

Illuminate



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*Celebrating 20 years
of Direct Agents*

SINCE 2003.

ISSUE
#06

SPRING
2023





ISSUE
#06

SPRING
2023



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illuminate

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF DIRECT AGENTS



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FOUNDERS' FOREWORD

Dear clients, partners & friends,

We are excited to present our 6th edition of Illuminate, with the concepts **reflect, adapt** and **persevere** to set the theme for this year.

With the barrage of headlines every day and exciting new tech products or tools launching weekly, there are both many unknowns and possibilities in the coming year. As we look back as an organization, we are motivated by our team's ability to adapt, reshape, and grow in a world of constant change. We are proud to head into our 20th year with a fresh outlook and an evolved growth mindset since our start in March 2003.

To celebrate our 20 years of success, we have gathered a collection of thought leadership, expertise, and industry insights. In this issue, we also gain inspiration from LA-based artist, Sebastian Curi (recently launched Zara's global new product line), who discusses constant experimentation and perseverance through his journey as a creator and collaborator. We are also pleased to present our clients and partners, Natasha Mulla and Taylor Stewart from AboveBoard, who cover their 2023 marketing goals of powering business growth through education.

We look forward to the year ahead as **we celebrate the past and navigate the future** alongside our clients, friends, colleagues, and families. Thank you to everyone who has grown alongside us for the past 20 years.

We hope you enjoy Illuminate.
Many thanks,
Dinesh and Josh Boaz

Dinesh Boaz



Josh Boaz

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Agency Founded
Launched Performance
Marketing Solution

2003



First Established
Office in NYC

2005



Expanded Office
to 594 Broadway

2007



Launched
Paid Search
Solution

2008

2009



Launched
SEO
Solution

2011



Moved
to 740
Broadway

2012



Launched
Paid Social
Solution

2013



Launched
Programmatic
Solution



THE DIRECT AGENTS STORY



Launched Data & Analytics Solution
Opened LA Office
Reached 50 Team Members



Launched Amazon Solution



First Crain's Award



Launch Creative Solution
Launched Consulting Solution

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020



Launched Polycultural Solution
Launched SOV Tech



Launched NYC New HQ in the Flatiron District



Launched Kanopy AI



Launched FOMO Tech

2021

2022

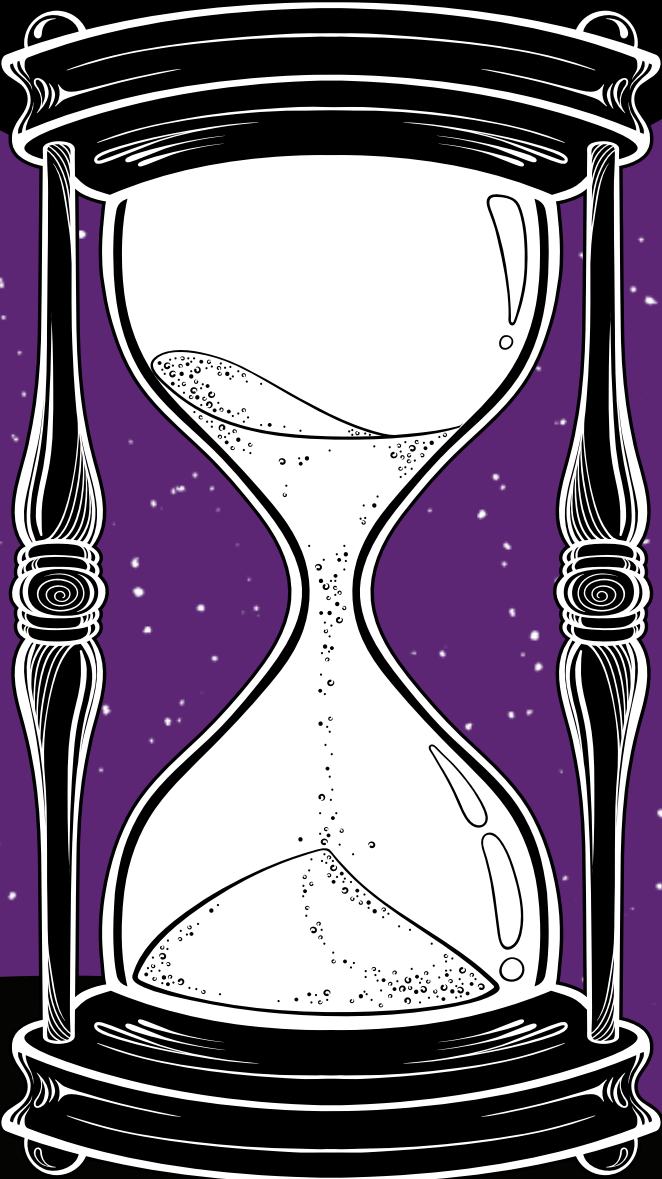
2023

A BRAND'S GUIDE TO THRIVING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



MONNICA FARAG

Director, Growth Strategy

A large, stylized white line drawing of an hourglass on a dark purple background. The hourglass has a wide top bulb and a narrow neck, with a smaller bottom bulb. The top bulb is mostly empty, while the bottom bulb is filled with a large amount of sand, indicating that time is running out. The hourglass is supported by two ornate, vertical legs that curve outwards at the top and bottom. The background is a dark purple with a pattern of small white stars, suggesting a night sky or a galaxy.

The possibility of a looming recession and a decrease in consumer spending is prompting familiar worries for brands and marketers alike. However, despite an uncertain economic climate and rising inflation, consumers continue to make purchases on brands and products they care about. These “non-essential” or “luxury” items are important to them, and thus, qualify as necessary and/or non-discretionary - prompting them to continue their normal purchasing behaviors.

While parsing down marketing costs will feel like the most obvious first step, investing in long-term brand health should actually be top of mind for marketers. Consider the following strategies to bolster emotional connections with potential consumers, creating value-brands that encourage consumption and come out on top.

Value Proposition

Brands should closely examine their unique benefits and ensure they communicate how their competitive differentiators align with their target audiences. By emphasizing their value proposition during times of uncertainty, brands can establish themselves as reliable and trustworthy, leading to greater customer loyalty and a competitive edge. Additionally, a well-defined value proposition helps brands make strategic decisions and optimize their marketing efforts, ensuring they're using their resources effectively and efficiently.

Personalization

According to PwC, 82% of consumers are willing to share more personal data in exchange for a uniquely curated experience. In exchange for their data, consumers expect brands to understand their needs and gravitate towards brands that recognize them as an individual. With more data available than ever before, brands can now create customized messages and content for specific segments of their target audience, creating valuable connections and brand loyalty with consumers.

Storytelling

Storytelling is a fundamental human experience that unites people and drives stronger, deeper connections. By creating a narrative around a product or service, brands are able to communicate their unique values and benefits in a way that is relatable and memorable. Leveraging storytelling is a way to differentiate a brand from its competitors by utilizing a unique delivery method in a highly fragmented digital landscape.

The digital marketing landscape is constantly evolving and brands need to stay one step ahead of the curve to be successful. Value propositions, personalization and storytelling are core to incorporate into marketing strategies. Brands that look to identify their customer needs and nimbly adjust their strategies and tactics in response to shifting factors are more likely than others to flourish both during and after a recession.

Leading with

Tech in

2023



documents

Marketers at every level understand how challenging it can be to drive cost-effective acquisitions and measure marketing strategies effectively.

After many years analyzing the current landscape and the challenges consistently faced by our clients, the Direct Agents team has perfected our tech capabilities to help our partners achieve the best performance with the most efficient budgets. In 2023, every dollar spent by our clients is working harder to achieve sustainable, long-term growth.

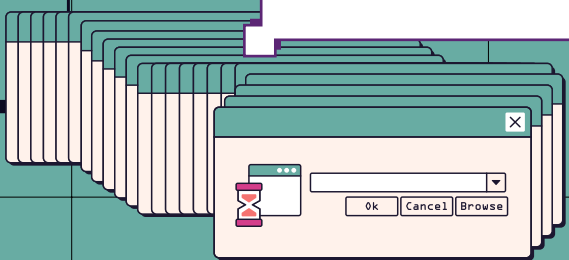
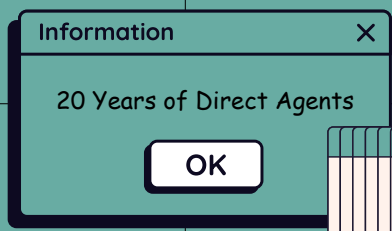
Direct Agents Analytics Team

KANOPY AI

Marketers face increasingly complex performance challenges, with rising media costs and performance insight limitations due to the evolution of data privacy. Kanopy AI was developed to address this new landscape by taking a cookieless approach to predictive insights and bidding. This solution has consistently proven to increase scale and generate efficiency for all types of brands.



internet





Kanopy AI consists of 3 core products

- Media Mix Modeling takes out the guesswork and provides brands with the optimal media mix to see holistic growth. With Kanopy AI's "What If" scenario planning tool, brands are provided advanced insights into how varying media budget scenarios will impact their projected performance
- Forecast maximizes the performance potential of every dollar using machine learning to proactively adjust media strategies
- Bidding makes a \$100k budget feel like \$300k using intelligent bidding that increases efficiency beyond the limits of native bidders

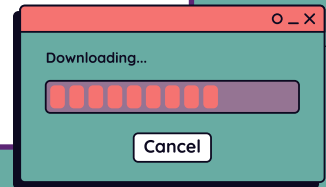


photo.jpeg



notes



e-mail



File View Play Help

FOMO TECHNOLOGY

Feedback for On-Page Management & Optimization (FOMO) Technology is the industry's first and only Amazon organic impact measurement technology. This proprietary tech product monitors all product detail page changes and integrates Amazon performance metrics. By utilizing these metrics, this technology helps brands easily quantify the impact of any organic strategy on Amazon. Direct Agents is able to provide a realtime feedback loop for how performance is impacted by any PDP (product detail page) change, such as listing price, promotions, product title / bullet points / content, OOS, LBB, and more. This allows brands to pinpoint the precise optimizations they can make to grow sales without the need to increase ad spend. This data is integrated in a customized and efficient dashboard, so clients are able to keep track of their performance. Simply put, brands can now supercharge their organic presence and sales on Amazon.

11



TREVOR CLUNE

Associate Director,
Paid Media

The streaming landscape has been evolving at a rapid pace, and the newest evolution is going to be one of the most disruptive shifts in television in decades. Year after year, live sporting events drive consistent TV viewership. Just this past year, 95 of the 100 most viewed programs on television were live sports. The rights to broadcast these sports leagues have traditionally been held by the largest broadcast cable companies such as CBS, NBC, or FOX. However, there has been an increase in streaming services outbidding these companies and winning the rights to stream live sports directly on their platforms. Some of the recent live sports to be bought by streaming services include:

- Amazon Prime purchasing the rights to Thursday Night Football

- YouTube TV purchasing the rights to NFL Sunday Ticket
- The CW purchasing the rights to LIV Golf
- Turner Sports purchasing the rights to U.S. Soccer, allowing it to be streamed from HBO Max

What this means for streaming platforms

Streaming services that have acquired live sports will now have the ability to grow their user base by attracting an entirely new audience to their platform. The challenge will be finding ways to retain these users, and get them to stream content beyond the live sports that are offered. One way we might see these services try to do this could be creating content in the style of Netflix's Formula 1 or HBO's Hard Knocks around sports in order to create ongoing storylines and more year round fan interest. Creating this niche style of "reality TV" content around sports can ensure there would be some on-demand programming a sports audience

would be interested in enough to keep returning to the platform.

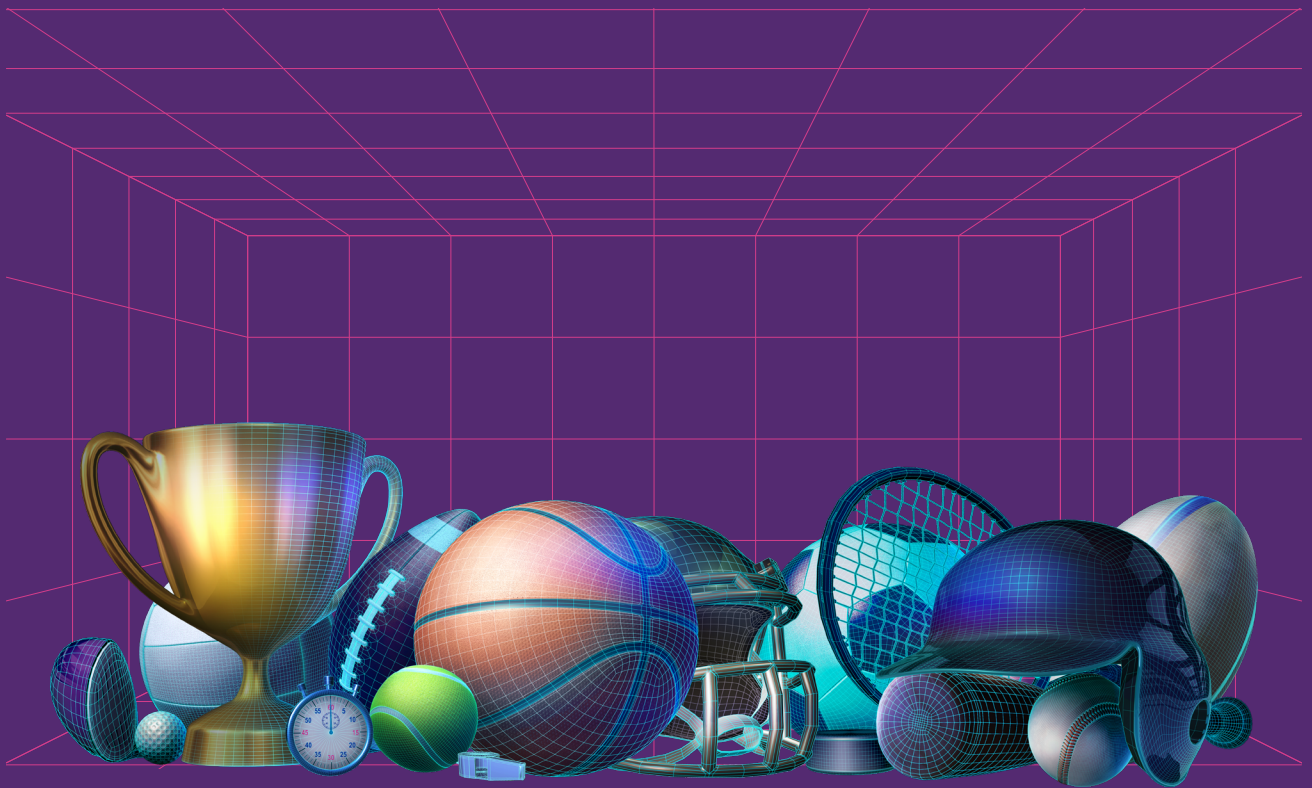
Streaming services who are yet to acquire live sports will need to find other ways to continue growing their user base to keep up with the market. To do this, they will need to invest in keeping their content catalog fresh. This path of growth is seemingly much less sustainable. The bidding war for popular TV shows and movies is only getting more expensive and content may only attract an audience for a short period of time before they decide to leave the platform. The alternative option is to invest in original content which is also risky since there isn't already an existing fan base or interest for originals.

What this means for advertisers

The majority of TV spots during sporting events

have historically been bought via upfronts, which most advertisers are not able to access or commit to. Now with the shift of live sports to streaming services, there will be more inventory openly available that can be accessed by a wider range of advertisers. Live sports might become even more attractive to advertisers since some of this inventory will be accessible in a programmatic environment, which will allow for additional targeting capabilities, more flexible planning, and alternative measurement solutions that aren't available when purchasing linear upfront packages.

The recent wave of live sports transitioning away from broadcast has only just started, and there are still many unknowns. Regardless, both streaming services and advertisers will need to keep adapting as the streaming landscape continues to evolve.



CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY ! IN THE YEAR AHEAD

In 2023, we're working smarter, not harder. Inefficient processes and time sucking administrative tasks are a thing of the past, and more time will open up for creative thinking, strategic decision-making, and innovative design. Our creative teams are leveraging new tools to refine our processes and deliver quality creatives in less time.

Eliminating the Need for New Resources

A common theme across many clients is a lack of creative resources or time for new original footage. With the application of **new AI tools**, the Future First Studio team is able to customize a humanlike avatar, write a script, and record a video all within hours or days, versus weeks or months. With the addition of video editing, custom animation, and sound engineering, product footage can

be turned into interactive how-to or testimonial videos in a fraction of the time it takes to coordinate and execute a full-scale video production.

In addition, authentic representation is top of mind for consumers and brands alike. Within minutes, these AI characters can be exported in a variety of languages so videos can efficiently and accurately reach wider markets.

Tedious Project Management is Simplified

Tools like **Figma** or **Miro** simplify the project management process so creative teams can spend less time on coordination and more time on strategic execution. These tools allow teams to communicate in real time and interact on digital whiteboards, rather than static presentations. Instead of talking at your clients or partners, these tools are able to streamline communication with all stakeholders. Future First Studio is utilizing these tools for brainstorming with clients, gathering client feedback, and internal collaboration.

Starting from Square One

ChatGPT has eliminated the need for copywriting and creative teams to start from scratch. Copywriting can be a strenuous ask that often times requires many hours of brainstorming, writer's block, and failed

ideas. While these AI tools are still learning and do not yet have the ability to fully replace professional copywriters, the Future First Studio team is leveraging ChatGPT as a brainstorming tool to create more efficiency in our copywriting process. As these products continue to advance, tools such as **GPT-4** will be able to mimic human speech to describe images.

As new technologies advance and become more accessible, the Future First Studio team is expanding on these capabilities for more innovative campaigns and advanced offerings.



KATHERINE GRABOWSKY

Senior Content & Creative Specialist

BUILDING A BUSINESS

An illustration of a foot wearing a black sock and a grey shoe with a black sole, stepping onto a white surface. The background is a solid red color.

20 years of business leadership has brought challenges, successes, and growth. Through these experiences as agency founders, we summed up our key lessons for current and future business leaders to build an organization for long-term growth.

FOR THE LONG TERM

Be nimble, agile, and flexible.

Your answers should not be set in stone and you cannot build a business model around stagnant solutions. Your clients will not recognize your value if your business model is not nimble and able to adjust for their changing needs.

It's a marathon, not a sprint.

Conduct all business decisions, both large and small, with the long-term vision at the core. If you do not stay true to your core guiding principles, your business will not differentiate.

Build diverse teams.

Embrace different types of people, perspectives and ways of thinking. Internal diversity is what leads to industry-changing ideas and organization-defining successes.

Celebrate the little wins and milestones.

The ways in which you recognize anniversaries, birthdays, personal achievements, and positive feedback will define your culture. Building memories over time is equally important to long-term success as larger, company-wide celebrations.

Adopt an always learning mentality.

Create a platform for long-term individual growth by encouraging learning and development opportunities. Not only will this make your team feel valued and recognized for their individual skill sets, but it will help your business grow an innovative organization.

Don't be afraid of change.

Welcome new technology and modern col-

laboration techniques. Embrace these pivots, understand how they can work for your business model, and create a plan for long-term adoption of these new methods.

Pay attention to trends, and be aware of fads.

Clients and consumers want to see that you're innovative and industry-leading. Always be on the lookout for the next big thing, but be careful not to shift your course at every flashy headline. Be discerning and trust your instincts when evaluating these broader business opportunities.

Have loyalty to clients, employees, and partners.

Your relationships will define your success as a business. Your business can only scale with great people on your side. Have loyalty to these people, as these are the relationships that will define your organization.

DINESH BOAZ

Co-Founder &
Creative Director



JOSH BOAZ

Co-Founder
& Managing Director

POWERING BUSINESS GROWTH THROUGH

Education & Thought Leadership

AboveBoard is an executive platform that provides transparent access and opportunities to senior leadership. Natasha Mulla, Chief Marketing Officer, along with Taylor Stewart, Marketing Associate, sat down to discuss their 2023 visions to grow their community through education and insights.



NATASHA MULLA
Chief Marketing Officer



TAYLOR STEWART
Marketing Associate



What is your vision for AboveBoard as we look towards the future?

Taking it quarter by quarter is key for us as we build out goals and benchmarks. For us, it's about building a community of business leaders that represent the underrepresented. As a startup, we're still trying to figure out the best way to share what we have available and get people excited about joining the platform. We slowly but surely want to establish ourselves as thought leaders. When people think, "I want to hire a diverse executive," we want the first thing on their mind to be AboveBoard.

What are some trends you're keeping top of mind and how are you applying them to your 2023 strategy?

It's about outreach and education. Whether you're a company looking to hire or an executive searching for an opportunity, we want to bring people in, but also provide these people with insights. We're prioritizing marketing in terms of growth, but also marketing through thought leadership. We haven't done anything in person since the pandemic, so we would love to tap into new in-person opportunities.

How has your relationship with the Direct Agents team grown and developed over the partnership?

The Direct Agents team has come to know our community the way we do, so we don't need to keep educating or explaining. They become familiar with how we're looking to grow, who these people we're trying to reach are, and how to best reach them. They're always thinking of things that are not on our radar, which is extremely valuable. They've been so helpful pushing different ideas and strategies that we wouldn't come up with until much later. We're able to bounce ideas off of one another and get to a solution quicker and more efficiently.

Learn more at aboveboard.com

Who is an industry leader or thought leader that you're inspired by and why?

Mita Mallick who does Brown Table Talk - she's a South Asian woman who hosts a round table talk podcast and provides great insights and content on what women of color are up against in the workplace.

Morgan DeBaun - Not only is she one of few venture-backed black women, but she also created the Afrotech conference and constantly works to advise/inspire the next generation and create opportunities, especially for BLACK people.

What is one piece of content or inspirational media that you would recommend sharing with others?

Last year in October, McKinsey came out with a "Women in the Workplace" study. It has insights and facts about how people in the workplace are growing and the headwinds women and specifically women of color face as they progress towards executive roles. Oftentimes, when we're talking about why it's important to have representation in these positions, everything feels very anecdotal. This study is not just about feelings, it's about facts and statistics. It shows readers why we're working towards these goals through tactical data.

What is something you're working on that you're excited about?

Season 2 of our podcast is launching soon. We're moving away from repurposing our events and moving into interviews with thought leaders and executives in the space.

The leadership is from other people in the space who have gone through similar experiences. That's something we've found that works really well in terms of offering insights to people in the community either through data and information or through the experiences of other people.

FILE

EDIT

EFFECT

VIEW

WINDOW

UPGRADE ⌘U

UPDATE YOUR

*C*REATIVE

loading...





**ELEVATING BRANDS
THROUGH STRATEGY
AND STORYTELLING**

WHAT WE DO!



- + Creative Audit & Campaign Strategy
- + Creative Concepting & Messaging
- + Social Content & Asset Design
- + Video Storytelling & Editing
- + Video Animation
- + Product & Lifestyle Photography



**FUTURE
FIRST**
STUDIO

SEBASTIAN CURI



Sebastian Curi is an artist based in downtown Los Angeles. He has been creating professional since 2008, and since then, he's worked with major brands such as Apple, Spotify, The New York Times, The New Yorker, Uber, New Balance, and Zara. We sat down with Sebastian to discuss inspiration, his career thus far, and plans for the year ahead.

When did you first become interested in art?

Forever. When I was a teenager, I used to play guitar, and I had a punk rock band. Music was my thing for a lot of years. And then I started drawing for flyers and stuff like that. Then, I studied motion graphics and video. I've always felt attracted to visual arts. At some point, I had to make some money, so I studied graphic design. When we moved from Buenos Aires to LA in 2016, art looked like a thing that I could do to make a living, so I started drawing more and doing illustration. It was just little by little. It was very organic.

How did you discover your unique style of art?

Kind of in the same way. Most of my work started as a commission. I needed to pay the bills, so I had a job, and I was doing a lot of animation and illustration. As I got older, I felt a bit disconnected. I was just doing massive projects where I wouldn't feel happy.

I was like, "Okay, let's do it." So I started drawing for myself just for fun. At some point, I started finding myself. So I think I found the style because of that, because I was tired of working in commercial projects. The personal work kind of like took me by surprise. Then, I started having commissions for my personal stuff. That was amazing. It was like, "Okay, you want to do stuff, but for my weird drawings, so, cool, let's do it." And it grew so much that I got a studio, went freelance, and kept growing.

Photography: Dinesh Boaz
Pictured: Sebastian Curi and Macarena Luzi
Sebastian Curi's Studio, Chinatown, Los Angeles



Ellsworth Kelly Postcards
DIRECTAGENTS.COM
SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP

ARTIST

Did you create with this style since you first started in 2008?

The style is a thing that is always evolving. I wanted to draw people and little moments. I'm not a very serious guy, so it's always kind of funny or comical or just stupid.

That's something that felt like me. At the beginning it was just people having little moments. Then I think I became interested in working with emotion. Then, sometimes you get curious. I started drawing a lot of gestures, like hand gestures. And that's what I'm at right now.

Where do you find inspiration?

I have a problem with inspiration. I think there is a big thing with inspiration, like the genius artist and the muse. I come from a different universe. I just come to the studio. I have a practice. I really enjoy my work. I love what I do, but it's not a thing that it hits me. I don't have that



moment of eureka or something and I draw hands like crazy. It's way more slow, maybe way less magical. I just come to the studio and draw a lot every day. At some point, something looks good and I feel that something could be a print or a painting. But, I don't feel inspiration. It's really part of my process.

What do you see for the future of your brand?

The last year was crazy. I did this collection with Zara. I never did any fashion stuff outside of a graphic T-shirt. To do a whole collection with a worldwide brand was insane. Most of the work that I do starts with an email. I can't predict that. It's just like a person on the other end on some place in the world, that is

like, "Hey, this gesture that you did with this hand, it could be perfect for my ___." I think that's really nice, and very unexpected. It's a collaboration, but it's really based on stuff that I'm doing and I really love. It's really cool to see how the work that we do here just spreads. I love to come to the studio and do more work.

"I think there is a big thing with inspiration, like the genius artist and the muse. I come from a different universe. I just come to the studio. I have a practice. I really enjoy my work. I love what I do."



SPOTLIGHT



COVER

TO

COVER

*Behind the cover art of
Illuminate with Yiping Liu.*



2D elements meet 3D design in the surreal collage of our Illuminate cover art. As we look ahead into 2023, we are inspired by the tech and innovation that surrounds us and will continue to expand our realm of creative possibilities.



wellness

in the

Workplace:

Taking Center Stage in 2023



BIANCA VARGAS

HR Manager

From navigating a global pandemic to witnessing people pivot into new careers, a lot has changed for us at work these past few years. Employees and employers are feeling new waves of burnout and pressure. While these complex realities may continue to evolve, one factor must remain a priority in the workplace: a focus on total well-being.

Simply put, employees are expecting employers to look after them in new and unique ways. Stress and emotional well-being are aspects of employees that are often overlooked in the workplace. In order to prioritize well-being and optimize performance, it has become critical for the workplace to create space for empathy and become more aware of the essential and nonessential needs of employees. Here are a few ways to get started:

Define Your Hybrid Model

According to data provided by LinkedIn, hybrid jobs made up less than 20% of the jobs posted last year but received 50% of applications across all industries, and this number is only growing. If your company is still trying to “navigate” your hybrid strategy, 2023 is the time to solidify this approach. There is no question that employees are craving a sense of community among their colleagues. Be clear about what hybrid means to your company. To do this successfully, actively inform employees what they can expect to experience when in-office. Highlighting factors such as available resources, amenities, or when a member of leadership is in town helps maintain an open and active dialogue about hybrid opportunities and flexibility. A hybrid model responds to this and offers a sense of flexibility toward the wellness needs of employees.

Create a Purpose-Driven Environment

According to a recent poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 90% of employed adults (full-time or part-time) shared that they are newly experiencing mental health challenges and fatigue. While offering coverage for therapy, self-guided meditation and other wellness resources are essential components, becoming a giving workplace can improve the well-being and engagement of employees. Offering volunteer opportunities or charity options has proven to boost employee satisfaction in the workplace.

Managers Can Take a Creative Approach to Wellness

According to the Harvard Business Review, 60% of hybrid employees say their manager is “their most direct connection to company culture.” This means instead of expecting HR to create and guide the company culture, managers and employees can play an impactful role in shaping culture and dialogue. A lack of interpersonal and thoughtful communication is often the missing link keeping an employee - or a company as a whole - from reaching their full potential. Start introducing softer layers of conversation. It is essential for managers to ask “how are you doing today?” before jumping into work jargon. Beyond this, routinely reflect on whether employees are happy in the workplace and act on it.

Interior Design for Community & Collaboration

As part of this wellness focus, office design must work to establish a level of equity within the workplace and offer an invigorating atmosphere. Are there areas in your office where people can feel inspired? Can teams

comfortably huddle or easily move into a space where a group can present materials? Creating an environment that is accessible and accommodating towards fortuitous encounters promotes well-being in the workplace.

Now is the time to prioritize the mental health of our employees. In 2023, thoughtful elevation to the employee experience will be key. Employers must dive deeper into authentic communication styles and craft more personalized workplace solutions. Tailored professional development, upskilling based on interests, supporting individual hobbies, and transparency are key ways to demonstrate you are thinking about workers as individuals and not just the roles they occupy. Organizations should aspire to build a thriving workforce centered around a commitment to well-being.

Here at Direct Agents, we have had an ongoing commitment to supporting the total wellness of our employees. We understand that wellness in the workplace goes beyond props or seasonal initiatives. It is embedded in our dialogue and the way we treat one another; it is at the core of our culture. We ask questions, get specific, and measure results. The best part? We involve our employees in the conversation. After 20 years of service, we are just getting started.







DIRECTAGENTS.COM

**Special Thanks:
Natasha Mulla
Taylor Stewart
Sebastian Curi**



A DIRECT AGENTS PUBLICATION



Chipping Lice