

**MEDIA
MONKS**

INITIATING IMPACT

**DIFFERENTIATING IN
A DIFFERENT WORLD**



APAC

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Something evolutionary kicks in when things change drastically and rapidly. It helps me cut to the chase and put energy behind less traditional thinking. Having founded MediaMonks during the 2001 financial crisis, I believe macroeconomics isn't an excuse to not grow, you just have to find your lane and how to create value for others. That mindset, and a hyper-focus on what you can control, has resulted in some of my biggest breakthroughs born in crisis.

Wesley ter Haar, MediaMonks Founder

INTRO

“COVID-19 to my mind is a burning platform for digital disruption,” Sir Martin Sorrell, Founder and Executive Chairman of S4Capital, said in June, about three months after the World Health Organization labeled the disease a pandemic.

And Sir Martin is right: COVID-19 has impacted businesses across industries and around the world. Throughout the first 100 days of the pandemic, we paid careful attention to the evolving needs and forthcoming trends, and have collected insights based on our work and conversations with brands during those months. Finding commonalities and shared experiences between them, we’ve collected those insights by region to support brands as a change agent as they redefine their goals now and into the future.

One of the key trends that we’ve noticed is that the meaning of digital transformation has itself transformed. Previously, digital transformation was characterized by slow, multi-year processes or narrowly focused experiences that drive impact at individual touchpoints, but overall fail to enact broader, lasting change (also known as random acts of digital). “For most, digital transformation is regarded as an ongoing, perpetual process,” explains Kate Richling, CMO at MediaMonks. “Which has long served in the best interest of partners looking to build and bill multi-year contracts. And it’s worked, with most brands having time on their side—and the need to only grow incrementally, month after month.”

Small, incremental change at brands’ own pace was acceptable—until the rug had been pulled out from under them. Now, there is a real need for brands to drive lasting impact, either by redefining their role in consumers’ lives or by exploring entirely new ways to engage with consumers.

In APAC, one of the most impactful results of the pandemic was a rush to build ecommerce platforms or invest in existing digital marketplaces. “The challenge for brands is that the user behavior is slightly different from platform to platform, and it’s important to recognize these differences when driving consumers down the funnel,” says Sanne Drogdrop, VP Business & Operations at MediaMonks APAC. “But at the same time, you must make sure there is brand consistency across all the different platforms. We have helped brands launch ecommerce solutions across different platforms during the pandemic in as short as two weeks.”

This has been more difficult for some verticals than others, says Drogdrop, including luxury brands who rely on the brick-and-mortar experience and typically lack in digital maturity. “Through creating virtual shopping windows brands can mimic the offline way they present products and then some, as it allows a full layer of storytelling that physical retail can’t offer,” she says. These more tactile experiences support brands’ greater focus on discovery online, building brand love in the process.

In this report, you’ll find a range of content offering a glimpse of the near future. The world is changing quickly, and in several ways; based on the trends that we’ve noticed among leading regional brands, this report focuses on ecommerce optimization, how digital experiences both online and in-store drive value, enhancing WeChat personalization, production optimization and more. We hope that in its pages, you’ll find information and practical strategies that will help you plan for success.

01



IS YOUR ECOMMERCE STRATEGY PREPARED FOR HYPERGROWTH?

By Sanne Drogtop (VP Business & Operations MediaMonks APAC) and Kelly Belchere (Senior Producer, MediaMonks Shanghai)

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, digital has become a lifeline for consumers and businesses alike. Around the time of Chinese New Year, online retailer JD **quadrupled its sales** of household staples compared to the same time last year, showcasing how essential ecommerce has become for consumers both in Asia and around the world. While ecommerce has gained steady traction over the past couple of decades, this shows a glimpse of how the impact of quarantining has propelled it into hyper-drive. Now more than ever, brands are setting their sights on the future and building strategies that will carry them towards long-term ecommerce success.

Relevance and creative differentiation become critical for brands to stand out.

The largest digital marketplaces—Amazon, JD, Tmall, Taobao and more—offer easy avenues to brands in creating comprehensive shopping experiences, satiating their audiences’ need for convenience in discovering, researching and purchasing online. But these platforms aren’t without challenges: brands must utilize the tools available to them to standardize and scale their offering, yet not underestimate the importance of finding solutions to stand out and differentiate at the same time.

With everything now just a click away, relevance and creative differentiation become critical for brands to stand out in a competitive marketplace.

OPTIMIZE THE FULL JOURNEY

E-commerce optimization is not just a templated design and a couple of nice banners. A successful digital product sales strategy starts by reaching your high value consumer on the right channels with relevant messaging, driving them down a frictionless path to purchase and closing them in an endless loop of up- and cross-sell.

Optimizing the full customer journey is of the essence to increase click traffic and conversion. It’s comparable to a brick and mortar store: you don’t want to spend a lot of money on out of home advertisement for a new summer campaign, but have the store display a winter sale. Online, things become more complex through the myriad of opportunities that are there to personalize at scale. True relevance can be achieved

through a combination of media, data-driven creative, analytics and optimization, with a focus on user acquisition and driving lifetime value.

CREATE RELEVANCY FOR AUDIENCES

An important starting point to optimize your ecommerce strategy is to make sure you truly understand your audience. With proper data at your disposal, you are equipped to differentiate between customers and what brings them to the store (for example, brand loyalists versus gifters) and can accommodate them by tailoring content to their specific needs or providing a specific type of service they’re seeking. This optimized approach leads to greater effectiveness along the path to purchase.

WARC **notes** that for shoppers in Asia, gathering and comparing information online is critical to the customer decision journey. “At this stage of the customer journey, brands should capture visitor information around site usage and search behavior, and then use that data wisely alongside message testing to generate better results and increase customer lifetime value.”

There lies an excellent opportunity here for brands to continually optimize. By experimenting with creative using the “test and learn” approach, brands can continually test effectiveness to highlight relevant audiences and best-performing creative, offering an experience that’s personalized and responsive to shifting consumer needs. Even a small tweak can greatly improve on drop off points, making a tremendous difference to your ROI.

DIFFERENTIATE THE BRAND

Knowing your audience and creating messages that are relevant at the right place and time is not the only aspect that allows a brand to cut through the clutter and the many distractions offered by these competitive aggregator platforms. The best online businesses care about more than just metrics, wielding data to offer content that is smart, contextual and tactile, with a focus on user acquisition and driving lifetime value.

To put it simply, great UX and design cannot be underestimated. Consider this: the interface is the brand. To compare again to brick and mortar retail, a beautiful flagship store provides a meaningful experience and atmosphere to shoppers—and

your ecommerce store must likewise provide a best-in-class experience to its customers. In addition to good design, storytelling builds connections with consumers, not only driving sales but also brand love. It helps people understand who you are. By integrating it throughout your full sales funnel and flow, it helps create the ultimate loyalty loop: one driven by love for the brand.

UX and design cannot be underestimated. The interface is the brand.

This story can be told in different ways across different touchpoints. Content needs to reflect consumer intent and evolve as they travel further down the funnel. An awareness piece will feel different from a consideration piece, which will differ from a conversion asset, but they can and should all feel like part of the same story.

LOCALIZE, BUT KEEP IT CONSISTENT

Another important consideration is the differences between the regions you operate in. Customer behaviour and what impacts purchase intent can vary greatly between cultures. 40% of searches on mobile are local searches. It's important to optimize and localize your keywords and storefront for each local market.

As you plan out your customer decision journey, including relevant messaging for each local audience, the last hurdle is ensuring brand consistency across everything you do. While each touchpoint across the CDJ serves a clear purpose and accounts for different needs, the sum of all parts needs to feel like one cohesive experience.

Not surprisingly, brand consistency is a key factor to building consumer trust—not just across regions, but also in one single market. In fact, brand consistency when done right can increase revenue **up to 33%**. Transcreation methods ensure you can retain global consistency while offering personalized, relevant content that extends into different languages, cultures and markets.

PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

To thrive in the future, brands must bridge the gap between data, insight-driven storytelling and best of breed digital design and development. Seamlessly connecting frontend martech with existing or **bespoke ecommerce solutions** and backend CRM allow brands to build a consistent and comprehensive customer journey, helping them reach their audiences in competitive digital marketplaces. Customer lifetime value is not about the next conversion, rather the long-term relationship you are building with your audience.

02

EXPERIENTIAL ENGAGEMENT IS WORTH IT FOR FUTURE-FOCUSED BRANDS



By Ron Lee, Technical Director at MediaMonks Shanghai

Here in China, one of marketing's biggest difficulties rests in linking ads with sales and growth. Restricted access to consumer data limits brands' ability to target and reach customers accurately, resulting in frequently irrelevant advertisements that can be costly regardless of effectiveness. But what if brands looked beyond just conversion metrics in retail and looked toward building brand love and loyalty through engagement metrics?

To get a sense of why this approach is necessary, let's take a moment to consider the strategy apps use to build audiences and drive engagement. The typical growth strategy for mobile apps is to gather as many users as possible and monetize this attention quickly and wisely. Whether an app offers a free service or is paid, the real metric for engagement is whether they return to it daily. Engagement is top of mind in the development of apps—but it's often treated as an afterthought in the retail environment.

EXTEND YOUR FOCUS ON ENGAGEMENT METRICS

When consumers enter a store, they're already in the mindset to shop. This makes the cost of conversion in store lower than if you were reaching them through a display ad at a different point in the customer decision journey. In fact, best-in-class digital retail experiences enable brands to offer value to customers even if they aren't ready to make a purchase just yet, building memories that will stick with them until next visit.

An example of this is the **The Run My Way** experience we built with Puma: located on a busy Shanghai square, passersby can enter a custom-made pavilion and step on a treadmill surrounded by floor-to-ceiling screens. After customizing their own puma avatar and running soundtrack through facial- and motion-tracking software, visitors can walk, jog or run to power their puma through three virtual environments. We built both the physical and virtual experience to fashion a forward-thinking trialing campaign that benefits the Shanghai running community through a stunning, full (and free) experience.

USE DIGITAL TO POWER EMOTIONALLY-RESONANT CREATIVE EXPERIENCES

Brands can derive great value by investing in communities adjacent to their product or offering. Nike, for example, has invested heavily on running as a lifestyle through digital

platforms like its Run Club app, which is integrated into WeChat, an approach that has offset a COVID-19-related drop in Q3 sales in China.

Of course, these brands still invest money into generating buzz the traditional way. But this mentality of building a space or community for consumers to join, celebrate their hobbies and collaborate with others makes for valuable brand building as well. The desire to offer value by enriching consumers' lives is a strong benchmark for the creative experiences that brands must aim to offer in their engagement with consumers.

The desire for value by enriching consumers' lives is a strong benchmark for experiences that brands must offer.

In addition to building a memorable experience, such digital engagements can often prove fruitful to capture and hold consumers' attention as they explore the store. Our **Google Arts & Culture: Living Jiagu** project achieved high engagement even though audiences had to wait at least 20 minutes in a queue to experience the latest creative implementation of Google TensorFlow for a short, one-minute demo. Placed in front of a large display environment that transformed users' script into living, animated characters brought a much higher emotional connection to the product than a standard ad or explainer video could.

Now, imagine what a similar approach could achieve in the simple context of buying sneakers or apparel. Such in-store entertainment experiences not only build connection but also lengthen store visits through more meaningful engagement.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE IMPACT

Brands must have renewed empathy for the user, building on emotional resonance that keeps consumers coming back. Consider what drove the boom in café culture: sure, people can make a cup of coffee at home, but it's the aroma of coffee, the sound of the music and the atmosphere of being around others that makes visiting a café so pleasurable. Retail can likewise offer emotionally driven experiences that build advocacy and excitement in consumers on behalf of the brand.

We are heading into a new era where the market is challenging our preconceived notions about what constitutes success. These experiences may not correlate with short-term boosts in sales, but that doesn't make them unsuccessful; by placing a greater focus on engagement metrics and enchanting consumers through creative experiences, brands can build long-lasting, more meaningful relationships with their customers.

We are heading into a new era where the market is challenging our notions about what constitutes success.

This shift will forewarn traditional media and calls for brands to offer considerable benefits to consumers with hopes to have more advertisements for good. For instance, LVMH shifted their perfume production to hand sanitizers and old, outdated factories in North America were retrofitted to construct ventilators. Could there be an increase in ads spent to further improve homeschooling and keep an active and healthy lifestyle? With these thoughts in mind, I look forward to a future in which brands find new ways to make meaningful impact in their communities.



03



**HOW EXPERIENTIAL
ECOMMERCE
VIRTUALIZES THE
IN-STORE EXPERIENCE**

By Kelly Belchere, Senior Producer at MediaMonks

Shopping behavior has changed significantly over the past few months, as many consumers around the world have spent at least some time under shelter-in-place orders. Compared to the same time last year, for example, February 2020 saw a **10.3% increase** in time spent monthly on mobile ecommerce for female users in China. And the types of platforms they use to make purchases are evolving, too: social commerce makes up a whopping **11.6%** (and growing!) of retail ecommerce sales.

Much like how brick-and-mortar retail stores offer experiences that reward customers who visit, future-focused ecommerce brands will likewise thrive through differentiated creative experiences—especially as greater investment in digital technology becomes the norm. But while many focus solely on providing convenience to their customers, brands that will truly win are those that aim to further close the online-offline gap through experiential ecommerce.

Experiential ecommerce is a customer-centric strategy that strengthens the bond between the brand and consumer through a virtualized shopping experience. Powered by emerging technology like 3D content, AR/VR, AI and more, it's designed for the best possible online experience for discovering and exploring products and purchases online.

HOW EXPERIENTIAL ECOMMERCE BOOSTS CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

One of the major benefits to experiential ecommerce is that it improves buyer confidence. The typical online shopping experience relies on product images or, if you're lucky, a video that provides a closer look at the product's uses or features. These are useful, but they don't answer all the questions customers might have about the item—for example, have you ever bought an item only to discover that it's **nowhere near the size you expected?** Disappointments like these lead to more returns (and more costs for the seller).

Experiential commerce, meanwhile, gives online customers an experience that allows them to engage, interact with, or test the product in a whole new way before purchasing. One of the most popular solutions available is augmented reality (AR), which even lets customers **"try on" items like cosmetics,** glasses and more—or see how furniture and other items look in their homes. It's easy to see how this more tactile experience better serves customers and increases their purchase confidence.

Virtual reality (VR) has the potential to unlock similar experiences. Dior has **replicated its entire Champs-Élysées store in 3D**, and other luxury retailers have followed suit with similar initiatives. Such uses of VR are intriguing, though the technology lacks the accessibility of AR, which is baked into major mobile operating systems. Still, VR has had great use in providing in-person experiences at flagship brick-and-mortar retailers—breaking down barriers between offline and online through unique digital experiences—and in B2B contexts like virtualizing **wholesale showrooms.**

Experiential ecommerce is a customer-centric strategy that strengthens the bond between the brand and consumer through a virtualized shopping experience.

While tech investments are table stakes to succeed in an era of experiential ecommerce, brands that are interested in starting small with their 3D content efforts should check out simple yet rich experiences like Google Swirl ads. This is an ad format that lets users examine 3D product models within a display ad on a mobile web page. If they like what they see, they can even expand the ad to engage more.

This format is easy to set up, consisting of just a product model and its parts. But it also offers unique storytelling opportunities. In a **case study** that Google did for fragrance brand Guerlain's Swirl campaign, developed in partnership with MediaMonks, they found a 17-point increase in customer purchase intent, three-time higher engagement and a 34% increase in exposure time.

DELIVER PERSONALIZATION AND RELEVANCE WITH CONTEXTUAL TRIGGERS

A strength of ecommerce that can't be understated is its use of personalization: based on interests, defined needs or previous shopping history, consumers can quickly find the exact product that they need on a website, in an app or even to collect in-store. And as explored above, experiential ecommerce opens opportunities to take personalization and contextual shopping to the next level—even taking some of the more iconic features of brick-and-mortar retail and making them better online.

Consider the window display as an example. On an ecommerce platform or social commerce app, a fashion retailer can offer 3D shopping displays featuring mannequins or models whose clothing changes depending on the consumer profile, or even change based on time of day and weather.

Based on interests, defined needs or previous shopping history, consumers can quickly find the exact product that they need on a website, in an app or even to collect in-store.

As users engage, they can check in with either a real or digital sales associate at any time of day—the virtualized enterprise doesn't have to close at the end of the day. And once consumers have examined and placed a purchase for an item, that trigger can then connect to messaging apps, encouraging customers to share an AR model of the item with a friend—and maybe with a discount coupon attached.

This action shows how important it is for experiential ecommerce to tie into the various digital channels that consumers engage with throughout the day, across the customer decision journey. One can imagine how simple content formats like Guerlain's can capture consumer attention in the discovery phase, leading them into more robust, immersive and personally tailored experiences that better replicate or augment the in-store experience.

THIRD-PARTY MARKETPLACES MAKE EXPERIENTIAL ECOMMERCE ACCESSIBLE AND SCALABLE

Previously, building 3D experiences to this caliber required developing a bespoke app, resulting in a high barrier of entry (no one wants to download a whole app to make an impulse purchase) when **seamlessness is so critical** to immersive content. Thankfully for brands, third-party ecommerce platforms themselves are driving a lot of innovation in this space by adding immersive features and 3D content to their platforms.

Alibaba's Tmall just recently launched just in time for its 6.18 Mid-Year Shopping Festival. The new feature enables brands to offer a 3D shopping experience to mobile users. In fact, IKEA managed to translate its entire Shanghai Baoshan store to the platform, letting customers enjoy the showroom experience without all of the crowds. Over on WeChat, shopping mall K11 **made its 46 stores available for virtual exploration.**

These features are some of the latest in support of long-term New Retail strategies that build on customers' desire for highly personalized and intuitive shopping experiences. Supported natively by some of the most popular channels in China, experiential ecommerce has become much more accessible for businesses.

NEW RETAIL THRIVES ON A UNIFIED COMMERCE MODEL

In an infographic, "**The 3D Connected Consumer In China,**" Forrester Senior Analyst Xiaofeng Wang notes that "Most digital business professionals in China are already mobile-centric and leverage borrowed mobile moments well; some are even venturing into emerging tech. But they tend to focus on the technology itself and overlook the business and customer values they can actually deliver through the devices, platforms, and channels that their customers are using."

One way for brands to better connect with consumers anywhere and everywhere is to take a more unified approach to online and offline commerce, giving touchpoints equal weight in your strategy, while also optimizing the seamless and omnichannel customer decision journey with a performance-driven mindset. Succeeding with this strategy is key to using experiential ecommerce as a creative differentiator, offering an experience that's not only convenient, but engages customers in new, value-added ways.

There's been incredible growth in mobile commerce over the years; eMarketer projects that **53.5% of retail sales will be through mobile** by 2023. As brands increase their investment in technologies that support mobile consumers, experiential ecommerce will become critical in meeting shoppers' expectations, increasing confidence and boosting engagement in digital shopping—helping brands differentiate through an unparalleled customer experience.

04



**MIX ENTERTAINMENT
AND SHOPPING WITH
LIVESTREAM COMMERCE**

As brands aim to engage with consumers in new ways after the pandemic, many are **seeking inspiration from the direct to consumer model** to engage directly with their audiences. While retailers and brands have incrementally invested in digital platforms more and more, year after year, these developments show how the need to digitally transform has accelerated to keep up with shifting user behaviors.

At a time when consumers are craving entertainment and connection while at home, livestream commerce—evoking the idea of home shopping TV programs, but made more interactive—is an intriguing solution for brands to directly and authentically engage with audiences. As a response to increased video viewership of at-home audiences, the strategy builds on recent trends in shoppable social content and the rise of influencer partnerships.

CHINA IS NO STRANGER TO LIVESTREAM COMMERCE

While it may be having a moment right now, livestream commerce isn't new; Taobao Live, the largest ecommerce streaming platform in China and owned by Alibaba, **made \$2.85 billion in sales** on Singles Day last year. The COVID-19-induced lockdown in China has increased the popularity of the platform even further; in February, merchants on the platform raised by **719%**.

Much of livestream commerce's appeal is its ability to mix engaging, interactive content with brand stories. JD.com, another ecommerce platform in China, **hosted online "e-clubbing" events** featuring musical performances and DJ sets—and the ability to buy liquor in a few taps, replicating the social experience of being at an actual club.

MediaMonks Founder Wesley ter Haar notes that for many brands, conversion-based content remains top of mind as they consider ways to pivot existing strategies or continue to engage with audiences digitally. "Brands are asking themselves if they need to keep the 'content machine' running," he says. "If ecommerce and conversion-based content is an essential bucket, we can help fill it faster and more effectively by shifting from traditional production to tapping into influencers and livestreaming."

WHILE SOCIAL DISTANCING, VIDEO IS KING

Over the course of the pandemic, at-home users have flocked to video content. According to **data from WARC**, 38% of consumers are watching more online video content now than they had before the pandemic. Out of that group, 73% say they expect to maintain that higher amount of viewing time. Among the most popular video content that people want to watch are how-to and tutorial videos, **according to data from Hootsuite**, a category that lends itself well to influencer content and B2B stories.

In fact, influencers are ideally situated to engage with new and existing customers with creative and livestreamed content. They are adept at using their voice and authority to recommend products to audiences and have built loyal followings through tutorial content—for example, the lucrative beauty space on YouTube that has catapulted popular vloggers into full-fledged business owners.

In response to the challenges that brands and retailers have felt due to the ongoing pandemic, our influencer activation team IMA **recently offered a few solutions**, including multichannel influencer campaigns that amplify voice and awareness across communities, as well as partnering with existing product advocates to carry business momentum on social media. Such strategies enable brands to reach consumers authentically, backed by a consolidated effort to ensure working teams can **easily continue production safely at home** and produce the stream remotely.

BUILD VALUE THROUGH ASSISTIVE CONTENT

While brands and retailers are focused on solving the "now," they must also look ahead into how they will serve consumers throughout what may be a difficult year ahead. As consumers seek out content and connection that helps them understand and make the most of a new normal—whether that means staying sane while social distancing or stretching the value of a dollar—livestream commerce offers a great opportunity to build a brand relationship.

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Despite being a vehicle for commerce, it doesn't have to be too salesy—think about a retailer offering a live cooking show focused on recipes using ingredients that are already in the pantry, for example, or a makeup artist giving tutorials featuring “dupes,” or greater-value versions of popular cosmetics.

“This is the new family dinner, this is how we watch movies together,” says ter Haar on the innovative ways that people are connecting. “We’re building traditions now that we don’t yet know are traditions. User behavior is being built that will change how we use these tools and how we create and connect together.”

Now more than ever, brands and retailers must be there for their audiences. Through livestream commerce, brands can accommodate new user behaviors that have emerged and engage in authentic, informative ways with video content. Accommodating a need for connection and entertainment, the format is well tailored to building strategic relationships into the year ahead.



05

IN DIGITAL VENUES, EVERYONE GETS A FRONT-ROW SEAT



With students holding **graduation ceremonies in Minecraft** and Travis Scott on **tour** performing via Fortnite, videogames have emerged and prevailed with ingenuity, with users finding new ways to communicate and socialize while at home.

This repurposing of platforms into digital venues might evoke the **“metaverse,”** or a persistent virtual world as seen in science fiction titles like “Ready Player One.” But as cultural hubs have been especially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, digital venues that replicate their real-world counterparts offer a great way to continue connecting with communities online. “Even though we’re seeing concerts and events move to the cloud and digital streams popping up everywhere,” says Geert Eichhorn, Director of Innovation at MediaMonks, “cultural venues, museums and other hotspots are commonly left behind.”

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Online virtual worlds certainly aren’t new, but few have captured mainstream adoption to become a killer app. Nor has there been a strong cultural drive to replicate in-person interactions virtually outside the context of gaming—until now.

“Right now, something we’re missing is the go-to platform that really owns that space,” says Eichhorn. “Second Life once had that promise, where brands would invest in virtual real estate on the platform. But given the global pandemic, it’s become more relevant to at least be prepared to have a virtual venue.” Linden Lab, the company that developed Second Life, has since built Sansar, a virtual reality entertainment platform recently sold to Wookey Project Corp. Facebook is working on a similar platform of their own called Horizon.

Over the years, we’ve seen museums in particular take steps toward this direction. Google Arts & Culture lets users **explore world-renown museums using Streetview technology,** for example, but the MediaMonks Labs team envisions fully realized 3D environments where multiple users can gather, mingle and engage in live content together. “With all of these venues currently being empty, now is the perfect time to shoot them through photogrammetry and build a custom digital space,” says Eichhorn.

Through technology like WebGL, MediaMonks has been able to design deeply engaging virtual spaces that require nothing but a web browser. With Victoria Cerveza, we built **Mexico’s**

Biggest Offering by inviting people to honor the dead with a 3D altar. The result is a moving, collaborative tribute that users can contribute to or explore. Likewise, brands can embrace game platforms and accessible 3D technology to build culturally resonant spaces.

FREE YOUR VENUE FROM PHYSICAL CONSTRAINTS

One of the greatest benefits of digital venues is that they allow brands and performers to continue engaging with communities at a time when consumers crave social connection and entertainment. But they’re also unbounded by physical constraints, opening up new opportunities to engage with content or personalize a space. “Consider entering a digitized museum, where you can swipe on a painting on the wall to view another by the same artist,” says Eichhorn. “You open up entirely new ways of interacting, and can even make it collaborative.”

Another idea is a personalized wall or wing filled with items from the collection, curated by data on viewers’ personal interests. “This level of interactivity and personalization applies to any experience you can do virtually,” says Eichhorn, noting that the technology is ideal for product demos, building creative customer experiences or conveying difficult concepts through visualization and virtual presentations.

There’s also no limit to the amount of people you can host within a virtual venue, enabling brands to extend their reach to wider audiences. In a world where social distancing regulations may be a part of our new normal, this could be more important than ever. While platform constraints might require overflowing attendees into multiple servers or “instances,” there’s no need to shut the door on anyone. “With digital venues, you can give everyone a front-row seat if you wanted to,” says Eichhorn.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUILDING YOUR DIGITAL VENUE

Above, we’ve discussed translating a physical space into a digital one. But brands can build entirely imagined digital venues as well. Whether you aim to **bring a fictional branded space to life** or want to **meticulously render existing products** to demo virtually, a production partner who’s skilled in VFX and

digital production can provide guidance on building a space that's not only functional, but drives emotional impact—a critical factor that's often missing when programming is translated from a physical space to just a livestreaming platform.

For example, it's important that you don't just focus on visual fidelity when digitizing an existing space. Aim to replicate other senses however possible in order to add a greater sense of atmosphere. Eichhorn highlights the 360-degree work we did for **Bancolumbia: School of Sustainability**, which not only makes a remote island community explorable, but brings it to life through the use of sound.

There's no limit to the amount of people you can host, enabling brands to extend their reach to wider audiences.

"We went in there to do 360 photography, but we also caught a bunch of ambient audio because the island is so densely populated, which made it feel truly alive," says Eichhorn. "If you're shooting in an empty place that's harder, but brands can still make it feel like people are there with the user."

In addition to creative considerations, brands must also take a moment to consider which platform suits their goals—or their audience—best for hosting a digital venue. Game platforms may be appealing to younger audiences, for example, while platforms like **Mozilla Hubs** have a low barrier of entry by being available directly within a web browser. No matter the purpose for your digital venue, we can create scalable, proprietary platforms to host virtual events—and even include social features and monetization of content.

By offering digital spaces for relaxation, play and continued programming, brands can tap into a behavior that consumers have already gotten used to in response to staying at home: meeting in virtual space. No longer constrained by physical limitations, these digital venues enable new ways of interacting with patrons and can continue extending experiences to distant audiences in the future. But most importantly, they enable brands to continue serving an important aspect of consumers' daily lives that has become difficult to hold onto: enjoying cultural touchstones together.



06

IN A TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING, BRANDS CAN LEARN A LOT FROM INFLUENCERS



By Maddie Raedts, Co-Founder and CCO at IMA

While brands have a responsibility to offer support to their audiences, many remain uncertain about how they can adapt to the digital channels where consumers have retreated in recent months—but I believe that when faced with these challenges, brands can take inspiration from influencers. Having been active for more than 10 years in the influencer marketing industry, I believe that now more than ever, social moments and human-to-human connections are important for brands.

As arbiters of digital culture, influencers have long fulfilled the role of bringing people together and building communities. In cases where the community interest skews very niche, influencers have helped people realize that there are others just like themselves, which showcases the impact they can have in helping to join people together in times of need. These independent content creators have highlighted new opportunities for brands to authentically engage and relate to their target audiences no matter where they are online.

DEMONSTRATE A COMMITMENT TO YOUR AUDIENCE

With digital channels serving as the primary medium through which people connect right now—think Zoom happy hours, video game lobbies, livestreams and more—I’ve seen many influencers double down on the commitment they feel to their communities by helping them find routine, structure and balance. From hosting virtual morning coffee conversations to at-home workouts, they’re fostering community and belonging like never before.

Consumer behaviors are shifting, too. Because consumers have spent more time at home, they’re finding new ways to connect through hashtags, memes and repurposed platforms. As brands aim to continue supporting their audiences on emerging channels or through new user behaviors, they can look to influencers as an example.

Consider brands that had planned messaging and strategies months in advance — which in today’s climate are no longer relevant or might even come off as insensitive. The challenge underscores the fact that now is the time to be supportive to consumers, not solely commercial. **One study** found that while most of the consumers surveyed don’t expect a lack of brand advertising, 77% do expect brands to become helpful

in navigating the new normal that we’ve found ourselves in. But brands are significantly challenged in how they can continue producing content with their teams distributed at different locations.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO SHOW VULNERABILITY

When it comes to switching strategies on the fly based on audience feedback, brands can once again take a cue from influencers. Among one of the top challenges influencers have faced so far from the pandemic is anxiety about **seeming insensitive**, a self-consciousness that has prompted many to ask their audiences what type of content they feel is appropriate in a time when many are struggling. The bonds between influencers and their communities are so close and strong that they often can get feedback in a minute and produce content the next hour, whereas many brands need to sit with their teams, re-strategize and reorganize—sometimes completely forgetting to listen to their audience’s voice throughout that process.

As brands aim to continue supporting their audiences on emerging channels or through new user behaviors, they can look to influencers as an example.

I believe that brands can adapt strategies as quickly as influencers do. Use your social channels to touch base with your community, understand how people are doing, and provide comfort and trust. From there, start building on their needs. Set up live sessions and Q&As, and then adapt your messaging to the right sentiment.

Are you struggling? Show that, too; don’t be afraid to show some vulnerability. Right now, we are all looking for identification and realness. Are your warehouses closed, and is everyone working from home? Show what that looks like. Showcase the situation as it is and how your brand is responding to that in its own unique way.

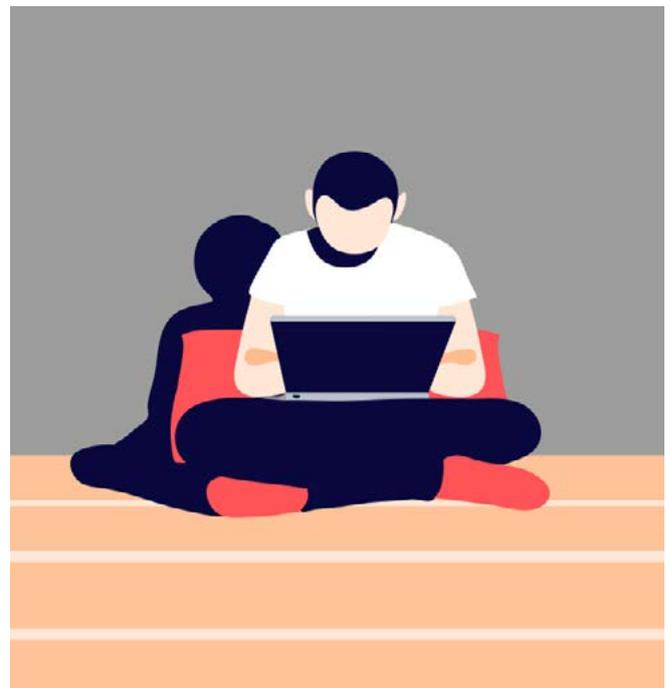
From what we've seen, influencers are reaching more fans than ever right now. Many of the influencers we work with noted a 40-50% increase in Instagram direct messages during the last two weeks of March. This is something that brands may also be seeing. Be sure to respond to these messages—private social conversations can help provide comfort as well as the insights you need to better drive impact and emotional connections.

EXPLORE NEW CONTENT FORMATS

Of course, pivoting a content strategy means more than just coming up with new ideas; it requires skill, equipment and production output. Influencers are well prepared to produce content at home, whether it's a casual chat in the living room or a tutorial filmed in an in-home studio. Brands can do the same with their teams by having them film from home or leveraging their existing digital communities. A good example of a brand doing this is Nike, which pivoted to offer livestreamed workouts from the homes of trainers on its roster.

Digital content is no longer an option; it's an imperative. Luxury brands often used to say, "That doesn't apply to my brand," when it came to TikTok. We now see massive support of brands on the platform. I believe it's no longer a question of whether you should be there — it's where many consumers are. The digital transformation got an enormous push from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I view this as a moment for brands to realize that influencers have a lot to teach them about creativity and production chops. You can still drive impact and emotional connection without the elaborate components of a traditional strategy. As you make your way through a brave new world, what matters is supporting your communities through content that truly resonates — and I believe you can look to influencers for inspiration.



07



DELIVERING DATA-DRIVEN EXPERIENCES THROUGH WECHAT

By Ron Lee, Technical Director at MediaMonks Shanghai

Consumers around the world crave personalization. In fact, **40.6% of Chinese millennial consumers** don't mind paying a premium for a personalized product. In discussing consumers' attraction toward luxury goods **with Jing Daily**, Longchamp Creative Director Sophie Delafontaine hints at why personalization resonates so well today. "Nowadays, people are not looking for a bag, they're looking for something special, something which really reflects who they are," she said. "And this is particularly true when speaking of customers buying luxury bags."

But if people look for products or experiences that reflect themselves, developing those impactful experiences can seem particularly challenging in a country so wide and vast as China: just 15% of its population is equal to the UK, Germany and France combined. By investing in personalization, your brand becomes better fit to further segment those audiences into actionable demographics that inspire and co-collaborate in new, emotionally resonant experiences.

To start, consider how to make a more meaningful impact throughout the customer decision journey (CDJ) and strategize around how that builds into a first-party relationship with individual users. This mindset is key for the approach we take in the work that we do, utilizing the full suite of Adobe's Experience Cloud to deliver memorable experiences that emotionally resonate.

THE NEED FOR DATA-DRIVEN CREATIVE EXPERIENCES

Some might see "data-driven creative" as an oxymoron, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Brands exist to serve their customers with the utmost care through the following simple reminder: behind every data point sits a real human being with a voice. That said, the aggregated data from your Adobe Analytics backend can help you better understand what resonates with consumers across the WeChat ecosystem, preparing your team to better understand the growing needs of consumers and confidently optimize their journeys.

It's obvious that analytics can help determine which product design performs best or whether KPIs have been met. But more interesting—and this is where brands must direct more attention—is how you can use consumer interaction data to pre-test and iterate upon an idea, essentially turning users into contributors to your product design.

This process enables you to focus your efforts on key strategic areas that build both innovation and momentum in incremental steps. In developing an app or web platform, you can use these analytics to identify and remove steps that don't add value to the user experience and adopt a more customer-obsessed approach as you go.

Behind every data point sits a real human being with a voice.

Here's a breakdown of the process that has worked for us in A/B testing audiences and specific experiences built for them, using Adobe Target in a four-week sprint cycle. First, spend the first week building a hypothesis around your user—this is where personas and research come into play. Next, test and learn your prototype by launching it for the audience segments matching these personas. Once you have a minimum of about 15,000 data points, you should have enough insights to build and launch the app. Post-launch, make sure to continue to test and iterate for effectiveness. Be mindful, as this bond creates a conversation between the user and the product designers, and helps inform upcoming consumer needs.

IDENTIFY TRIGGERS AND INTENT FOR IMPACT

Effective personalization requires you to rethink what you thought you knew about demographics. What's important isn't just what Tencent UserID provides—what matters is the content that clicks with a user, and any personalized platform should recognize these preferences across a creatively differentiated experience. Adobe does this seamlessly via its Experience Cloud's Visitor ID: a fixed, persistent identifier per WeChat user that visits your mini-program, WeChat Ecom Store or other digital properties of the brand. This allows you to build comprehensive profiles of your visitors based on their actions and interests, augmenting the data from WeChat.

Consumers are more comfortable providing data when they understand there's a fair tradeoff. From a user experience perspective, aim for transparency in how your platform translates user interactions into recommendations and new content. The **PUMA "run my way" campaign** began by acquiring the user's

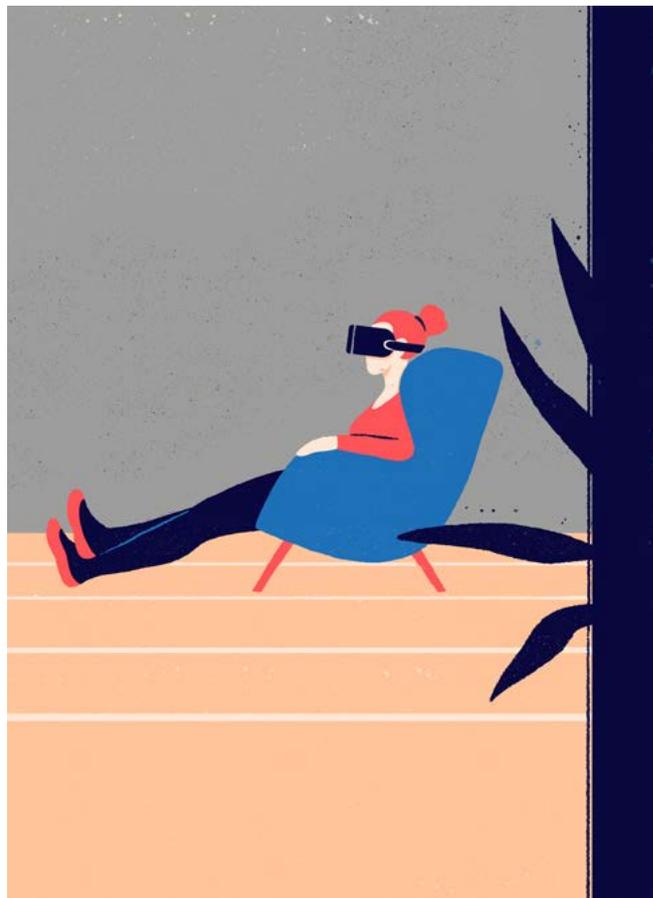
OpenID via a QR code scan, allowing for personalization by giving each user a choice in the color and finish of their puma avatar as well as options for the soundtrack. After running through the scene via a treadmill, users conclude the experience with a personalized video takeaway.

Effective personalization requires you to rethink what you thought you knew about demographics.

So, how can you execute with a platform that achieves something similar? First, move away from a one-size-fits-all mentality. Adobe Analytics and Target let you identify and segment audiences for testing, leveraging touchpoints throughout the customer decision journey to inform creative design and tailoring the user experience toward business outcomes. By turning successful tests into perpetual personalization activities, you can continue to serve your audiences their preferred experience through Adobe Target.

This part of the process trips up those who **haven't properly set up an attribution model** or strategy for success, leading some to consider abandoning personalization altogether. It begs the question: if businesses continue to inundate users with the same, irrelevant ads again and again through careless retargeting in external channels, were they ever really personalizing in the first place?

Personalization is your chance to build the experience your users have always wanted on your own properties. With the right toolset, this is a tangible and practical thing to do. The mighty size of the Chinese consumer market truly enables even the most sophisticated personalization powered by machine learning in Adobe Target. It requires a lot of data,



but in return offers automated targeting of your experiences to just the audiences most likely to respond. And it has the power to change the messaging and creative of any experience to the options that work best for a particular segment of the audience — all without a data analyst's involvement.

Personalization done properly actually empowers the user to craft their own product and design their own journey to their own liking. Through a data-driven creative process that focuses its strategy on assisting your WeChat users, you can drive more meaningful, impactful, memorable user experiences.

08



HOW SMART PRODUCTION BALANCES BUDGETS AND CONSISTENCY

By Joris Knetsch (Managing Director, MediaMonks Singapore) and Chin-Han Yu (Growth Monk at MediaMonks)

Production challenges may be stalling efforts around the world, though there's never been a more urgent need for content—and for cost efficiency across the board, from concept to market. To remedy these difficulties, many brands have fallen back on reusing archival material or stock. Both strategies showcase the benefits of having a library of assets built for the long-term.

But asset libraries have another key benefit, too, particularly in the APAC region: they offer a strategic way to balance visual consistency across locally produced assets. With each market building and executing its own creative, it can be a challenge to ensure the brand identity stays coherent throughout. This drove the strategy behind our asset library for Senka.

MediaMonks set out to build a centralized asset library with a full year's shelf life. Organized from the top down, the library depicted each product in a variety of ways. We took careful considerations to ensure assets could be used with relevance in a variety of markets, like holding back on typography and only partially featuring models in a way that would be relevant for all markets. Through this strategy, a global brand is able to not only retain some control over locally produced assets, but also makes the process easier for local teams that no longer have to build their own creative from scratch.

Of course, this strategy helps a brand build a large volume of creative as well. For an automaker advertising in APAC, for example, we **built a platform** that enables local marketing teams to quickly mix-and-match creative assets and copy into new banner ads. The platform came out of a need to create, review and approve a volume of ads that had previously seemed unsustainable for the variety of APAC markets and their different guidelines.

A FIT-FOR-PURPOSE PROCESS

Building an asset library that not only remains relevant throughout the year, but to a diverse audience throughout the APAC region, requires an efficient, fit-for-purpose production process. To shoot as efficiently as possible, we organized the process around a handful of photographic setups. Each setup was built around a specific purpose and goal, and by establishing these compositions early in the process, we minimized the amount of time you would need to set up each creative asset. Some of the setups included: shooting skin, shooting water, highlighting the products' unique foaming quality, tabletop flat lays and more.

This process offers an important learning that applies to any production: it's critical that your producer serves as a guardian of efficiency and is aligned closely with the creative team from the start. The strength of creatives is that they love to dive deep into storytelling whenever they're given the chance—and a producer that's focused on opportunities to reduce, reuse and recycle helps to put much-needed constraints in place and keep the process grounded. Striking that balance between creative output and efficiency is key, and teams that are able to align both put themselves at an advantage.

It's critical that your producer serves as a guardian of efficiency.

Whether you aim to produce a traditional shoot or want to shoot over 110 diverse, unique assets in just three days, including the producer in the mix from the earliest concepting phase ensures the project stays on-track, both from a budget as well as a timings perspective. Similarly, a liaison between the production team and client is equally important. Just like the producer's role in safeguarding efficiency, the person connecting the team to the client ensures that client needs are met—for example, that budgetary requirements are strictly adhered to.

BYPASS FORMAT CHALLENGES WITH VERSATILITY

While the process above worked well for Senka's needs, other smart production strategies exist to achieve the required creative output. An alternative to the process above is to shoot each element individually, which can then be stitched together in post-production. A benefit to this approach is that it can enhance the shelf life of your library, or you can continually tweak and remix elements to increase the effectiveness of your creative **using performance data**.

Brands that have taken such an approach may find that it's well-suited for a reality in which doing new shoots has become increasingly difficult. But a caveat to this process is that post-production becomes more time consuming—so it may not be the optimal approach for a brand that aims to meet budget efficiency as much as possible. With this in mind, brands should carefully consider the practical purpose behind their production strategy.

The fit-for-format approach also typically begins with specific formats and platforms in mind. For most countries, this is a straightforward exercise since there will be the favorite social and ecommerce platforms. In APAC, with a much wider variety of formats, building such a media plan in advance can be tough. Therefore, organizing creative production around these specific formats can be difficult.

To be truly multipurpose, it's important to create assets that don't work just in specific dimensions but have large, neutral backgrounds you can resize to fit a large variety of formats, whether they skew wide or tall. Key details in each asset need to be visible and legible no matter how the asset is adapted.

This approach also enables you to account for different sizing needed for different languages and writing systems, which is another challenge that is particularly unique to the diverse APAC market. For Senka, we set everything against plain, color-blocked backdrops that were easy to resize.

This all goes to show that strategy and alignment are key to an efficient production process, which enables brands to develop a large volume of high-quality assets—enough to last a whole year but produced in just days. From budget efficiencies to enabling visual consistency targeted toward diverse audiences, a strategic approach to production gives brands the tools they need to offer relevance across markets.



CLOSING REMARKS

The past 100 days have been challenging across industries, but necessity is the mother of invention. Now that they have gained their bearings, the future holds great potential for brands to start new traditions, differentiate themselves and reinvent their industries.

In the coming months and years, we expect brands will take a more considered approach as they continue to evolve within a changed world. Success today relies on rejecting the traditional digital transformation approach, and instead adopting a more agile mindset that drives impact through quick wins and supporting customer-facing experiences.

This more focused, intentional investment in virtualization helps to support what MediaMonks Founder Wesley ter Haar calls “interactive, tactile and personalized moments of magic that create conversation, conversion and commercial opportunities.” After seeing what we have achieved with brands in the intervening months since the pandemic began, we look forward to seeing what other innovations brands will build into the next year.

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INTEGRATING FORWARD WITH MEDIAMONKS

MediaMonks is a premium digital experience partner, helping brands better understand and connect with their audiences, building brand love in the process. Deeply engaged and committed to our clients' success, we help brands integrate forward and retain stronger control in their creative, content production and delivery—bridging together several diverse capabilities from across the S4Capital family in a single, end-to-end offering.

Whether applying data to optimize a campaign's relevance or helping clients deliver total branded experiences across a digital ecosystem, our capabilities include a mix of strategic consulting, data auditing, production optimization and digital transformation. You can find us spread across the globe in 40 locations, 29 countries with over 3,300+ people.

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