


Paradox

Feeling Machines and the Rise of Post-Modern Marketing

From Storytelling to Storyliving: Post-Modern Creative & Content Experiences

October 2018

Chapter 6



“Post-Modern Marketing creative and content experiences must wow customers and prospects the way the first Uber experiences wowed New Yorkers who had never known an alternative to abusive yellow cab rides.”

Dan Collings, Head of Digital Creative Experience, Stein IAS

In the Post-Modern Marketing age of wow, marketing is experience. And, as it turns out, experience is marketing.

Marketers probably don't need much supporting evidence for this three-word palindrome; you're, well, experiencing it. Still, Harvard Business Review's original Welcome to the Experience Economy (July-August 1998) was prescient; since then, the world has begun to shift exactly as that analysis predicts. And, today, research houses are documenting the shift: Gartner "confirms" customer experience as "the new battlefield," saying 50% of product investments are focusing on customer experience innovation; WalkerInfo reports that by 2020, customer experience will overtake price and product as the most important brand differentiator; and, according to McKinsey, "Where companies once could differentiate themselves by product or efficiency, distinctiveness today increasingly lies in creating a seamless, omnichannel customer experience."

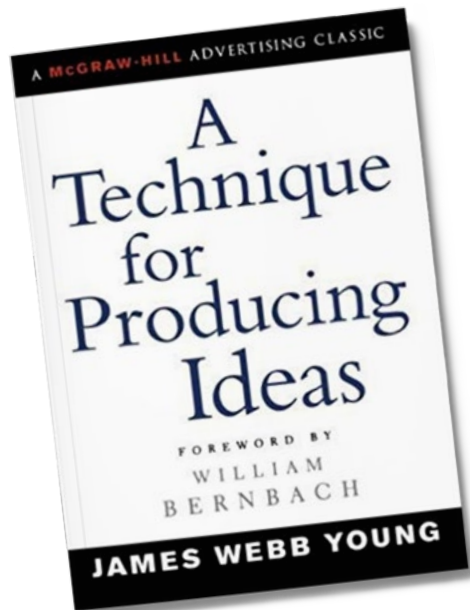
The implications of 'marketing is experience' are many – all big. Taken together, they raise the stakes higher than ever before for marketers and the businesses they serve. "Post-Modern Marketing creative and content experiences must wow customers and prospects the way the first Uber experiences wowed New Yorkers who had never known an alternative to abusive yellow cab rides," says Dan Collings, Stein IAS' Head of Digital Creative Experience.

Here's why marketing is experience raises the stakes so high:

- Experiences are immersive. People participate in experiences. Thus, Post-Modern Marketers must reinvent narrative structure to achieve storyliving (using immersive digital technology to create an experience that people literally "live") rather than just storytelling – without giving up control of the brand. Living the story creates a whole new depth of engagement.
- Experiences are emotional. Post-Modern Marketers must pursue bolder, braver ideas, because all the data-and-tech-enabled personalized messaging in the world doesn't amount to a hill of beans if you don't make an emotional connection. As Ella sang, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing." But when creative and content experience does swing, people are literally compelled to share great experiences, exponentially multiplying the value of those experiences.
- Experiences raise the bar on style and – even more so – substance. People expect to get something out of their experiences; they have to be useful, educational, fulfilling, enjoyable, inspiring. This expectation shines a spotlight on shared purpose and brand community, which enhance substance. Meanwhile, the rising technologies that mediate creative and content experiences – think two-way video, virtual and augmented realities, AI – make for much more powerful connections between business and audience. Get it right, it's awesome. Get it wrong, it's awful.
- Experiences are personal. They exist "only in the mind of an individual." This makes experiences ephemeral, intangible – different for each and every customer – and implies that Post-Modern Marketers must master real 1:1 creative and content experiences, at long last.
- Experiences raise marketing's stature in the enterprise. As business leaders realize that customer experience – from customer acquisition to customer engagement over time – is the hallmark of higher-performing enterprises, Post-Modern Marketers have the opportunity to be the advocates for and owners of extraordinary customer experiences – and owners of strategic high ground in corporate c-suites as a result.

To fully appreciate the impact of these points, remember: they're not discrete. They're interacting parts of a system, all of which affect the others. The immersiveness of Post-Modern creative and content experiences significantly raises their potential emotional impact – which drives increased focus on real 1:1 connections. The quality and substance of the experience affects its emotional and subjective value. And so on.

It's enough to overwhelm the analytical left side of your brain – many times over. In the Post-Modern Marketing age, marketers will have no choice but to depend more on their intuitive engines, their right brains. "It's going to come down to creative intuition, and to bravery," says Stein IAS' Collings. "It's having faith that if you do something great, people will want it, and want to share it." Or, what Procter & Gamble CMO Marc Pritchard calls "the tingle factor."

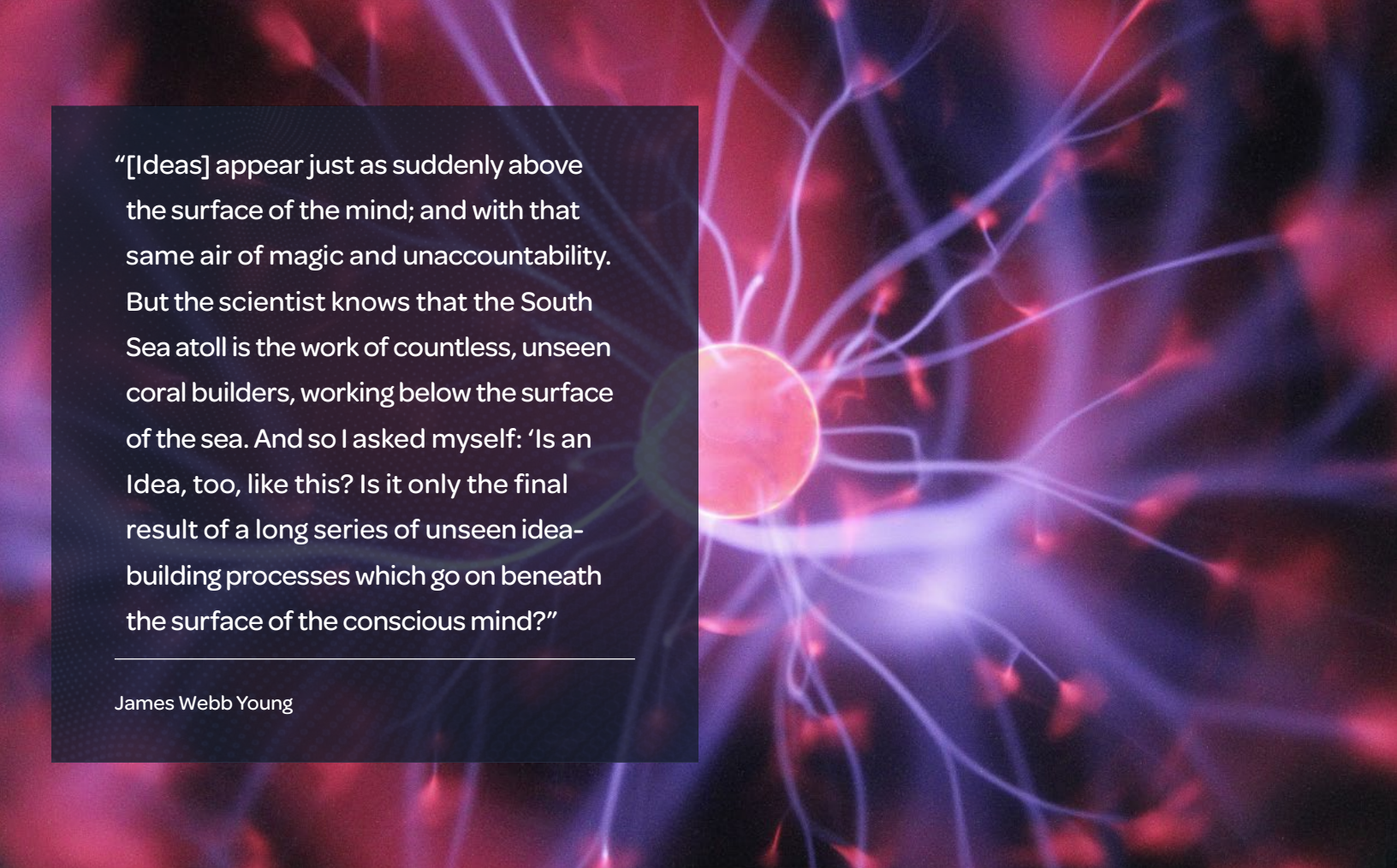


Are You Tingling Yet?

"The wheel is come full circle," as Shakespeare first wrote in King Lear. The emerging belief that marketing is experience is causing leading marketers like Pritchard and Collings to, once again, begin valuing creative based on "tingle" factor – the emotional feeling that this mo-fo is gonna CONNECT with people!

In mid-2018, Pritchard pointed to intuition as the essential tool for assessing the potential emotional impact of creative and content ideas. In explaining how he couldn't technically measure the success of the award-winning 'It's a Tide commercial' advertising, he said he could feel the magic of it. "[You] don't measure creativity, you feel it ... I go with the tingle factor. And I've just had [a new] Pantene campaign described to me. I tingled, I knew it was a brilliant idea."

Pritchard and Collings are rediscovering the ideas of advertising Hall of Famer James Webb Young. In *A Technique for Producing Ideas*, first published 78 years ago and still in print, Young posited that intuition is, in fact, a data-rich leveraging of the mind's subconscious in the service of creativity. He emphasized the data-rich aspect, noting the need to totally immerse oneself in the topic at hand; then he metaphorically compared intuitive ideas to atolls that suddenly appear above the surface of the sea: "[Ideas] appear just as suddenly above the surface of the mind; and with that same air of magic and unaccountability. But the scientist knows that the South Sea atoll is the work of countless, unseen coral builders, working below the surface of the sea. And so I asked myself: 'Is an Idea, too, like this? Is it only the final result of a long series of unseen idea-building processes which go on beneath the surface of the conscious mind?'"



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James Webb Young

Young’s thinking may have been superseded by the rise of modern digital marketing technology and its hard lean toward empirical and granular measurability – but it has been more recently re-asserted by neuroscientists.

Of course, in the Post-Modern Marketing ‘Age of Wow!’, the context in which tingles do or don’t get generated could not be more different from that of the Mad Men era, when emotion last dominated our craft. Imagine Young’s atoll metaphor but with unimaginably vast oceans of data in which to immerse yourself. Oceans so large, of course, that even our right brains need AI and machine learning augmentation to turbocharge our intuitive insights. And imagine the vastly superior digital sharing tools available to each and every person who becomes a carrier for your tingle-worthy idea – which, to recount what Dom Cobb points out in the movie Inception, is the most highly contagious kind of virus.

In 2018, The Times / News U.K. and Ireland earned a Cannes Lion for creative use of data that strikes a tingling

chord for everyone who experiences it. The newspaper’s Find Your Voice campaign was spearheaded by “JFK unsilenced,” an achingly inspiring rendition, in U.S. President John F. Kennedy’s own voice, of the Dallas Trade Mart speech he was minutes away from delivering before he was assassinated on November 22, 1963. AI technology synthesized JFK’s voice by drawing on a database of 233,554 distinct sounds (each only 0.04 seconds long, on average) derived from recordings of 831 different speeches and interviews. The result is stunning, and affecting.

Call it one-and-a-half Lions: Technology developed for The Times’ Find Your Voice was shared with The ALS Foundation, which won its own Lion for Project Revoice. That campaign shows how ALS sufferers who have lost the capacity for speech can speak again, in their own voices instead of a synthetic computer voice – as long as there are enough recordings of their voices to feed the AI’s data needs.

Straight Outta Your Mind

But if tingle-worthy ideas can be likened to a virus, Beats by Dre's deceptively simple "Straight Outta Somewhere" meme set off a worldwide epidemic. In just the first week after launch, there were 6 million downloads; "Straight Outta Somewhere" trended number one for two days on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram – simultaneously. On those days, #Straightoutta averaged 15,000 tweets and retweets per minute.

#Straightoutta hit all the experience buttons. Explains Jordan Lane, Stein IAS' Director of Creative Technology: "Simply by using the iconic stamp from Straight Outta Compton and letting anyone put 'Straight Outta Wherever' over their chosen image, it was immediately personal, purposeful, shareable, useful and fun. It created a kind of 'Straightoutta' Brand Community. And it blew up the internet."

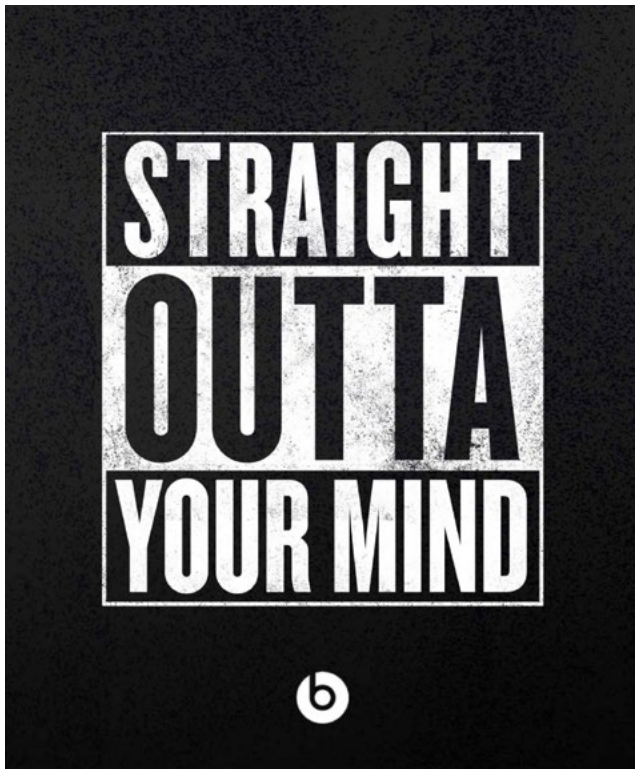


Image source: <http://www.straightouttasomewhere.com>


The tingle at the heart of #Straightoutta was born when three junior Beats by Dre marketers discovered a video of Dr. Dre explaining that the name Straight Outta Compton was meant to show pride in where they came from. "That is where the campaign took its form," says Beats by Dre CMO Omar Johnson. "It wasn't about Compton as a place anymore, it became about being proud of where you're from."

And we are. From Ringo Starr (Straight Outta Liverpool) to JLo (Straight Outta Bronx); from Chris Rock (Locash) to Jamie Foxx (Terrell); and millions more, including an unverified tweet from Jesus (Nazareth).

Straight Outta Somewhere, and the other experiences described below, all hew to the definition of brand experiences set forth by Harvard Business Review in 1998. It still resonates as invaluablely informative:

An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible and experiences memorable. ...While prior economic offerings – commodities, goods and services – are external to the buyer, experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. Thus, no two people can have the same experience, because each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event (like a theatrical play) and the individual's state of mind.





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Joseph Puthussery, Cisco's VP in Digital Marketing

B2B's Post-Modern Experience Paradox

For B2B Post-Modern Marketers, though, customer purchase decisions aren't that simple. Therein lies a challenging paradox.

Consider how dramatically the advent of mobile apps changed the game for enterprise software developers. Despite the enormous leap in complexity from Angry Birds to an Oracle database, enterprise software companies learned, quickly and painfully, the hard lesson quoted by Cisco's Joseph Puthussery, VP, Digital Marketing, at the ANA's June 2018 Masters of B2B Marketing conference in Chicago: "The best customer experience anywhere sets the bar for customer experience everywhere."

Puthussery presented stats from IDC's 2013 and 2017 IT Buyer Experience Surveys. In 2013, 67% of respondents blamed their own organization's processes for the complexity of the buying experience. Only four years later, however, 61% laid the blame squarely on their vendors' processes. In the intervening years, the simplicity of mobile apps had changed everyone's perception of what enterprise software could be – added complexities be damned.

Says Stein IAS' Chairman and Chief Client Officer, Tom Stein: "We in B2B have to be able to market at that level of simplicity. But B2B is still B2B. The product and value proposition complexity is still there. The committee decision-making complexity is still there. The high stakes of big-ticket purchases is still there. All of these core B2B differences are still there. But then there's this overlay from all of our personal experiences. That's a very, very important paradox to solve."

Solving the B2B Experience Paradox

The B2B Post-Modern Marketing triumph that solved that paradox most eloquently – and which we’ve therefore mentioned in nearly every chapter – is State Street Global Advisors’ (SSGA’s) Fearless Girl.

Fearless Girl promoted SSGA’s SHE fund, with its core value that corporations with women in positions of power deliver superior financial performance. Using a bronze statue of a girl staring down Wall Street’s famous “Charging Bull” created millions of personal, subjective experiences. A viral storm was born.

“Fearless Girl created a genuine bond between you, the brand and the message, an emotional connection that compelled you to take a picture with her and share it, because it was a real, meaningful artistic statement,” says Collings.

But you don’t necessarily need a world-wide Brand Community movement to solve the Post-Modern Marketing B2B experience paradox.

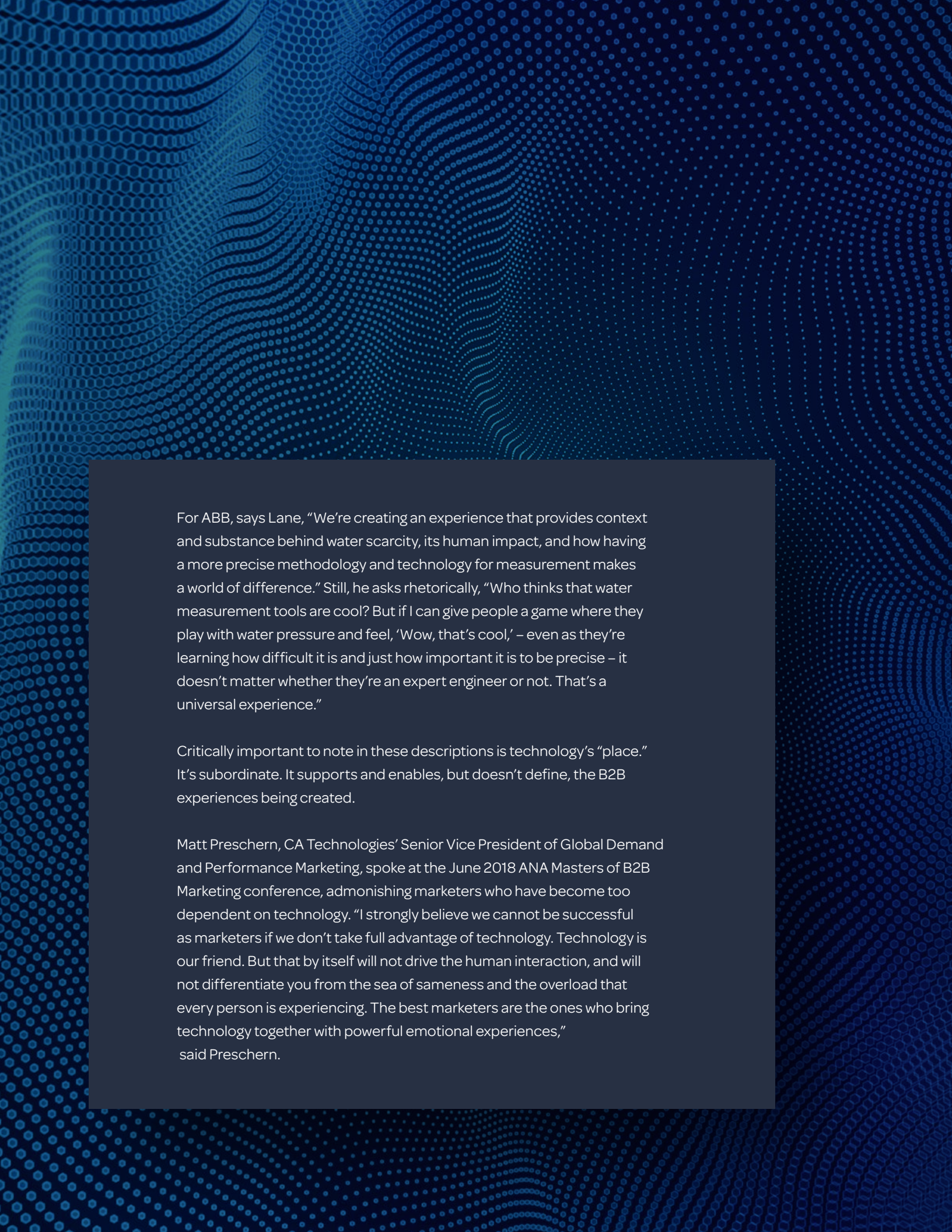
At Stein IAS, Collings, Lane and their colleagues are applying lessons learned from “Straight Outta Somewhere” and “Fearless Girl” to far more intricate B2B marketing challenges. How do you convey the difference-making engineering solutions with which Trelleborg Marine Systems optimizes the safety and efficiency of shipping ports? Or the links between industrial technology leader ABB’s high-precision measurement and analytics and the world’s quality of life? Or global ingredients solutions company Ingredion’s insight about the key role of texture over taste in determining the foods that people become truly passionate about?

Food scientists have long known that “flavor” is really a combination of taste, smell and texture, and is highly personal – you experience it in your mouth and your experience is completely different from everyone else’s. In its research, Ingredion realized that texture – which

is often overlooked or underrated by food companies – most often determines whether someone spits a morsel out or goes back for more. The research revealed that most people gravitate toward one of four general “mouth behaviors” related to texture: cruncher, chewer, smoosher and sucker.

Paul Myerscough, Global Director of Content for Stein IAS, explains: “We needed to re-create that ‘in-the-mouth’ sensory experience to help Ingredion’s customers have an emotional connection to the way consumers really experience their products. We made a series of videos with people in each of the mouth behavior areas talking about how they feel eating their favorite foods, but the centerpiece was a humorous take on one person’s obsessive love of crisps – chips in America – because of the crunch the maker put into them. It takes the viewer right inside the consumer’s mouth.” The work won multiple awards on both sides of the Atlantic, most recently two in July 2018 from the Content Marketing Institute for best manufacturing industry content marketing program and best use of marketing automation.

For Trelleborg, everything comes back to building “safe ports.” The challenge was to convey that devotion to customers in an experience that doesn’t dismiss its complexity. Collings explains: “Instead of a standard demo of how their software and systems work together to guide ships through a harbor, we’re putting customers on the bridge of a tugboat using a 360-degree camera and aerial photography from drones. You’ll understand the situational awareness this new technology affords you. You’ll be able to look around and see the blind spots, see the software, and see what you need to do to avoid collisions. You’ll see how the decisions you make help you to avoid collisions at a certain distance. All of that video will be housed in an immersive digital experience and linked to other relevant content that ultimately then drives you further down the sales funnel. So it’s not just that we’re having fun with boats; it’s tied to commercial objectives and integrated with demand-gen activities.”



For ABB, says Lane, “We’re creating an experience that provides context and substance behind water scarcity, its human impact, and how having a more precise methodology and technology for measurement makes a world of difference.” Still, he asks rhetorically, “Who thinks that water measurement tools are cool? But if I can give people a game where they play with water pressure and feel, ‘Wow, that’s cool,’ – even as they’re learning how difficult it is and just how important it is to be precise – it doesn’t matter whether they’re an expert engineer or not. That’s a universal experience.”

Critically important to note in these descriptions is technology’s “place.” It’s subordinate. It supports and enables, but doesn’t define, the B2B experiences being created.

Matt Preschern, CA Technologies’ Senior Vice President of Global Demand and Performance Marketing, spoke at the June 2018 ANA Masters of B2B Marketing conference, admonishing marketers who have become too dependent on technology. “I strongly believe we cannot be successful as marketers if we don’t take full advantage of technology. Technology is our friend. But that by itself will not drive the human interaction, and will not differentiate you from the sea of sameness and the overload that every person is experiencing. The best marketers are the ones who bring technology together with powerful emotional experiences,” said Preschern.



Is it Authentic? Is it Commercial Manipulation? Yes!

And now we come to a paradox at the heart of the whole Post-Modern Marketing story. Are the experiences marketers create, truly, “genuine” and “authentic”? Are the emotions “real”? The bonds “meaningful”? Or is it all so much cynical commercial manipulation done in service of the only true goal – making a buck? Or a pound, a euro, yen or yuan?

“People talk about relationships with brands all the time, and they’re real. Why do you think when somebody has their data stolen, they talk about it being a breach of privacy or a breach of trust and having to earn trust back?”

Dan Collings, Head of Digital Creative Experience,
Stein IAS

The answer, says Collings, is “yes.” It’s both at the same time, and the only way to succeed is to hold this paradox in your head and give equal weight to both sides anytime you’re creating Post-Modern Marketing experiences. They must be genuine, interesting and valuable. They must achieve your marketing and business objectives.

“Why should the B2B value exchange be any different than any other relationship you have?” asks Collings. “Consider a friendship. You’re not buying anything from your best friend, but there is an expectation between the two of you that you’re able to tell them things and trust them and that, in return, you’re going to get their support, and they’re going to make you laugh and you’re going to enjoy your time together. There is something being given and there is something being taken. Nobody wants to talk about it because they don’t want to reduce the power of friendship, or love, down to a transaction, but that’s what it is.

“People talk about relationships with brands all the time, and they’re real. Why do you think when somebody has their data stolen, they talk about it being a breach of privacy or a breach of trust and having to earn trust back? Think about how long it’s taken some brands to rehab their images after they’ve done awful things, while other brands, that offer better experiences, have an easier time mitigating those things.”

While the idea that love and friendship have a fundamentally transactional basis may be unsettling, at first, it resolves the paradox and ties back to the “shared purpose” discussed at length in [Chapter 5 \(Post-Modern Brands: It Takes A Brand Village\)](#). If a brand’s sales and profits come from business operations that embody a shared purpose with the people who make up its Brand Community, its marketers are authentically motivated to ensure that their creative and content experiences are genuinely true to that purpose.

“Too many companies are very often guilty of random acts of content,” says Stein IAS’ Tom Stein. “They think, ‘Oh, I need an infographic’ and so they make an infographic. But what does it mean? What do they do with it? What emotional connection does it make? But if you’re purpose-led when creating content and experiences, then it doesn’t matter if it’s a written piece of content, or if it’s an infographic, or a much richer virtual reality experience. If it’s created from a truly shared purpose to further a relationship, then it will be good.”

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