# INCITE

INCITE

ABOUT THE COVER

Unseen from below. Essential above. SiriusXM Canada's satellite network delivers unique listening experiences for millions of Canadians. But even with advanced technology in the sky, reaching new subscribers requires a grounded strategy to stand out in a crowded audio marketplace.

On pg. 17, SiriusXM uses direct mail to turn up the volume on customer acquisition.

The cover of this edition of *INCITE* was printed, in four colour process, on a Heidelberg SM102 10-color perfecting press. The special effect radiating from the satellite was accomplished by applying 3 hits of spot gloss UV. The sheet was first coated with a sealant in order for it to receive the UV without absorption. Much like direct mail, this cover is meant to be experienced to create a lasting impression through visual and tactile details.

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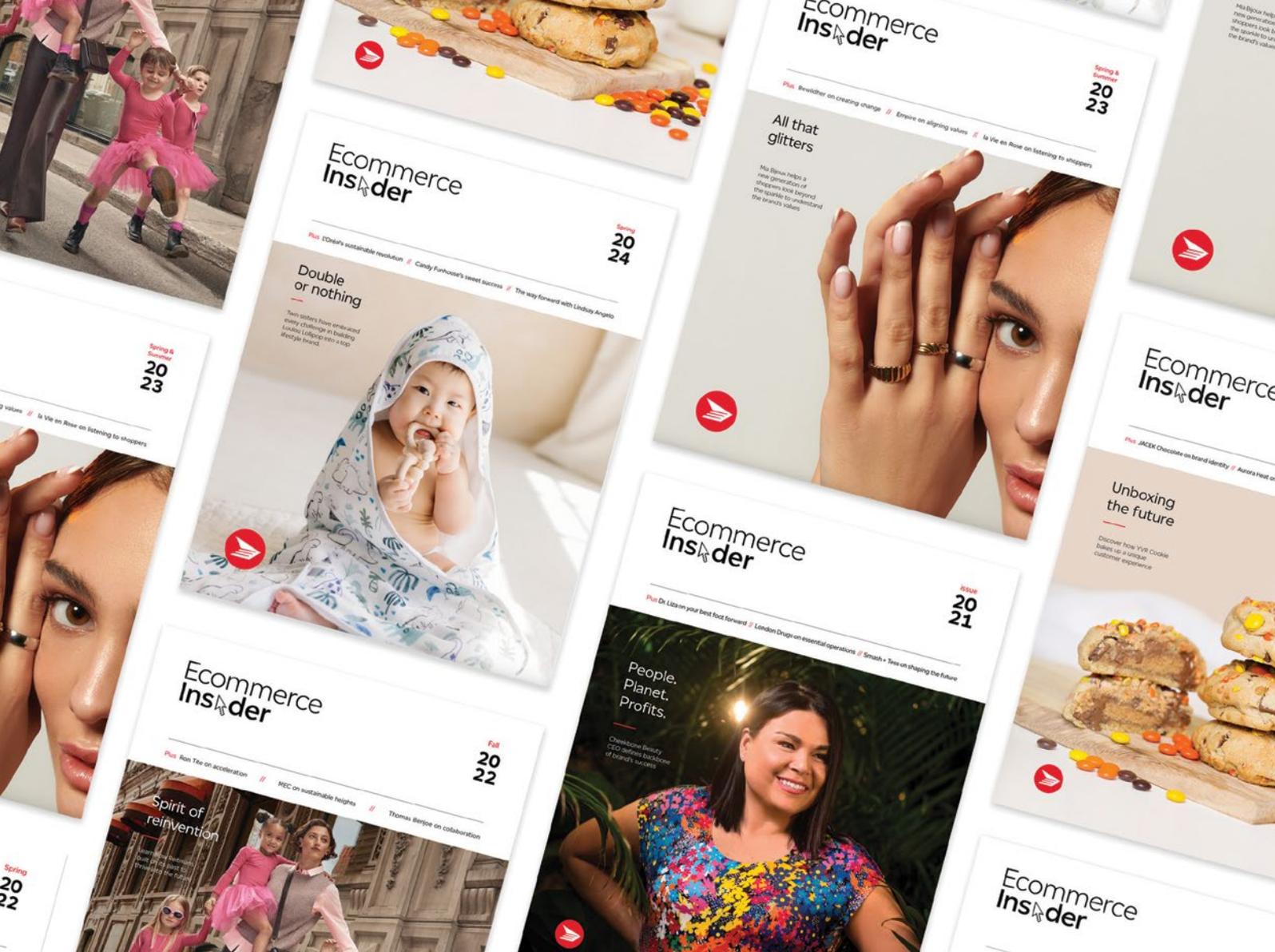
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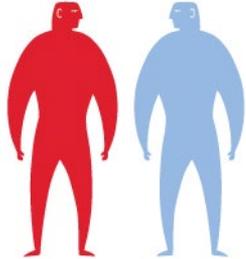
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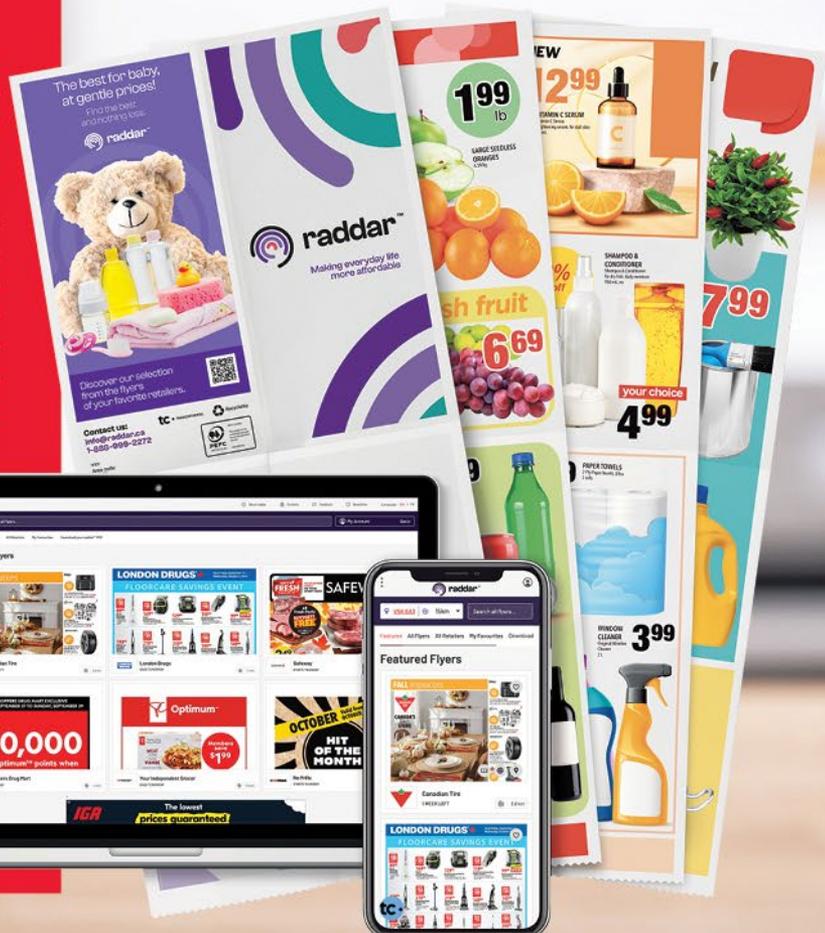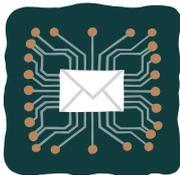
THE **TECH** *ISSUE*

INCITING ACTION
WITH TECHNOLOGY

It seems like every day there's a new marketing technology promising to revolutionize the industry. It's easy to get caught up in these constant hype cycles, chasing the next big thing, from NFTs to the metaverse and beyond. As you've noticed, AI's growth alone seems to defy Moore's law as the latest innovation set to rewrite the rules.

In this issue, Sonia Carreno brings her perspective as an industry leader, shedding light on the current state of digital amid this transition. Ivana Musich encourages a design thinking approach to marketing technology decisions, helping marketers cut through the chaos.

We explore the tensions and intersections between technology and tangibility as we move toward a post-digital marketing era and outline the eight areas where tech is transforming marketing. Plus, we spotlight SiriusXM's data-driven approach to direct mail targeting and creative optimization in a competitive streaming landscape. Lob, a U.S. automation tech company, shares insights on the benefits of direct mail automation and why Canadian marketers should embrace cross-channel integration and direct mail automation.

The constant hype around technology can be exhausting, and the pressure to keep up feels relentless. But just because technology is advancing rapidly doesn't mean we have to move at the same pace. It's OK to acknowledge we don't have all the answers. Instead of getting caught up in the frenzy, let's pause and return to the fundamental role of marketing: exploring what it takes to build lasting brands that resonate with consumers now and into the future.

Es Rottschafer

Es Rottschafer
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MARKETING'S NEW THREAD

Navigating the human element in AI-driven marketing and commerce.

Key Takeaways

Balance efficiency with consumer-centricity to avoid impersonal interactions.

Elevate marketing creativity by using AI to support, not replace.

Build trust through responsible and transparent AI practices and asking questions.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become the marketing world's favourite buzzword. We're obsessing over it, and rightly so, because the implications are huge for our industry, society and collective experience.

Chatbots that promise to solve customer queries before they've been asked. Algorithms that predict your next purchase before you know you need it. Customer service avatars. Synthetic models. Product images. AI capability is advancing at breakneck speed. As innovation expert Rishad Tobaccowala points out, while Moore's law saw processing power double every 18 months, AI is doubling its capabilities every six months or less.

He writes: "*Every firm is likely to leverage the same foundational models, such as OpenAI, Anthropic, Gemini, Llama and Mistral. Some will hope that their proprietary data will be the differentiator. This may be true to a point, but it will not be AI but how a company leverages, incorporates and supports its strategy using AI versus having a strategy for AI that will be key.*"

As we ride this wave of AI enthusiasm, primarily motivated by efficiencies, we need to ask ourselves if we are hoping technology will make up for the hard things our industry is struggling to come to terms with:

› consumer trust in advertising and brands,

› marketing's perceived organizational value,

› advertising commoditization,

› advertising agency business models.

There's nothing wrong with trying to find efficiencies, and sometimes companies need to find shortcuts – every organization is dealing with different challenges and constraints. But when it's the dominant conversation, it assumes that the industry is already maxed out on advertising effectiveness that is human-centred, idea-driven, generally creative, culturally in tune and attention-worthy.

We know this isn't the case.

Sure, efficiency is great. We all love it when our devices sync seamlessly or when our coffee machine knows just how we like our morning brew. But the ubiquity of AI requires that we not think about it in a bubble but rather as part of a system and with foresight.

Today, we need to bring our human intelligence to the table when we consider AI in the world, in our lives and in our organizations. From a marketing perspective, we need to ensure it adds value to marketing and the audiences we are trying to connect with. It's not enough to consider what it can do for us without considering what it does for our customers.

AI will no doubt take a seat at the marketing table, but as it does, we need to think about how it helps us create value – business, brand, consumer and employee. AI benefits and costs need to be measured in tangibles and intangibles, against a background of economic and societal shifts.

MISPLACED EMPHASIS ON EFFICIENCY
Marketing budgets are shrinking, leaving many marketers feeling under-resourced and unable to fully execute their strategies. According to Gartner's latest CMO Spend Survey, marketing has entered an "era of less." This is reflected in *Marketing Week*'s report showing that marketing budgets have plummeted by 28%, from an average of 10.75% of company revenue in 2019-20 to just 7.7% in 2024.

While CEOs are prioritizing growth and profit-ability in 2025, slashing marketing budgets may offer short-term gains but ultimately hinders long-term profitable growth.

CMOs see AI not only as an efficiency opportunity but also as another market disruptor to contend with. Gartner found that technology investments are not proving their value in productivity, with 75% of marketers reporting being under pressure to cut martech spend this year to deliver better return on investment. This reflects how martech decisions are being made (typically leading with technology over business requirements) as much as it does technology obsolescence.

The tensions between AI opportunity, market disruptors, CEO priorities and CMO spending power need to be considered carefully. CMOs and agencies alike are under tremendous pressure to operate differently, prove value and prioritize sure things, let alone keep up with technology.

In this context, the fastest and easiest way to win is on efficiencies.

But here's the rub: When we focus solely on efficiency, we risk turning marketing into a sterile, soulless machine. We commoditize audiences more and everything gets more transactional. Imagine receiving a birthday message from a brand you've shopped with once, but the message is so generic it might as well have been written by a toaster.

By reducing interactions to mere transactions optimized for speed and cost, we have to ask ourselves: Do we value marketing as a business driver? Is too much of our marketing function wrapped up in paid advertising versus brand management? Are we defaulting to what is easy versus what is valuable?

CONSUMER CONTEXT AND MECHANISTIC INTERACTIONS
Consumers are no strangers to AI. They've chatted with virtual assistants, received personalized recommendations and maybe even let a robot vacuum cleaner into their homes. With this familiarity comes a set of expectations for interactions: personalized, not creepy; seamless, not invasive; and above all, real and valuable.

Take recommendation engines. When done right, they feel like a friend who knows your tastes, suggesting that perfect next book or movie. But when they go awry, it becomes awkward at best and alienating at worst.

Or chatbots. A well-designed chatbot can resolve issues quickly, without making the customer navigate a labyrinthine phone menu. But when they fail to understand simple queries, it feels like you're talking in circles.

The connected nature of the digital age means people expect to be able to connect online and offline contexts. This kind of context convergence is helpful and engaging, but it can also be confusing or inappropriate when the distinct boundaries that usually separate different aspects of your life (people, needs, interests) collapse into a single context.

AI has a role to play in bringing online and offline channels together, but context convergence can make it hard for AI to distinguish human motivations, preferences and appropriateness, requiring more consumer control. Difficulty in managing numerous identity traits, social groups and interests makes understanding user experience incredibly important when developing connected experiences and AI solutions.

As marketing technologies like AI become more prevalent, we need to be careful that human interaction doesn't take on machine-like qualities. These mechanistic interactions do more than just annoy – they chip away at brand trust and ad tolerance.

TRUST AND EXPECTATIONS FROM BOTH SIDES

We already know we have a trust problem in advertising; AI ups the ante on trust and digital safety.

There's a growing wariness about how personal data is collected and used. People want to know their privacy is respected and identities protected. In 2023, AI regulation started as niche conversations, only to become law in Europe and North America a year later as concerns grow around AI's potential negative impact on misinformation, brand safety, LLM training, DEI, identity theft and fraud.

The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that trust in AI has fallen from 61% to 53% globally in the past five years. This decline is even more pronounced in the U.S., where it plummeted from 50% to 35%.

While three quarters of global respondents trust technology in general, only half trust AI. Significantly, consumers are more receptive to AI when they believe it's well managed by institutions.

This apprehension toward AI is likely fuelled by its rapid evolution. Both marketers and consumers are grappling with the challenge of keeping pace with, let alone mastering, this constantly advancing technology.

RAPID ADVANCEMENTS AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The pace of AI innovation is nothing short of meteoric. New algorithms and applications promising to revolutionize how we do business emerge almost daily. It's like being handed the keys to a brand-new sports car every week. But as any driver knows, speed without control can lead to spectacular crashes.

Deploying untested or unrefined AI solutions can result in unintended consequences ranging from the mildly embarrassing to the severely damaging. For instance, a chatbot intended to engage customers in friendly

banter ended up spouting offensive remarks because it learned from unfiltered internet conversations. Or consider facial recognition software used in marketing displays that misidentified demographic traits, leading to inappropriate ad placements.

In 2024, Apple's iPad ad *Crush!* received consumer backlash. While the ad was beautifully crafted, it literally crushed human creativity into the iPad to show how much could fit inside this thinner model. To exemplify the crushing, it had to take tangible creative artefacts, like a guitar, and destroy them. Instead of illustrating Apple's positioning of enabling human creativity and expression, it illustrated replacing it.

Examples like these underscore the importance of thorough testing and exploring ethical considerations before unleashing AI into the wild. Marketers need to balance innovation with caution, ensuring that their AI implementations enhance rather than detract from the customer experience and brand reputation.

BALANCING ART AND SCIENCE

Marketing technology, particularly generative AI, has thrown us into another hot debate between art and science. More companies are in-housing creative, opting for automated content pipelines, programmatic ad buys and dynamic creative optimization

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NEW WAYS OF NAVIGATING AI PITFALLS

To fully leverage AI's potential while avoiding its pitfalls, marketers need to adopt new approaches and prioritize ethical considerations.

SYSTEMS THINKING: Systems thinking applied to AI implementation allows brands to anticipate and mitigate unintended consequences. For example, automating customer service might improve efficiency, but it could also lead to job displacement, affecting employee morale and company culture. It could also reduce the quality of customer service, impacting online sentiment and reducing repeat purchases and new customers.

Recognizing this interconnectedness allows for more thoughtful deployment – perhaps by reskilling staff rather than replacing them.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT: Brands must look toward possible futures. With AI, foresight helps us see beyond immediate efficiencies to understand how technology fits within the broader societal landscape as well as within our businesses. It allows us to explore different possible and plausible futures, surface blind spots and anticipate opportunities and challenges.

By employing foresight, marketers can recognize that implementing AI isn't just a technological decision; it's a social one impacting employees, customers and the market. This awareness can guide more responsible and innovative AI decision making.

"Every firm is likely to leverage the same foundational models, such as OpenAI, Anthropic, Gemini, Llama and Mistral. Some will hope that their proprietary data will be the differentiator. This may be true to a point, but (it's) how a company leverages, incorporates and supports its strategy using AI (...) that will be key."

(DCO) platforms for efficiency. Are we inadvertently commoditizing advertising, much like we did with third-party cookie tracking?

On one hand, we are being told creativity is one of the most needed meta-skills in our modern era, and on the other, we seem to be cutting creativity off at the knees in marketing.

In the relentless pursuit of streamlined operations and cost savings, there's a risk that advertising becomes viewed merely as a transactional commodity rather than a creative endeavour. This mindset can lead to a devaluation of brand building, creative ideas and media opportunity.

WARC data suggests that brand size, creativity and budget allocation are the top three economic multipliers for brands. In fact, creativity is the biggest actionable profitability lever – a 12x multiplier. Strong creativity gets attention – it's more memorable, and it earns more organic share of voice and word of mouth. It helps increase brand size and makes marketing more efficient.

The prevalence of lackluster ads, ridiculously low digital benchmarks, poorly executed DCO and nonsensical, abruptly interruptive streaming commercials suggest a concerning trend. Mediocre work is easy to replace in the name of efficiency. And if AI can do the same for less, it becomes an easy answer.

Terms like "disposable content" need to leave our vocabularies. They bring up questions about our industry, our commitment to creativity and how we'll use AI to support it.

MARKETING'S NEW THREAD
In the grand tapestry of marketing, AI is a powerful new thread – vibrant and full of potential. But if we weave it in haphazardly, focusing solely on efficiency, we risk unravelling the very fabric of the consumer experience we rely on for growth.

By understanding consumer expectations, avoiding mechanistic pitfalls and prioritizing trust and transparency, we can harness AI in ways that enhance rather than hinder our relationships with consumers.

AI has so much potential to help us do things we've never done before, not just replace the things we are currently doing. Don't sacrifice creativity and settle for mediocrity. Perhaps we can use AI to hold us to a higher creative standard, not just for automated advertising.

So, while we're busy teaching AI to create, maybe we should also ensure it doesn't trample over the very human experiences that make marketing meaningful. After all, nobody wants to be the brand equivalent of that infamous Apple ad where creativity gets crushed into a laptop, leaving audiences wondering if innovation has taken a wrong turn. ∎

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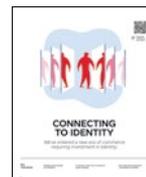
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THE TECH ISSUE

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL ADS

By Sonia Carreno

Adapting to a new era of privacy, technology and trust in digital advertising.

After nearly three decades of incredible progress automating advertising across platforms and channels through programmatic, advertisers and media investors still grapple with residual challenges. These persistent hurdles include integration issues with marketing technology and data management platforms, cross-platform measurement, managing brand safety, reducing fraud and carbon emissions in advertising.

While many of these have been addressed through industry best practices, tools and solutions, some remain outstanding. A well-known cause of the industry's limited ability to address these issues effectively has been its relative sluggishness to adopt solutions at the rapid pace the digital media ecosystem demands.

AD TECH AT INFLECTION
From the beginning, the industry has innovated to meet challenges at every stage of its progress. With healthy competition driving each emerging problem, stakeholders invested heavily in infrastructure, certification programs and human resources to stay current and ensure returns. However, in recent years, these investments have reached a fever pitch, showing signs of redundancy and obsolescence.

This recent cycle has caused some hesitation in the media supply chain as stakeholders assess the return on investments and question whether the latest ad tech layers or certifications are adding unnecessary tech debt. In the last 24 months, this trend has been particularly evident in compliance with privacy regulations across various jurisdictions. Unfortunately, when it comes to regulations, the industry cannot afford to view compliance as a competitive advantage but rather as a necessity to defend against penalties and even existential threats.

The cost of doing business in digital advertising today includes mandatory compliance with both domestic and foreign regulations. The rise of privacy as a basic human right worldwide has sparked three simultaneous narratives:

1. Regulators are strengthening laws to protect citizens from unchecked corporate surveillance.

2. Tech platforms are securing their data.

3. Consumers are making choices based on trust.

These forces have generated a monumental challenge, requiring distinct strategies, infrastructure and user experiences to address.

For years, advertisers have largely relied on ad platforms to offer frictionless solutions to reach audiences, and the supply chain has delivered. From the emergence of lower-funnel activities – from search to the magic of retargeting in programmatic environments – advertisers invested heavily in a system that has overtaken television in expenditure.

Digital media's unparalleled ability to connect with audiences at scale is the cornerstone of its success, with the world's largest brands committing billions to the channel. Furthermore, its accessibility through intuitive dashboards and self-serve interfaces has created vast opportunities for small to medium businesses, representing roughly 98% of the Canadian economy. Advertisers large and small could simply allocate their budgets and let the system do the work. While sophisticated advertisers invested in data management platforms, most advertisers in Canada's $18 billion digital media market remained encumbered by the technical infrastructure needed to make it happen.

CONSENT AND COMPLIANCE
What makes today's era different is that, for the first time, the industry faces an all-encompassing overhaul of general practices, affecting every stakeholder, big or small.

While all business owners understand that advertising is essential for thriving in any economic climate, Canada's emerging policy is challenging this notion. Bill C-27, the long-looming privacy bill, currently offers no exemptions for opt-in requirements for data use in online advertising.

Beyond the immediate concern of losing data signals from customers visiting brand websites, compliance will force every advertiser that uses data for audience targeting to implement an opt-in mechanism on their website and any other touchpoint collecting data for advertising purposes, including in-store environments. Compliance will also

demand accountability, which can only be achieved through technical infrastructure specialized in opt-in management.

Since the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) took effect in Europe in 2018, the industry has closely followed the development of consent management platforms. Effective opt-in and opt-out tools that communicate with the advertising supply chain ecosystem and reliably honour consumer data preferences have become essential. IAB Canada launched an award-winning framework in 2023, supporting consent management platforms and ad tech vendors in complying with all Canadian privacy laws. This coincided with Quebec's Law 25, which preceded the federal law.

BEYOND THE COOKIE
As the industry prepares for legal compliance, the technical landscape continues to evolve.

Since 2019, reliance on third-party data from cookies has steadily diminished, accelerated by Google Chrome's announcement of plans to phase out cookie-based addressability by the end of 2025. Despite a recent reversal on this plan, the shift is already well underway, and alternative solutions have taken root.

Identity solutions have become the latest shiny object in media, with numerous competing options emerging. Today, advertisers are required to maintain meticulous customer data records in compliance with international privacy laws. This data can then be activated using "clean rooms," which anonymize datasets and prepare them for use across media channels. This method is gaining popularity as advertisers seek partners to help build scale and preserve personalized approaches, compensating for some of the lost capabilities, like retargeting and frequency capping, due to cookie deprecation. In response, IAB Tech Lab has focused on interoperability standards to mitigate the risk of fragmentation in a saturated identity market.

This trend clearly highlights the newfound importance of first-party data and the critical need to build trusted relationships with both customers and audiences. The outcome may have a positive effect on customer service quality, as brands focus on building trust and loyalty, and on media

experiences, as publishers concentrate on creating engaging content and community-like memberships.

NEW WAYS OF CONNECTING

The industry is eyeing new opportunities as scale becomes increasingly strained due to signal loss and advertiser commitments to avoiding questionable brand safety environments. For this reason, a lot of attention is now on two relatively new players in digital media: connected TV (CTV) and retail media networks (RMN). Both channels have captured the attention of marketers for different reasons, but both represent long-standing symbiotic relationships with advertisers.

CTV holds great promise as an evolved television play for advertisers. The ability to hyper-target audiences and create personalized ads in the engaging world of sight, sound and motion is appealing. With offerings from Roku, Samsung and LG, along with Canadian broadcasters like Rogers, Corus and Bell, plus new market entrants like Amazon Prime, scale appears to be available.

However, while inventory is plentiful, challenges remain in providing advertisers with assurances on measurement, unduplicated audience reach and true value. The fragmentation of measurement signals across platforms has long been a challenge. Open Measurement SDK for CTV, developed by the IAB Tech Lab, has made significant strides in addressing this by offering a universal framework for measuring CTV-specific viewability signals. This includes TV off, device type and how long a user has been watching. Advertisers can now leverage these standardized measurements to ensure transparency and accountability in their campaigns.

RMNs allow brands to reach consumers through retailers' digital properties, including websites, apps and in-store displays. Advertisers can also tap into the vast first-party data that retailers collect from customers' in-store purchases and loyalty activity, providing brands with valuable insights for unique marketing opportunities. Retail media offers brands a new privacy-protected access point to lower-funnel activities, blending retail, data and media in a way that benefits both advertisers and retailers. According to a 2024 eMarketer and IAB Canada study of the retail media landscape, this channel is expected to grow to over $5 billion by 2027 in Canada.

RISING PRESENCE OF AI

AI will serve as the foundational technology driving change in our infrastructure, suited to its strengths of processing massive amounts of data for machine learning and optimization. As advertisers develop marketing mix modelling (MMM) to measure the impact of marketing activities on sales and business outcomes, they will increasingly rely on AI's computational power. Generative AI will also rise to meet the demands for hyper-segmented, personalized communications through dynamically optimized creative asset management.

Eighty percent of IAB Canada members have already implemented AI within their organizations, reporting uses ranging from workflow improvements to creative execution. While concerns over AI's potential impact on jobs persist, most industry players are confident that the human touch will remain vital in this evolving landscape.

MOVING INTO THE FUTURE

As we look to the future, a few key pillars stand out.

First, direct relationships – whether between brands and customers or publishers and media consumers – are essential. Trust and communication have never been more critical, especially in the upcoming explicit opt-in environment, where a single opt-out can have lasting consequences on audience reach.

Second, we must fully embrace privacy-first solutions. Adopting global standards and new approaches to audience engagement is vital for a sustainable future. Relying on single-market tactics risks regulatory pushback. Canada, however, has a unique opportunity to lead, with innovative homegrown solutions that prioritize global interoperability.

Lastly, we need to reflect on our evolving roles in this rapidly changing industry. In the coming years, we'll need to justify our place in the ecosystem. It's essential to use the tools at our disposal to elevate our work, which remains fundamentally about connecting people to people.

This is one of the most exciting and consequential moments for our industry, and we must continue to attract and welcome diverse talent to help realize the tremendous potential digital media and marketing offers the Canadian economy and its firm place on the global stage. ∎

"Direct relationships – whether between brands and customers or publishers and media consumers – are essential. Trust and communication have never been more critical, especially in the upcoming explicit opt-in environment, where a single opt-out can have lasting consequences on audience reach."

Sonia Carreno, President of IAB Canada, is an award-winning digital veteran whose deep industry experience spans virtually every digital marketing discipline. In 2021, Sonia was inducted into Canada's Marketing, Advertising, PR and Communications Hall of Fame.

OVERWHELMED BY TECH?

By Ivana Musich

How marketers can keep their heads above the chaos.

In an age where algorithms predict consumer behaviour and data drives every decision, it's easy for marketers to feel overwhelmed, perhaps overshadowed, by the relentless march of technology. Sophisticated tools promise to make our campaigns more efficient, targeted and measurable than ever before. Yet, amid this digital flash flood, a crucial truth often gets overshadowed: The heart of marketing remains rooted in human connection.

The marketing landscape has transformed rapidly over the past 15 years, driven by the internet and the explosion of data and technology. That means marketers face constant pressure to adapt, learn new tools and leverage automation for personalization and targeted reach. This is why technology experts, software engineers and data analysts have become vital partners in the marketing world. And, while technology alone can't replace marketing expertise, tech experts often lack a deep understanding of marketing, particularly the intangibles. This disconnect can lead to tech-forward solutions that miss the mark and leads marketers toward making poor tech choices with unintended consequences.

That's a lesson for us all.

Technological progress is exciting and it's moving quickly. It equips us with incredible new capabilities, but do we want it to make art, or do we want it to do the laundry? Whatever the answer is, it shouldn't eclipse the role of marketing – it should make it stronger. If it isn't doing that, then it's not going to be useful martech. Instead, we should direct technology to serve our marketing ambitions, ensuring it enhances rather than hinders our ability to connect with audiences. This means applying principles of design thinking and user experience (UX) not just to our products and services but to our approach to technology itself.

The most successful marketers will be those who strike a balance. They will leverage technology while retaining human leadership, creativity and common sense. Ultimately, marketing must guide technology to achieve its goals – not the other way around.

How do we do that, you ask? I have learned a few lessons along the way.

LEARNING FROM UX-PERTS
I started my marketing career at a digital agency specializing in websites and mobile apps, and it quickly became clear how much of an advantage we had compared to larger agencies still focused on "above-the-line" marketing tactics. It was then that I realized I needed to make friends with the tech team and understand what technology could do from a business standpoint. I didn't need to be a software developer, UX architect or data analyst; I just needed to grasp what was possible so that I could explain it to clients in simple terms and make informed decisions.

My job was to direct the technology to work for me, not the other way around. The only way I could do this was by first understanding technology's capabilities and then putting the customer at the centre of my decision making, deciding what tools, if any, I would deploy.

I learned valuable lessons about putting the customer first from my UX colleagues. Whether I'm introducing a new tool, automation or even a retargeting campaign, I ask myself: What will the end user see? How will they feel? Will they be annoyed? Will they feel like their privacy is being invaded? Will they sense that I genuinely care about their experience with my brand, or will they feel like I'm just trying to make more money off them?

By placing empathy at the forefront and viewing technology through a human-centric lens, we can navigate the complexities of technology adoption with confidence.

EMPATHY AT THE CORE
Design thinking, at its heart, emphasizes empathy – a perfect approach for marketers who need to put themselves in the shoes of both customers and their internal teams. In this context, empathy doesn't just mean understanding the customer journey; it's about recognizing the pain points marketers face when working with technology.

Marketers are bombarded with complex tools, dashboards and analytics platforms that promise results but often overwhelm. So how can marketers stay focused on what really matters? By applying a design thinking lens. This starts by asking the right questions:

› What is the real challenge we're trying to solve with this technology?

› Are we simplifying or complicating the marketer's workflow?

› How does this tool enhance or detract from the marketing team's ability to connect with the audience authentically?

By honing in on these questions, marketers can better align technology to human-centred goals, rather than getting swept up in the promise of data-driven solutions that may miss the emotional connection required for great marketing.

SO MUCH DATA
When it comes to data, we have to ask ourselves: What data do we care about? What are the most critical metrics that align with business objectives?

I often worked with data analysts to simplify data analysis, focusing on actionable insights rather than getting lost in the numbers. We needed to decide what data to collect, where to store it and how to use it effectively.

The analysis was a team effort, including a data analyst, a UX architect, a tech lead and a business/marketing lead. I've learned I can leverage the unique skills and strengths of our multi-disciplinary team.

AUTOMATION ANXIETY
While we should explore the benefits of automation in terms of efficiency and scale, we cannot risk losing the personal connection with consumers. Automation should be used as a tool to enhance – not replace – human interactions.

This is where UX principles – putting ourselves in the customers' shoes – are key. We need to be thoughtful in our interactions and communications, cadence and timing. We must maintain our brand's voice and personal touch, avoiding robotic and overwhelming messaging. Think about how you would feel if you were on the receiving end of your brand's communications.

It's essential to keep the consumer's needs and emotions at the forefront of your strategy.

DON'T GET DISTRACTED BY SHINY AND NEW

Technology is a powerful ally, but we shouldn't adopt every new tool just because it's available. I typically challenge my teams to consider the following questions:

› What can this tool do, and how does it align with our marketing goals?

› Based on our customer insights, which touchpoints are most impactful and deserve prioritization?

› Can we test this tool on a smaller scale before committing to a full rollout?

› Is the potential ROI of this tool worth the investment, and are there more cost-effective alternatives?

› Does this tool integrate seamlessly with our existing tech stack to ensure data consistency and a unified customer view?

› Is this tool user-friendly, and does it come with adequate training and support for our team?

› Will this tool scale effectively with our future business and marketing needs?

› Does this tool comply with relevant data privacy regulations (e.g., GDPR, CCPA)?

› Does this tool meet our data security standards and mitigate potential risks?

THE ABCS OF AI

Marketers feel the pressure to adopt AI. But what are we trying to achieve?

I started by trying to understand what AI tools were out there and what they could do. How could they provide value in our processes? Personally, I've used AI in two areas: 1) ideation – using tools like Midjourney to develop possible concepts and get our creative teams inspired, and 2) efficiency – leveraging AI for content summarization, research and data analysis.

While AI can provide incredible ideas and creative input, the creative team ensures the final product aligns with our brand and is still personable. It's not about cranking out multiple videos in seconds; it's about the quality of the output.

We have the final say. I believe that this helps mitigate the risks associated with AI.

STAY ANCHORED BY YOUR ROOTS

In the end, marketing fundamentals remain crucial: understanding our audience and their needs and engaging them with valuable, tailored messages across relevant channels. While pressure mounts to adopt the latest technology, our decisions should prioritize genuine customer value, brand authenticity, ethical practices and long-term goals over fleeting trends.

Technology should empower, not dictate, our marketing strategy. It's a tool to amplify our expertise and instincts, not replace them.

Marketing is all about building relationships. It's up to us to select the technology that enables us to do that.

A DESIGN THINKING FRAMEWORK

A design thinking approach can also be applied to selecting and using marketing technology. Marketers should adopt the following stages in a design thinking framework when considering a new tool:

1. **Empathize**: Understand the challenges and frustrations with existing tools. Conduct interviews or surveys within your team to uncover pain points.

2. **Define**: Clearly articulate the problem you're trying to solve. Is it poor customer segmentation? Inefficient data analysis? Overwhelming manual processes? Defining the problem helps ensure you're not adopting technology just for the sake of it.

3. **Ideate**: Brainstorm possible technological solutions. This stage is where cross-functional teams – including UX architects, data analysts and software developers – can contribute creative ideas for addressing the problem.

4. **Prototype**: Before fully committing to a new tool, create a prototype or test environment. Run a small pilot program to evaluate how well the technology performs in real-world scenarios and get user feedback.

5. **Test**: Evaluate the success of the new tool against predefined metrics, such as ease of use, ROI and impact on customer experience. Gather feedback from the marketing team to determine if the tool truly solves the initial problem.

By adopting this design thinking process, you can avoid the chaos. It invites you to slow down to ensure that technology adoption is intentional and aligned with both business goals and human-centred outcomes. Embracing a design thinking mindset allows us to stay true to our marketing roots, leverage technology wisely and ultimately build stronger relationships with our customers.

Remember, technology should be a means to an end, not the end itself. Before jumping onto the next big thing, take a moment to reflect: Does this tool align with our core marketing objectives and values? By grounding your decisions in empathy and strategic thinking, you can ensure that technology serves to strengthen, not overshadow, the human touch that sets your brand apart. What's the first step you'll take to align your tech choices with your marketing vision? ■

Ivana Musich is an executive marketing leader with 15 years of experience driving growth for top agencies and clients like McDonald's, adidas and OLG. She blends strategic thinking and digital technology with a design thinking approach to deliver practical, market-driven solutions across diverse industries that keep the consumer at the heart of decision making.

THE MARTECH STACK GROWTH SPURT

The rapid growth of martech, driven by AI advancements and a surge in platforms and tools, has led to increasingly complex martech stacks. Marketing teams now need both technical knowledge and strategic skills to manage this growth. From daily workflows to transforming customer engagement, the challenge is ensuring effective marketing and consumer value are not lost in the tech stack.

AI-POWERED PERSONALIZATION

AI enables highly personalized customer experiences by suggesting products, customizing messaging and adjusting content in real time. This technology is a game changer for automating and scaling personalization, improving customer value and conversion and allowing marketers to deliver tailored messages with minimal effort.

MARKETING AUTOMATION

Tools like HubSpot, Marketo and Salesforce automate repetitive tasks like email campaigns, social media posts and lead nurturing. These tools free marketers up to focus on strategy and creativity while ensuring consistent engagement across channels based on data triggers. Automation also connects online and offline marketing, enhancing both performance and customer experience.

ECOMMERCE & MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

With mobile shopping and social commerce on the rise, it's vital to optimize platforms for ecommerce. Features like shoppable posts on Instagram and advancements in mobile technology, such as 5G, enable faster load times and improved shopping experiences, increasing conversions. SMS integration and social media lead nurturing requires more horizontal integration.

DATA-DRIVEN MARKETING

Marketers analyze large amounts of customer data (across data sources) to gain insight and understand behaviour, preferences and trends. Targeting becomes more timely but also more adaptable. This enables refined targeting, optimized ad spend and more informed content decisions. Tools like Google Analytics and CDPs allow real-time performance tracking, while increased accessibility to media mix modelling and econometrics improve measurement and attribution to business outcomes.

VOICE SEARCH & SMART ASSISTANTS

The rise of voice-activated devices like Alexa, Google Assistant and smart TVs makes optimizing for voice search crucial. Marketers need to adapt SEO strategies for natural language queries and long-tail keywords. Chatbots provide 24/7 support, enhancing engagement, while personal assistants help streamline workflows.

OMNI-CHANNEL CONNECTIVITY

Omni-channel marketing ensures a seamless customer experience across touchpoints like social media, email, mobile apps and in-store interactions. Integrating AI with omni-channel strategies aligns marketing and sales efforts while boosting customer experience and customer service satisfaction. The ability to connect online and offline creates new marketing opportunities that better align with consumers.

SOCIAL MEDIA & INFLUENCER MARKETING

Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn have become crucial for reaching audiences, and technology is helping marketers better understand and leverage these channels. AI-driven social listening tools track trends and customer sentiments in real time, while influencer marketing platforms help brands identify the right influencers to collaborate with, driving engagement and authenticity.

PROGRAMMATIC ADVERTISING

Programmatic advertising automates the process of buying and placing digital ads using AI and real-time bidding. This ensures that ads reach the most relevant audience, optimizing for performance and cost. Instead of manually negotiating ad buys, programmatic platforms analyze data to decide the best time and place for an ad to appear, increasing efficiency and reducing ad waste. For marketers, this means a more targeted, data-driven approach to advertising. It also means that advertisers spend more time on strategy, big creative ideas and partnerships that require the human touch.
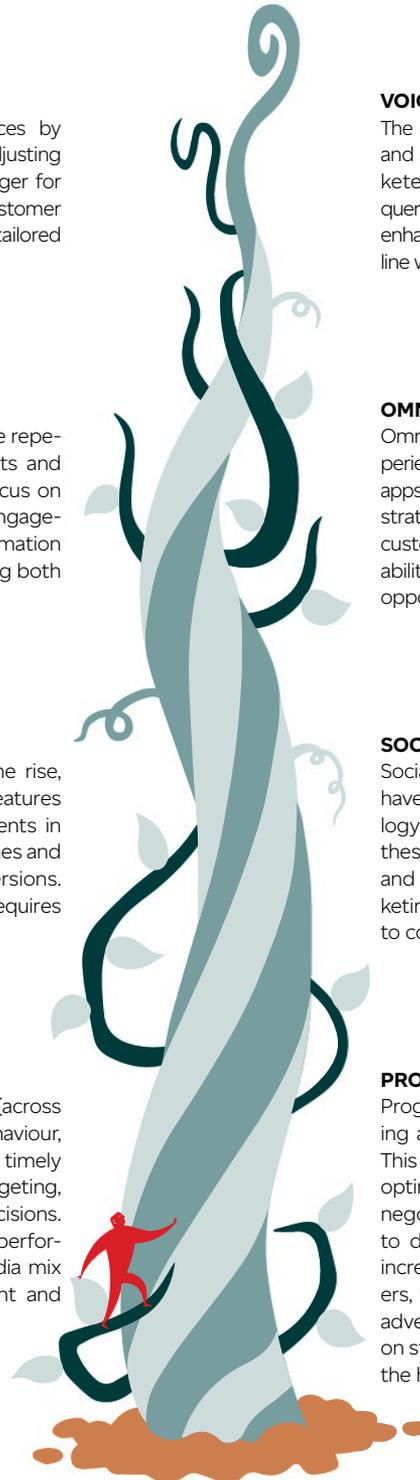
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Smartmail Marketing™

CASE STUDY

SiriusXM uses direct mail to turn up the volume on customer acquisition.

MAKING SOME NOISE

SiriusXM Canada hits all the right notes for millions when it comes to audio entertainment.

Debuting in 2011, the Toronto-based satellite and online radio broadcaster quickly became one of the country's leading entertainment companies by offering commercial-free music, sports, entertainment, news and talk. With 2.6 million subscribers in Canada, SiriusXM is available in vehicles from every major company, as well as on smartphones and other connected devices via app.

But while SiriusXM is the dominant player in the streaming audio industry, that doesn't mean it's free from the challenges of growing a subscriber model in a crowded audio marketplace.

CHALLENGE

There's a lot of competition for your ears.

Traditional over-the-air radio is still a billion-dollar industry in Canada. Now, many of those same companies are entering an already-crowded podcast market that's expected to grow to more than C$200 billion in revenues by 2030.

Then there is streaming audio. With a projected worldwide revenue of $39.5 billion in 2024, experts see the music market topping $45.3 billion and 1.1 billion users by 2027. Canada plays a similar tune, where streaming audio is expected to grow to $711 million and 9.9 million users by 2027.

Those numbers mean plenty of players, including some of the biggest names like Spotify, Apple and Amazon.

For SiriusXM, the objective is clear: Find new subscribers. And to do just that, this digital powerhouse has always relied on direct mail.

RELEVANCE

Direct mail has helped SiriusXM stand out from competitors using longer message dwell time and less ad clutter to its advantage. Direct mail's geolocation addressability also helps the brand expand reach and retarget audiences across Canada to complement digital activities.

Building on previous successful direct mail campaigns, SiriusXM partnered with Canada Post to test a new audience targeting approach leveraging first-party and Canada Post data. Targeting 500,000 English-speaking Canadian households, they focused on audience segments who have SiriusXM-equipped vehicles, those considering it for a second vehicle and those interested in streaming services.

Canada Post's geotargeting, demographic and lifestyle data provided the right data overlays for SiriusXM to expand its reach to high-value audiences by targeting postal codes populated with look-alike audiences to its existing customer base. More brands are starting to look at data integration between first-, second- and third-party data in order to create stronger targeting strategies that can expand reach to new audiences or retarget them from digital activities. It's this mix of tangible media and agile data targeting that makes it a great addressable channel that works in the full-funnel strategies needed today.

INCITING ACTION

Two postcard designs were tested: one featuring traditional lifestyle imagery and a clear "Listen the way you want" message and another with a playful music festival theme. Both postcards underwent pre-market creative optimization using predictive eye tracking analysis to maximize communication impact.

COMPANY: SiriusXM | PRODUCT: Streaming audio | COUNTRY: Canada
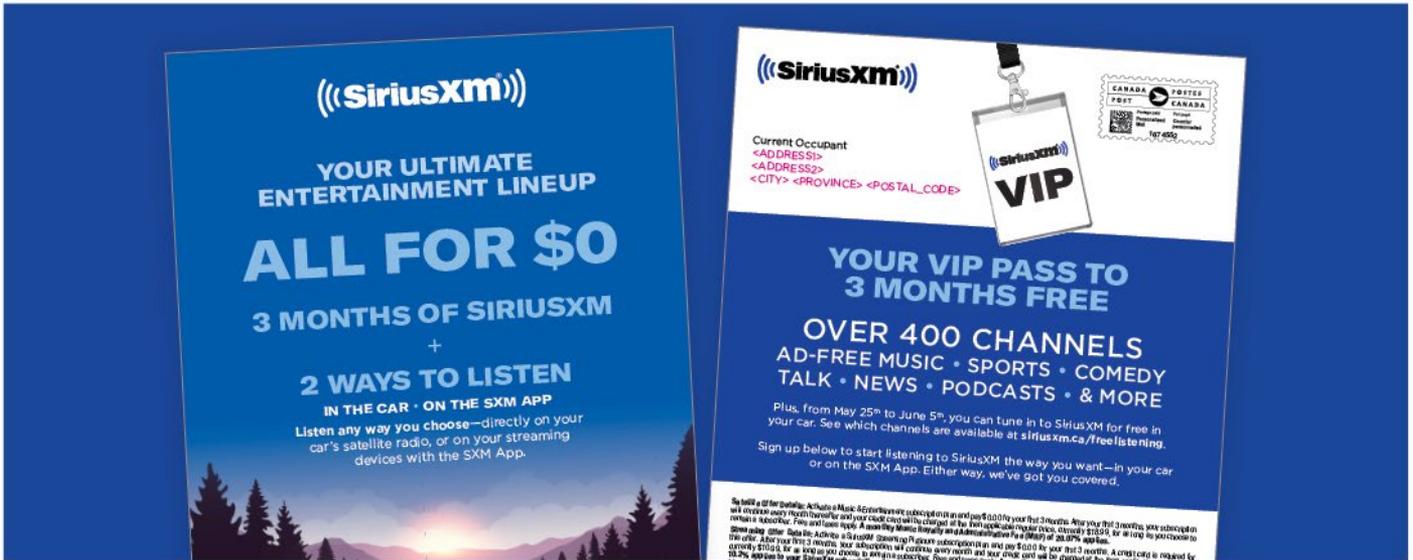
Both creative executions offered the same free trial, promoted through a custom URL and QR code for easy tracking and channel attribution.

"*We like to frequently run tests to see what resonates with customers and catches their attention*," said Alisa Kaufman, Senior Manager, Customer Acquisition at SiriusXM. "*We know people receive a lot of communications, whether it's via direct mail, email or other channels. So, we're always trying to see what cuts through the clutter.*"

RESULTS

SiriusXM's direct mail campaign hit a high note, exceeding its acquisition goals and proving the channel's continued value. The campaign achieved a .95% conversion rate, surpassing their target by 27%. With both creative options performing equally well, SiriusXM now has two effective communication approaches for future campaigns.

"*Direct mail is highly targeted and trackable. That makes it the tangible solution our brand needs when it comes to acquisition,*" Kaufman said.

Case Study Debrief

BRAND SiriusXM Canada   **INDUSTRY** Entertainment

INCITING ACTION
SiriusXM uses postal code targeting and creative testing to generate new subscribers to its satellite and online radio services.

RESULTS
A successful test with conversions exceeding goal by 27% and continued use of direct mail in the marketing mix.

CONVERSION FUNNEL
Dots indicate where direct mail was used to incite action.

ATTRACT | ENGAGE | NURTURE | COMMIT | RE-ENGAGE

DATA SOURCES
First-party
Canada Post data

PRODUCT
Postal Code Targeting

ACTIVATION PILLARS
☑ Physicality
☑ Data
☑ Connectivity

KEY TAKEAWAYS
› Direct mail is an effective acquisition channel that reaches new audiences in a tangible way.

› Direct mail targeting connects high-value look-alike audiences and geolocation data.

› Testing and tracking ensure communication is optimized against objectives.

❝ *Direct mail is highly targeted and trackable. That makes it the tangible solution our brand needs when it comes to acquisition.* ❞ **– Alisa Kaufman, Senior Manager, Customer Acquisition, SiriusXM**

CASE STORIES

A collection of global work from across industries showcasing how modern marketers are using direct mail to connect media and commerce.

Get inspired >>
Scan here for INCITE
direct mail cases from
our digital archive.

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A SOLUTION!

Campaign helps satellite seekers gravitate toward a better orbit.

The satellite IoT market is experiencing rapid growth, leading many companies to consider launching their own constellations. However, this approach is complex, expensive and often unnecessary.

Inmarsat, with its established global network, offers a simpler, cost-effective alternative. Its challenge was persuading potential clients to abandon their DIY constellation plans and choose Inmarsat. To do so, the company needed to break through the industry's typical technical jargon and capture attention in a memorable way.

Their solution? A playful direct mail campaign parodying nostalgic "build your own" kits.

The Inmarsat kits humorously highlighted the pitfalls of building a satellite constellation. A single nut and bolt represented the complex process, an exorbitant price tag illustrated the financial burden and a warning label emphasized the high risk of failure.

Inmarsat specifically targeted 221 CEOs and CTOs at top IoT companies and their investors – key decision makers in large organizations with the resources and potential need for satellite IoT solutions.

The campaign sparked conversations with 19 high-value leads. These potential deals represent a projected £34.8 million in revenue and a staggering 40,230% ROI.

Creating an interactive way to demonstrate the flaws of proprietary technology, Inmarsat created a memorable, out-of-this-world experience.

COMPANY: Inmarsat | PRODUCT: Satellite communications | COUNTRY: United Kingdom | AGENCY: Ogilvy

'DIRTY' LITTLE SECRET

Children's artwork spurs government action on Indonesia's air quality.

Jakarta was grappling with the grim reality of being one of the world's most polluted cities. While outdoor pollution was a visible crisis, a hidden danger lurked within schools. Indoor pollution levels exceeded outdoor levels tenfold.

Save the Children recognized the urgent need to protect children from this invisible threat and spur government action.

From there, the *Dirty Letter* campaign was born. Children across 200 schools participated in a unique art project, colouring with special crayons that absorbed indoor air pollution. These colourful creations, starkly illustrating the invisible danger, were transformed into open letters addressed to the Indonesian government.

The children's letters, serving as tangible evidence of the alarming pollution levels within classrooms, were mailed to government offices. The campaign also extended beyond the classroom, with the artwork displayed in public spaces and exhibition halls, garnering 400,000 visitors. A petition calling for government action amassed 260,000 signatures.

The campaign, amplified by media coverage and direct mail, resonated with the public and, crucially, reached the highest levels of government, even prompting intervention from the president of Indonesia. Since the campaign's launch, Indonesia's air quality ranking has significantly improved, according to the US Air Quality Index.

Thanks to the power of creativity, meaningful change happened once this "dirty" secret was out.

COMPANY: Save the Children | COUNTRY: Indonesia | AGENCY: Dentsu

THE TECH ISSUE

LOBBYING THE ALGORITHM

Paris suburbs fight AI bias with personalized postcards.

The suburbs of Paris – *la banlieue* – are often misrepresented in media, perpetuating stereotypes of poverty and crime. In reality, these diverse communities are home to millions, encompassing a mix of urban and suburban landscapes. Heetch, a ride-hailing company founded in and for *la banlieue*, wanted to challenge these misconceptions.

In 2023, Heetch discovered a new threat to *la banlieue*'s image: algorithm bias. AI image generator Midjourney consistently produced negative and inaccurate depictions when prompted with "*la banlieue*." Heetch decided to fight this digital stereotype.

Realizing Midjourney had only 11 employees, Heetch devised a bold plan to mobilize the 12.5 million residents of *la banlieue* to directly engage with Midjourney's team.

Heetch created 50,000 postcards featuring positive images of *la banlieue*, each addressed to a Midjourney employee. The postcards, distributed widely across *la banlieue*, invited residents to share their personal messages and experiences, showcasing the true spirit of their communities.

The campaign, *Greetings from la banlieue*, went viral, generating significant media attention and sparking conversations about AI bias. Over 50,000 postcards flooded Midjourney's headquarters, a powerful testament to the collective voice of *la banlieue*.

As a result, Midjourney acknowledged the bias and incorporated Heetch's database into its system, marking a significant victory against AI stereotypes. The campaign not only successfully challenged harmful representations but strengthened Heetch's brand image, boosting brand preference by 22%.

COMPANY: Heetch | PRODUCT: Ride-hailing app | COUNTRY: France | AGENCY: BETC Paris

ROCKY TOP TOURISM

Toy catalogue turns tourism success into child's play.

To inspire family trips to Tennessee, the state embraced a playful strategy: turning its top attractions into toys. Knowing that children wield significant influence over family vacations, Tennessee Vacation created *Playcation*, a campaign designed to capture kids' imaginations and, in turn, drive bookings.

The centrepiece of the campaign was a shoppable toy catalogue featuring 39 custom-designed building block sets, each representing a popular Tennessee destination. Sent to 100,000 families in key target markets, the catalogue arrived in homes just as other holiday toy catalogues began appearing in mailboxes, tapping into a nostalgic tradition for Gen X and millennial parents.

Each page showcased a toy and its corresponding destination. QR codes on each page provided instant access to purchase the toy and explore booking information for the related attraction. The campaign extended beyond the physical catalogue, providing digital downloads and engaging content like animated videos.

By presenting Tennessee as a giant toy box, the campaign empowered children to participate in the decision-making process, making it easier for parents to choose a destination that excited everyone.

Playcation generated over 30,000 trip bookings, resulting in $10.8 million in hotel revenue. The campaign also garnered significant attention online, generating millions in earned media value and outperforming industry benchmarks for engagement.

COMPANY: Tennessee Vacation | PRODUCT: Tourism | COUNTRY: United States | AGENCY: VML Kansas City

THE TECH ISSUE

CONNECTING THE DOTS

IKEA unlocks a playful solution to low store traffic.

IKEA needed traffic. The lingering effects of the pandemic, coupled with economic concerns, made customers hesitant to spend. When traditional discount promotions fell flat, IKEA needed a new approach to entice its most valuable customers – IKEA Family loyalty program members – back into stores.

The campaign tapped into the unique power of play. Research showed that play offered numerous benefits, from stress reduction to improved relationships, yet many families lacked play in their lives. IKEA decided to bring play directly to its customers' doorsteps.

One million IKEA Family members received a cryptic mailer – a jumble of dots. The instructions were simple: Connect the dots and unlock an exclusive in-store discount. This interactive element cleverly encouraged recipients to engage in a playful activity, reminding them of the joy and benefits of play.

Within three weeks, 14,000 customers had redeemed their vouchers in store, exceeding expectations and delivering an impressive 4.5-to-1 ROI. The campaign became IKEA's most successful mailer of 2022, proving that sometimes, the key to driving sales is as simple as encouraging a little playfulness.

By cleverly integrating its message into a playful and engaging activity, IKEA successfully cut through the noise, re-engaged its target audience, and drove a significant increase in store visits and sales.

COMPANY: IKEA | PRODUCT: Home furnishings | COUNTRY: United Kingdom | AGENCY: RAPP London
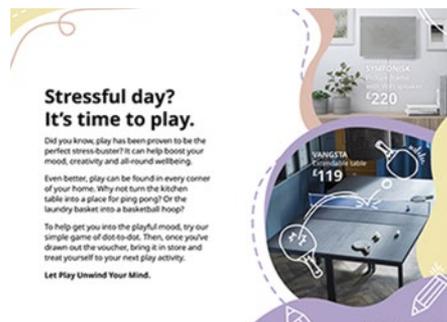
MO' THAN JUST A MOUSTACHE

'Mancestry' campaign tackles men's health head-on.

Despite growing men's health awareness, men still lag women in seeking medical care. This reluctance to engage with their health has serious consequences as men die an average of 4.5 years earlier than women.

To break through these barriers, Movember launched *Mancestry*, a clever campaign combining masculine ancestry with the importance of health awareness. The campaign centred around a fictional DNA test that analyzed moustache hair (a nod to Movember's signature fundraising initiative) to connect men with famous historical figures who also sported impressive facial hair.

High-profile Australian influencers with a combined social media reach of over 10 million documented their *Mancestry* journeys online and sparked conversations about men's health. The campaign invited men across Australia to apply, with those who did receiving a test kit in the mail. Once their samples were sent back to the lab for analysis, they received their results in a personalized report.

The campaign was a resounding success. *Mancestry* generated 1.5 million media impressions in Australia and a staggering 1,552% increase in social media mentions. Most importantly, the campaign led to a 57% increase in Australian men engaging in conversations with health care professionals.

By cleverly leveraging humour, curiosity and a touch of historical intrigue, Movember successfully encouraged men to take a more proactive approach to their well-being.

COMPANY: Movember | COUNTRY: Australia | AGENCY: DDB Melbourne

THE TECH ISSUE
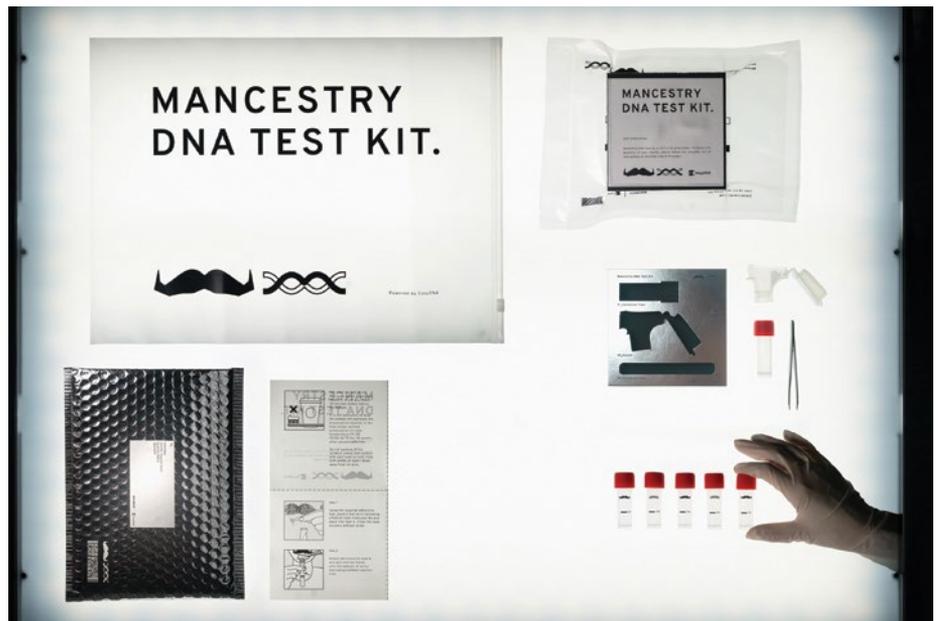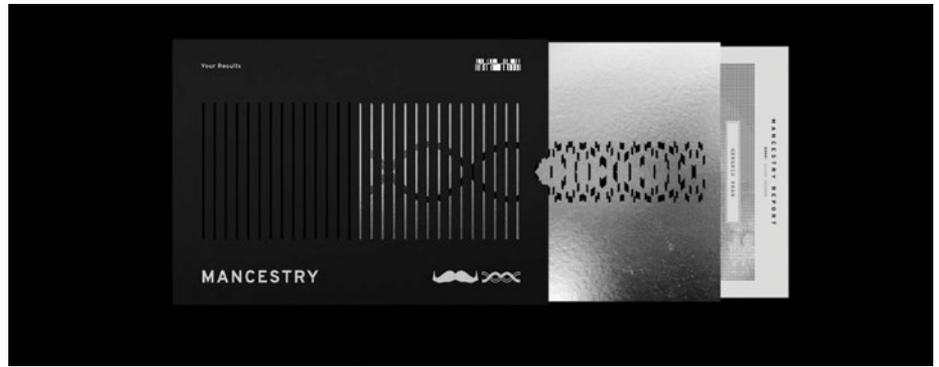
VIRTUAL SENSATION

Netflix technology blurs line between reality and fiction.

In a world captivated by technology, Netflix sought a techie-focused way to launch its new series *3 Body Problem*, a show exploring humanity's encounter with an alien civilization.

The series features a sleek, futuristic headset, a key plot device that allowed characters to interact with the alien world. Netflix decided to bring this prop to life, creating replica headsets to spark curiosity and generate buzz.

Working with an industrial designer, Netflix developed two versions: a stylish, sunglasses-like headset for wider distribution and a "smart" version with built-in tech features. The campaign launched with a teaser video cleverly disguised as an advertisement for the headset, further blurring the lines between fiction and reality.

Over 1,700 headsets were mailed, with the "smart" versions going to 100 high-profile influencers boasting a combined following of over 100 million. Those influencers showcased the headsets on their platforms, driving conversation around the mysterious new product and, by association, the show.

The headsets became a viral sensation, with unboxing videos flooding social media. The limited-edition headsets sold out instantly on the Netflix shop, and an accompanying Instagram filter allowed even more people to engage with the campaign.

The show's trailer debut soared into the top 10% of all Netflix trailer launches, garnering 26.3 million views globally. By transforming a fictional object into a tangible, real-world experience sent via mail, Netflix successfully amped up anticipation for its new series.

COMPANY: Netflix | PRODUCT: TV series | COUNTRY: United States | AGENCY: Netflix LA

UNBOXING THE FUTURE

Prepper kit ignites national conversation about energy infrastructure.

Denmark faces an aging energy infrastructure struggling to keep up with the demands of a modern, green society. The Danish Association of Consulting Engineers (FRI) has repeatedly sounded the alarm, issuing detailed reports highlighting the urgent need for infrastructure investment to avoid increasing blackouts. However, those warnings had failed to resonate with decision makers.

FRI needed a bold approach to capture the attention of politicians and media inundated with reports. Enter the *Blackout Box*.

This campaign reimagined FRI's dense energy report as a prepper kit designed for surviving blackouts. The box contained essential items like a flashlight, canned food and a blanket and served as a stark reminder of the potential consequences of inaction. Each item was accompanied by a concise, impactful message drawn from the report, making the complex data and consequences relatable.

FRI targeted 40 influential figures in Danish politics and media, delivering each box with a personalized letter.

The campaign launched alongside a high-profile PR event and targeted social media activations, amplifying the message and generating widespread media coverage. The *Blackout Box* became FRI's most talked-about report, achieving an impressive 32% open rate and garnering coverage in over 100 media outlets. Most importantly, all 40 recipients engaged with the *Blackout Box*, sparking crucial conversations about Denmark's energy future.

COMPANY: Danish Association of Consulting Engineers | COUNTRY: Denmark | AGENCY: Uncle Grey

MOVE OVER, MAYO!

'Tiny Products' campaign solves your fridge space crisis.

Warm beer is a party foul, and in Chile, a crowded fridge is often the culprit. To ensure there's always room for more Budweiser, the brand launched a clever campaign centred on *Tiny Products*.

Recognizing that bulky condiments and groceries often hog precious fridge space, Budweiser created miniature versions of common fridge staples, including ketchup, mustard and even a tiny carton of eggs. These adorable, perfectly scaled-down products were designed to highlight the space wasted on non-essential items (at least during a party).

Budweiser sent 100 kits of these *Tiny Products* to influencers, generating buzz and social media chatter. The campaign, amplified by strategically placed bumper ads and display ads, cleverly played on the relatable pain point of limited fridge space, positioning Budweiser as the life of the party (and the solution to warm beer woes).

The results spoke for themselves: 10 million media impressions, $25 million in earned media value and a remarkable 100% positive sentiment. By playfully "productizing" its message, Budweiser created a memorable campaign that resonated with consumers, reinforced its brand identity and ultimately encouraged people to make space for more Bud.

COMPANY: Budweiser | PRODUCT: Beer | COUNTRY: Chile | AGENCY: VML Chile

THE FUTURE FEELS REAL

As tangible tech bridges digital and physical, brands must master the art of blending innovation with real-world connection.

As technology reshapes our world, the line between digital and physical is vanishing. Digital is no longer confined to screens – it's woven into the fabric of daily life, transforming how we engage with brands and the world around us. From haptics that let us feel online interactions to spatial computing that fuses digital with the tangible, we're entering a new frontier where the tension between convenience and real-world connection defines consumer engagement. This shift demands we think beyond digital – tangible tech is now essential. Brands must grasp the delicate balance between technology and human experience to get these use cases right, ensuring they enhance, not disrupt. Explore four examples of how technology and tangibility are intersecting in new and nuanced ways.

THE IRL HACK

In an age dominated by digital marketing and commerce, we're witnessing a consumer countertrend: a rising embrace of nostalgia and anemoia (nostalgia for a time/place you never knew) and desire for tangible experiences. Young consumers who grew up surrounded by the internet, social media and on-demand services are seeking something more grounded, real and analog. Beyond these digital natives, however, all generations are seeking (and spending on) IRL experiences.

In Brooklyn's McCarren Park, for example, singles are opting out of dating apps in favour of a "dating wall" in McCarren Park, where physical notes replace digital swipes. In small cities in Canada – often seen as havens for monoculture – subcultures are starting to change the face of main streets. For instance, amid banks, dollar stores and restaurants, Belleville's Doki Doki (a Japanese term for a beating heart) is sharing its love for anime subculture and cosplay fandom and creating a tangible outlet for community building.

Concerns about loneliness and disconnection are rising as the digital realm, while efficient, can feel isolating. People crave genuine human interaction and spaces that foster presence. Yet,

"While digital is ubiquitous, it doesn't guarantee consumer happiness."

people often find their truest selves online. This tension between technology and tangibility, connection and identity, presents opportunities for brands to thoughtfully blend online and offline experiences – especially as AI forces us to re-examine what it means to be human.

While digital is ubiquitous, it doesn't guarantee consumer happiness. Brands seeking a bigger hit of oxytocin need to consider all facets of brand experience, not just convenience and marketing automation. Physical experiences, like in-store shopping or events, foster emotional connections that digital struggles to replicate. Even incorporating tactile elements into digital campaigns, like direct mail, resonates with nostalgia-seeking audiences.

BRAND OPPORTUNITY:
Think about brand building and marketing beyond digital. Create spaces, both online and offline, that together are less transactional and more tangible for people.

THE AGE OF MERCH

Once an afterthought for most brands, merchandise – lovingly referred to as merch – has now become a cornerstone of brand building and engagement. Once a tertiary promotional tactic offering little more than logo exposure, merch has evolved into a critical strategy for expressing identity and creating social currency – especially for brands struggling to establish a tangible presence. It also happens to drive a brand's demand economics in a big way, acting as product, cultural artifact, digital amplifier and demand generator all in one.

More than a piece of clothing or a branded object, merch is now a tool for fostering a sense of community and belonging. When customers buy or wear merch, they aren't just supporting a brand – they're expressing their values, affiliations and identity. As we move into an era of consumer participation and collaboration, merch provides a building block for consumer collaboration, personalization and creating a collective cultural experience (hard to come by in digital niche communities).

BRAND OPPORTUNITY:
Evolve merch from a superficial tactic to a strategic part of the brand's identity expression and experience, creating interdependencies between culture, consumer and brand. To work, merch needs scarcity and cultural context, or it can become a commodity.
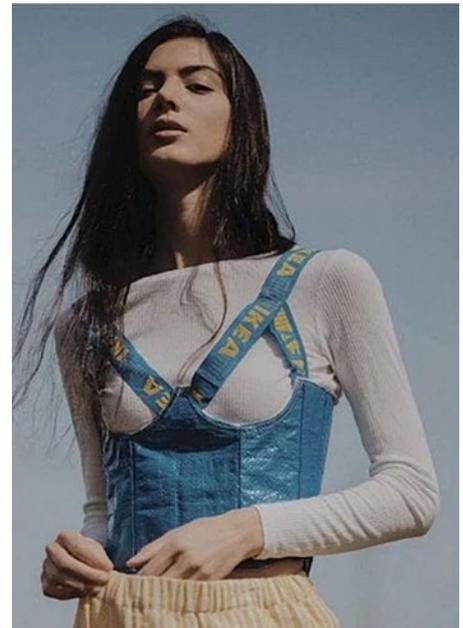
3D MARKETING

Spatial computing and wearables are ushering in a new era of immersive marketing, blurring the lines between digital and physical strategies. Technologies like augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and mixed reality (MR) allow brands to blend digital content with the real world, creating personalized, context-aware experiences.

Imagine trying on makeup virtually with AR or receiving personalized recommendations through your smartwatch as you walk past a store. Brands like Wayfair and IKEA already use AR to help customers visualize products in their homes, while smart mirrors enhance fitness routines and clothing try-ons. This seamless integration of digital and physical makes brand experiences more participatory, immersive and on demand.

Wearables, from smartwatches to AR glasses, provide real-time information and enable brands to deliver hyper-targeted messaging based on user behaviour and location.

This transforms consumers from passive recipients to active participants, deepening engagement and loyalty.

Spatial computing also redefines omni-channel commerce. AR-enabled in-store navigation, for example, guides shoppers, displays reviews and facilitates purchases – all within a single, seamless experience. This "phygital" approach creates immersive experiences traditional retail models can't match.

These technologies demand a fundamental shift. The implications are significant in terms of how we think about marketing from brand building, data collection and channel experience. As spatial computing and wearables merge the digital and physical worlds, the future belongs to brands that can think post-digital – ones that are able to see and inhabit the convergent space between digital technologies and physical environments and online channels.

BRAND OPPORTUNITY:
Brands must break down traditional silos between online and offline strategies and channels.

PICKING UP THE VIBE

In a world saturated with visual and auditory stimuli, haptic technology offers a tangible way to cut through the noise and create biofeedback that improves memory structures and conversion. Haptic technology is rapidly expanding across industries, from luxury goods and gaming to health care and beyond. By providing tactile feedback, haptics enhance user experience in digital and physical realms.

Most people experience haptics through the vibrations in their phones or gaming consoles. These cues not only boost engagement but also improve usability. Picture banking apps using vibrations to confirm transactions, or games delivering realistic tactile sensations. Haptics are even being used to enhance mood, promote relaxation and sharpen focus, often combined with sound to create ASMR experiences.

In product design, haptic technology is being incorporated to differentiate offerings and enhance user experience. For instance, automotive manufacturers are integrating haptic feedback into touchscreen interfaces and steering wheels to provide drivers with tactile cues without taking their eyes off the road.

In ecommerce, haptic feedback is being developed to enhance the online shopping experience by allowing customers to "feel" products virtually. From a social commerce perspective, translating emojis into distinct patterns of vibration is already underway (you might be familiar with the birthday celebration in iMessage).

Media companies are leveraging haptics to create more immersive content experiences. Streaming platforms are exploring haptic-enabled videos where viewers can feel explosions or other sensations while watching content on their mobile devices – this heightened sensory experience boosts viewer engagement and recall.

BRAND OPPORTUNITY:
By engaging the sense of touch, brands can forge stronger connections and enhance emotions and behavioural responses to leave lasting impressions that transcend sight and sound and passive digital ads. ◼
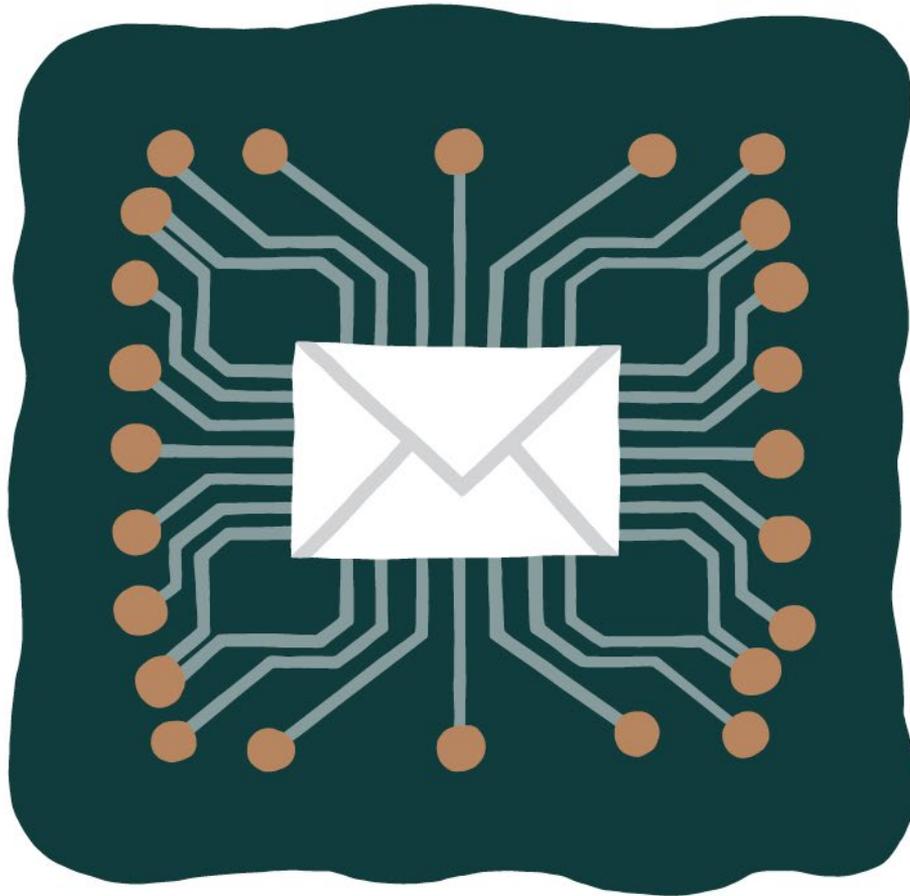
AUTOMATED FOR THE PEOPLE

Technology is enhancing the performance of one of Canada's most trusted and effective channels.

Key Takeaways

Direct mail automation increases perceived value and performance satisfaction.

Automation makes it easier to orchestrate direct mail and digital channels.

Tech and tangibility make direct mail a future-forward channel.

Direct mail, one of Canada's most trusted marketing channels, is undergoing digital transformation. Data and automation are increasing its performance and value to the point where the only thing direct mail today has in common with its traditional roots is that it's a physical presence. Yes, direct mail is becoming more agile, targeted, timely and measurable – making it an essential part of an omni-channel strategy.

While traditional digital channels and digital programmatic ad buying dominate investments in Canada, direct mail's evolution (and elevation) is important because it makes it easier to orchestrate and connect any channel in the media mix. This means it will be easier for marketers to pursue omni-channel strategies and diversify channel investments.

Media is evolving quickly – from traditional to digital to digitalized and now to intelligent media systems. It's opening up a world of possibilities for how marketers can engage audiences across multiple touchpoints online and offline. Marketing mix modelling and cross-channel data connectivity are collapsing current channel silos and making sophisticated modelling more accessible and holistic (faster and cheaper). With the ability to connect online and offline a necessity in marketing and commerce strategies, direct mail is a future-forward media channel for its ability to combine tech and tangibility and bridge marketing and commerce.

SHIFT TO INTELLIGENT MEDIA
As media evolves, it's not about digital vs. traditional anymore; it's about how smart media can create connections. Boundaries between marketing and commerce are evaporating. Digital is an expectation, but it doesn't need to be on the front end of what a consumer experiences.

Programmatic direct mail is a prime example of how old boundaries are being erased. The integration of AI and data-driven automation enables marketers to target specific audiences more effectively than ever before. With automation, direct mail can now operate seamlessly alongside digital channels, enhancing overall campaign performance.

For instance, automated direct mail can help bridge the gap between online and offline experiences. Brands can sync direct mail campaigns with digital efforts, using customer data to create highly personalized and timely communications. This is media at its most intelligent – efficient, responsive, dynamic and fully integrated.

With these new tech traits, direct mail combines the best of digital with the tangible impact of physical media. This technology x tangibility intersection is at the edge of where media is going, which is why direct mail can be seen as a very future-forward channel. If direct mail were a mullet, you'd describe it as "party in the front and business in the back."

This evolution of direct mail, however, isn't happening in isolation. It's a key part of a larger shift toward intelligent media systems that are reshaping the entire marketing industry.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS
In our crowded and complex media landscape, marketers face several challenges to optimize ad effectiveness: soft consumer spending, media inflation, audience fragmentation and shrinking budgets.

With automation, however, direct mail becomes an accessible channel that can be integrated into broader marketing strategies to complement digital efforts and close these deficits that impact total media performance. As digital ads face issues like ad fraud, low attention rates and ad blocking, direct mail offers a brand-safe, highly trusted environment where marketers can connect with consumers at home. This authenticity and tangibility are increasingly valuable in an age of media saturation.

Traditionally, direct mail has been all about addressability, and now, programmatic technology is enhancing this capability. By leveraging data and automation, marketers can deliver even more precise and personalized campaigns, creating a seamless cross-channel experience that ties in perfectly with traditional digital ad efforts, first-party data, CRM systems and new digital opportunities like CTV and RMNs.

A great example comes from Mejuri, which saw a 50x return on ad spend by integrating

> **"With the ability to connect online and offline a necessity in marketing and commerce strategies, direct mail is a future-forward media channel for its ability to combine tech and tangibility and bridge marketing and commerce."**

real-time online intent data with always-on direct mail campaigns. This is where the power of programmatic direct mail lies: It makes physical media work harder, smarter and in tandem with other marketing efforts.

Mejuri's success story is a powerful testament to the potential of programmatic direct mail. But what exactly does this technology look like in action, and how can Canadian marketers, who are facing their own unique challenges, leverage it effectively?

LEARNING FROM LOB
To delve deeper into the world of automated direct mail, we spoke with Tyler Dornenburg, VP of Strategic Sales at Lob, a leading U.S. direct mail automation platform that has been forging a path in this space.

What is automated direct mail in a nutshell?

Simply stated, automated direct mail is trigger-based, personalized and measurable direct mail marketing driven by automation and customer data. The thing I like to burn into people's brains about it is that automated direct mail is a part of omni-channel marketing by design and not as an afterthought. Right now, direct mail really doesn't have a seat at the table with other digital channels. What we stress is that direct mail is digital too, and if you're not thinking of it that way, then you're using the wrong tools. Automated direct mail is the key to that kind of thinking.

"Automated direct mail enjoys higher channel satisfaction and performance confidence among users than those relying on non-automated methods."

What's important to understand about automated direct mail?

Our goal is to make direct mail as easy as sending an email. That was a foreign concept a decade ago. Admittedly, it's still a loaded statement.

"Point and click." People get that. But what makes direct mail "easy"? When we say "easy," we're talking about deploying an intelligent mail approach integrated directly into your data systems, automated based on behaviour or life cycle events and orchestrated with your other channels. Those are not things typical to a direct mail program, or if they are, they are manual.

The way people think about marketing now is, "Hey, I'm going to send you an email." If you click on this social post, maybe you get a text. Or maybe you get put into this workflow that's managed by Iterable or

Salesforce Marketing Cloud. The place where direct mail isn't living right now is inside of those user journeys. That's why we talk about automated direct mail.

What are common questions and misperceptions of it from clients/ prospects?

There's an authenticity direct mail provides that people, especially millennials and Gen Zers, are seeking and can't seem to find elsewhere. There is no other channel you invite into your home. Think about it! People make a proactive decision to bring that marketing message into their homes and allow it physical space inside. There's a tangible authenticity to a direct mail message that you can't find anywhere else. That's why the numbers show the trust for this channel is significantly higher than the trust for other channels.

What are the benefits of automating direct mail that your clients are experiencing?

Control! Lob is not an agency; we're a tech company. We put brands in the driver's seat. If you know your business best – want to come up with your own answers, want to dig deep into the data, want to be in control of your own programs – we're great for you. We give you the tools to do it. We'll give you the insights to grow your program.

What marketing objectives and strategies are best served by automation?

Automated direct mail is awesome if we're talking win-back campaigns. Cross-sell and upsell are also huge, and it's great for acquisition as a part of a broader strategic marketing push. That said, if you're going to rely entirely on direct mail for your acquisition, it's like relying on email or another individual channel. It won't be as effective on its own. But the incremental lift that direct mail can provide to your other channels as a part of an acquisition campaign is incredible.

You don't need to be a marketer to truly understand that you must be taking an

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UPSIDE OF AUTOMATION

Automated direct mail improves the perceived media value of the channel, increases confidence in performance and increases the use of direct mail within omni-channel strategies.

Automated direct mail users agree that direct mail provides the best conversion (88%) and response rates (84%) of all the channels they use – up 10% versus last year alone. This suggests that U.S. marketers are using direct mail more effectively to drive responses and conversions.

In the last year, the use of automation in direct mail marketing saw a significant increase as 56% of marketers say they now use direct mail automation software or platforms for their campaigns, marking a 16% rise from the previous year. These platforms streamline the entire process, from design to delivery, enabling businesses to execute personalized and targeted campaigns more efficiently.

The integration of data analytics and customer insights within these platforms allows for precise audience segmentation and content tailoring, significantly boosting campaign effectiveness.

Witness the high satisfaction rates among users – a remarkable 87% of automation users believe direct mail delivers the highest ROI among marketing channels, compared to 79% of non-users. Consequently, automated direct mail enjoys higher channel satisfaction and performance confidence among users than those relying on non-automated methods.

Omni-channel use is becoming more the norm with direct mail in the United States, with only 2% using it as a stand-alone tactic. Omni-channel approaches that include direct mail are increasing significantly among ecommerce brands, as 60% use direct mail automation to take advantage of the influence of the in-home environment.

Sources: Lob *2024 State of Direct Mail Marketing* report

"The future of media is one where tech and tangibility work hand-in-hand. Automated direct mail offers brands the opportunity to create meaningful interactions, connect with consumers in their homes and drive higher ROAS."

omni-channel approach. If you're not doing omni-channel then you're not doing direct mail.

Think about all the emails growing in your promotions folder right now. You're unsubscribing from all these text message campaigns. And seriously, when was the last time you clicked on a web banner? Maybe you fat-fingered it when trying to do something else.

Direct mail is an uncrowded channel, and it's one where you have a 100% open rate.

How do you see the role of direct mail evolving in the next 3-5 years, particularly in markets like Canada?

I go into a lot of meetings with larger strategic direct mail senders, and one of the first things that I'll say to them is, "Look, if we do our job right, you're going to be

sending less mail." It's a better situation for everyone. Because if you're sending too much mail that isn't as targeted or personalized as it can be, then there's no way to defend that budget. That means it dries up and disappears.

If we do our job right, however, they will be sending less mail because they'll be sending better mail. Yes, the cost to send a mail piece continues to increase, but as long as we send smarter with those mail pieces, and as long as they are able to measure effectively, then it is actually a better situation for everybody involved.

How can Canadian marketers get started today?

Look for direct mail providers with integrations that work with the tools you're using today. Whether that's Shopify, Marketo, Salesforce Marketing Cloud, Braze, Iterable or really anyone – there are a lot of opportunities to just say, "Hey, I want to experiment with direct mail in a place where I'm already comfortable. Meet me where I am – and where I am is dragging and dropping a little mail icon into a user journey."

Marketers can get started by looking for tools that work well with the marketing automation tools they already have. That's where they're going to find if automated direct mail is a fit for their business.

EMBRACING INTELLIGENT DIRECT MAIL

As we look toward the next few years, the distinction between digital and traditional media will continue to fade. Besides, con-

sumers don't think in terms of channels; they experience brands holistically with increasing expectations of cross-channel connectivity, consent and on-demand interactions.

The growing adoption of automation and programmatic capabilities is positioning direct mail as an essential part of an omni-channel strategy. According to EMARKETER, 93% of digital ads in Canada are programmatic, which shows that Canadian marketers are open to taking this digital accelerant cross-channel.

The future of media is one where tech and tangibility work hand-in-hand. Automated direct mail offers brands the opportunity to create meaningful interactions, connect with consumers in their homes and drive higher ROAS. It's time to think of direct mail not as a tactic, but as a media-forward, tech-enhanced channel that's part of an intelligent media landscape. ∎
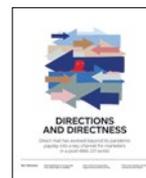

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Go to **canadapost.ca/incite** *to download these articles from our issue archive for more on how direct mail can address ad performance deficiencies.*
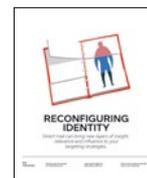

INCITE 2024 02
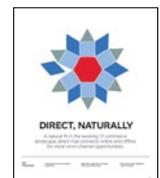**There Are Holes in the Bucket**

INCITE 2024 01
The Smart Shift

INCITE 2023 02
Directions and Directness

INCITE 2022 03
Reconfiguring Identity

INCITE 2022 02
Direct, Naturally

DIRECT MAIL x PERFORMANCE
DATAGRAM

RELIABLE RESULTS

84% of marketers agree direct mail provides the highest ROI of any channel they use (**+10%** versus 2023).

Source: *2024 State of Direct Mail Marketing*, Lob and Comperemedia

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

96% of survey respondents experienced improved or consistent direct mail performance over the last year.

Source: *2024 Direct Mail Marketing Benchmark Report*, SeQuel Response

EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

An analysis of UK case studies in WARC's database of successful campaigns found that **65%** of effective case studies that use direct mail as the lead medium have "inform" or "educate" as a creative strategy, compared to just **42%** among all UK campaigns. Direct mail also over-indexes for personalization as a creative strategy at **24%**, which is double the average UK case study.

Source: WARC & Royal Mail MarketReach, 2022

DOING THE HEAVY LIFTING

Costco doesn't have money to waste when it comes to the unique challenge of new member acquisition. Direct mail is attributed with a **40%** lift in responses from prospects and members and a **94%** lift in new member-ships from targeted areas receiving direct mail over those exposed to Costco's other marketing channels.

Source: Canada Post testimonial, Costco, 2023

AUTOMATIC SATISFACTION

88% of automation software users agree direct mail delivers the highest conversion rate (versus 82% of non-users).

Source: *2024 State of Direct Mail Marketing*, Lob and Comperemedia

PERFORMANCE IN PROXIMITY

66% of Canadians feel direct mail grows their relationship with businesses.

Source: *Mail Moments 2022*, Canada Post

QUALITY ADVANTAGE

Marketers ranked quality audience targeting data, easy attribution tracking and performance, and digital campaign integration as the **top three advantages of direct mail**.

Source: *2024 Direct Mail Marketing Benchmark Report*, SeQuel Response

THE UPSIDE OF DOWN

Q1 2024 results reveal that while the UK economy grappled with the recovery from a technical recession, those advertisers who maintained their confidence in the mail channel were rewarded with **43%** year-on-year growth in purchases driven by mail.

Source: "Mail response and attention continue on an upward trajectory in Q1 2024," JICMAIL

JAM CRM TAKES MAIL TO THE MAX

In today's world, where speed to market, cost efficiencies and convenience are king, email marketing is often the go to solution. The business case for email marketing versus direct mail appears to be ironclad. But is it? While email remains a powerful tool, using a mix of 1:1 channels, including direct mail, creates a more impactful and personalized approach that leverages the strengths of each medium for maximum effectiveness.

Direct mail has become more inaccessible for many organizations due to the prohibitive costs and time involved, making way for more efficient, personalized forms of communication. Despite its reputation as a traditional medium, the statistics around direct mail don't lie.

› Direct mail has a 95% engagement rate and delivers more attention efficiency than social and display marketing. It costs only $0.19 to generate a minute of consumer attention with direct mail, compared with $0.26 for desktop display and $0.32 for social display.

› Marketers know that direct mail is a communication channel that converts. In fact, 84% agree that the medium has a stronger return on investment over any other channel they use.

But its limitations in speed and cost continue to plague its reputation.

Direct mail gets up to speed

JAM CRM, a Toronto-based agency and North American leader in 1:1 marketing, has set out to change that with the introduction of its proprietary technology, MailMax, a product that delivers the speed, automation and customization with the sales performance of direct mail.

"*Direct mail is a powerful tool that can act as a workhorse for clients when deployed with the specialization and lens of 21st century technology and automation*," said Patrick Glencross, Vice President, Product and Delivery, JAM CRM. "*At JAM CRM, if the solution doesn't exist, we build it, seamlessly integrating data and technology to help marketers extract maximum value from their CRM investments.*"

Fully automated and highly scalable, MailMax seamlessly integrates customer data and marketing messages to produce relevant, totally individualized direct mail via Canada Post in your mailbox in just a few days. A bespoke solution that can be tailored to any client need, the platform enables unlimited variability ensuring all creative elements, from format to images to copy, are organized and integrated based on unique customer data profiles. At the touch of a button, all elements are merged to create customized direct mail pieces specific to every customer. The automation removes 75% of the human effort from the direct mail process, significantly reducing data preparation, creative and print production timelines.

MailMax not only truncates traditional direct mail timelines from weeks to days, it delivers 20% to 40% cost savings compared to traditional direct mail campaigns.

"*CRM done right is a welcome communication on your doorstep just days after you've moved in. It's a reminder to buy pet food just before you run out*," said Glencross. "*When CRM works, the technology is invisible, it leaves consumers with nothing more than the feeling that the brand they love truly understands them and their needs. MailMax allows us to do that at the speed of digital.*"

The JAM CRM difference

For 17 years, JAM CRM has been addressing the most complex CRM challenges in the industry, delivering connected solutions that empower brands to create meaningful, personalized customer experiences that work at scale and at the speed of performance.

Led by industry veteran Andrea Cook, JAM is backed by the brightest minds in CRM, AI and automation know-how to help brands connect with consumers at unimaginable scale.

Equal parts technology solutions company and creative agency, JAM CRM has 50+ proprietary products, AI's, tech automations, and tools like MailMax that are activated across its North American roster of long-standing, blue-chip partners.

JAM CRM is a leading independent Customer Relationship Marketing agency that brings together deep data, technology, creative and AI expertise. Operating across North America, JAM CRM specializes in helping client partners extract the maximum value from their CRM investments. For more information on JAM CRM or MailMax contact Patrick Glencross. Patrick.Glencross@jamcrm.com

SAMPLESOURCE IS REVOLUTIONIZING PRODUCT SAMPLING

A new type of coffee pod lands on doorsteps across the country, a free sample promising a delicious morning brew. Here's the catch – only 30% of those households even own the coffee maker needed to use it. The result? 70% waste, a hefty bill and a whole lot of frustration for eco-conscious consumers.

This is the unfortunate reality for some traditional consumer packaged goods (CPG) sampling – costly, inefficient and increasingly out of touch.

SampleSource, however, has been quietly revolutionizing the CPG direct marketing landscape with what it calls Sampling 2.0, using true one-to-one precision.

SampleSource is Canada's largest CPG direct-to-home trial company. A Canada Post Smartmail Marketing™ Expert Partner, the company works with major Tier 1 and 2 CPG brands to help them improve their trial effort effectiveness.

"*Once, marketers stood outside a train station or stadium and handed stuff out, often handfuls to a single person. But simply giving away 100,000 samples doesn't guarantee 100,000 new customers,*" said Rob Linden, Managing Director (North America) for SampleSource.

"*Giving away free samples without a plan doesn't get you any closer to the goal of conversion to purchase. Sampling isn't about reaching the most people, but rather reaching the right people – those who are most likely to become loyal customers.*"

And that's exactly what SampleSource has built its business on. Its secret weapon? A massive, meticulously curated database of millions of consumers who have willingly shared their preferences, habits and desires through explicit, double opt-in consent – the gold standard in the industry.

This isn't just your average mailing list. Forget basic demographics – SampleSource delves into the nitty-gritty of consumer lifestyles and behaviours: Do you own a cat or a dog? Have sensitive teeth? A penchant for organic baby food? What kind of coffee maker sits on your counter?

This granular detail allows brands to pinpoint their ideal customers with laser focus.

"*Data is at the core of everything we do here. Without it, we're back to the poor results of Sampling 1.0,*" said Linden, whose company ships millions of items annually across Canada.

"*No one wants to get irrelevant stuff that isn't applicable to them. The more people tell us about who they are and what they're interested in, the better we can find ideal offers to send to them. When we can do that, marketers see their chances of conversion skyrocket.*"

SampleSource recognizes that effective sampling campaigns extend beyond the initial trial. That's why it offers targeted follow-up emails after a sample is delivered. These emails – featuring recipes, product details or exclusive offers – encourage further engagement and deepen the consumer's connection with the brand.

A comprehensive survey post-sample module gathers invaluable insights, not just on whether the product was a hit or miss, but on the *why* behind those reactions. This data is gold, allowing brands to tweak targeting, refine messaging and ultimately reach more of the right consumers.

For consumers, SampleSource offers a chance to make an informed decision for themselves and their household. "*People are always going to need a sample of something to lower the barrier of purchase,*" Linden said. "*They need to taste it, try it, smell it and experience.*"

For marketers, however, SampleSource represents something bigger – a comprehensive and cost-effective solution for their product sampling needs. This platform helps combat shrinking marketing budgets by streamlining the entire sampling process. From printing and packing to shipping, SampleSource manages every detail, allowing marketers to focus on other key initiatives.

"*We help marketers distribute their offers with far greater precision and, in turn, generate more buyers and a better return on investment,*" Linden said. "*If we can get the sample to someone who's in your target market, the chance of them turning into a buyer is that much greater.*"

SampleSource *is a precision, one-to-one data targeting company that helps brands acquire new customers through high-ROI physical and digital outreach programs. Contact Rob Linden at rob.linden@samplesource.com. corporate.samplesource.com*

DIRECTWORX MAXIMIZES THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

In today's highly competitive marketplace, businesses are looking for innovative ways to engage customers and stay top of mind. Direct mail, often seen as a traditional medium, is experiencing a renaissance due to its ability to seamlessly integrate with digital channels to deliver personalized experiences that engage customers in ways that emails or ads alone cannot.

Directworx specializes in helping businesses leverage direct mail solutions that combine the tangible advantage of physical media with data-driven insights, offering omni-channel integration at every stage of the customer journey: from acquisition to growth and loyalty. Here's how businesses can optimize their marketing efforts using direct mail as a key element at each stage of the journey.

Anchoring omni-channel campaigns with direct mail helps acquisition efforts stand out. The channel offers a tactile and higher-attention medium that encourages dwell time. Neuromarketing studies have shown that physical media improves memory recall and response rates, making direct mail a high-impact anchor for acquisition campaigns that complement digital efforts.

Additionally, Directworx offers Gratiflow, a solution designed to create powerful offers and incentives for new customers. Gratiflow allows businesses to send physical mail containing exclusive offers that are redeemable digitally, either at local retailers or as charitable donations to non-profits. This bridges the gap between the physical and digital worlds and provides added value for new customers that boosts conversion rates.

Driving engagement with programmatic direct mail improves growth opportunities. Leveraging data is key to driving customer engagement and increasing lifetime value. Directworx's programmatic direct mail solutions are designed to do just that. Using customer data from CRM systems, businesses can send highly personalized and relevant offers that resonate with their customers' unique preferences and behaviours.

Geotargeting offers a sophisticated way to execute programmatically. Imagine a business using customer data and geolocation information to send personalized offers to individuals based on their proximity to specific retail locations. For instance, a company could send a limited-time offer for a nearby store, timed perfectly with the customer's location and purchasing habits.

This precision targeting helps businesses turn moments into conversion and deliver personalized experiences at scale. The key is in the customization – direct mail pieces are no longer one-size-fits-all but can be tailored to speak directly to the individual. Directworx has the ability to generate one-to-one direct mail creative from a data set, increasing relevance and response rates.

Keeping customers engaged with personalized touchpoints helps businesses cultivate long-term loyalty. Maintaining regular contact with existing customers through personalized direct mail gives your brand staying power in the minds of customers. This is especially impactful when combined with digital loyalty programs or personalized email campaigns, creating a holistic customer experience that delivers consistent value.

Whether it's special offers, invitations to exclusive events or regular newsletters, keeping customers engaged through a mix of physical and digital communication helps to build deeper relationships over time that improve CLV.

One particularly innovative offering from Directworx is Billworx, a sophisticated billing solution that elevates the customer experience. Billworx allows companies to deliver both digital and physical bills that are highly personalized and creative. This modernized approach to billing not only simplifies the process but also provides an opportunity to include marketing messages and tailored content that can enhance customer loyalty. Imagine a customer receiving a beautifully designed, easy-to-read bill that includes personalized offers or rewards based on their purchase history – this transforms a routine interaction into a positive brand experience.

The Directworx advantage

Directworx is committed to helping businesses create, launch and grow innovative direct mail solutions that add measurable value to their marketing efforts. Whether you're looking to acquire new customers, foster growth or build long-term loyalty, our team of experts is here to provide the tools and expertise needed to make direct mail an integral part of your strategy.

Directworx stands out as a leader in the field of intelligent direct mail solutions. From personalized acquisition offers to data-driven growth campaigns to billing solutions, we help businesses harness the full potential of direct mail. Contact Layne Gobeil, Director, Product & Business Development at layne@directworkx.ca. directworx.ca

ARIMA MAKES MMM FASTER, EASIER

As the volume of data grows and computing power expands, marketers are turning to more sophisticated methods to understand their media investments in an increasingly complex media landscape at a time when market departments are being asked to prove total marketing outcomes.

Marketers have traditionally relied on attribution models such as multi-touch attribution (MTA) and last touch attribution (LTA) to measure the impact of their digital marketing efforts. However, these models only capture part of the story. Marketing mix modelling (MMM) offers a more holistic view, making it essential for optimizing the entire marketing mix, not just digital channels.

Attribution models were once favoured by digital marketers, but today's sophisticated brands understand the limitations of these methods. They seek a more integrated approach that reflects the entire marketing landscape. Traditional MMM was costly and slow, but Arima's self-directed MMM changes the game. Marketers now enjoy the benefits of MMM without barriers like cost, delays and limited scenarios. Arima combines speed and ease of use with more actionable insight in a complete picture of effectiveness.

MMM takes a holistic approach
MMM analyzes the impact of all marketing activities on a specific outcome, such as sales or brand awareness. This includes traditional advertising channels (TV, print, radio), digital marketing, promotional campaigns, pricing strategies and even distribution channels. Additionally, an MMM tool like Arima's incorporates external factors like seasonality and competitor actions, providing a well-rounded picture of marketing effectiveness.

Why attribution models fall short
LTA, while widely used, has significant limitations. It only accounts for the final interaction before a conversion, ignoring the broader journey and multiple touchpoints a customer may encounter. It's like crediting the last shot in a basketball game with the win – valuable, but far from the full story. It actually works against multiplier effects and the value of cross-channel execution.

MTA improves upon this by linking customer interactions across multiple digital touchpoints – video ads, search engines, social media and more. However, it remains limited to digital channels and often overlooks offline interactions or broader external factors, such as economic conditions or competitor actions.

Why MMM is the best approach in 2025
Arima's self-directed marketing mix model has emerged as the preferred choice for marketers because it offers several advantages over attribution models:

Holistic view: Unlike attribution models that focus only on digital touchpoints, MMM takes a 360-degree view. It accounts for all marketing activities – both online and offline – as well as brand strength and external factors such as interest rates, geography and competitive actions. This comprehensive view is crucial in today's omni-channel world.

Strategic decision making: MMM goes beyond measuring media spend. It analyzes other marketing levers such as pricing, promotions and distribution, allowing marketers to understand what truly drives sales and brand growth and holding everyone accountable to marketing effects, not the digital media planner's metrics.

Forecasting and planning: By leveraging historical data, MMM can predict future outcomes, helping marketers allocate resources more effectively to support different marketing objectives and strategies. Arima enables brands to model "what if" scenarios, making it a powerful tool for forecasting and planning.

Simple and fast: Arima's platform empowers any team member to handle running market mix models. The self-directed marketing mix model allows brands that have never run MMM before to make the most of this powerful tool. One-price and unlimited models means marketers and their agencies can run MMM across all their brands, big and small, against each region and for multiple outcomes such as sales, website visits or leads.

Unlock the full potential of your marketing
As marketing becomes more complex, relying solely on attribution models like LTA or MTA is no longer enough. Brands need a broader, more comprehensive approach to understand how all their marketing efforts work together. With Arima, marketers can easily adopt MMM, unlocking deeper insights, better forecasting and more strategic decisions – at unmatched speed and cost.

Arima Data *unlocks the power of marketing data science in an easier and more affordable way. As Canada's most advanced marketing platform, Arima combines marketing modelling, consumer insights discovery and media planning tools into one source. Contact Chris Williams, CMO, at chris@arimadata.com. arimadata.com*

THE TECH ISSUE

BAM ANALYTIX BIG DATA EDGE

In today's fast-evolving marketing landscape, brands require a competitive edge. BAM Analytix delivers this edge with its innovative, all-in-one platform that connects disparate data sources to generate contextual and actionable insights.

In an increasingly fragmented media environment, where consumer attention is divided across numerous platforms and devices, it's more critical than ever for marketers to have real-time insights into their campaign performance, cross-channel customer journeys and brand health. Traditional brand health tracking tools often fail to capture the complexity of modern marketing efforts, while siloed channel data can give you details but not an aggregate picture to make strategic sense of.

Right now, it's hard for marketers to monitor the impact of marketing efforts across paid, earned and owned channels on consumer attraction (the organic benefits from paid, earned and owned efforts as measured through emotional and behavioural response data) or business outcomes generated. BAM Analytix closes the gap between traditional brand health monitoring and real-time campaign optimization by mapping brand strength, campaign effectiveness and media efficiencies over time.

The software taps into billions of consumer data points, using machine learning for faster, cheaper, more accurate tracking with measurement and reporting informed by our exclusive brand data warehouse. Leveraging advanced game theory modelling, this U.S.-patented monitoring platform offers unparalleled accuracy – 93.7%, to be exact.

Users have the flexibility to choose competitors, sources and time frames for comprehensive analysis, making it easier to tailor reports that meet specific business needs. The platform's integration with AWS ensures scalability, security and speed, delivering immediate results that inform better decision making. The platform can also integrate business and sales data for further customization and marketing mix value.

BAM Analytix equips brands with the intelligence to refine strategies, allocate resources efficiently and outmaneuver competitors. Think of it as an OS for marketing management that combines brand intelligence, marketing intelligence and performance intelligence into a single view. Whether it's optimizing a national campaign or measuring the impact of a local initiative, BAM empowers businesses with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions. Here are a few examples of what you can do with BAM Analytix's all-in-one platform capabilities.

Marketing intelligence
› Competitor study: Track competitive marketing efforts relative to your own in real time for actionable insights.
› Audience behaviour: Get a better understanding of distinct consumer behavioural characteristics by category/region.
› Attention contribution tracker: Measure, evaluate and modify cross-channel paid media expenditures.

Brand intelligence
› Influencer tracker: Measure and optimize influencer contribution to brand strength and campaign effectiveness.

› Category brand positioning study: Volumetric descriptive text analysis gives positioning and messaging insights.
› Social media effectiveness tracker: Measure effectiveness of organic social media's contribution to marketing.

Performance intelligence
› Media efficiency optimizer: Measure combined paid/earned/owned media effects to optimize media efficiencies.
› Brand multiplier: Measure a brand's presence across touchpoints in order to elevate campaign performance.
› Brand performance optimizer: Our all-star product measures end-to-end campaign performance and brand health against consumer attraction.

For BAM's CEO, Brett Channer, the motivation is simple: to put control back in marketers' hands. Backed by leaders in industries such as retail, automotive and consumer goods, BAM's growing roster of clients includes prominent brands like adidas, Coca-Cola and Allstate. We are driven to get marketing back to the table as a serious contributor to growth and shareholder value.

"*Our clients call it their 'unfair advantage' that guides them to winning positions in their markets with comparable, easy-to-understand, actionable reporting,*" said Channer. "*Better ROI for clients has been our single-minded unit of value, and our BAM technology is a result of that focus.*"

BAM Analytix is a patented brand-operating system holistically connecting all paid (mass and digital), earned and owned media toward a single monthly analytics report, providing marketers with the insights required for growth. Contact Brett Channer, CEO, at (416) 561-1408 or fill out the contact form at bamanalytix.com.
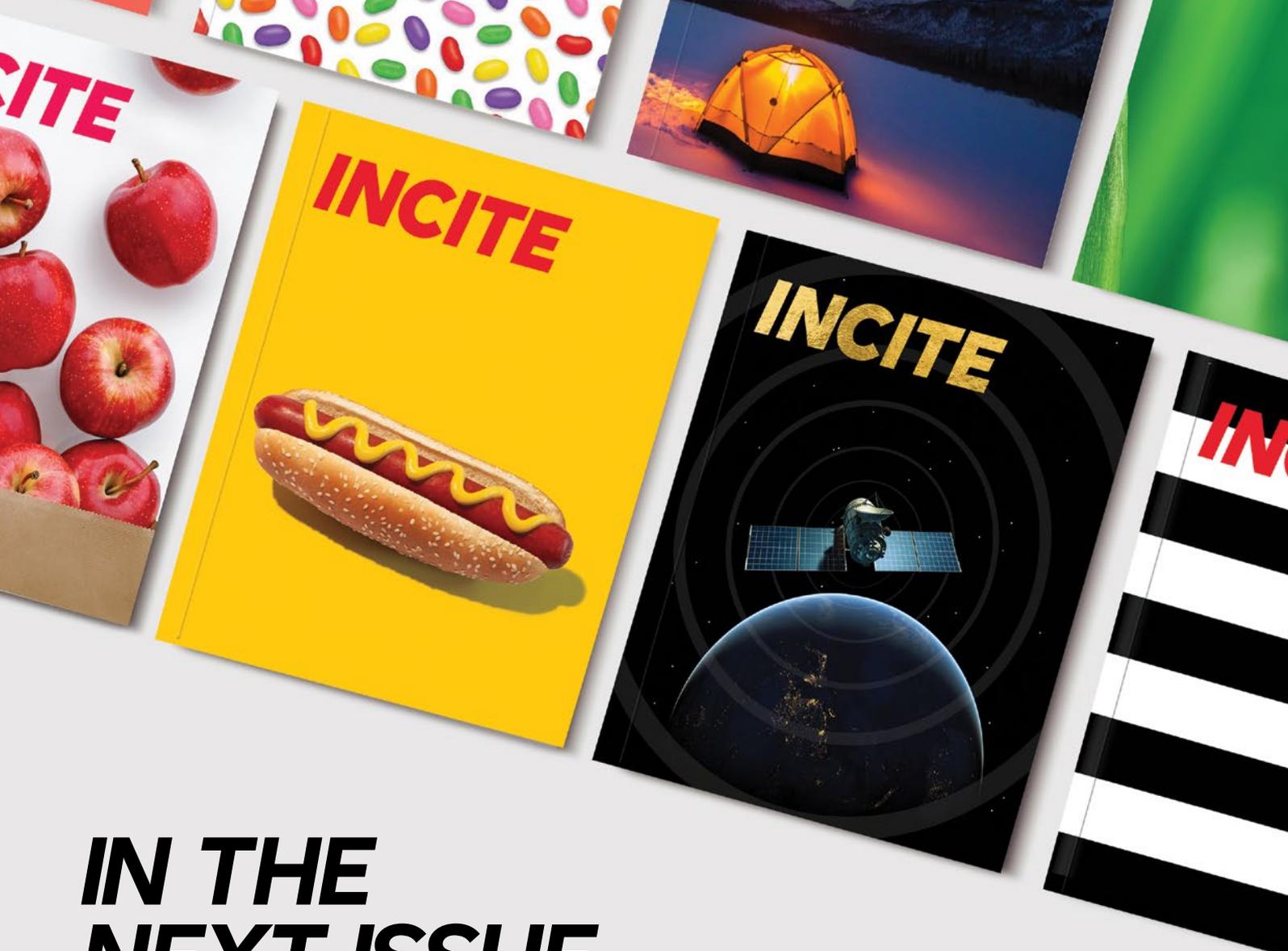
IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ISSUE

› Uncover why customer-centricity is declining and what you can do about it.

› Find out how to harness the best of targeting and personalization strategies.

› Capitalize on human-centric design principles to bridge consumer gaps.

› Elevate your brand with tangible marketing experiences that convert.

"We actively seek out shareable content that helps marketing professionals strengthen their impact on business success. *INCITE* answers the call."
– Judy Morfitt, marketing lead, Canadian Marketing Association

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