In one instance, leadership meant standing up to a client who questioned the agency's policy mandating vaccinations for all people entering the agency's offices. That client is now a former client and the mandate remained in place — part of the agency's effort to protect its people, their jobs and their health and mental well being.

As the pandemic was quickly spreading last March FitzGerald told the agency's staff that "No one will lose their job because of what's happening in the industry due to the pandemic. Our futures



quarterly financials. You won't lose sleep over the potential of losing your job... focus on being our clients' greatest ally."

no COVID-19-related layoffs at the agency, and revenues in both 2020 and 2021 grew by double digits.

FitzGerald's creativity has been felt throughout the agency including its capabilities, talent, culture and branding, leading MediaPost to name him one of its 2021 All-Stars.

It was his idea to start EmpowerU, a program to bring in talent fresh out of school, putting them on a rotational track to learn not only the ins and outs of the agency but to also identify strengths of individuals. Through the program, Empower has hired dozens of new employees. The agency believes the program has helped keep its attrition rate at 10% or lower each year, significantly below the industry average.

FitzGerald makes a dedicated effort to nurture agency culture and amplify the passions of its people. Case in point: Search Associate Annette Echikunwoke, who trained for the Olympic hammer throw event with a dream to compete for her native Nigeria in the Tokyo Olympics. When FitzGerald learned she was training, he supported

the effort by having the agency both sponsor her travels to the Olympic trials and film her journey for a multi-episode documentary series.

Echikunwoke's Olympic journey had its ups and downs, but the agency's support never wavered. FitzGerald also suggested that Empower partner with one of the young woman's sponsors — the Aruna Project, an athleisure brand dedicated to supporting survivors of human trafficking. "Beyond being important to Annette, the Aruna Project is all about empowering women, helping people find their voice and independence, which directly correlates with Empower's heritage and brand values," FitzGerald said.

The series that documented Echikunwoke's Olympic effort, "Grind Before You Shine," was named a 2021 Webby Honoree.

On the branding front, FitzGerald repositioned the agency as "The Unholding Company," a reference to Empower's independence, suggesting a faster, nimbler and less bureaucratic approach to servicing clients. FitzGerald has plenty of past experience working at holding company shops including stints as president of OMD China and managing director of Initiative's Tokyo operation. He also held a senior strategy role at the latter in the u.s. in addition to managing one of its U.S. regions for a time.

As "The Unholding Company," Empower describes its mission this way: "To be the agency where clients and employees come to prove there's a better way to do it."

FitzGerald's entire career has been dedicated to agencies — a profession that he loves. "It's in my DNA," he says. "I can't imagine doing anything else." But he also knows that getting things done in Adland often isn't easy. As a former amateur boxer, he says, "Sometimes this business can be a punch to the gut, but you just have to keep on swinging."

Empower CEO Jim Price describes FitzGerald as "more than an all-star — he is an all-around champion."

FitzGerald, adds Price, "is the ultimate utility player and knows how to win. He is able to step in on any agency project to change outcomes. His deep global experience in running agencies all around the world has brought Empower the much-needed confidence to continue to prove to the industry that there is a better way to do it." Steve McClellan



Creative All-Star

Enical Schmidt

Global CEO, Matterkind

Erica Schmidt has led Matterkind, Interpublic Group's activation intelligence company (previously Cadreon), for the past six years and continues to break barriers as global CEO, focusing on introducing the industry to a people-first approach to engaging audiences and driving brand growth regardless of channel on a global scale.

She has been the executive sponsor of the company's Impact group since its inception, and watched it evolve from a women's employee resource group to one that supports all underrepresented groups. Schmidt also has spearheaded efforts to develop an Impact Marketplace, which drives investment to BIPOC (black, indigenous and people of color)-owned businesses.

Under her stewardship, Matterkind works to let brands engage with audiences in an addressable manner in a way that is kind and conscious of those on the receiving end as well as the data and activation experts in the Matterkind family.

There is tremendous inefficiency in the digital programmatic ecosystem. And fragmentation across platforms, browsers and publishers results in over-saturation of the same audiences. Programmatic advertising generally fails to achieve the best outcomes for advertisers. Equally as

important, those on the receiving end of the digital experience are rarely treated with respect and kindness.

Long ago, Schmidt came to learn that "it takes very little energy to exhibit kindness to others," she tells MediaPost. "Ever since then, I have tried to be as kind as possible. I feel privileged that in many circumstances people find me to be empathetic and compassionate, and this goes all the way back to my childhood."

Matterkind's unusual approach in addressable marketing was formed in early 2020 at the height of the pandemic when marketers, advertisers and consumers were undergoing extreme shifts. Schmidt, the former CEO of Cadreon with over 20 years of digital data and technology experience, was an obvious choice to steer the new organization. Still fueled by data, technology and the innovative heritage of Cadreon, Schmidt and her leadership team looked for a better, more responsible and sustainable way to addressably reach and engage audiences rather than programmatically.

Matterkind also works with clients to examine their first-party data and to find ways to use advertising to grow their databases in a way that represents the actual population. "This ensures that our audiences feel heard and understood," Schmidt says.

"Even seemingly small things, like our words, make a big difference — so we fight micro-aggressions and don't say Black and White lists, but instead Block and Allow. It really takes a holistic approach across all aspects of an organization to make change, and I am proud that we are able to bring responsible marketing in a way that is truly sustainable."

Such work has paid off. This past July, the Business Intelligence Group named Matterkind Organization of the Year in the 2021 Sales and Marketing Technology Awards program, also known as The Sammys. The Sammys honor organizations and products helping to solve the challenges companies have connecting and collaborating with prospects and customers.

Schmidt is passionate about her team of specialists and has put people at the center of a technology-heavy industry. Alongside Matterkind's business endeavors, she is deeply committed to building a best-in-class culture. She serves as a board member of IPG's Women's Leadership Network, and executive sponsor of Matterkind's Impact Group, a network championing women in advertising technology across the United States.

Prior to joining IPG, she spent eight years in London working on the global development and rollout of Dentsu Aegis' search offering iProspect, as well as its programmatic trading offering. Nina Lentini



Like many kids growing up in the Detroit suburbs, Vinay Shahani was exposed to the auto industry at a very young age. He went to his first Detroit auto show when he was only 4 years old.

"There's no question that the car culture I grew up with in Michigan was a big influence on me and led to my desire to work in the car business," Shahani tells MediaPost. "Plus, my dad worked his entire career in automotive engineering. He definitely inspired me to chase my passion when it came time to choose a career path."

After attending some 40 Detroit auto shows and working at several other automakers, Shahani is now the head of marketing for Toyota Motor North America's Lexus luxury division.

"While my initial start in the auto industry was on the engineering/technical side of the business, over time my passion has grown for the commercial side, and in particular, marketing," Shahani says. "I love to play a role in helping build that emotional connection between the Lexus brand and our guests, and seeing that passion firsthand at our events is really rewarding."

Shahani took over as vice president, Lexus marketing in early 2021. He replaced Lisa Materazzo, who was selected to head Toyota division marketing, replacing Ed Laukes, who retired after more than 30 years with the automaker.

Laukes is the executive who hired Shahani at Toyota in 2017. Toyota was in the process of moving its headquarters from California to Texas and was realigning its executive team.

"We met at the temporary headquarters in Plano and we hit it off and so I decided to hire him," Laukes says.

It turned out to be one of his best hiring decisions, he recalls.

"In most cases, I will tell you in the sales and

marketing world, we kind of grow our own, and so that sometimes gives you a limited perspective on what is going on outside of the Toyota culture," Laukes says. Shahani was able to not only offer a critical outsider's point of view, but also to validate the positive aspects of the Toyota way of doing things, he says.

"He's got a lot of patience and people love working for him," Laukes says. "I think that he's a true student of marketing. He really not only stays focused on what's happening within the Toyota and Lexus environment, but he also studies what the other manufacturers are doing and also what is going on outside of automotive that potentially is going to impact our industry."

While working on the Toyota brand, Shahani brought insights that helped change the way social media marketing was handled.

"Social is growing so rapidly, it's still the wild, wild west," Laukes says. "In Toyota and Lexus and HR and Toyota Financial Services and every other silo within the organization, in many cases, these folks wanted to do all their own social."

Shahani helped streamline that to one group running social for the entire North American unit, resulting in an alignment of messaging, he says.

Now at Lexus, Shahani is responsible for leading all aspects of marketing for the brand in the United States, including strategy, advertising, product marketing, incentives, digital/social, websites, retail initiatives, sponsorships, engagement/event marketing and motorsports.

Previous to Toyota, he spent more than three and a half years as the CMO at Volkswagen of America and nearly 10 years in various marketing



nay Shahani

Vice President – Marketing, Lexus

and sales positions at Nissan Motor Co.

Mark McNabb was one of Shahani's former bosses and colleagues at both Nissan and Volkswagen. He says he was most impressed with Shahani's skills in updating the way regional marketing was handled at Volkswagen.

"Vinay and team fixed a process that had been broken for years," says McNabb, who is currently partner, Van Tuyl Companies and interim chief executive officer of Call Box. "Continual updates, creative input and broadening the digital platform for dealers were huge accomplishments for Vinay and his team."

McNabb cites Shahani's intellect, empathy, direction and ability to listen as the skills that helped him get through what was undeniably a trying period for the German automaker as it dealt with fallout from an emissions scandal.

"He is incredibly smart and he always actively listens to the different points of view," McNabb says.

Christian Meunier, currently the chief executive officer of Jeep for Stellantis, called Shahani one of the best teammates he has had in his career. The two worked together for 18 months when Meunier was vice president of marketing for Nissan North America and Shahani, who was director of product marketing, reported to him.

"Vinay is the perfect 'iron fist in a velvet glove' person," Meunier says. "He is extremely driven, strategic and operational and gets strong performance, pushing hard the right way, getting people to buy in."

Personality wise, Shahani has an "on-thespot attitude" and "a commitment to finding solutions." Above all, he is empathetic.

"People recognize him as a very intelligent, strong executive, but with a very human and personable attitude," Meunier says.

Aaron Walton, CEO of Walton Isaacson, Lexus' multicultural AOR, says Shahani has a sense of partnership and purpose which has garnered him respect among agency partners.

"He's incredibly passionate about the auto industry, he creates a 'speak-up' environment for all of his team members (internal staff and agency partners), and he understands the business and societal values of expanding brand outreach to diverse consumer groups," Walton says.

Walton believes part of Shahani's legacy will

be reflected in how he has transformed the brand positioning to connect with diverse, influential consumers.

"He was masterful at bringing all of the agency partners together with the internal Lexus team to chart the new strategic direction for the brand," Walton says. "By inspiring bold thinking and leaning into culture, he has made a significant impact on the work."

Shahani says ultimately his biggest challenge is striking a balance between work and life.

"It sounds clichéd, but it's true," he says. "My wife and I both have demanding careers, and each week represents a delicate balancing act between our iob schedules, my business travel, our kids' school and their numerous extracurricular

fit. It is not easy, but I try my best to just be present and in the moment with my family when I'm home."

The pandemic has been a good reminder about making sure to prioritize personal relationships and take care of one's self, he says.

"I love my job," he says. "I have a tremendously strong team here at Lexus, both within the marketing department as well as my peers and my boss. We have the best chemistry of any team I've ever been part of."

His current priority is to elevate the profile of the Lexus brand.

"We have a lot more we want to accomplish and there's just not enough time in the day to get it all done, but we will," he says. "I think we have the right north star for our Lexus brand positioning, now we have to ensure that we roll it out cross functionally and do everything we can to find innovative ways to bring it to life." Tanya Gazdik



Marketing All-Star

Inacy-Ann Lim

Chief Media Officer, JPMorgan Chase & Co.

One of Tracy-Ann Lim's many achievements as the chief media officer of JPMorgan Chase & Co. is the consolidated Media Center of Excellence (COE), a team that manages everything from strategy to execution globally across both paid and organic channels. This centralized way of working allows JPMC to holistically, cohesively steward the firm's go-to-market investments and care for the safety of its brands and messages in market.

"Situated at the center, the COE acts as a bridge between a multitude of partners and functions," Lim says. "What I've experienced recently is that media and its positioning at the center is and can continue to be a driving force for collaboration. By coming together cross-functionally, we can co-author how to transform the ways we work that best position us for the future."

Lim adds that transformation doesn't necessarily equate to doing more. Instead, it means refining the way the company uses resources and technology to reach people. One example is its #ShowMeYourWalk campaign.

After studying the social conversation among students at the time, JPMorgan Chase better understood that for the graduating class of 2020, COVID-19 was not only a national crisis, it also represented the loss of a defining milestone. A collaborative, omni-channel campaign followed involving two virtual commencements — one for the class of 2020 at large and one that focused on graduates from Historically Black Colleges & Universities — across the top digital and social

The livestreams featured such celebrities as comedian Kevin Hart, former President Barack

Obama, Vice President Kamala Harris, TV presenter Steve Harvey, and sports stars Serena Williams and Stephen Curry. To amplify the effort, JPMorgan Chase initiated its first-ever TikTok hashtag challenge.

Besides the virtual graduation, it offered students a financial education across social platforms. Wealth Management Advisors used TV and digital to let high net worth investors know their advisors were there for them, and working from home, too. Advancing Black Pathways — part of the Oprah Town Hall, "Where Do We Go from Here?" — showed a diverse audience how JPMorgan Chase supports the Black community and businesses.

Not only did the campaign drive historical engagement and positive sentiment for the firm, it also acted as a launchpad for future diversity initiatives.

Lim, who is responsible for paid media, social content and community management as well as SEO company wide, is a game changer and rainmaker in a predominantly male industry vertical — although she's doing her part to change that. At the start of the pandemic, she was the director of media for JPMorganChase and, within weeks, her emotional intelligence and business



acumen were recognized, and she was elevated to chief media officer.

A native of Dublin, Ireland, Lim joined JPMorgan Chase in 2019, having worked in the media industry for almost 20 years. She has filled executive roles at media agencies in New York, Los Angeles and in her hometown. In her most recent position prior to JPMorgan Chase, she helped Media Assembly win Agency of the Year in 2018 on the strength of her work on the E*Trade business, embedding a data-led model that proved the ROI of all media investments.

Coming out of agency life, Lim was drawn to the financial services industry as it is both a necessary, evergreen category as well as hightempo and highly competitive. She is a supporter and cultivator of brand safety, innovation, and audience-centric planning, and remains committed to developing a team that represents the diverse customers and clients that the company serves.

Lim has always been an advocate of emerging talent and as such has always sought ways to build support systems and add value. "Within my team, I've made it known that hiring and developing diverse talent, and then fostering safe spaces for those diverse voices to be heard is a nonnegotiable," Lim says.

Her involvement ranges from annual speaking engagements with college students on the power of consumer behavior in media to participating in the MMA Global, North America Board, where she works alongside other Fortune 500 leaders on subjects such as performance marketing research, cognitive neuroscience and data privacy in today's marketing environment. Nina Lentini









🜟 Marketing All-Star

lick Inan

Head of Global Marketing, TikTok

In late 2005, a Saturday Night Live short, "Lazy Sunday," went viral and quickly established YouTube as the place to go to experience new video.

Some 14 years later, Idaho Falls resident Nathan Apodaca posted a clip of himself on TikTok that showed him skateboarding down the street as Fleetwood Mac's 1977 hit "Dreams" played.

The video went viral, earning tens of millions of views and prompted Fleetwood Mac members Mick Fleetwood and Stevie Nicks to post TikToks of themselves grooving to the song.

That video, released in October 2020, capped off a breakthrough year for TikTok. The brand went forth with a new approach: Don't make ads, make TikToks.

Brands like Chipotle, Amazon, Target and Mountain Dew have accepted that challenge.

The man credited for the rise of TikTok is Nick Tran, TikTok's first head of global marketing. Tran, a veteran of Hulu and Samsung, took the role as

global head of marketing at TikTok in April 2020, just six months before the "Dreams" video broke through.

Tran started his career as Unisap and originally foresaw himself following an IT track. But early on, he switched to marketing. "It struck me that I was not in the field I wanted to be in," Tran told the podcast cmo Moves. "I wanted to be on the other side."

After getting his MBA, at the University of California, Irvine, Tran assumed a marketing title at Taco Bell. After that, he took a role as VP of marketing at Stance Socks, where he took a Gold Lion at Cannes for his website for its Star Wars Stance collection. During his tenure there, Tran also partnered with Kia Motors for a Super Bowl ad called "Walken Closet," featuring Christopher

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Walken and a custom Stance sock.

After that, Tran moved to Samsung and then Hulu, where he helped craft a Super Bowl ad starring Tom Brady that teased the idea of his retirement to announce "Hulu doesn't just have live sports, according to the script they just gave

January 2018 to 689 million by July 2020, according to Reuters. That meant a 45% jump.

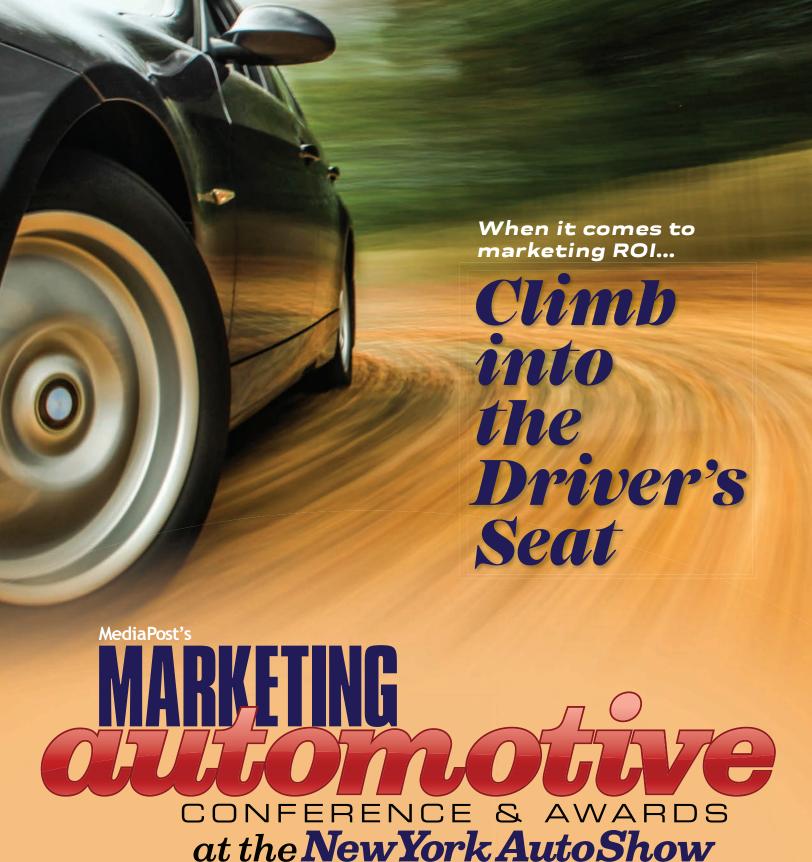
The app hasn't been without its competitors. In August 2020, Instagram launched Instagram Reels and in early 2021, Google launched YouTube Shorts.

To help bolster its status, TikTok launched its "It starts on TikTok" campaign, which featured real users in TikTok short films.

But in the interview, Tran said that his messaging doesn't necessarily hinge on big statements, but little moments in which TikTok breaks through. When asked about the Fleetwood Mac moment, Tran said, That's definitely a moment we love, but this idea of bringing TikTok to people when they least expect it." Todd Wasserman

At presstime, Tran had stepped down from his role at TikTok.

Nick Tran



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