

BRAND ACTION REPORT

2019-2020

A quick look at some of the most important trends brands are facing, and how to respond.

BRAND ACTION REPORT

2019-2020

Based directly on our real-world experiences and observations of the challenges facing some of the world's most interesting brands.

A quick look at some of the most important trends brands are facing, and how to respond.

00

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

1. Know Your Core
2. Know Your Values
3. Know Your Voice
4. Know Your Map
5. Know Your Expression
6. Know Your Identity

01

THE CUSTOMER

As in all good trendspotting, we begin with how the modern customer has, and continues to, change right before our eyes.

1. The Rise of Individualism
2. The Ecosystem Lifestyle
3. Compartmental Learning

02

THE SELL

As customers continue to change, how your brand and business tries to engage and capture the modern customer must also evolve.

1. Seeing in 2C
2. The Learning Wars
3. Brand Advocates Are Everything
4. Enable Storytelling
5. Micromoments

03

THE EXPERIENCE

Because the customer and the art of engaging them has evolved, so too must the deeper experiences that your brand creates.

1. Social 3.0: Your Stance
2. AI is Coming
3. AR/VR
4. Voice

04

THE OFFERING

Because the customer and their expectations for amazing experiences have changed, the core offering you deliver must begin to reflect these new norms.

1. Experience
2. BI Built-In
3. Subscriptions
4. Internet of Things
Connectivity

05

THE ORGANIZATION

And finally, because basically everything about your customer, their expectations, their experiences, and the entire universe you live in have changed, your organization has to change to not only keep up, but stay in front.

1. Small is the New Big
2. Ecosystem
3. Social Good
4. Culture & Content
5. Brand Office

With so many trends and industry evolutions flooding the airwaves, it's easy for brands to get overwhelmed keeping track of what to do next, trying to keep up, and learning how to stay ahead.

Here are our observations of some of the most impactful trends and evolutions that brands are facing, and how they can respond to stay ahead of the curve.

00

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

1. Know Your Core
2. Know Your Values
3. Know Your Voice
4. Know Your Map
5. Know Your Expression
6. Know Your Identity

01

THE CUSTOMER

As in all good trendspotting, we begin with how the modern customer has, and continues to, change right before our eyes.

02

THE SELL

As customers continue to change, how your brand and business tries to engage and capture the modern customer must also evolve.

03

THE EXPERIENCE

Because the customer and the art of engaging them has evolved, so too must the deeper experiences that your brand creates.

04

THE OFFERING

Because the customer and their expectations for amazing experiences have changed, the core offering you deliver must begin to reflect these new norms.

05

THE ORGANIZATION

And finally, because basically everything about your customer, their expectations, their experiences, and the entire universe you live in have changed, your organization has to change to not only keep up, but stay in front.

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

BRAND POSITION

Know the absolute core
of who you are.

Your Brand Position is the core of your brand strategy—it's who you are and why you matter. Your Brand Position tells you what kind of brand you're going to be, how you compare to competitors, and most importantly, how you use your brand to drive your business objectives. As you respond to trends and continually evolve how your brand acts, your positioning is what keeps you focused on where you're going and how you'll get there. If your brand changes "who it is" at its core level in response to trends around you, you're responding incorrectly.

BRAND PILLARS

Know your values and
what you're fighting for.

Your Brand Pillars are what keep your brand grounded; they're like the ingredients that make your brand positioning possible. They're usually a set of 3 to 4 attributes that explain the most important aspects of your brand positioning, and are often directly connected to your organization's "corporate values." It's critical to understand your brand pillars so that as you respond to trends, you can always draw a direct connection from brand action to an underlying brand pillar; if you can't connect a brand action to your brand pillars, you risk confusing the market and distracting from your strategy.

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

BRAND PERSONALITY

Know your unique voice in a crowd.

Your Brand Personality is your brand tone and voice. It's how you show up at the party, it's what you're like to hang out with—it's your style put into words. Your brand personality should be super consistent across all communications and over time. As you respond to trends and find new opportunities for your brand to express itself and create new experiences, your brand personality will make sure you build brand memorability and loyalty by always "showing up to the party" in the same way.

Consider: As more and more brands flood your market, and as more and more clever advertising pops up literally in every nook and cranny of your customer's life, WHAT you say will increasingly be commoditized, but HOW you say it will set you apart.

BRAND ARCHITECTURE

Know how to intuitively rationalize and organize your offerings.

Your Brand Architecture may be one of the most important assets your brand will build. Brand architecture is the strategic mapping of how your brand's offerings relate to each other, relate to the Masterbrand, and relate to the experience your audiences want to have with you. Think of brand architecture as the bridge that connects the often intangible spirit, promise, emotion and story of a brand to the tangible products, services, and locations your business provides.

Brand architecture can be strategically designed to help you enhance how you cross-sell or upsell offerings, how you push the value of a popular offering onto less-known offerings, or how you protect the perception of your Masterbrand if one offering flops or fails. The brand architecture is how the company's strategy is reflected in the organization of its offerings.

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

BRAND VISUAL SYSTEM

Know how to
express yourself.

Your Brand Visual System is the set of principles, conventions and elements that, when developed and deployed in unison, help inform how your brand looks and is experienced. It's your strategically chosen color palette, graphic design style, typeface selection, iconography, and imagery decisions—all of which should be carefully tailored to the precise expression of your brand positioning.

BRAND LOGO SYSTEM

Know how to lead with
the right tip of the spear.

Your Brand Logo System isn't just your logo; it's the system for using your logo. Brand logo systems sometimes only consist of a logo if your logo contains your name, sometimes logo systems are a combination of a visual mark or emblem and a wordmark, and sometimes logo systems are built to strategically "house" other important ingredients like sub-brands, service lines or locations your brand operates in. Logo systems are usually one of the first experiences audiences have with your brand, so instead of thinking just about what makes for a pretty logo, think about how you want to jumpstart an experience with your audience.

00

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

01

THE CUSTOMER

As in all good trendspotting, we begin with how the modern customer has, and continues to, change right before our eyes.

02

THE SELL

As customers continue to change, how your brand and business tries to engage and capture the modern customer must also evolve.

03

THE EXPERIENCE

Because the customer and the art of engaging them has evolved, so too must the deeper experiences that your brand creates.

04

THE OFFERING

Because the customer and their expectations for amazing experiences have changed, the core offering you deliver must begin to reflect these new norms.

05

THE ORGANIZATION

And finally, because basically everything about your customer, their expectations, their experiences, and the entire universe you live in have changed, your organization has to change to not only keep up, but stay in front.

1. The Rise of Individualism
2. The Ecosystem Lifestyle
3. Compartmental Learning

THE CUSTOMER

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

The Rise of Individualism

We've heard it talked about, we've seen glimpses happening all around us, but just how pervasive individualism has become is unexpected. Consumers at large, not just "Millennials", are increasingly and irreversibly 'me'-centered. They still value collective good, but how they think about brands is fundamentally individualistic.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Your audiences process the information you're providing them (and selling to them) through a filter of what it means to them as individuals, and how the product or service you're providing will impact them, before they consider a larger community, group or the company's collective impact.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Frame for "Me."

Frame your language to individual consumers. They'll extrapolate the brand message to the broader community or society level.

Add Heroes to Your Stories.

Create content that tells the stories of individuals adding your brand to their lives and showcase their unique lifestyles and situations. Other consumers will interpret what one individual has done with your brand in a way that's meaningful for them.



"Almost half a century after the "Me Generation" made headlines with its focus on the self, individualism is well on the way to becoming one of the central themes of the 21st century. Baby Boomers did indeed look out for #1 in the hedonistic, therapeutic 1970s, but now individualism—acting in one's own interests versus those of an organized group or government—is arguably the guiding principle of our times."

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY
AUGUST 2018

THE CUSTOMER

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

The Ecosystem Lifestyle

Consumers are getting trained to care about, and desire, multiple things at once. And to them, the increasing amount of things they do and care about all relate to each other. Consumer lifestyles are interconnected and, much like ecosystems, are full of different interests working together to give their lives complex, additive meaning.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Your audiences don't just care about you. Sorry to be harsh, but you occupy just one of a dozen or more interests or activities they engage with in a single day. This means how you present yourself should help them understand how you fit into their ecosystem lifestyle.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Quit Offering Silver Bullets.

Don't frame your brand as the answer or solution, frame your brand in the context of enhancing interconnected lifestyles. What other activities does your brand fit in with? What other efforts does your brand enhance?

Hear Customers Out.

Ask your consumers to tell you what other aspects of their lifestyle you enhance, and/or where they want you to enhance. Getting them to tell their story of how they use your brand in context of everything else they do will help you learn how to fit in better, and will help them feel like it's all about them (a very good thing).



“According to the survey of 1,300 online shoppers, the majority of consumers today are engaged in other activities while shopping. Fifty-seven percent of respondents indicated they make purchases while at work, 51 percent are actively shopping while conducting household chores, and a significant number of respondents are shopping while dining out, running errands or commuting to work.”

BUSINESS WIRE
MAY 2018

THE CUSTOMER

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Compartmental Learning

Consumers love learning. They may not volunteer that info when you ask them what they love most, but they do. Most don't think of it as learning, but instead they think of it as entertainment...if you do it right. Because modern consumers are so busy living their ecosystem lifestyles, they love getting information, knowledge, and perspective that add depth and meaning to their lifestyle ecosystems.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Brands must build a concept into their DNA that used to be reserved for marketing and sales: Don't sell, teach. This axiom is as old as dirt, but it's truer to today's consumer than ever before. Be a brand entirely centered on giving people interesting information they can fit in to their lifestyles.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Learn from LEGO.

Teach-don't-sell should be a deeply ingrained brand strategy and cultural tenet, not just a sales tactic. If this mentality, behavior and culture doesn't exist yet, start there first.

Be a Tour Guide.

Showcase your brand as the informative guide to help navigate your audiences through their life situations. Give them free educational content, tips, and tools, about how they can enhance their life situations, and where your brand fits into that proposition.



"The company mission is "to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow." It's not just about selling more bricks to more kids: playing with Lego is about education as well as creativity."

WWW.CNBC.COM
AUGUST 2018

00

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

01

THE CUSTOMER

As in all good trendspotting, we begin with how the modern customer has, and continues to, change right before our eyes.

02

THE SELL

As customers continue to change, how your brand and business tries to engage and capture the modern customer must also evolve.

03

THE EXPERIENCE

Because the customer and the art of engaging them has evolved, so too must the deeper experiences that your brand creates.

04

THE OFFERING

Because the customer and their expectations for amazing experiences have changed, the core offering you deliver must begin to reflect these new norms.

05

THE ORGANIZATION

And finally, because basically everything about your customer, their expectations, their experiences, and the entire universe you live in have changed, your organization has to change to not only keep up, but stay in front.

1. B2I: Business-to-Individuals
2. The Learning Wars
3. Brand Advocates Are Everything
4. Enable Storytelling
5. Micromoments

THE SELL

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

B2I: Business-to-Individuals

Every brand, no matter the category or space, must sell as if they're selling to consumers. B-2-Business and B-2-Government brands used to have very specific and very different strategies than those B-2-Consumer brands use, but because humans are adopting very individualistic, compartmental, and ecosystem-driven buying behaviors (see The Customer trends), all brands must adopt consumer-centric strategies.

Welcome to the era of B-2-Individual.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Buying behaviors have merged. All categories, business types, and sectors must now assume that their buyer, no matter who they are or how they used to buy things just a few years ago, will fundamentally view brand propositions through a consumeristic lens. Which means brands must sell to that individual perspective.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Make It Short and Special.

Try thinking about how you would sell your brand and offerings to a 21-year old fresh-out-of-undergrad new-adult who knows nothing about you. They like short fun content, they like to engage with, they like things that focus on them and make them feel special. Start there and you'll be on the right track.

Start and End with the Individual.

No matter the category or space you're in, frame your offering to the individual lifestyle of your consumer-minded buyer. Tailor the sales experience to start and end with clear impact on your primary buyers' individual lives. One individual has done with your brand in a way that's meaningful for them.



"Forget B2C and B2B—We Need B2I. In the fast-approaching world where tailored products and customer experience are a competitive advantage, the old categories of business will be obsolete. The distinction between B2C and B2B is no longer useful. Instead, we should begin thinking about "B2I," in which the I stands for individual. Companies succeed or fail these days based on their ability to build and maintain lasting relationships with individuals. We have to earn our customers' trust or those relationships will not grow."

WWW.STRATEGY-BUSINESS.COM
AUGUST 2018

THE SELL

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Win the Learning War

Part of consumers becoming more individualistic and self-interested is their desire to improve their lives, learning, and sense of self. This has led brands across the board to pump content and learning moments out into the ether like never before. Which means it's a war out there. It's a war for who can provide the most compelling learning moments.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Brands today must figure out not just what kind of content should drive learning moments, but also where and when to place those moments that will most creatively engage their customers. Properly placed learning moments have the power to become a revolutionary engagement experience.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Forget Content Strategy. What's Your Teaching Strategy?

Within your brand's "content" strategy and "sales experience" strategy, think about how you can dramatically increase where, when and how often you're providing learning moments for your consumers.

Recruit Users as Teachers.

Crowdsource your consumers for topics they wish they knew more about, or better yet, recruit your most loyal users as teachers and capture them on camera providing insights. Other consumers want to hear from people like them more than your brand anyways.



"As Laura Casselman, CEO of JVZoo explains, "Your product may create satisfied customers, but educational content creates the kind of cheerleaders who will outsell your sales team by a 10-1 ratio." Consumers are more willing to trust brands that can prove their worth. No matter how many impressions you get on social media, educational content is the only way to do that."

WWW.INC.COM
MARCH 2018

THE SELL

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Brand Advocates are Everything

Referrals, referrals, referrals. It's all about what like-minded peers think, not what the brand or business thinks. Because there's so much chaotic marketing noise out there and brands yelling at consumers to 'pick me, choose me, love me'—consumers are becoming numb. Brands must tap into their real-life human users to tell their story for them.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Testimonials on homepages have historically been the way brands tapped into this truth, but unfortunately, most have not evolved beyond that. "Marketing" and "Sales" fundamentally assume a mindset that the brand knows things and wants to push them to consumers. THIS DOES NOT WORK ANYMORE. Brands must adapt and at the most foundational core level frame their strategies around how they will create communities, tribes, or even mobs of excited humans to brag about their brand for them.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Employee Stories.

Employee voices and stories are notoriously the most underutilized source of phenomenal marketing and sales content. Empower your employees to be your marketers, give them content, make it about them, reward them, and never make it about you. Your brand's value will naturally surface when employees get to show off.

Make a VIP Mob.

Every brand has VIP users—those employees and real customers that are loyal. Give them the tools to embrace and brag about their chosen loyalties, in a way that shows them off, not the brand. Invite them to a retreat, invite them to submit stories, "brand" them as VIP's, make them feel special. They'll take care of the rest.



"Who sells your products or services? You might think it the sole responsibility of the sales and marketing team. Yes, for a long time, sales and marketing was the team responsible for product growth, but the situation has changed. Your customers have quickly become the most critical people to sell what you're offering.

To succeed in the modern market, companies need to do more than produce an excellent product or provide reliable service: They need to turn their faithful users into advocates."

WWW.SMASHINGMAGAZINE.COM
JUNE 2018

THE SELL

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Enable Storytelling

If you haven't already seen this theme in basically every section of this trend report, then let's make it clear: Consumers are increasingly self-interested. So feed the beast. Help your consumers and users (and employees!) tell THEIR stories.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Brand leaders must first embrace what might be a hard truth: consumers don't like you. They have no reason to. They like what you do for THEM, they like how you enable THEM, they like how you fit in with their lifestyle to make it better in intricate and nuanced ways. They want to tell that story, and brands have to find ways to empower and enable them to do so. Even (especially) in the sales experience, enable prospective consumers/buyers to tell their stories. It will give them instant skin in the game and make them feel like an insider. All very good things.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Create a Storytelling Game.

Somewhere in the sales experience create what feels like a game that asks prospects to submit stories of themselves and what they want. More important than the quality or volume of their content is just the act of having them focus on themselves. Telling their stories will make them active participants.

Create a Storytelling Platform.

One step further than one-off submitted stories via a game, for example, is a dedicated platform for prompting and capturing stories, ideally categorized around different places in the sales cycle. It's cheaper and easier than you think, and if you aren't already considering it, you're probably already behind.



"One of the most powerful sales tools that companies have are the stories people tell about their products and services.

Their experience with your product carries more weight than any marketing message you can come up with."

**KELLOGG SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AT
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
OCTOBER 2018**

THE SELL

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Build for 'Snackable' Micromoments

We were given access to a million data points from a client (small company called Google) about how people's consideration and purchase behaviors are evolving, and one of the BIGGEST factors that jumped out was the presence, and power, of micromoments—dozens or more mini modular moments people experience that compel them toward a brand or a buy. Small is the new big, embrace it.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Consumers are too distracted to pay attention to a big proposition. This is related to the trend (and need) to "keep it simple", but it goes beyond that—consumer attention and behavior is increasingly influenced by the sum of a dozen micromoments they have with your brand. Which means brands need to stop thinking about "what's my pitch" and "what's my value prop" as one containable thing, and start thinking about them as an ECOSYSTEM of a dozen modular micromoments.

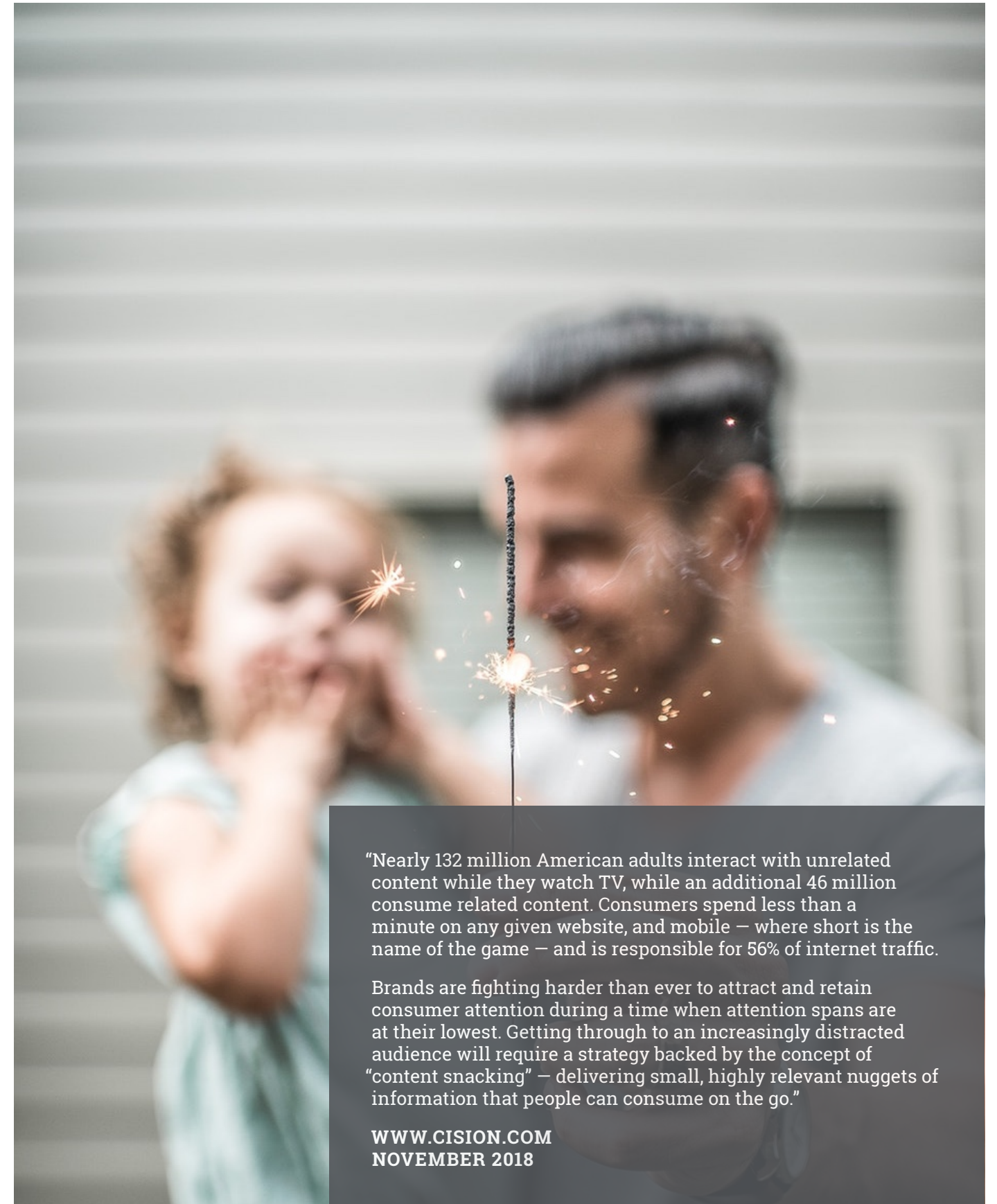
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Small is the New Big.

Brands and businesses have a tendency to want to elevate, enhance, expand, aggregate their value into bigger and bigger offerings. Try not doing that. The first step is reversing that trend, and deconstructing a big value proposition into a dozen mini moments, and creating accessible experiences around those mini moments.

Create Micromoment Ecosystems.

Instead of a strategy of focusing on the few big ways you'll present and sell your brand, create an ecosystem strategy where you know exactly how you want to guide your consumer along a path of TEN different mini moments. The risk of losing them along the way does increase, but it's their new preferred behavior, so it has to be done.



"Nearly 132 million American adults interact with unrelated content while they watch TV, while an additional 46 million consume related content. Consumers spend less than a minute on any given website, and mobile — where short is the name of the game — and is responsible for 56% of internet traffic.

Brands are fighting harder than ever to attract and retain consumer attention during a time when attention spans are at their lowest. Getting through to an increasingly distracted audience will require a strategy backed by the concept of "content snacking" — delivering small, highly relevant nuggets of information that people can consume on the go."

WWW.CISION.COM
NOVEMBER 2018

00

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

01

THE CUSTOMER

As in all good trendspotting, we begin with how the modern customer has, and continues to, change right before our eyes.

02

THE SELL

As customers continue to change, how your brand and business tries to engage and capture the modern customer must also evolve.

03

THE EXPERIENCE

Because the customer and the art of engaging them has evolved, so too must the deeper experiences that your brand creates.

04

THE OFFERING

Because the customer and their expectations for amazing experiences have changed, the core offering you deliver must begin to reflect these new norms.

05

THE ORGANIZATION

And finally, because basically everything about your customer, their expectations, their experiences, and the entire universe you live in have changed, your organization has to change to not only keep up, but stay in front.

1. Social 3.0: Your Stance
2. AI is Coming
3. AR / VR
4. Voice

THE EXPERIENCE

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Social 3.0: Your Stance

If Social 1.0 meant simply having a presence online and Social 2.0 meant brands needed to create a connection and conversation with customers, then Social 3.0 takes brands' voices even further. Social 3.0 requires brands to take a stance on issues and topics of debate once seen as outside of their purview.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

As brands and political, social, and environmental causes become more ingrained in consumers' personal identities, they expect brands to voice their opinions and connect with causes of their own. This does not mean always taking a side in divisive, partisan issues, but it does mean clearly stating your values and living them in visible ways.

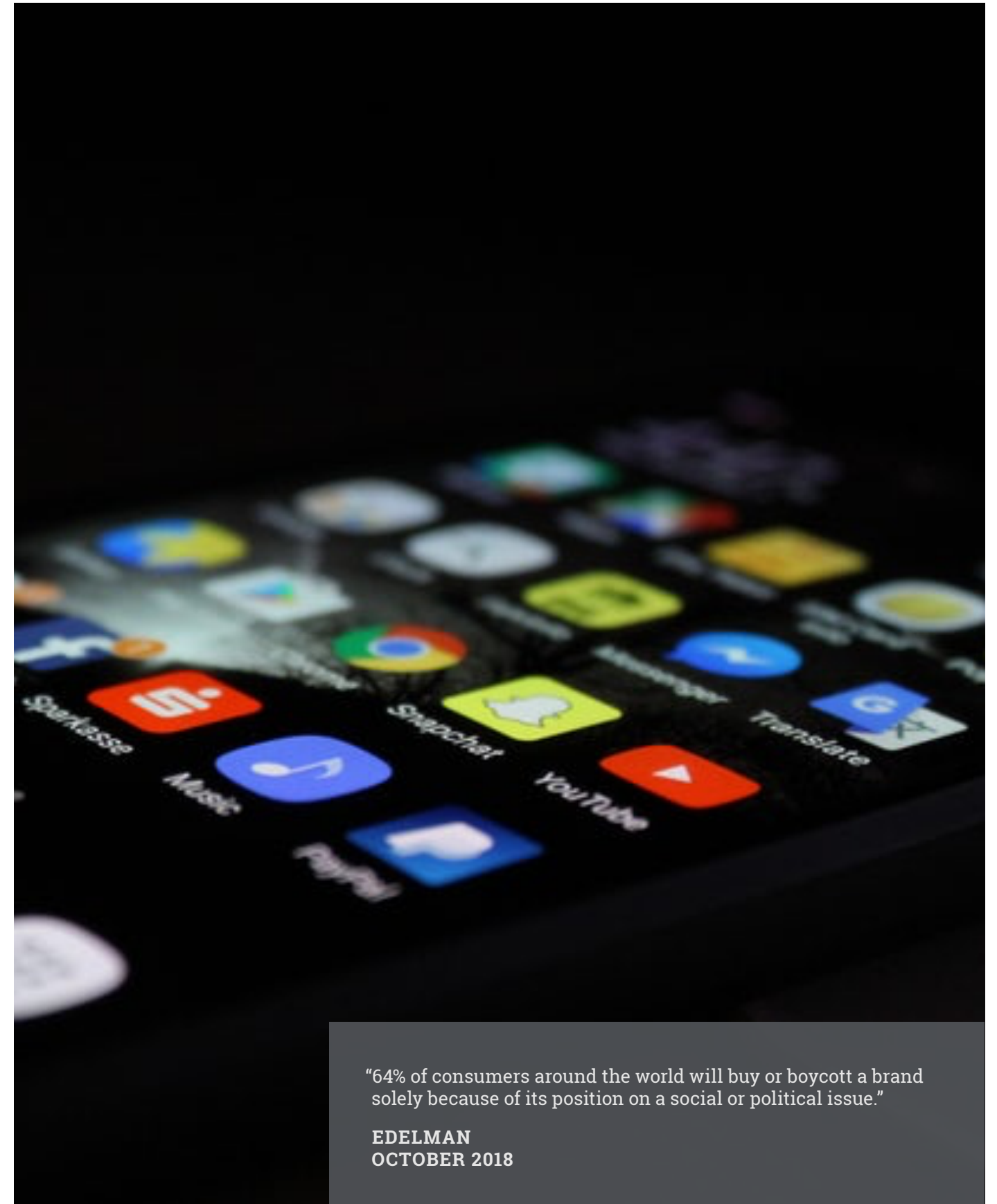
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Connect Cause to Values.

Authenticity is the most essential part to any brand's social commentary. Avoid knee jerk reactions by speaking to what aligns with your brand's core values. If it doesn't align, be transparent and just say exactly that—speaking negatively on a divisive issue can be a hugely a harmful practice.

Ask Your Audience.

To truly capitalize on 'Social 3.0' you should invest in deeper audience understanding (e.g. social analytics tools, more robust customer data management, or similar quantitative tools). You can't please everybody but guessing at your core customers deeper beliefs can land you in trouble.



"64% of consumers around the world will buy or boycott a brand solely because of its position on a social or political issue."

EDELMAN
OCTOBER 2018

THE EXPERIENCE

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Artificial Intelligence

The number one fear associated with artificial intelligence is job loss. Yet, in the increasingly data-driven world of marketing and brand-building, marketers are discovering a new realm of depth, insight, and possibility in their existing roles as AI technologies continue to evolve.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

AI lacks the emotive, empathetic, and unpredictable elements that make marketers successful at building brands. BUT with rapid learning and constant personalization, AI enables digital brands to have a dynamic personality, not just a singular consistent voice.

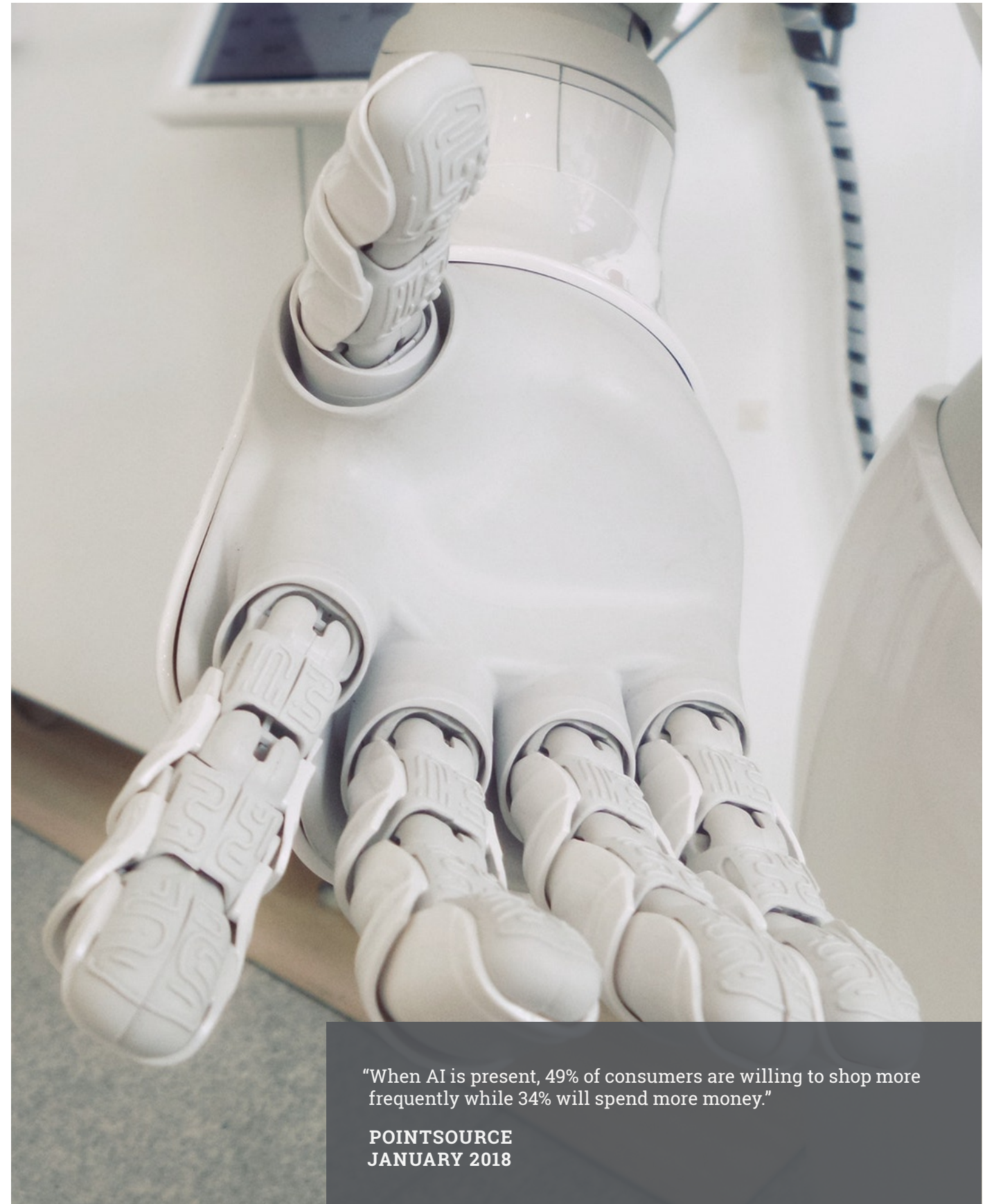
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Use AI to Make People Smarter.

AI offers more rapid, accurate, and insightful analysis of customer behaviors than ever before. Begin your AI evolution by employing it in your customer analytics and decision-making process. This will help support more informed brand-building initiatives and make your emotive, creative humans even more effective.

Don't Buy for the Headline.

AI is often used as a blanket term for a wide variety of capabilities, applications, and functions. Before integrating AI into your brand narrative, take a deeper look into what actual value it can deliver to not just your business but also your customers.



“When AI is present, 49% of consumers are willing to shop more frequently while 34% will spend more money.”

POINTSOURCE
JANUARY 2018

THE EXPERIENCE

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

New Brand Realities: AR & VR

As augmented reality becomes widely adopted for both consumer-facing and operational experiences (and virtual reality begins to catch up), brands must prepare for an entirely new dimension of B2I interactions.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Brands are able to connect with customers with an entirely new depth of creativity and experience. As more organizations begin to offer these immersive digital experiences, the once irreplaceable relationship between physical brick-and-mortar stores and customer experience may be facing a tipping point.

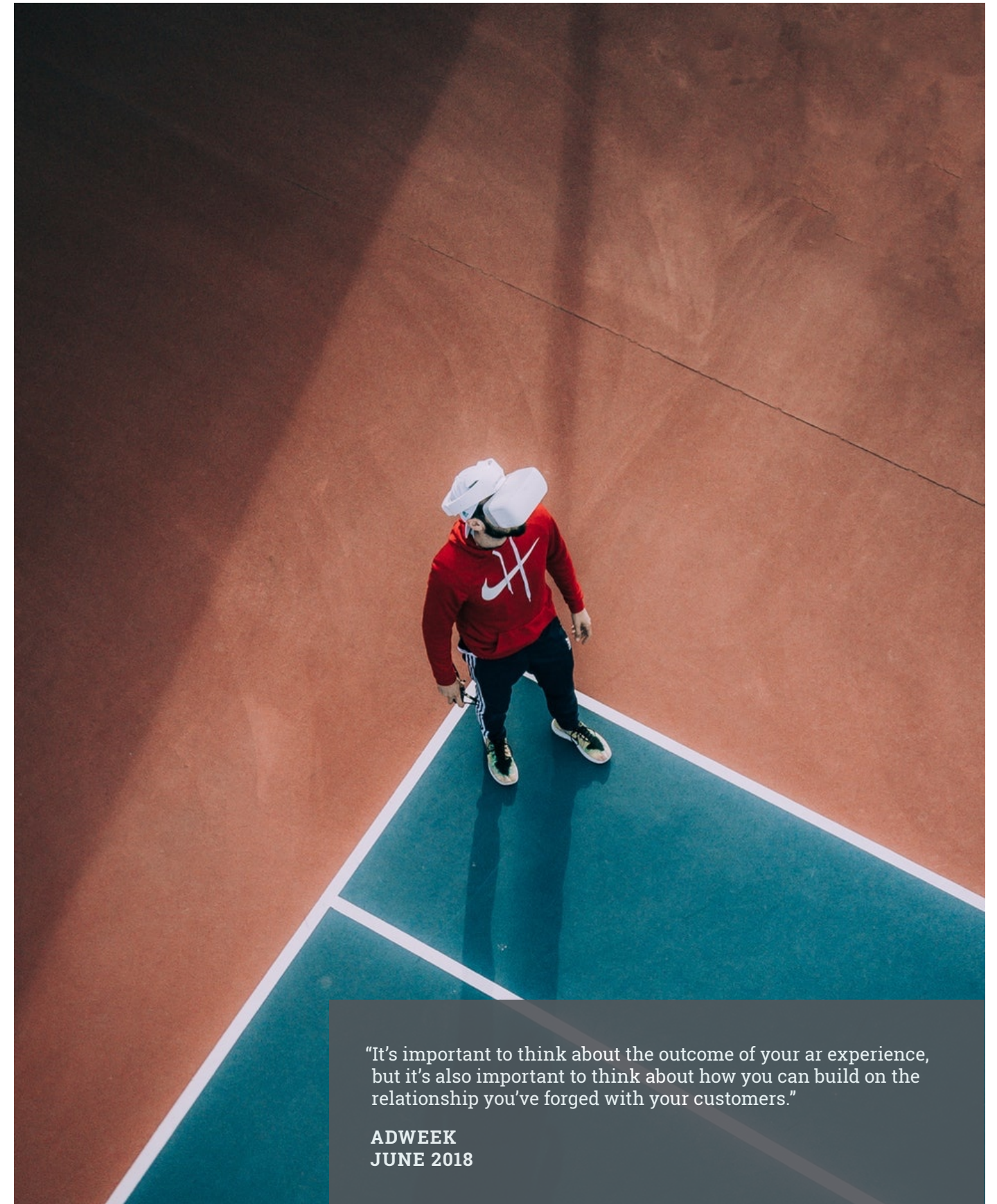
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Think Beyond One Experience.

AR and VR are not going to take over the digital world any time soon. But, as they become an essential part of the marketing mix, focus on linking elements and themes from those immersive experiences across existing/traditional channels to deepen their meaning and avoid becoming a novelty.

Build Your Brand Story.

Like any creative medium, AR/VR will be driven by narrative intrigue and context. Before investing in an experience, ask yourself, 'how may the signature story of my brand translate to this new medium?' 'How may my well-known story be adopted and reinvigorated in this more intimate environment?'



"It's important to think about the outcome of your ar experience, but it's also important to think about how you can build on the relationship you've forged with your customers."

ADWEEK
JUNE 2018

THE EXPERIENCE

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Voice

Voice assistants have begun to proliferate American households and buyer journeys over the past few years. So much so, that entire businesses are popping up to capitalize on voice assistants' potential. Ultimately, voice's rapid growth signals that brands that fail to optimize for this new medium will be left in the past.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Brands now have a new, more literal opportunity to establish their voice as an integral part of their customers' lives. Voice may prove to be the final piece to becoming more of a friend than a vendor.

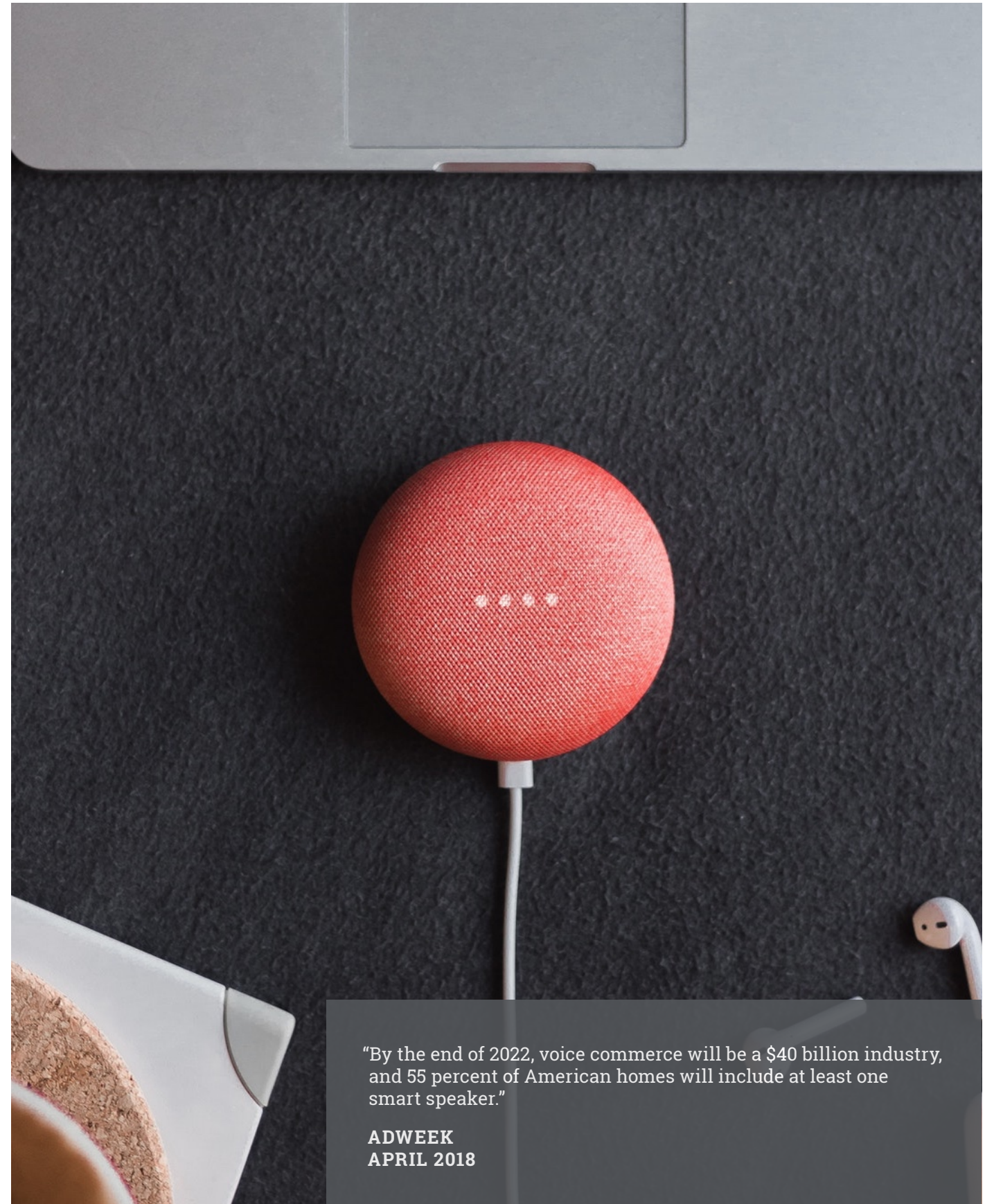
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Act Natural.

One of the core brand benefits of voice is the shift from formal, abbreviated searches and engagement opportunities (i.e. "best Thai food near me") to naturally formatted questions and conversational responses (i.e. "Hey, what's a good Thai restaurant nearby?"). Ensure your brand's voice remains conversational, not just topical.

Go Beyond Just Being Useful.

As consumers explore the technology and its capabilities, brands have an opportunity to deliver content that delights, entertains, and surprises. Yes, being useful and delivering information is essential but in a world without any visual cues, will it be memorable enough to thrive?



"By the end of 2022, voice commerce will be a \$40 billion industry, and 55 percent of American homes will include at least one smart speaker."

ADWEEK
APRIL 2018

00

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

01

THE CUSTOMER

As in all good trendspotting, we begin with how the modern customer has, and continues to, change right before our eyes.

02

THE SELL

As customers continue to change, how your brand and business tries to engage and capture the modern customer must also evolve.

03

THE EXPERIENCE

Because the customer and the art of engaging them has evolved, so too must the deeper experiences that your brand creates.

04

THE OFFERING

Because the customer and their expectations for amazing experiences have changed, the core offering you deliver must begin to reflect these new norms.

05

THE ORGANIZATION

And finally, because basically everything about your customer, their expectations, their experiences, and the entire universe you live in have changed, your organization has to change to not only keep up, but stay in front.

1. Experience
2. Brand Business Intelligence
3. Subscriptions
4. Internet of Things

THE OFFERING

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Experience is Everything

As expectations extend beyond products and features, brands face a need to deliver more diverse value throughout the entire purchase journey. This most notably takes place after purchase, when brands are expected to continue a flexible, repeatable, and dynamic relationship.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

As experience and variety become main points of differentiation, brands must consider that every point of engagement (pre-, mid-, or post-purchase) is a critical opportunity to either grow or lose a customer.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

It's Connection, Not Just Communication.

We as humans build our deepest connection with one another because of how others' words and actions make us FEEL. As a brand looking to build out its experiences, think how you want to make people FEEL, not just what you want to tell them. For example, when writing that next bit of copy focus on the emotion you want to evoke, not just the technical points you want to get across.

Your Customer = Your Hero.

The most critical element of an experience-first brand is putting the customer and their ambitions in the limelight. Whether it is hyper-personalized content or an informed, empathetic approach—the main question for building a connected experience journey should be, 'how does this empower, support, or delight my customer?'



"81% Of marketers say they expect to be competing mostly or completely on the basis of customer experience in the next two years."

GARTNER
MARCH 2018

THE OFFERING

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Brand Business Intelligence

In today's hyper-competitive marketplace, analyzing competitive messaging and upcoming market trends can only get you so far. True business intelligence around your customers' behavior and their needs can lead to considerable competitive gains.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Orienting your brand and processes around customers advances success faster than going toe-to-toe with the market. Intelligence gained from a customer-centric approach informs smarter, lasting marketing decisions that boost revenue and cut costs.

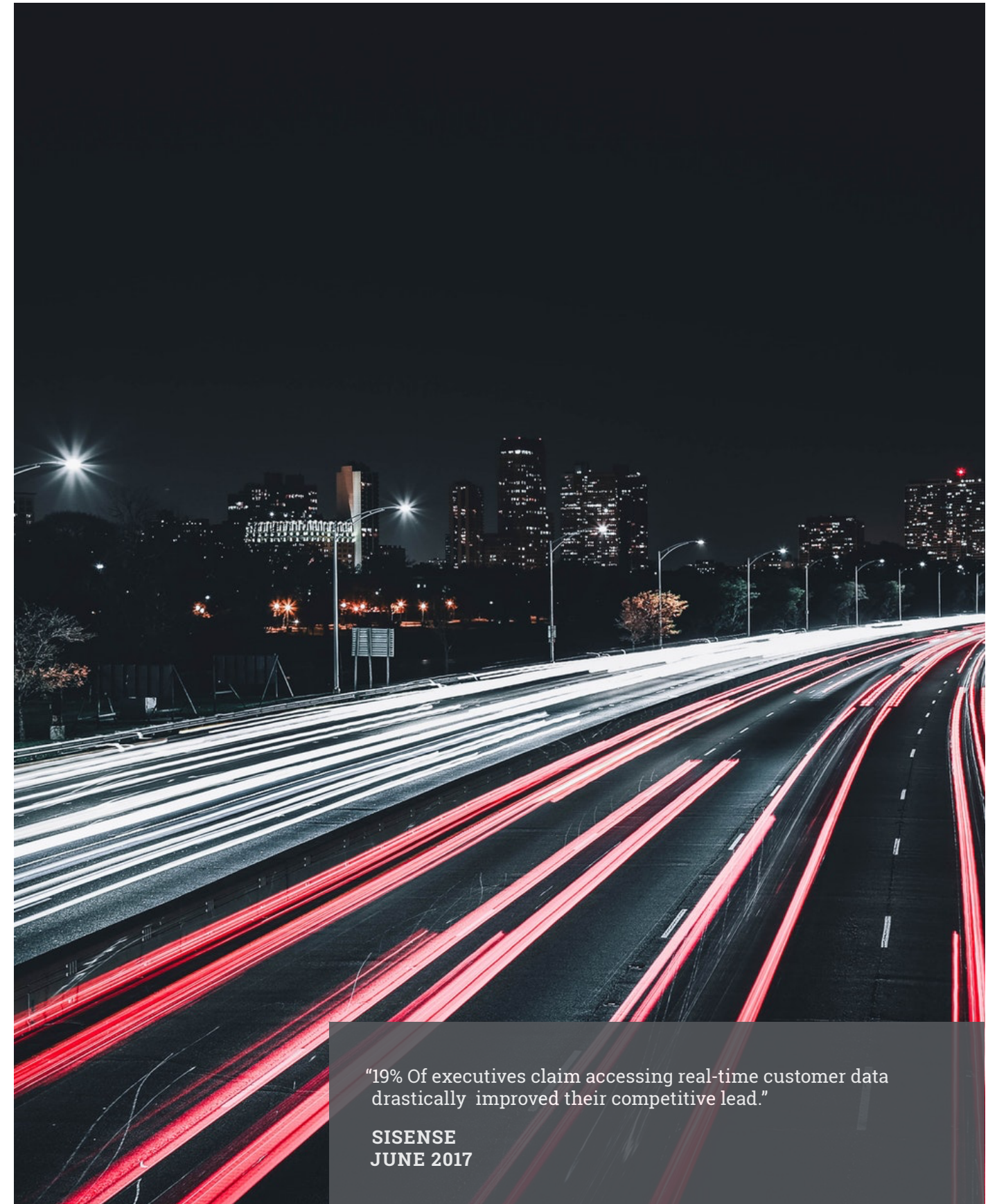
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Build a BI Roadmap.

Before investing in technologies or realigning processes, brand leadership should plan the path forward for BI. This roadmap should align BI with growth goals, industry shifts/norms, changing customer expectations, and core brand objectives.

Connect Sales and Marketing.

Sales data is becoming increasingly detailed, actionable, and timely. By connecting sales data and marketing processes in one place, targeting becomes more accurate, campaigns more measurable, and decisions more informed.



"19% Of executives claim accessing real-time customer data drastically improved their competitive lead."

SISENSE
JUNE 2017

THE OFFERING

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Frequency and Flexibility of Subscriptions

As consumers seek rapid access and more convenient experiences, subscription-based, on-demand business models of companies like Netflix or StitchFix are permeating a huge spectrum of industries. This, in combination with an increasingly fractured customer journey and media environment, has created entire new norms of service delivery and communication.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

The flexibility, repeated value add, and impermanence of subscription models, together with more complex customer journeys, are accelerating modern consumers' shift away from purchasing "things" as they begin seeking experiences/relationships from every brand. This, ultimately, forces marketers to realign their thinking to deliver value (tangible, monetary, emotional, or otherwise) and variety in every engagement.

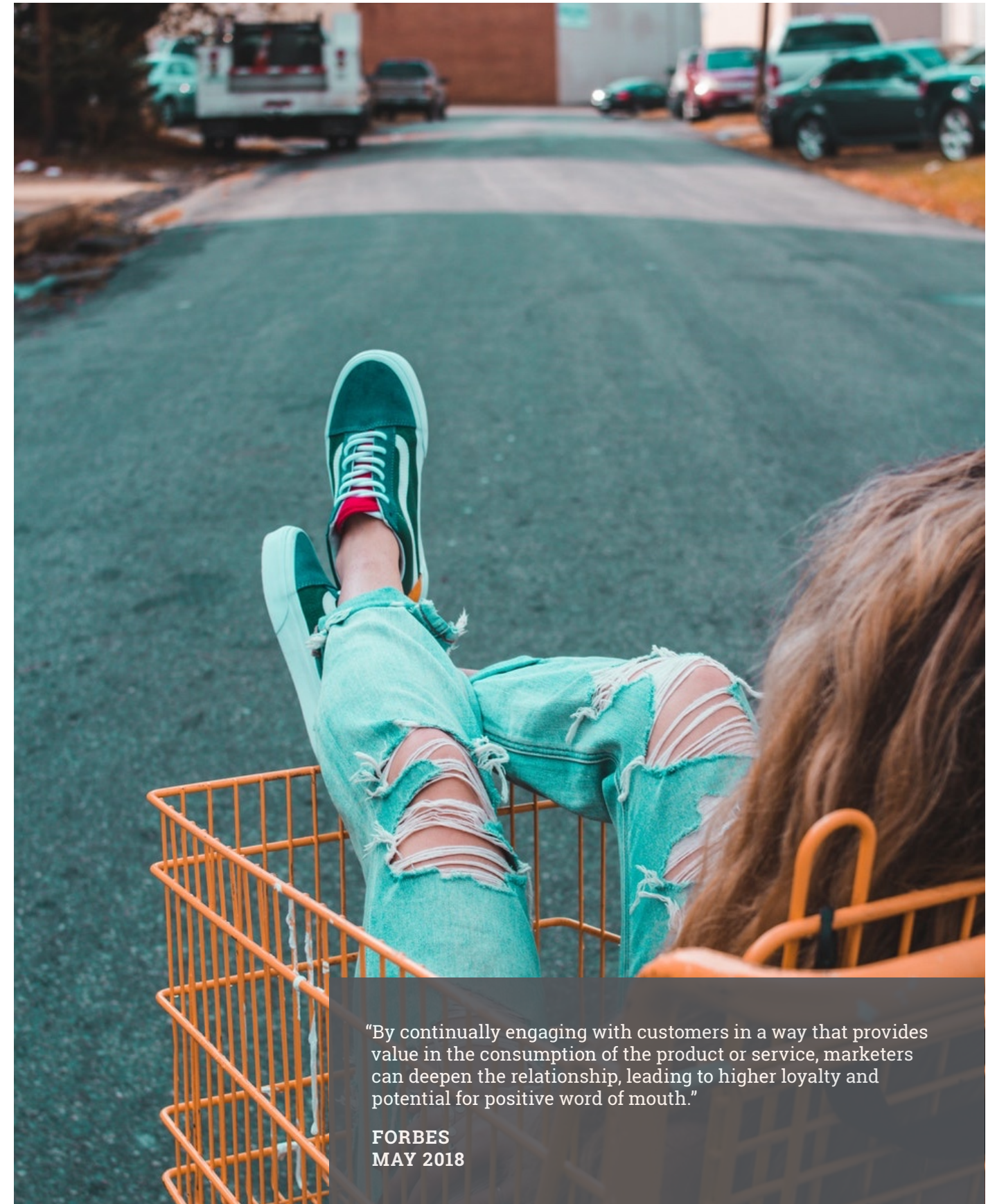
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Diversify the Message.

The first risk of more frequent communications with customers is redundancy. Avoid annoying or alienating customers by creating more diverse, purposeful messaging frameworks that can inform a wider variety of effective executions.

Stop Talking Features.

Through technology's rapid advancement—conversations, industries, and customer needs are changing faster than ever. Building your brand around features is a sure way to be caught in a state of perpetual catch up. Elevate your message to focus on outcomes, experience, and benefits to stay ahead of the curve.



"By continually engaging with customers in a way that provides value in the consumption of the product or service, marketers can deepen the relationship, leading to higher loyalty and potential for positive word of mouth."

FORBES
MAY 2018

THE OFFERING

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

IoT: Interknit Everything

An actual internet of things is quickly approaching. Whether they are led by smart assistants like Alexa or built with their own forms of internal intelligence, future-forward products are connected, internet-enabled, and primed to create a new relationship between people and technology.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

As consumer expectations continue to rise around what should and can be connected, smart companies are preparing for an interknit future by enabling their offerings to connect now.

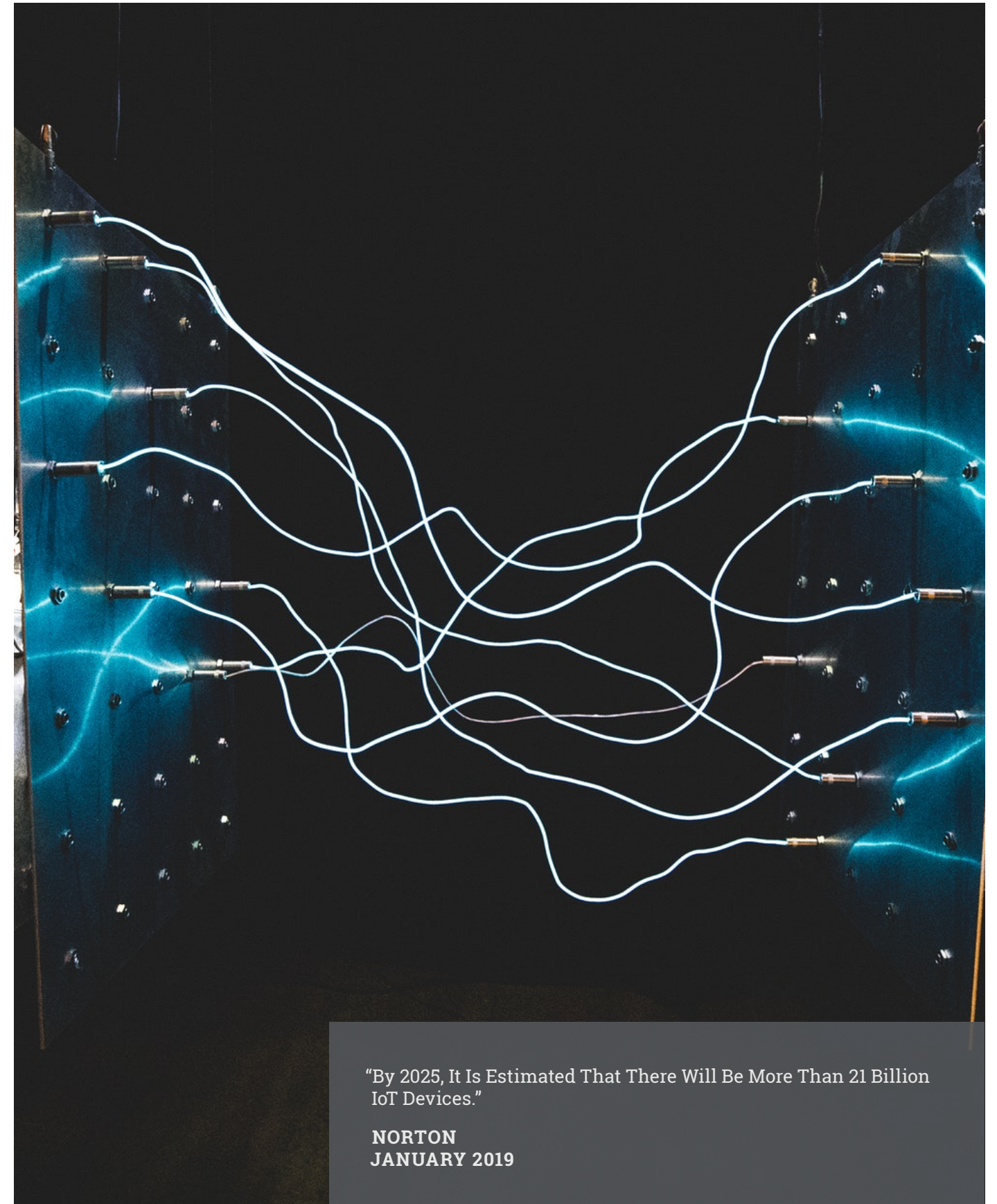
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Play Nice.

A key aspect of IoT success is your offerings' ability to quickly and easily integrate with external partners. Consider working with partner brands early to ensure seamless integration throughout product development and the product lifecycle.

Safety First, Kids!

Recent studies show that security is the #1 reason IoT projects fail to get market traction. As you begin to invest in creating more connected products and services, take advantage of others' mistakes and focus on including clear security measures.



"By 2025, It Is Estimated That There Will Be More Than 21 Billion IoT Devices."

NORTON
JANUARY 2019

00

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

01

THE CUSTOMER

As in all good trendspotting, we begin with how the modern customer has, and continues to, change right before our eyes.

02

THE SELL

As customers continue to change, how your brand and business tries to engage and capture the modern customer must also evolve.

03

THE EXPERIENCE

Because the customer and the art of engaging them has evolved, so too must the deeper experiences that your brand creates.

04

THE OFFERING

Because the customer and their expectations for amazing experiences have changed, the core offering you deliver must begin to reflect these new norms.

05

THE ORGANIZATION

And finally, because basically everything about your customer, their expectations, their experiences, and the entire universe you live in have changed, your organization has to change to not only keep up, but stay in front.

1. Small is the New Big
2. Ecosystem
3. Social Good
4. Culture & Content
5. Brand Office

THE ORGANIZATION

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Small is the New Big

Massive monolith brands once dominated the market, the airwaves, and consumers wallets, but due to a number of emerging trends across business categories and customers that is no longer the case. Smaller, more nimble brands are gaining preference and driving considerable growth across a huge spectrum of categories.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Whether it is digital origins, responsiveness to customers, or a more direct delivery of value, hyper-focused brands are equipped to capitalize on changing customer behaviors. This opens doors for increased competition and a horizon of sizeable change for larger brands.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Big Guys Can Experiment Small.

A huge advantage that many large brands still maintain is ample resources. As they begin to feel the heat of increased, nimble competition, legacy brands should be exploring their own direct-to-consumer, specialized, and more transparent sub-brand opportunities.

More Social, Less Advertising.

A major vehicle for small brand success is the momentum gained through social media rather than traditional advertising. Millennial audiences widely mistrust traditional mediums, so as big brands look to further spark their growth, they should turn to social engaged projects from the start.



"Small/mid-size brands are driving anywhere from 10-20% more growth in their category than legacy brands."

NORTON
OCTOBER 2018

THE ORGANIZATION

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Thinking Ecosystem

In response to a hyper-fragmented, accelerated, globalized world, modern brands are evolving into broad, connected ecosystems. These ecosystems are full of cross-categorical entities that all work to build a powerful brand identity and deliver connected, value-driving customer experiences. These ecosystems are enabling brands to reimagine corporate structures and organizational possibilities.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Brand is no longer an exercise reserved for the marketing department. Brand is a large scale business driver that must be inclusive of and co-created by ALL of a company's stakeholders.

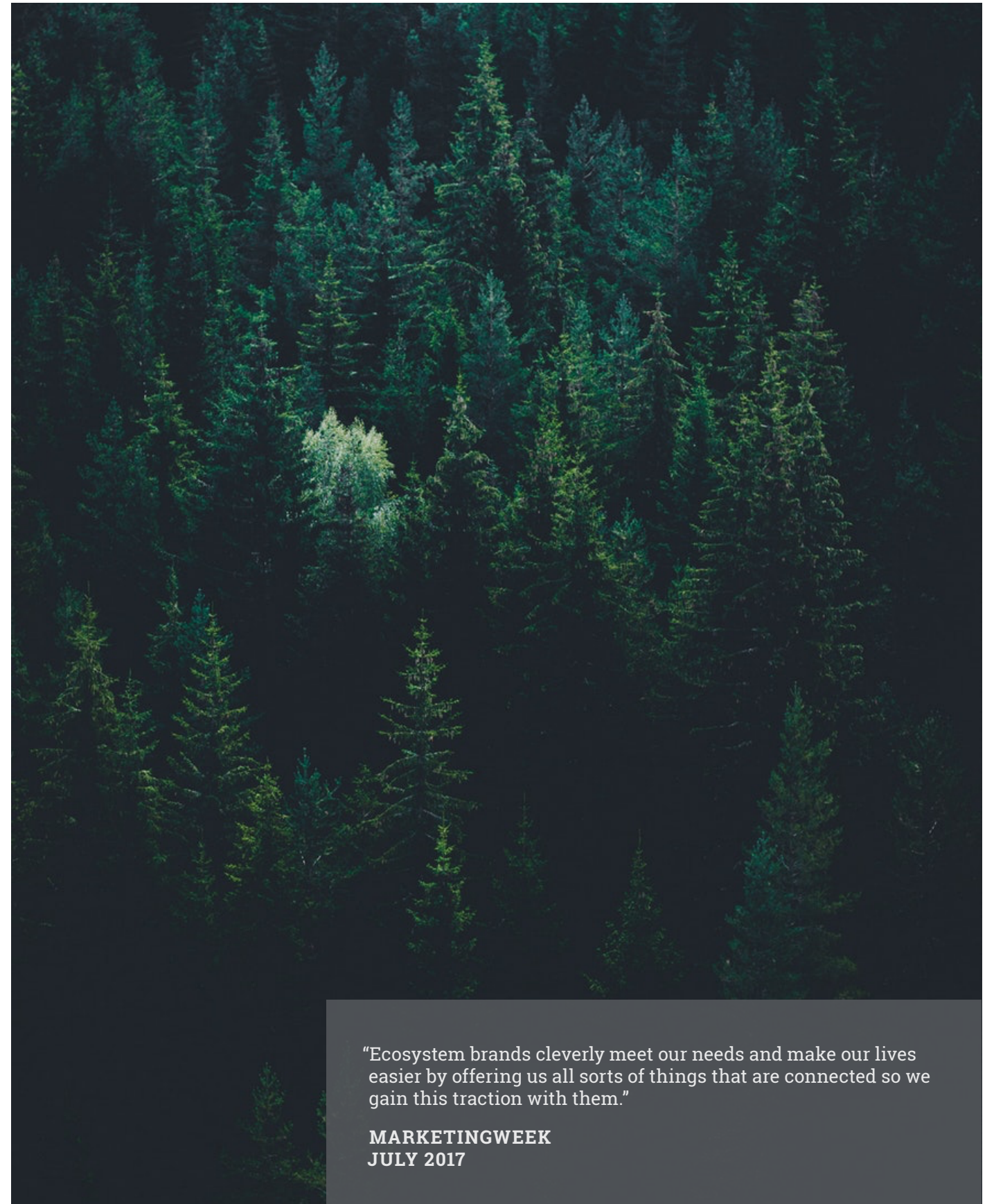
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Connect Pieces with Purpose.

To ensure your brand ecosystem creates a seamless, connected experience for customers, introduce and connect new entities with outcomes in mind. Connected data sources, multi-purpose loyalty programs, and consolidated apps are all strong programs to help ensure your ecosystem continually delivers value.

Start from the Inside Out.

Developing a modern brand ecosystem may seem like a daunting task. The most effective start is outlining which assets already exists within the brand and how those resources could be most logically applied to adjacent or related categories/ventures.



"Ecosystem brands cleverly meet our needs and make our lives easier by offering us all sorts of things that are connected so we gain this traction with them."

MARKETINGWEEK
JULY 2017

THE ORGANIZATION

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Social Good

Social good, corporate social responsibility, and general benefit to the world are no longer programs brands can spring up when needed. Social benefit is increasingly baked into the identity of transformational brands. Having an authentic, almost inseparable identity of being both a business entity and social contributor is emerging as the future of business.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Following a deeper, structural, systematic approach to social good that companies like Patagonia, Dove, and Volvo have embodied is preferable to bolting social responsibility efforts (siloed in the marketing or corporate responsibility departments) onto unrelated business strategies.

HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Start with What You're Good At.

It may seem obvious, but when aiming to create a social good practice that becomes inseparable from core business objectives you should start with initiatives and causes that are directly related to your business. These may include changes around supply-chain sourcing decisions, employee benefits, or product recycling/donation.

Implement from the Ground Up.

In order for any social good program to succeed it must live as an authentic piece of both employee and customer lives. While it may be guided by brand leaders, your social good program should motivate, inspire, and include both internal and external stakeholders as the foundation of its impact. This can be done in a variety of ways including donation matching, in-store volunteer sign-ups, advocacy newsletters, and product donation/repair.



"It's crucial we draw a line between businesses that were founded from purpose and those that originated with a profit agenda and applied purpose to secure more of it."

MARKETINGWEEK
MARCH 2019

THE ORGANIZATION

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Culture & Content

Competing on “great products” or “amazing service” or “competitive pricing” is becoming a harder and harder game to win. Aspects of a brand that used to just be internal are becoming new territories for brands to compete and win with. Culture and content are becoming two of the most important sources of competitive advantage for modern brands.

What’s It Really Mean for Brands?

Your culture and content strategies should be considered as integral to your overall brand strategy. They are increasingly becoming some of the best new ways to engage not only the very best talent, but also the very best customers.

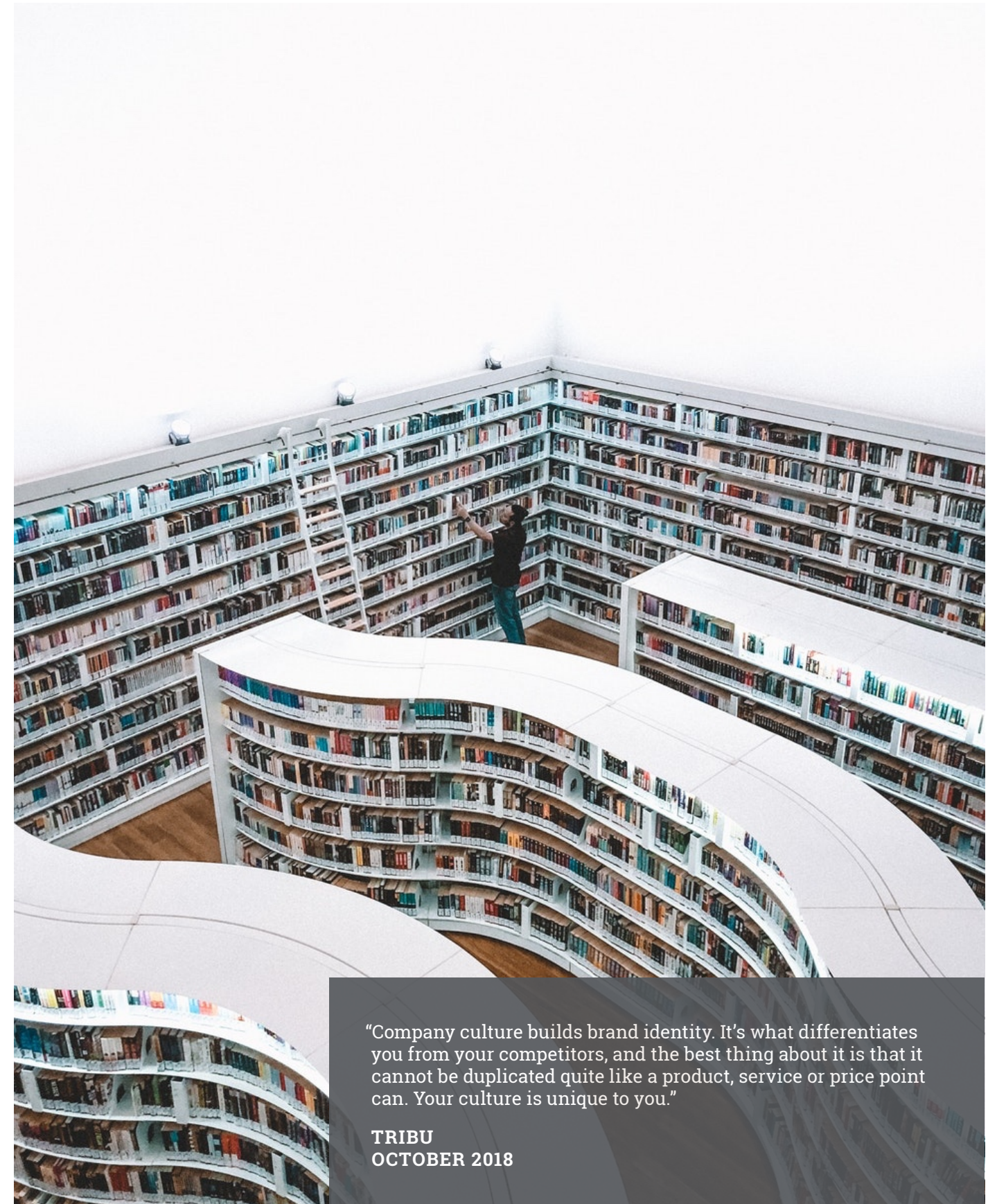
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Have a Culture Strategy.

Engaging modern brands must not only know what their culture is, they must also know how to grow it and USE it as a competitive advantage in the race for customers. Build an internal SWAT team to determine what your culture is and how to link it to your external experience, content, marketing and sales strategies.

Have a Content Strategy.

We’ve heard it a thousand times—“our brand has a content strategy, we create cool content about our brand and...”—WRONG. Content must be regularly created to invites employees and customers in to not only consume, but also co-create. Dedicate a team to determining what aspects of your employee culture and customer stories can be captured. Make a microsite, put it up there, and repeat repeat repeat.



“Company culture builds brand identity. It’s what differentiates you from your competitors, and the best thing about it is that it cannot be duplicated quite like a product, service or price point can. Your culture is unique to you.”

TRIBU
OCTOBER 2018

THE ORGANIZATION

Here are a few big trends that brands are facing related to their changing customers, and how brands can respond.

Brand Office

Today's CMO is held more accountable for sales and revenue growth than ever before. This has "transactionalized" the role and shed a bright light on the gap between marketing's outward emphasis and the internal, strategic direction of the brand. To solve for this gap, some forward-thinking companies are investing in a new brand office and, more specifically, a dedicated steward of the brand or a Chief Brand officer.

What's It Really Mean for Brands?

Marketing and sales are becoming increasingly intertwined and current "brand managers" are focused primarily on external promotion and policing for inconsistencies. The brand itself needs a dedicated set of stewards and strategists to stay ahead of trends and maintain market relevance.

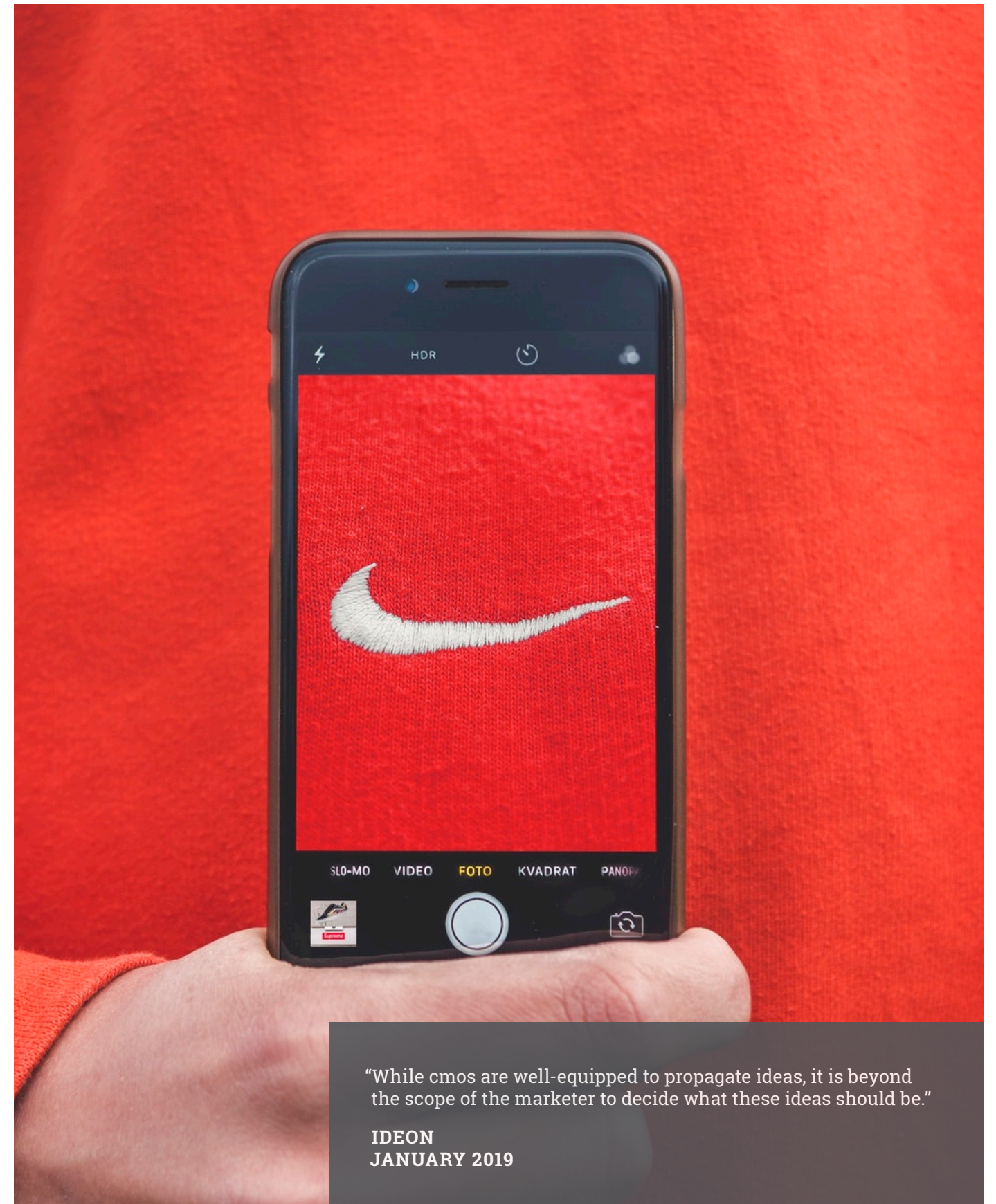
HOW BRANDS CAN RESPOND

Build a Brand Office.

Yes, it can be as simple as that. By building an internal office dedicated to not just policing marketing materials but to strategizing and advancing the brand, your organization is primed to evolve more fluidly with customer, market, and competitive changes.

Don't Mix Sales and Brand Strategy.

Being accountable for sales is a main reason current marketing leaders are stuck in tactical, reactive cycles. By removing an internal brand office from ROI/revenue constraints, it opens the door to create more attainable, strategic and influential success metrics. Many of these new metrics will be tailored to specific organizations to ensure that the brand remains authentically tied to the company's core purpose



"While cmos are well-equipped to propagate ideas, it is beyond the scope of the marketer to decide what these ideas should be."

IDEON
JANUARY 2019

00

BRAND BASICS

In order to effectively respond to trends, these brand foundations must be in place.

1. Know Your Core
2. Know Your Values
3. Know Your Voice
4. Know Your Map
5. Know Your Expression
6. Know Your Identity

01

THE CUSTOMER

As in all good trendspotting, we begin with how the modern customer has, and continues to, change right before our eyes.

1. The Rise of Individualism
2. The Ecosystem Lifestyle
3. Compartmental Learning

02

THE SELL

As customers continue to change, how your brand and business tries to engage and capture the modern customer must also evolve.

1. Seeing in 2C
2. The Learning Wars
3. Brand Advocates Are Everything
4. Enable Storytelling
5. Micromoments

03

THE EXPERIENCE

Because the customer and the art of engaging them has evolved, so too must the deeper experiences that your brand creates.

1. Social 3.0: Your Stance
2. AI is Coming
3. AR/VR
4. Voice

04

THE OFFERING

Because the customer and their expectations for amazing experiences have changed, the core offering you deliver must begin to reflect these new norms.

1. Experience
2. BI Built-In
3. Subscriptions
4. Internet of Things
Connectivity

05

THE ORGANIZATION

And finally, because basically everything about your customer, their expectations, their experiences, and the entire universe you live in have changed, your organization has to change to not only keep up, but stay in front.

1. Small is the New Big
2. Ecosystem
3. Social Good
4. Culture & Content
5. Brand Office

It is no coincidence that the opening trends around core customer behaviors connect with and amplify the impact of others throughout this report. We see an unavoidable and hugely influential connection between the modern organization, shifting customer behaviors, and everything in between.

Yes, responding to these trends in a modular way or taking easy wins can add value to your organization.

The trick to capitalizing on this customer-centric connection is developing a strategic, focused, and comprehensive strategy for brand transformation.

Whether it is dedicating more internal resources, investing in external support, or simply educating yourself on the interconnected nature of these trends—a step towards a game-changing strategy begins with understanding and acting on the shifting business climate as its driven by evolutions in consumer needs.

Innovation Protocol is a full-service strategic brand consulting and design firm based in Los Angeles, with offices in New York and San Francisco. We serve innovators—those ready to transform their businesses and reinvigorate their industries.

Our services include brand strategy, brand design, market research, brand activation, as well as corporate and academic speaking engagements.

Drop us a note. We'd love to talk trends, your brand, and the bright future ahead.

Phone: 646.783.9403

Email: info@innovationprotocol.com

**INNOVATION
PROTOCOL**

