# CREATIVITY VS. EVERYTHING

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# CREATIVITY VS.
# THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital creative used to be a novelty, but now it's ubiquitous. In the attention economy, it's harder than ever to compete and stand out. But understanding what you're up against and overhauling your creative processes can help you infuse your work with creativity and humanity.

**Three ways to optimize your team for the creative tasks of the future**

1. **Move from reactive understanding to futurecasting.** Future creative teams will need specialists who know their own field inside and out, as well as how to imagine how disparate pieces of tech can combine to create wild new ideas.

2. **Move from handoffs to iteration.** A creative brief can only take you so far. We live in a world of fast turns and iteration, and creative teams and their processes must reflect that.

3. **Move from two-person teams to the Trifecta model.** Traditionally, creative teams work in pairs. Adding a tech-focused third team member—a data scientist, social strategist, developer, or tech planner—can help creatives build work for today's digital-first world.

**"An idea can turn to dust or magic, depending on the talent that rubs against it."**

- Bill Bernbach, founder of DDB

# CREATIVITY VS. THE CONTENT SURPLUS

It's never been harder for a brand's creative to stand out.

Digital creative used to be a novelty, now it's ubiquitous. We live in what economists call "the attention economy" — a surplus of information equals a scarcity of attention. "Ten years ago if you wanted to increase traffic and leads, the formula was simple: publish more content," wrote Janessa Lantz on ThinkGrowth.org. "Today, the equation isn't so neat. What do traffic and leads represent after all? Attention. And what is more rare, more scarce, more valuable than attention?"

The bad news: If your creative can't compete with the today's political scandal, BTS and the Kardashians, and the latest TikTok memes, then your creative is no good.

The good news: Understanding what you're up against and overhauling your creative processes can help you stand out.

The key: **infusing your digital creative with creativity and humanity**.

## HUMAN TO THE CORE

WE's Brands in Motion global study seeks to quantify what consumers and B2B decision-makers in eight global markets think about brands, industries and the trends shaping our world. We've talked to 80,000 people over the past three years. New in 2020? A push for brands to be more human.

Consumers are moving toward a more holistic understanding of the role technology and brands play in their lives. More than ever, they're looking for products and services that slot seamlessly into their lives, and that reflect them as human beings. A donut shop can't afford to just be a donut shop — it must source sustainable ingredients, cater to dietary restrictions, hire from local communities, have a great story and

be available through a wide range of delivery apps. And if it's not, then there's another donut shop down the street that does all that and more. In this climate, brands can no longer simply provide solutions — they must provide meaning. That goes double for creative. Creative is consumers' window into your brand's story. If they can't see your humanity through your creative, where *can* they see it?

The problem is that most brands are caught in a tech arms. They're pulling money away from creative budgets and human solutions and reallocating to optimizations and automation. They're geared for efficiency rather than humanity, and that's leading to digital creative that all looks alike.

**49%** of business professionals are more selective about the content they consume now compared with a year ago.

# CREATIVITY VS. THE SEA OF SAMENESS

If you've ever booked a flight on your phone, you know that booking services all look the same. So do banking apps. So do food delivery apps. Some sports leagues use the same app solution for every team and just swap out logos and colors.

There's good reason for this. Customer experience (CX) is so similar across the board because brands work hard to understand what makes good CX. "We're really living in a golden age for customer experience," says Ray Page, executive vice president of WE's Digital & Experience Technology team for North America. "Good CX used to be a differentiator, but now mobile-first thinking and A/B testing the hell out of how users move through apps have just made everything easier to use. What we're seeing less of is people connecting with these interfaces on a human level."

And it's not just CX that's creating this sea of sameness. The ocean of user behavior data has led to optimizations across all kinds of creative work:
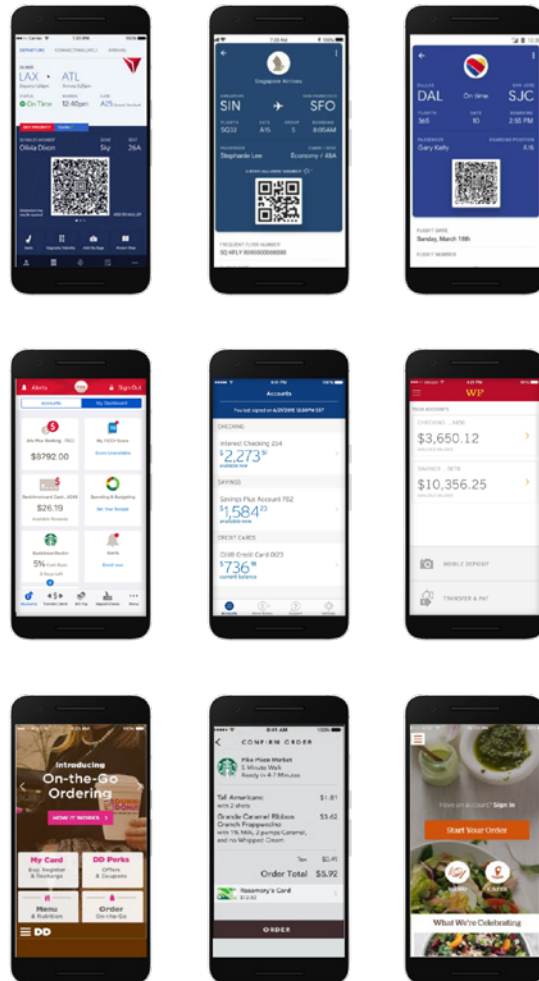
**" People aren't connecting with these interfaces on a human level. "**

- Ray Page, EVP of WE's Digital & Experience Technology team for North America

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## Optimizing Movie Posters

A movie poster needs to communicate a lot: the name of the movie, stars, the movie's genre and tone — and it has to do it all in a split second. Market research has identified useful patterns to do this, which means a lot of posters rely on the same handful of optimizations.
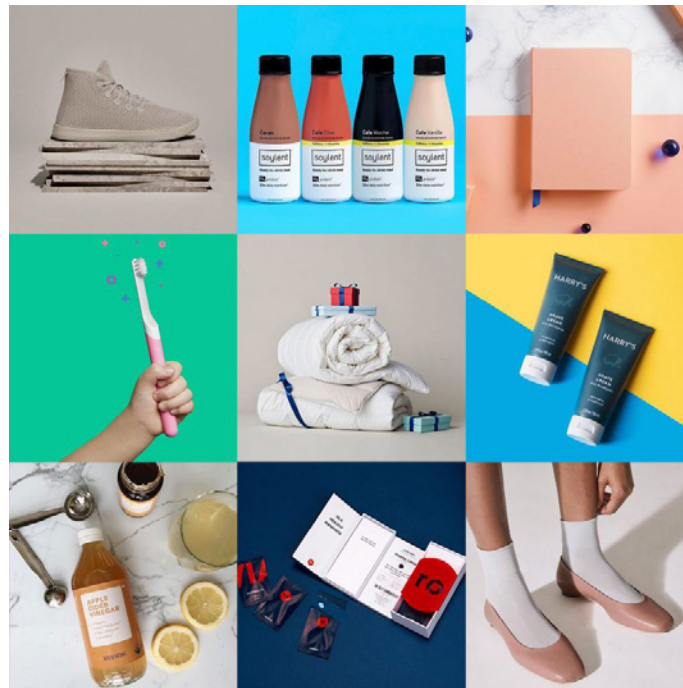


*Image courtesy of The Wrap*

## Optimizing Headlines

Sensational always sells. The rise of social platforms led to publishers weaponizing attention-grabbing headlines to earn traffic. Think "One weird trick," "You won't believe what happens next," "When you read these five facts, your jaw will drop," etc.

## Optimizing Ad Creative

Instagram has given direct-to-consumer brands an invaluable platform, but its format and algorithm have led to countless effective but visually similar ads — simple product on a bold background.



*Image courtesy of InVision*

## Optimizing Music

Artists have altered their music to fit the medium for as long as recording technology has existed. Now they're shortening their songs and frontloading hooks to maximize user attention on streaming platforms like Spotify. Others are writing seconds-long "meme-worthy" beats in an attempt to go viral on TikTok.

# TL;DR

We've gotten so good at optimizing our creative that optimization is now less of a competitive advantage than creative execution. Except for market size, creative execution is by far the most effective ROI multiplier of digital advertising — well over optimization factors like audience targeting:

| Position | Factor | Profit Multiplier |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Market Size | 16.00 |
| 2 | Creative Execution | 10.00 |
| 3 | Budget-Setting and Allocation | 2.00 |
| 4 | Variable Media Costs | 1.60 |
| 5= | Laydown | 1.10 |
| 5= | Media Multiplier | 1.10 |
| 7 | Brand Life Cycle | 1.08 |
| 8= | Quality Viewing | 1.05 |
| 8= | Task | 1.05 |
| 10 | Audience | 1.04 |

| Position | Factor | Profit Multiplier 2014 |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Market/Brand Size + Share | 18.00 |
| 2 | Creative — Tagging, Ad Length | 12.00 |
| 3 | Budget-setting across Geographies | 5.00 |
| 4 | Budget-setting across Portfolios | 3.00 |
| 5 | Multimedia Campaigns | 2.50 |
| 6 | Budget-setting across Variants | 1.70 |
| 7 | Cost and Product Seasonality | 1.60 |
| 8 | Product vs. Equity vs. Season | 1.40 |
| 9 | Laydown (of over time) | 1.15 |
| 10 | Target Audience | 1.10 |

It's a Catch-22: We live in a world where optimization is mandated, but where creative execution is a stronger success indicator. We are all solving the same problems, using the same people and partners, building off the same technology platforms, and designing for the same devices.

**What's a creative to do?**

**Infuse these tech solutions with humanity and emotion because when you do, you can create behavioral change and loyalty.**

# DIGITAL CREATIVE THAT'S HUMAN TO THE CORE

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What does the perfect confluence of tech platform and creative brand storytelling look like? Here are three examples.

## 01 NIKE+ RUN CLUB APP

Nike's Nike+ Run Club app built a loyal following of casual and diehard runners over the years through smart sharing options, inspirational creative and an app with emotional storytelling baked in. In 2016, Nike redesigned the app and stripped out many of the community features.

Despite the fact that the app's core functionality hadn't changed significantly, runners took to social media to demand their old Nike+ Run Club features. On the App Store, its rating plunged from 4.5 stars to just 1.5. One publication called the update "a complete redesign for marketing droids by marketing droids." The functionality was table stakes — the human touches were the competitive differentiator that made the audience fall in love with Run Club.

It took years for Nike to regain the goodwill it lost in the 2016 redesign, and it did it largely by rebuilding and expanding the community and personalization features the redesign stripped out. Users liked the app's functionality, but they loved how it made their runs into an emotional and communal experience.

## 02 REXONA'S GERAK

When Indonesian consumers buy personal care products, they buy based on the lowest price. Rexona, a sporty deodorant brand by Unilever, is all about getting its customers moving — its ads are full of young Indonesians golfing, dancing and having fun.

Its dedication to movement is why it launched Gerak, a mobile app designed to help people of limited mobility. Many Indonesians are living with some sort of handicap, and only 7% of roads in the capital city, Jakarta, have sidewalks. It's a tough city to get around on crutches or in a wheelchair. Rexona's Gerak is a voice-activated chatbot app that helps Southeast Asians find handicap-accessible restaurants, banks, pedestrian bridges and more with a clean, convenient app.

It was a brand awareness play that was a perfect pairing of a tech solution and a human-focused piece of brand storytelling. Rexona found a market segment nobody was talking to and won their hearts and minds with impeccable creative execution.

**On a lifetime value basis, emotionally connected customers are more than twice as valuable as highly satisfied customers.**

## 03 AIRBNB'S "LIVE THERE"

In 2016, Airbnb urged its users to not just visit places, but "Live There" like locals. The campaign spanned TV spots, digital, experiential and print creative, but its most fascinating activation was the updated Airbnb app.

Running alongside and interspersed with its standard search and booking functionality, in-app content offered users a local, super-personalized take on key cities. Looking for the best brasserie in Le Marais? There's a local guide for that. Want East Village nightlife and a good route for a morning run to beat your hangover? Airbnb's user-generated content can tell you.

This was brilliant for two reasons. First, it further differentiated Airbnb from its competition — hotel chains — by providing a lifestyle experience hotels simply can't. Staying at the Hilton in Tokyo isn't the same as staying in an artist's apartment. Second, it shifted the narrative from "where do you want to go?" to "how do you want to live?" and opened up brand new conversations with Airbnb's customers — and it did it through unparalleled integration between content and its existing platform.

**60%** of loyal customers use words like **love, happy** and **adore** when talking about their favorite brands.

# CREATIVITY VS.
# THE WAY WE WORK NOW

Digital creative with a human core is the exception rather than the rule. Too often, a creative team's ability to tell an exciting brand story is compromised by factors outside of their control — project managers can forget to loop in legal early on, tech teams might mandate a white label solution that isn't reflective of the brand, and review cycles with busy stakeholders might make building something that speaks to the here-and-now current moment impossible.

So, how do we optimize for creativity rather than efficiency? By building processes that equip us for the creative tasks of the future.

## 01 FROM REACTIVE UNDERSTANDING TO FUTURECASTING

Data-driven creative is the story of the past few years — creative teams have unprecedented amounts of information at their fingertips to determine what works and what doesn't. But right now, most teams are optimized to react to data rather than proactively optimize for future possibilities.

"You have to invest in creativity to set yourself up for the future," says Page. "If a client asks, 'Can you build me a chatbot experience,' and you don't have a team member with voice experience, you're already behind the curve."

Predicting the future means bringing in specialists who not only cultivate a deep understanding of their own fields, but are smart enough to see how disparate pieces of tech can come together to create wild new combinations. That's how American Greetings was able to show up at SXSW 2019 with an attraction that let visitors build "analog GIFs" based on 19th century motion picture technology.

This decade will see the definition of creative teams expand to include skillsets of all sorts. The teams of the future will be bigger, broader and more specialized. Creative activations will become more complex — employing drone operators, roboticists, VR/AR designers, and machine learning specialists as well as the traditional writers, designers, videographers and developers.

But it's not just about roles and disciplines, it's about team shape and team process.

# 47% of jobs in developed nations will vanish in the next 25 years.

## 02 FROM HANDOFFS TO ITERATION

In December 2019, Peloton released an advertisement that featured a (very fit) young woman who receives an exercise bike for Christmas. Her over-the-top enthusiasm and the sexist undertones were out of step with the post-#MeToo era, and critics and social media commentators had a field day.

The social media mockery peaked on Dec. 3. On Dec. 6, Ryan Reynolds released an advertisement for his gin brand, Aviation, featuring the same actress. In the Aviation ad, she sits, stunned with her friends and downs martinis — it's the night-out-with-the-girls B side of the Peloton ad, the moment you realize your horrible husband passive aggressively bought you an exercise bike for Christmas, and it's very funny.

Imagine the creative process for this ad: It was greenlit, written, shot, edited and released in a matter of days. Can your agency do that?

This highlights a truth that's hard for a lot of creative professionals to hear:

**The creative brief isn't always the best place to start.**

Iteration and fast turns better reflect the world we live in, and our processes need to reflect it, too. When you're reacting to up-to-the-minute trending topics, which works better: a detailed brief and a weekslong review cycle, or approving creative with a quick series of texts while your client is between meetings? Successful teams make planning and strategy a team sport.

We're guessing the Aviation Gin ad was made that way — one person scraping up a budget, one calling casting agencies to track down the "Peloton girl," one frantically trying to ring up Ryan Reynolds. That level of responsiveness will become our new normal.
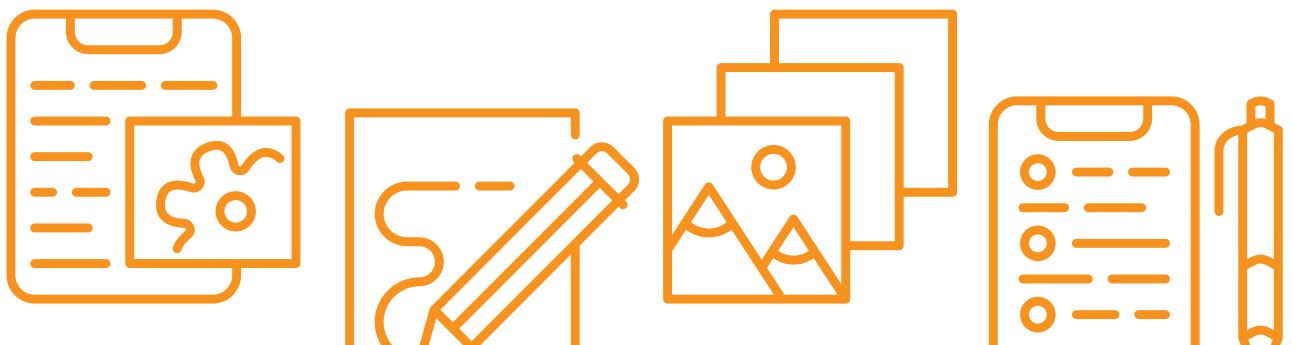
## 03 FROM THE TRADITIONAL MODEL TO THE TRIFECTA MODEL

Even in today's world we still see creative teams work in pairs — an art director and a writer, a designer and a developer. They read the brief, strategize, create and turn in a creative product. Agency models haven't changed on a broader scale since the Mad Men days, and they're not well adapted to the 21st century.

More often than not, creative teams are siloed away from people who understand the platforms and digital systems they're creating for. Pairing the traditional creative team duo with a data scientist, social strategist, developer or tech planner from the very beginning is the heart of the Trifecta model.

A technologist working with creatives — iterating with them, weighing in, educating them on the ins and outs of how the tech works — leads to creative output that won't have to be compromised. No more square pegs in round holes. No more digital creative that looks the same as everyone else's.

And having a techie weaving data-driven iteration into the creative process leads to stronger outcomes. Remember Airbnb's "Live There" campaign? That was inspired by an insight gleaned from user data: 86% of Airbnb customers want to live more like a local when they travel.

No more square pegs in round holes. No more digital creative that looks the same as everyone else's.

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# CREATIVITY VS.
# THE CONCLUSION

It's an exciting time for creative teams, but a challenging one. On one hand, they're being asked to achieve bigger results on smaller budgets. On the other, there's more opportunity than ever to build groundbreaking projects across channels, disciplines and media.

But they can't create next-generation content with last-generation processes. Your brand must be willing to work differently to be the signal in the noise. As an independent agency, WE has the flexibility to overhaul our processes, team shape and offering to better reflect the world we live in today — we adapted the Trifecta Model in 2019. We work differently, and that larger perspective helps us understand what makes content stand out.
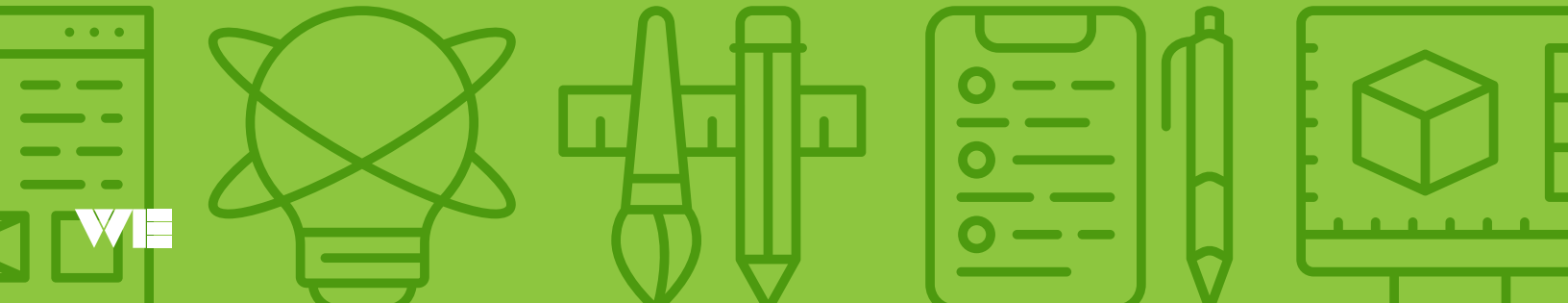
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# Reach out to WE to learn more about charting a course through the sea of sameness.

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