

# illuminate

A DIRECT AGENTS PUBLICATION



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ELEVATING  
VISIONARY BRANDS



SINCE 2003.

ISSUE  
#04



APRIL  
2022



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# Illuminate

Dear clients, partners, & friends,

Looking ahead into the next few months, we're excited about what the future holds for the Direct Agents team and our visionary partners. As we celebrate our 19th year in business, we reflect on our growth and success as an agency.

Over the past few months, we've moved into new offices in Los Angeles and New York, hired many new employees, and continued to stay ahead of ever-evolving digital marketing trends with industry-leading technology. Our people and our visionary mindsets have remained at the core of everything we do from the very beginning. To commemorate our time as an agency, we've gathered a collection of our best work, thought leadership, and our predictions looking ahead. Our agency leadership and client partners have collaborated to bring you this content in the first Illuminate issue of 2022.

Thank you for your partnership over the past few months, years, and decades. We look forward to continuing to rise with you in the future, as we hit new milestones and celebrate past achievements. We have a vision to expand, innovate, excel, create, and grow with our individual teams, clients, and partnerships.

We hope you enjoy Illuminate.

Many thanks,  
Dinesh and Josh Boaz



Dinesh Boaz



Josh Boaz

## Executive Team

**Dinesh Boaz**, Co-Founder & Creative Director

**Josh Boaz**, Co-Founder & Managing Director

**Lyle Srebnick**, Partner & President - Performance Marketing Group

**Megan Conahan**, EVP

**Mark Glauberson**, EVP

**Daniel Owen**, EVP, Emerging Media + Technology

**Eddy Gil**, SVP, Finance

**Sara Martinez-Noriega**, VP, Human Resources

**Brittany Lange**, VP, Client Resources

**Joe Belafonte**, VP, Data Science & Experience

**Jackson Richards**, VP, Strategy

**Corey Levine**, VP, Integrated Media

**Brendan Strauss**, VP, Performance Group

**Jennifer Graeffe**, VP, Client Services, Performance Group

**Oren Arbit**, VP, Performance Media

**Nick Galante**, VP, Growth

**Rachel Nugent**, VP, Compliance



## EDITORS

Mark Glauberson  
Katherine Grabowsky  
Hannah Musante  
Erin Gerety

Valentina Elegante  
Shay Roman  
Austin Korff  
Katerina Katehis

## CONTRIBUTORS

Dinesh Boaz  
Josh Boaz  
Matthew Curtis  
Austin Korff  
Daniel Owen  
Monnica Farag  
Nick Galante

Jackson Richards  
Trevor Clune  
Khari Motayne  
Sara Martinez-Noriega  
Corey Levine  
Matt Otis

## ART DIRECTION

Maria Corner

## DESIGNERS

Yiping Liu  
Matt Swain

## NEW YORK OFFICE

149 5th Ave, 16th Floor,  
New York, NY 10011

## LOS ANGELES OFFICE

10000 Washington Blvd. 6th Floor  
Culver City, CA 90232

THE RISE OF THE \* \* \* \*

# META-VERSE



**JACKSON RICHARDS**

Vice President, Strategy  
Direct Agents

Reading business and technology headlines over the last 12 months, you get the sense that a paradigm shift is taking place across the internet. The hype surrounding Web3, The Metaverse, and NFTs is seemingly building every day and, understandably, many organizations

are wondering if they need to participate in this movement, and where they might even start.

But with all of the buzz surrounding the Metaverse, many are still struggling to understand what these technologies are and how they are being used. The truth is that this space is still being defined, and both today's Big Tech goliaths and new players are working to build their own applications; Meta (formerly Facebook) and Microsoft each have visions for the Metaverse, while a fully decentralized world owned by its users exists in Decentraland.

For now, we can simply refer to the Metaverse as any of the numerous immersive, 3D, connected digital experiences. These worlds are powered by blockchain technology where the exchanges of digital goods and properties are facilitated with cryptocurrencies and NFTs. Together, the Metaverse, NFTs, and cryptocurrencies comprise the fundamental aspects of Web3, a decentralized and token-based internet.

A small group of businesses, mostly in gaming and entertainment, are already firmly established in today's iteration of the Metaverse. Massive gaming titles such as Fortnite and platforms such as Roblox have popularized playing in real-time virtual settings. For most businesses outside of the gaming industry, the Metaverse is not so clear, and there are limited ways to leverage the Metaverse or Web3 technologies for short-term, positive-ROI revenue generation. Still, there are real and immediate reasons why many consumers and B2B companies should be eager to take their first steps in exploring these new technologies.

The importance of experimenting with the Metaverse and/or NFTs...

- 01 Gain an early-mover advantage.** While their ultimate applications are still being identified, these technologies will soon be ubiquitous. Brands that place strategic bets today will have a head start in pivoting their businesses to take full advantage of new revenue streams.
- 02 Reach younger demographics in an exciting new medium.** As Gen Z will likely be the first generation to adopt Web3 technologies at scale over the coming years, brands looking to attract younger audiences will need to move faster in developing their initial tests. Nearly 75% of Gen Z shoppers have purchased a digital product within a video game, demonstrating their enthusiasm towards new consumer formats.
- 03 Develop innovative and forward-thinking brand reputation.** Brands that have already experimented with NFTs and the Metaverse have experienced boosted PR coverage and awareness as many consumers are excited to learn about how different brands are exploring these new mediums.
- 04 Strengthen relationships with existing customers.** Brands that are able to provide new experiences to their customers in the Metaverse or with NFTs have an opportunity to build brand loyalty and gain insights into how you can better service your customers in a Web3 world.
- 05 Propel your career.** Marketers need to constantly keep up with a rapidly changing landscape. Championing the Metaverse and Web3 within your own organization can be a great way to push your business forward while developing your reputation as a bold and leading-edge thinker.»



# NFTS AND ECOMMERCE

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRANDS



### TREVOR CLUNE

Paid Media Strategist  
Direct Agents

This upcoming year will be shaped by new technologies and ways for brands to engage with and create value for their customers. Undoubtedly, it will be the brands who are among the first to act upon these new opportunities that will benefit the most, both in the short and long term. Among

these new opportunities, Web3 applications such as NFTs and live shopping stand out as the most unique and impactful ways to help **grow and position your brand in 2022.**

In short, NFTs (non-fungible tokens) are non-interchangeable and are stored on a blockchain. At the moment, NFTs are still in the early adoption phase and anyone from artists to brands have already been creating different types of NFT projects.

One of the most important aspects of NFTs that brands should keep in mind is the fact that they are still far from mainstream and only a small portion of tech early adopters understand how to use them. That's important because dedicating resources to creating an NFT project now likely won't have an impact in boosting your bottom line revenue or sales. However, it will **position your brand as innovative and forward looking**, while encouraging your customer base interested in purchasing an NFT to become brand advocates, if the NFT ownership is valuable. Aside from the external benefits, it will also give your brand an initial **roadmap** for how to execute a Web3 project, which will be necessary as Web3 continues to become more widely adopted in the years to come.

Live online shopping merges the experiential element of shopping at brick and mortar stores with the convenience that comes

with online shopping. This makes it a major area of opportunity for both DTC brands who have historically relied on ecommerce to generate sales and big box retailers who generate the majority of their sales from physical storefronts. Live shopping gives brands a chance to stand out from the crowd as more traditional online shopping platforms, such as social feeds, are flooded with more ads and product-focused posts.

There's already been live shopping success stories as brands who have tried it have reported a lift in sales, engagement, and brand awareness around the times of their events. A live shopping strategy will be **increasingly necessary to stay competitive and generate sales** as the paid media landscape continues to change and become less effective due to consumer data loss.»

# THE POWER OF MISSION-DRIVEN BUSINESS



**KHARI MOTAYNE**  
Director, Inclusive Strategy  
Direct Agents



**AUSTIN KORFF**  
SEO Coordinator  
Direct Agents

The past two years have represented a dynamic shift in how brands engage with and build communities around their products. Between the rise of TikTok, and the explosion of online social movements ranging from racial justice to environmental activism, and the breakneck speed that culture has moved at has accelerated the need for brands to take rapid stances on cultural issues. **The expectations have changed**, with 63% of consumers wanting brands to make the world a better place, and 83% expecting brands to act beyond their core business. Brands that can authentically execute this have more consumer trust and superior margins, with consumers being 4.5 times more likely to purchase from a brand that takes a stand (Source: Edelman Trust Index).

Consumers are not only looking for brands with solid missions that align with their values—but they also want to see that mission in action. To show this, brands should emphasize storytelling as a means to demonstrate their impact. Brand stories should bring the mission to life and show authentically the positive effects of their mission in a way that connects with consumers. Telling human-centric stories that convey how a brand acts as a force for good or positive change can resonate deeply with audiences and, ultimately, be a differentiator in purchasing decisions.

With 70% of consumers linking purchase considerations to trust, it is crucial that before brands market their business as mission-driven, they have to do the work genuinely (Source: Edelman Trust Index). Customers have gone beyond just consumers, becoming critics and creators. The good news is that when done well, loyal consumers can become powerful advocates for the brands and flag bearers for community engagement. The bad news is brands that have done only surface-deep investment in particular social stances will not pass this new savvy consumers sniff test. Showcasing partnerships, whether it's diverse suppliers, non-profit community organizations, influencers, or other mission-driven organizations, can be powerful quality cues to signal a commitment to social causes that align with the brand's core values.

Navigating the increasingly fast-moving cultural landscape requires more than a simple one-step strategy. However, brands can keep three fundamental principles in mind when leaning into the power of mission-driven business:

- 01 Not taking a stance on social issues can be more of a liability than taking the wrong perspective** for a mission-driven business. It can undermine the public-facing integrity of that mission.
- 02 Consumers are more likely to trust and forgive** brand missteps when a strong history of being a mission-driven business.
- 03 Content & storytelling should follow the mission and purpose** of the brand that goes beyond the product; however, authenticity is vital, and partnerships can offer a gateway into securing that trust with the consumer.»



# TURNING POINT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
DINESH BOAZ

Dinesh Boaz, Creative Director & Co-Founder of Direct Agents, has a passion for taking images of the natural world from open-door helicopters. His background as a music producer enables him to combine the visual and performing arts in developing his aerial photography inspiration. Dinesh creates his works like layers of sound in a track; playing with a dynamic juxtaposition between the natural landscape and our involvement in it.

In 2021, Dinesh joined Fujifilm X-Photographers as a brand ambassador and opened his own photography studio in NoHo. In 2022, Dinesh has been featured in Harvard Business Review's January issue and released his book, "Turning Point," which showcases more abstract work captured in Iceland. Dinesh uses his photography to help inspire and grow his vision for the creative solutions at Direct Agents.



(Top Left)  
*'Adventures of Ragnar', Iceland 2021*  
(Top Right)  
*'Matterhorn', Zermatt, Switzerland 2022*  
(Bottom Right)  
*'Glacier Run', Gornergrat Railway,  
Zermatt Switzerland 2022*



# 19 YEARS OF INNOVATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH



**JOSH BOAZ**  
Co-Founder & Managing Director  
Direct Agents



**DINESH BOAZ**  
Co-Founder & Creative Director  
Direct Agents

## What does it mean to be a visionary?

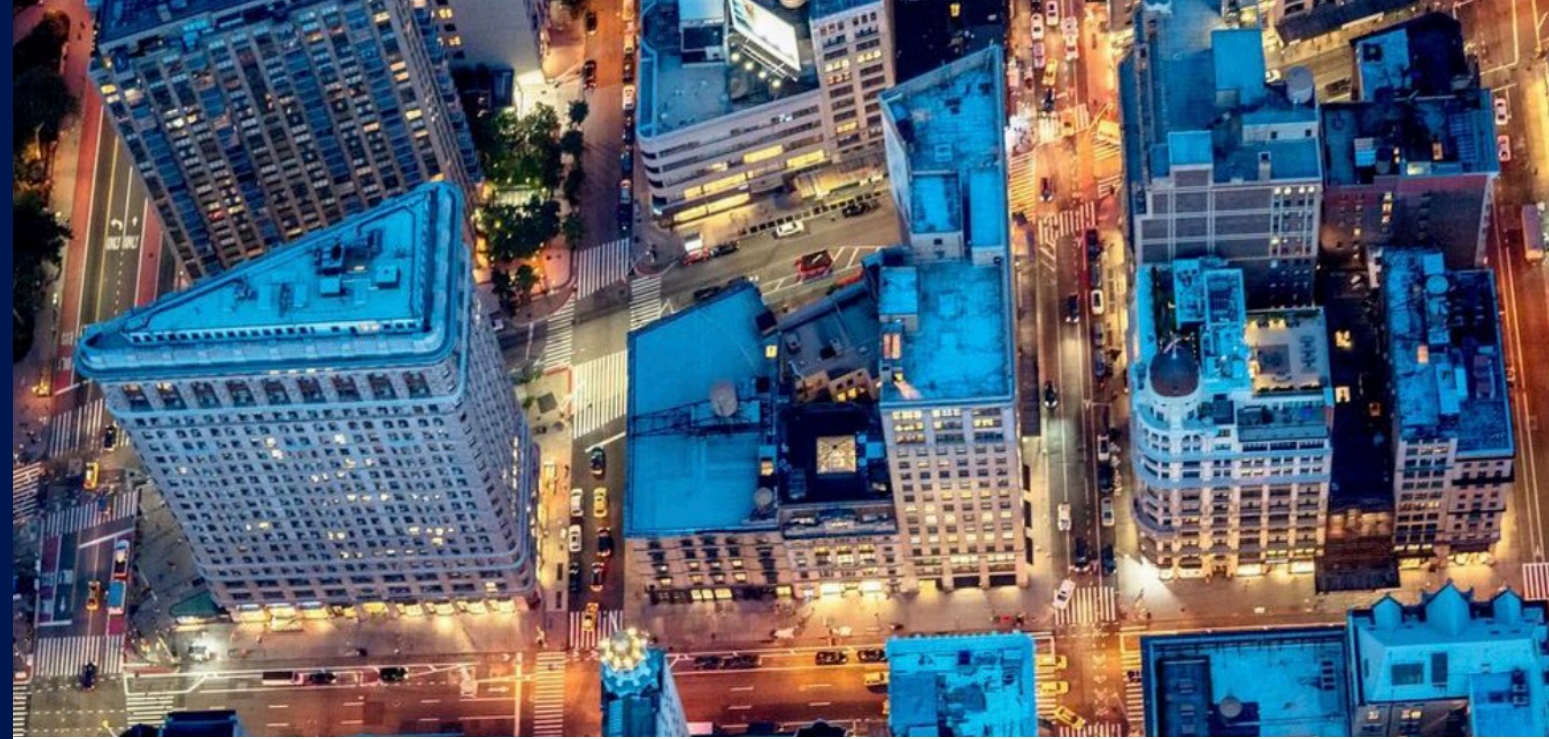
**J:** To be a visionary is to have a path that is not clearly defined, and be okay with that as long as you are constantly learning and growing. Professionally, being a visionary is being able to pursue the undefined path and be curious enough to pursue all the directions that it'll take you in.

**D:** Visionaries are creators & makers of things. Visionaries have a drive to discover more and stay on the pulse of what's coming ahead in design, technology, business and innovation. We're constantly evolving and setting trends as we look forward. We push the boundaries to not just adapt to, but overcome challenges. Creativity and innovation are at the core of everything we do.

## How does Direct Agents exemplify a visionary mindset?

**J:** As entrepreneurs, we didn't have a set path to travel on or a playbook to follow in the very beginning. However, we've always had certain values that are non-negotiable. We put our employees first, we prioritize a work-life balance, and we always embrace a growth and learner mindset. These values have allowed us to have that visionary mindset and continue to pursue those undefined paths.

**D:** We value our people, first and foremost. For 19 years, Direct Agents has been built on a commitment to grit, hard work and staying ahead of the competition. It's also built on trust, transparency and a culture of learning, growth and development. Our team is helping define the future of the digital world. Our goal from the very beginning was to create an environment for our teams to thrive and grow.



## WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO HAVE A VISIONARY MINDSET?

**J:** For our individuals, our client relationships, our goals, and our business outlook, we're in it for the long run. It's a marathon, not a sprint. When you have that visionary mindset, you make decisions that are more well thought out in good times and in bad. It permeates everything we do as a company.

**D:** Our constant need to change, grow, and push the boundaries has kept us ahead of the industry. We have seen so much change in our 19 years in business and we understand what it takes to have a visionary mindset when considering our business growth. Our people are constantly challenging themselves to create, build, and grow more.

## How does Direct Agents position themselves as a partner with visionary brands?

**J:** As a company built on this visionary mindset, we're naturally attracted to other companies that share similar philosophies. We work with long-term thinkers who want to push the boundaries of what they do and take those paths that are not as certain. We think about the bigger picture for our clients with that long-term approach. In our 19 years of business, we've built that expertise and brought this to our clients..

**D:** We pride ourselves on our work with visionary brands who look to us as a partner. Our clients have that same growth-driven mentality, and we are inspired by their drive and tenacity for innovation in a fast-growing and competitive marketplace. We thrive in the environment of obstacles, challenges and problem solving alongside our client partners. Our teams build off this energy to drive each other and build solutions that are truly changing and shaping the future of industry.»



# Beyond the Digital Shelf:

HOW ONLINE PRESENCE CAN LEAD INTO AN OMNI-CHANNEL PRESENCE IN 2022



**DANIEL OWEN**

EVP  
Direct Agents



**NICK GALANTE**

VP of Growth, eCommerce  
Direct Agents

## AS AMAZON CONTINUES TO SEE GROWTH IN THE DIGITAL SPACE,

we see strategic expansion in two main categories that may favor having more brick & mortar spaces: **grocery and apparel**.

Amazon recently announced it is shutting down 68 brick & mortar bookstores and 4-star stores to focus on Amazon Fresh, Whole Foods, Amazon Go and Amazon style stores, clearly showing these are big areas for growth.

In early January, Amazon officially announced Amazon Style: “our first-ever physical fashion store where customers can find a selection of women’s and men’s apparel, shoes, and accessories.” Apparel is a category that thrives in physical stores as consumers want to try clothes on for the perfect fit.

While this is still very new, we have seen smaller format fast fashion apparel stores such as Zara and H&M grow over the last year despite the ongoing pandemic, and it’s a sign of Amazon’s growth in this space.

With an ever changing “new normal” over the past two years, **retail strategies must constantly evolve**. With major supply chain disruptions beginning last year and continuing into 2022, there are key players that have come out on top due to their strong supply chains: Amazon, Walmart and Target. These retailers have been able to shift operations considerably between the digital and physical space and reach consumers in a way many other retailers were unable to do.

Let’s take a look at some key trends across these retailers and what that means for your selling and marketing strategies:

Moral of the story: If you’re a brand in the grocery or apparel category, you can **start winning these brick & mortar placements** with Amazon through a strong online presence.

## WALMART AND TARGET ARE OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE COIN ...

when it comes to expansion opportunities. With both having an undeniably strong footprint in brick & mortar across the country, they are **driving considerable growth and investments into their digital space**.

In 2022, Walmart revamped its advertising business with Walmart Connect, began offering free shipping with a Walmart membership, and leaned into approximately 3,000 brick & mortar stores to quickly fulfill online orders.

With a **quickly growing marketplace business**, they are also using their online business to find new brands to showcase in their Walmart and Sam’s Club retail locations. For the first time ever this year, online sellers have exclusive early

access to their Open Call event giving a unique opportunity to win in store placements.

We see a similar story with Target who showed incredible growth in 2021 (+\$30B in revenue) and is continuing to invest heavily in the digital space. They are building large warehouses that use automation to quickly pack same-day delivery orders and expanding Roundel (Target’s internal media agency) to grow its operations to \$2 billion over the next few years.

Target also offers a program for early-stage product companies called Target Forward Founders to help them expand into retail spaces.

These trends can help us know one thing for sure: **omni-channel is the future of retail and winning digitally** will be a major first step to gaining retail space as well. Our eCommerce team at Direct Agent’s focuses on creating a strong strategy for marketplaces across content, advertising investments, logistics and more. We help our client’s win in all areas of ecommerce and can help guide them into an even greater omni-channel presence. »

# THE CREATIVE LANDSCAPE

## CREATIVE & DESIGN HAS NEVER BEEN MORE DYNAMIC...

and inventive than it is in 2022. From the growing popularity of NFTs and the conversation around design in the metaverse, to new design styles emerging from the inspiration of decades past, 2022 is bringing a new energy and life to the world of design. As marketers continue along into 2022, here are the five major creative and design shifts guiding our digital strategies.

### 01 SIMPLIFY THE MESSAGING.

From web design to video content, consumers want **clarity in brand messaging**. Focus on simple concepts that communicate a brand's core values, rather than getting bogged down in the details. Consumers are looking for messaging that focus on the **humanness of the brand**, without the extra fluff. The Interactive Advertising Bureau found that four times as many consumers prefer efficiency in ads, rather than campaigns that try out "fun" messaging. That's not to say these ideas must be mutually exclusive, but when considering a messaging strategy that's going to resonate with consumers, focus on **utility over cleverness**.

### 02 COLLABORATE ON A DEEPER LEVEL.

As hybrid work schedules are in full swing, brands are looking for **deeper collaboration** tools. Brainstorming, storyboarding, presenting and relaying feedback are no longer linear processes. Tools like Miro and Figma allow agencies and brands to interact directly with each other in a virtual environment. Presentation decks are replaced with interactive maps and sticky boards.

Feedback is given in real time, and overarching campaigns goals are stripped down to **uncover the core strategy**. These collaboration tools will set good ideas apart from great campaigns.

### 03 KEEP MOVING.

As conversations around NFTs and the metaverse continue to grow, **trends around motion** are emerging. Consumers are looking for movement in 2022, and that's apparent through the push towards motion in 2022. **Dance** as a way to display motion within the human form will be trending among brands of all sizes, with consumers seeking energy and liveliness. This can also be seen through technological advancements with new animation styles emerging. Bold hyperrealism will take over the creative landscape, as animation becomes more accessible.

### 04 AIM TO MAKE THEM SMILE.

Q2 and Q3 bring warmer weather and **brighter futures**. Consumers are no longer looking back at the past couple of years, but rather forward at what the new year will bring. **Humor** and **optimism**

are resonating with consumers, evident through the most popular Super Bowl 2022 ads such as Amazon's "Mind Reader" or T-Mobile's Zach Braff and Donald Faison duet. The idea of 'We're Back' is at the heart of messaging in 2022, as consumers are hopeful for the months ahead.

### 05 SPICE IT UP WITH COLOR.

Consumers are **craving color**. Pantone announced "Very Peri" as the color of the year, a blue hue with a violet red undertone, as "a new Pantone color whose Courageous Presence Encourages Personal Inventiveness And Creativity." People want to get up and move in 2022, as the **vibrancy of life returns**. Create inventive ideas, explore unknown areas, and try new hobbies. 2022 is the year of bright, bold colors.»

LEADER POINT OF VIEW

# ATT'S

## IMPACT ON FACEBOOK ADVERTISING

Since Apple rolled out its App Tracking Transparency (ATT) in April 2021, the mobile ad industry has seen significant shifts. Costs to advertise on Facebook have become more expensive, measurement is more difficult, and Facebook's targeting capabilities have become weaker. So far, in 2022, Direct Agents has seen: CPAs on Facebook/Instagram increase on avg.

60% YoY, with CPMs on Facebook/Instagram increasing on avg. 31% YoY and conversion rates dropping off slightly (by ~1 percentage point.)

So, how should brands and marketers approach media looking ahead, as ATT continues to impact Facebook advertising? **Take it from some Direct Agents experts in the industry:**



### KHARI MOTAYNE

Director, Inclusive Strategy  
Direct Agents

Brands should keep their final goals in mind and not underestimate the value of signals outside of the last attributable conversion event. In addition to looking at marketing strategy holistically against business goals, looking at other intent signals earlier in the funnel will be critical. If they haven't already, brands need to lean into more robust first-party data collection. Experimenting with tools like lead generation through messenger campaigns provides unique opportunities to enhance the quality of the data collected.



### COREY LEVINE

VP, Integrated Media  
Direct Agents

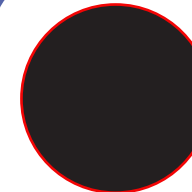
Social media will continue to play an important role for brands and marketers as long as users continue to use the platforms. To be successful in the world of data privacy, brands and marketers should look to diversify their social media mix, develop new audience strategies by leveraging 1P and/or custom data segments, change how they buy within Facebook by testing if best practices like Automatic Placement Optimisation are still effective, and re-evaluate realistic CPA goals based on LTV and profitability.



### MONNICA FARAG

Strategic Account Director,  
Business Strategy  
Direct Agents

Technology has always brought new challenges and opportunities, and that is the case for the privacy-focused marketing era we are currently in. Moving forward, brands will need to shift their mindset from a direct response approach to focus on their value propositions and differentiators in order to create meaningful connections with potential customers. By using authentic storytelling to create impactful content, brands can foster genuine connections with consumers by aligning with their interests and values and creating emotional connections that will drive further consideration.



### MATT OTIS

Associate Director, Paid Media  
Direct Agents

The adoption of ATT across Facebook/Instagram has had a massive effect on the advertising industry, forcing brands and marketers alike to adjust the way they approach the platform. As consumers continue to opt out of tracking, traditional targeting will start to become less effective over time, especially in regards to retargeting. Brands and Marketers will need to shift their Facebook/Instagram targeting approach to focus on broader audiences and in-app retargeting to ensure they are prepared for the future of digital advertising. At Direct Agents, we are constantly monitoring this progression for our clients to ensure that they are set up for future success.

# THE GREAT ~~RESIGNATION~~ PROGRESSION

"AS INDIVIDUAL VALUES SHIFT, WE SHOULD REEXAMINE OURS AS COMPANIES..."



**SARA MARTINEZ-NORIEGA**  
VP, Human Resources  
Direct Agents



The Great Resignation—what a daunting name for the phenomenon many companies are currently experiencing. After a year on pause, it only made sense that the normal attrition we should have seen in 2020 would be pushed to 2021. What we didn't fully expect was the extent of how the **changing world would shift our personal values** and affect the ways we choose to live and work.

A LinkedIn article, "The Reinvention of Company Culture," recently called this period **The Great Reshuffle**. This is a more accurate term because the majority of what we're seeing is people resigning and going to work somewhere else. So while we're seeing people go, we're also gaining new team members.

While it's more accurate, both terms are passive, as if this phenomenon is just something that is happening out of our control, instead of considering the opportunities that we're being presented as culture builders. I prefer to look at this time as The Great Reset. As individual values shift, we should reexamine ours as companies. What does our ideal culture look like and how can we get there? Instead of just focusing on numbers, let's truly see who is leaving. What were they adding to our culture, where did they detract? If we lose an A player, that's attrition, but losing a B or C player? That's an opportunity.

We also need to see who is staying. Were there potential A players in the shadows that now have the opportunity to shine? How can we further **foster their development and fast-track their growth?**

While it's frustrating to feel like we're playing a never ending game of staffing whack-a-mole, let's not waste more time wallowing on The Great Resignation. Let's step back, reset and act on the possibilities for change and growth.»

# NEW YORK CITY CULTURE GUIDE



## ⇒ THE HOLE

This local contemporary art gallery supports the collaboration of artists in the downtown community. Oftentimes, two exhibitions will run simultaneously, and for the lucky visitor, performances are occasionally hosted in between exhibitions.

## ⇒ FAVELA CUBANA

Two of our favorite cuisines mixed together, to create amazing dishes. Both Cuban and Brazilian aromas and flavor fill this location!

## ⇒ RUMBLE

Combine boxing, strength training and cardio for an intense workout. Relieve stress and get a great workout with flashing lights, blasting high energy music, and bag punching.

## ⇒ SWIFT HIBERIAN LOUNGE

The local Irish pub in NoHo offers live music and a great atmosphere. Whether you're looking to try a Classic Irish Whiskey, or if speciality cocktails are more your speed, Swift has it all.

## ⇒ FITTING ROOM

This athletic training facility is native to New York City and a favorite among the DA FitFam. Whether you're a rookie or a pro, everyone is welcome to burn, sweat and tone.

## ⇒ NITEHAWK CINEMA

With two Brooklyn locations, Nitehawk is a premier dine-in theater that highlights first-run and repertory film programming. Nitehawk creates a full experience around the movie features, with speciality menus featuring local ingredients and Q&As by special guests.

*(Left to Right)*





A DIRECT AGENTS PUBLICATION



*Maria L...*