



Meaningful brands

Connecting with the consumer in the new world of commerce

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In the new world of commerce dominated by e-commerce and voice, brands will face the ultimate test. It will challenge the strength of their relationship with consumers and the true value they bring.

What consumers buy and how they buy, will be redefined with the growth of e-commerce powered by the introduction of voice ordering. Platform players, like Amazon, will use voice ordering assistants to promote their private label brands and commoditise entire categories. All of this will come at the expense of branded goods.

In order to be prepared and face these challenges, brands will have to shift from owning the aisle to owning the consumer. This means becoming truly meaningful to consumers by offering value beyond the product and establishing deeper connections based on shared values.

Digital and data will provide endless opportunities to build this connection. However, this will require brands to make considered choices about when and how to engage with consumers and how to genuinely add value in the moments that matter.

This paper seeks to explore the options for FMCG companies to establish meaningful consumer relationships and face the challenges that the digital world of commerce will bring.



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The ultimate test for brands

After years of relative stability in our grocery shopping habits and retail landscape, the fundamentals of what, where and how we buy are being redefined. The digital influence on today's shopper journey is profound – digital is shaping buying decisions and creating new paths to purchase.

E-commerce is on the rise and marketplaces offered by platform players like Alibaba, Amazon and Tencent have entered markets around the world, including Australia. 'Voice' is seen as the catalyst for e-commerce growth and will amplify the power of platform players owning voice assistants, such as Amazon with Alexa. Once voice reaches its forecasted adoption levels for search and ordering, it will reset the basis of competition. The new world of commerce will trigger the ultimate test of the strength of brands and their true value to the consumer.



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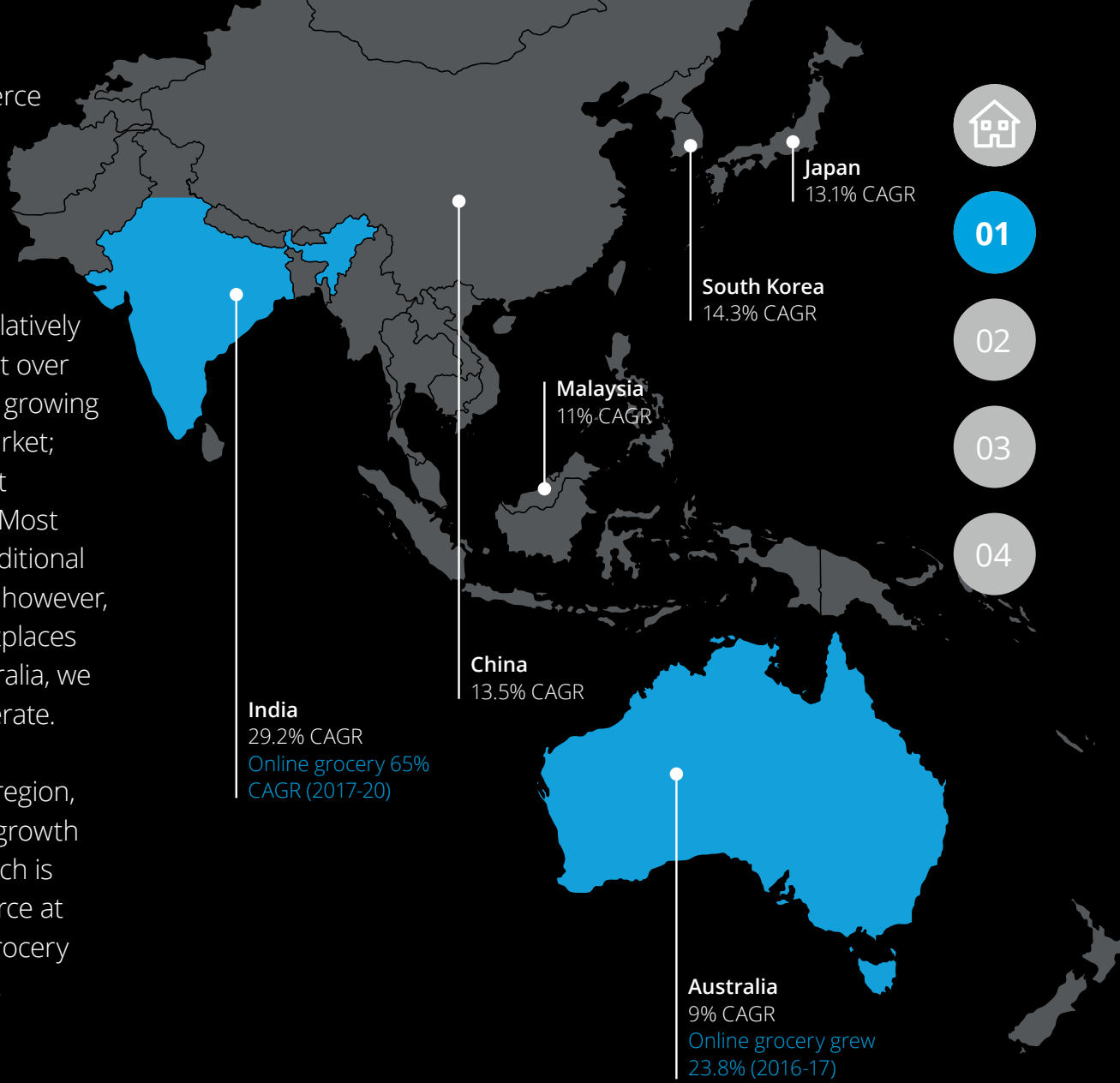
New and emerging paths to purchase

Physical visits to grocery retailers may remain the dominant way for consumers to shop in the short to medium term, but new paths to purchase are emerging and new players are on the rise. Investments in ‘click-and-collect’ and home delivery by traditional retailers are increasing, and marketplace providers like Alibaba and Amazon are entering new markets including Australia.

The growth in e-commerce sales both globally and within the Asia Pacific region is undeniable. E-commerce is predicted to see a combined annual growth rate of 20 percent to become a US\$4trn market globally by 2020ⁱ, and in the Asia Pacific region, e-commerce is on course to represent a quarter of all retail sales in 2021ⁱⁱ.

While grocery e-commerce is still relatively small in Australia, accounting for just over 3 percent of total grocery sales, it is growing significantly faster than the total market; Nielsen research saw a 23.8 percent increase for the year ending 2017ⁱⁱⁱ. Most of that growth was coming from traditional retailers and their online platforms, however, now that Amazon and other marketplaces are establishing themselves in Australia, we expect this growth to further accelerate.

Looking at the broader Asia Pacific region, some markets show extraordinary growth rates. Take India as an example, which is expected to grow its online commerce at approximately 30 percent^{iv} with a grocery CAGR of an astounding 65 percent^v.



A key driver of the growth in India will be the recent proposed consolidation of Flipkart and Walmart. And with Alibaba increasing its stake in Lazada, South East Asia's retail landscape will be transformed by the power of these platforms.

The marketplace platforms and new paths to purchase are creating opportunities for brands to sell to the consumer, however it may also mean that influencing the consumer may become harder. With many more players involved, consumer data can become fragmented and more difficult to obtain. In response to this, some branded goods companies have started to invest in a direct-to-consumer sales channel, often as part of their existing channel mix. Examples include brands that establish subscription services to deliver directly to customers, or those that establish their own sales website. Their aim is to decrease the dependency on third parties when it comes to sales or to get closer to the consumer and learn from their online behaviours. But is that enough?

At the mercy of an algorithm

Voice technology is predicted to be the true force of disruption. It will amplify the power of platform players who own voice assistants and will act as a catalyst for growth in e-commerce channels. The market expectation is that in two years, 50 percent^{vi} of all searches will be made via voice, with 1 in 3 owners using their voice device to make purchases^{vii}.

Voice-based ordering will redefine the basis of competition and challenge traditional marketing fundamentals. Packaging, design, and physical attributes traditionally used by brands to stand out on a shelf are losing relevance in a world of voice. It will commoditise entire categories and the likes of Amazon will capitalise on this by pushing more of their private label products into the market. Over the past year, Amazon's private label grew by 90 percent^{viii} and they have launched over 80 brands to date^{ix} including the well-known Amazon Basics line of products.

Voice assistants like Amazon's Alexa present search results based on price and best value for the consumer and the platform player. Private label and lower cost, smaller brands will likely feature high on the list and will be the ultimate beneficiaries of this voice revolution. In this new world, consumers may not even be given a choice to buy a brand. Unless the consumer explicitly asks for it. Brands will end up at the mercy of an algorithm controlled by the platform.

Do your consumers love your brand enough that they would explicitly ask for it?



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The shift back to the consumer

With multiple pathways to the consumer and countless parties involved, there can only be one relationship that truly counts – the one directly between brand and consumer. Brands, however, will have to earn the right to own the consumer relationship. As with any relationship, connecting on shared values is foundational. To win loyalty and trust, brands need to build a connection with consumers that is meaningful, personal and authentic.



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Brands must identify the key connection points and consider the value they offer beyond the product, such as the services and experiences they create and curate based on shared consumer values.

From owning the aisle to owning the consumer

The journey towards owning the consumer starts by recognising the significance of the shift that is required in both mind-set and organisation capabilities. Today's consumer product companies are mostly geared towards servicing and influencing the retailer. Their people capabilities, trade spend and supporting systems are mainly targeting traditional in-store conversion within the major retailers. However, success in the physical aisle doesn't always translate to the digital aisle, let alone a world of voice ordering. In this new age of commerce, consumers will have to have a strong preference and true connection with a brand for it to find its way into their homes.

To create meaningful relationships, brands need to adjust their mind-set from being a product manufacturer to a facilitator of more direct and value adding interactions with consumers. They must intimately know and understand their consumers by listening to what matters most to them, understanding their motivations, and responding honestly and consistently to build trust. There are significant benefits to brands who get this right, and their consumers will have higher rates of consideration, purchase and the willingness to pay a premium. It will increase their ability to withstand the fierce competition of private labels and smaller niche players who will be the likely beneficiaries in this new world of digital commerce.



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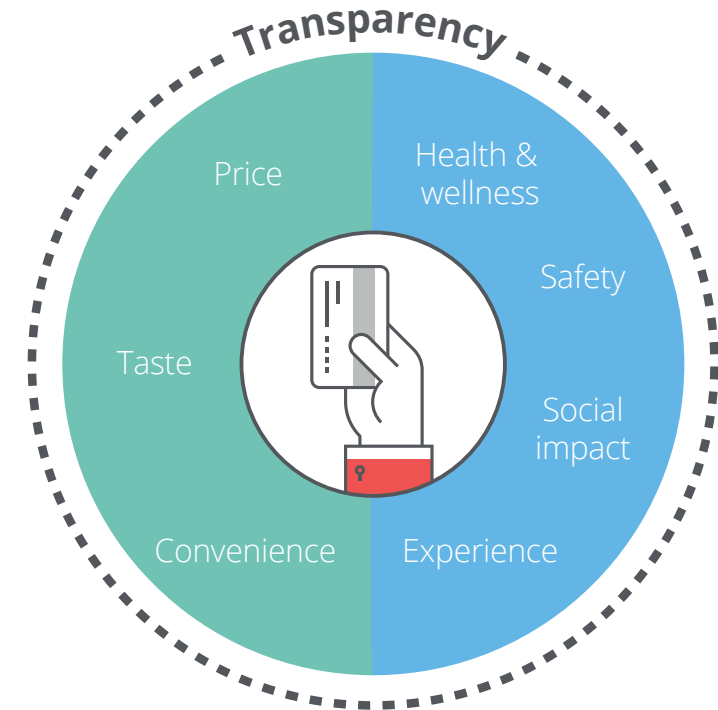
Becoming meaningful - connecting on values

A recent study highlighted that consumers wouldn't care if three out of four brands they use every day disappeared^x, illustrating that brands today are not making a meaningful impact on consumers' lives. So what is it that consumers care about?

Today's consumer has a new set of value drivers, one that is more intrinsically linked to their core values and beliefs. Traditional drivers such as price, taste and convenience remain important in their buying decisions, but new evolving drivers such as social impact, health and wellness, safety and experience have emerged to the forefront. More than half of consumers weigh these evolving value drivers more heavily than traditional ones and 63 percent^{xi} are willing to pay more for products where social impact values are demonstrated.

There is significant opportunity for organisations to leverage these values in their brand proposition and to find common ground to connect with the consumer. This is especially relevant in the food and beverage sector, where products have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of the consumer and the environment. Food is a highly emotive category; imagine the power that could be unlocked if brands became truly emotionally connected to their consumer based on shared values.

Consumers will connect with a company's values, relevance and ambition beyond profit - not just with their products



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Not just a marketing responsibility

For a values-based brand proposition to be successful, it has to be authentic and consistent. Values need to be visible in every consumer interaction and every action undertaken by the company – from the way you source, produce and package, to the care you show to staff, animals and the environment, and the external partners you choose to engage with. In the ‘always on’ and ‘camera-ready’ digital age, the responsibility of living and behaving in accordance with consumer values and the brand purpose is an entire organisational commitment led by the CEO, not one which rests solely with the marketing department.

The role of the CEO is becoming much more critical in demonstrating and communicating values, as consumers are increasingly expecting CEOs^{xiii} to share their opinions and personally take a stand on societal issues. The key for brands is knowing what they stand for. A brand may not be able to be everything for everyone, but it should aim to be something important to its target consumer market.

Consumers want to see the brands they love reflect their values

Australian citizens voted for marriage equality in 2017 and several brands and CEOs made a stand to support the marriage of same sex couples. One brand which made a bold public statement supporting same sex marriage was Ben & Jerry’s, who used the power of its brand to help create social change. In 2015, the brand renamed its Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough flavour to ‘I Dough, I Dough’ to celebrate the legalisation of same sex marriage in the US. In its effort to support the campaign for legalisation in Australia, Ben & Jerry’s temporarily banned all shops from selling same-flavour double scoops – saying “love comes in all flavours”.



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The endless opportunities of digital and data

The digital age is opening up new, exciting opportunities for brands to find common values and connect with consumers. Technologies such as augmented reality (AR), wearables, voice and the Internet of Things (IoT) can facilitate the collection and exchange of data with consumers at any location, on any topic and at any time of day.

But how do businesses ensure they don't just jump onto the next fad or run another gimmicky digital campaign that doesn't add value to the consumer? With an endless set of possibilities comes the need to be deliberate and to make clear choices with only one aim in mind – how to become truly helpful and meaningful to the consumer.



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Designing a truly consumer-centric digital engagement approach

Now that more businesses are experimenting and investing in digital, the time has come to become truly strategic about the type of meaningful engagements to create. Once shared values are identified and the desired direct consumer relationship is articulated, organisations can start designing their digital engagement approach. Brands will need to make considered choices about the moments to engage with consumers and how to genuinely add value for the consumer by asking themselves:

1

What are the moments that matter in which we should communicate and engage? Is it during the search, purchase or consumption phase of the consumer journey?

2

What role can the brand play in these moments to be truly helpful to the consumer, i.e. what meaningful digital services should be offered? Is the consumer looking for information, commercial offers, advice or entertainment?

The potential to create meaningful connections with consumers 'in the moment' by offering services and being helpful is significant. From finding inspiration, product selection, purchase through to consumption, brands can influence the buying decision, add value and enhance how consumers feel about the brand. Digital channels and technologies, e.g. AR, IoT and voice, can support the delivery of those services. However, choices around the most appropriate digital channel or technology to deliver those services to the consumer in the most effective and useful way will need to be made.

How can brands use digital technology to create meaningful connections with customers and stay top of mind?

The digitally influenced shopper

So let's look at what's happening today as digital technology already has a profound impact on the shopping journey. A Deloitte study on grocery found the influence of digital on in-store grocery sales grew from US 33 cents to 51 cents in each dollar within 2017^{xiii}. And digital is influencing every stage of the consumers shopping path.

This digital influence starts with **finding inspiration and browsing**, with more than three out of four shoppers influenced by YouTube channels, blogs, websites or social media. Shoppers can then use digital shelf displays or QR codes to obtain information on nutrition and provenance when **selecting and validating products**, or may receive mobile push notifications and personalised promotions to stimulate conversion. **Purchase and pay** in-store has also been simplified with mobile check-outs and 'just walk out' technology introduced by Amazon Go and WeChat.

The study^{xiv} also highlighted that the use of digital technology increased basket size in 19 percent of in-store purchases - a finding which illustrates that retailers and consumer product companies who choose to invest in digital engagements to create seamless and personalised customer experiences should experience return on their investment through increased sales.



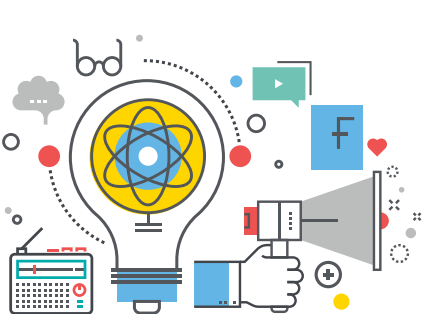
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In today's world, the consumer's path to purchase is already heavily influenced by digital touchpoints...



Find inspiration

- Family and friends
- Food network
- Sampling
- Radio
- Previous experiences
- Recipe website
- Cooking blog
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- Crowdsourced offerings



Browse & research

- In-store associate
- Direct mail
- Weekly circular
- Grocery retailer website
- Manufacturer website
- Personalised email messaging



Select & validate

- In-store signs / displays
- Product packaging
- In-store associate
- QR codes
- In-store kiosk
- Meal kits
- Grocery retailer app
- Manufacturer app
- Digital shelf displays



Purchase & pay

- In-store coupons / instant rebates
- Associate assisted check-out
- Mobile check-out
- Adaptive pricing
- On-demand local delivery
- "Just Walk Out" payment technology
- Contextual mobile coupon push notification



Consumption

- Connected devices
- Wearables
- Contextual push notifications



Reconsider

- Customer service
- Loyalty programs
- Recommendation to friends / family
- Blog / Social Media post
- Recurring Subscriptions
- Loyalty Apps
- Online Product Review

Broadly there are five types of helpful, digital services and experiences that can be offered to consumers to create meaningful connections. The key is to offer them when the consumer is most receptive to them, i.e. in the moment that really matters.



Information

Today's consumers want access to relevant information in a clear, comprehensive, and understandable way to make informed choices. The traceability and transparency generated through IoT technologies combined with connected packaging provides brands with the opportunity to meet this demand by delivering a wealth of multimedia content to consumers in a quick and easy way. This could include nutritional information, provenance or whether the product meets the ethical standards they desire.



Convenience

Connected products can offer efficiency and convenience for consumers by simplifying routine tasks within the patterns of daily life. Sensors and intelligent software will allow brands, through their products, to get to know consumer preferences, anticipate needs and respond dynamically to behaviour. Simple examples of these services include communicating expiry dates or reminders to use the product based on external information, e.g. humidity levels to prompt the application of hydrating day creams.



Entertainment

Providing entertainment allows a brand to express their personality and build stronger affiliations with consumers. This could include virtual reality games via an app or additional digital content that is accessed via a QR code on a product, or perhaps a gamified promotion to drive future brand engagement.



Real time advice

Infusing products with smart capabilities, like hair brushes that provide in the moment guidance on your brushing style or socks embedded with fitness tracking devices, can enable companies to offer personalised, relevant advice that enlightens and educates consumers, and enables new ways for them to interact with the brand.



Commercial offers

Through a combination of connected products and precision marketing, brands can fuse data points and technology to send consumers notifications when products are on offer. If consumer demand and usage is combined with geolocation services in smartphones, offer notifications can be a powerful conversion tool, especially in-store.



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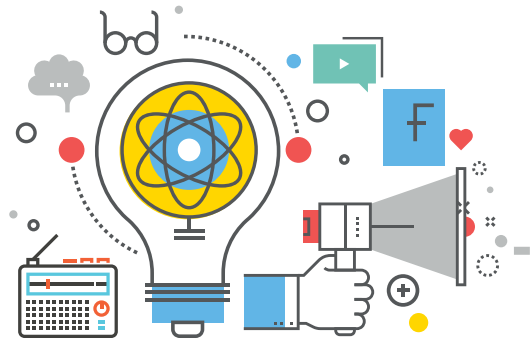
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Examples of meaningful digital engagements

Key moments throughout the consumer journey



Find inspiration

Quaker partnered with Amazon Alexa to create an app that helps consumers find recipes for 'overnight oats', which was trending on social media. Quaker identified this trend by monitoring activity online, where food bloggers were sharing pictures of oats they soaked overnight in various ways. By being at the forefront of the voice-activated assistant movement, Quaker has helped position itself as an innovator while also setting itself up to capitalise on consumers looking to shop through Alexa on Amazon's platform.





Browse and research

Barilla Group has implemented IoT technologies, making it easy for consumers to research their products and track the entire supply chain. Barilla gives consumers the opportunity to scan a QR code, which serves as a 'digital passport,' allowing them to learn about everything from the exact wheat field their pasta was made from to the final stages of packaging and labelling. Barilla is empowering consumers by giving them full transparency into where their food has come from while making the entire process safer and reducing counterfeiting within the food supply chain^{xv}.





Select and validate

SPC Ardmona with their Goulburn Valley Fruit brand is tapping into consumer needs around transparency, trust and provenance. It has redesigned its packaging and turned its brand into a destination by implementing a new GPS labelling system. A search on any device enables consumers to pinpoint exactly which orchard their fruit came from. It also launched an immersive food tour allowing consumers to explore the orchards and discover the beauty of Australia's Goulburn valley.

PEACHES
GROWN HERE

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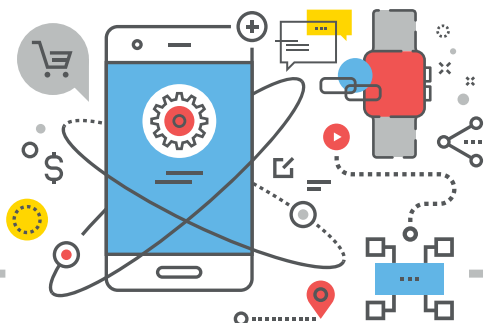




Purchase and pay

Coca-Cola is shifting its focus from ‘route to market’ to ‘route to me’ to stay competitive in a landscape where e-commerce is reshaping the way people buy and receive orders of food and beverage items. The company is partnering with meal kit provider Chef’d to pair Coca-Cola beverages with menu items and exploring ways to tack on beverage suggestions to orders placed via voice interaction services. Coca-Cola is also looking to give shoppers an easy way to add drinks to orders for pickup at e-grocery ‘lockers’ found in dense urban areas and on university campuses^{xvi}.





Consumption

Johnnie Walker Blue Label whisky has introduced a smart bottle which features a printed sensor tag. It can detect the sealed and opened state of each bottle allowing producer Diageo to send personalised communications to consumers who read the tags with their smartphones. Diageo can continue communicating with the consumer once the bottle has been opened, providing advice on how best to enjoy the product.





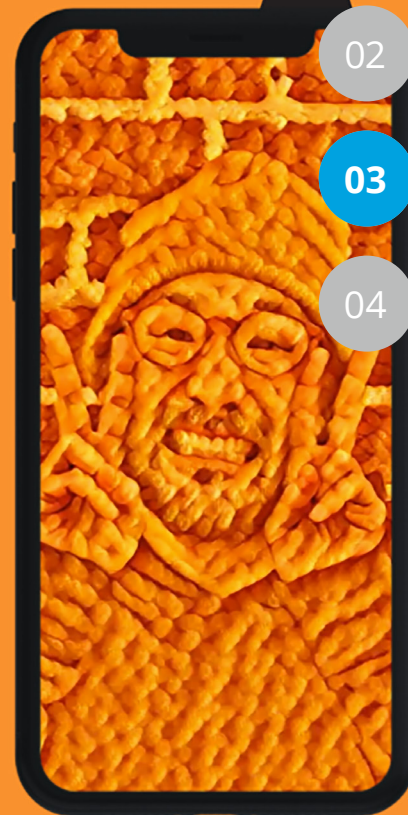
Reconsider

Cheetos, a brand from PepsiCo Frito-lay, has gone down the entertainment route by inviting fans to see the world in a new light. The 'Cheetos Vision' app available on the App Store, uses an artificial intelligence-powered camera that turns everything you see into Cheetos. Users can share their signature Cheetos-inspired creations, images and videos directly on social media. The launch included ads using geo-targeting to likely users of this entertainment service.



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Consumer data, trust and the value exchange

Consumer data is at the heart of meaningful engagements, aiding the enablement of personalised messages, offers and services. But first, brands must earn the right to own consumer data through a relationship built on trust which delivers value consistent with what a consumer would expect in exchange for access to their data. However, access to and usage of consumer data is increasingly impacted by regulatory changes and shifts in consumer perceptions which is providing both challenges and opportunities for brands.



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Transparency and trust

Consumers are increasingly aware, better informed and distrustful of the potential for misuse of their personal data - presenting an imperative for brands to act and reconsider existing data capture and usage practices. Demonstrating strong ethical principles in the management of consumer data (this includes obtaining consent around personal data, how it can be used, where it can be shared and how long it will be held) will provide businesses with a greater licence to build more intimate and trusted connections with consumers.

The more value you offer, the more comfortable consumers will be with sharing their data

Delivering on the value exchange

In this new world of consumer empowerment where brands must have a value proposition built on trust and a relationship that transcends the individual transaction, a direct value exchange between business and consumer becomes a game changer. Without a direct relationship with the end consumer, the challenge will be how to develop trusted relationships where end consumers will consent to the collection and use of their data. This is where direct-to-consumer relationships will become a critical factor to driving relevance and meaningful connections with the true end consumer.

However, as transparency around data usage increases, regulation gathers pace and consumers become more aware of the real value of their data, brands need to rethink their approach to consumer data and what amount of value the consumer will expect in return for their consent.

For example, the European Union's *General Data Protection Regulation* offers consumers an 'opt-in' consent as well as the right to be forgotten, rather than the traditional 'opt-out/unsubscribe' model. This is elevating the 'What's in it for me?' question for the consumer and introduces the concept of value exchange between the business requesting data and the consumer sharing their information.

Although Australia hasn't yet adopted such a consent based model, consumer expectations will slowly be reset. This concept of value exchange will become an important consideration for brands. As a general rule, the more you give, i.e. the more meaningful you become, the more willing consumers will be to share their data.



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E-commerce and voice ordering will reset the basis for competition. The understanding of, and connection with, the consumer will become the true source of competitive advantage.

Consumer brands are most at risk as many lack a true relationship with the consumer or are challenged by their lack of data. This is therefore the time for brands to make the shift from emphasising their relationship with the retailer to looking at how to win over the consumer. This will mean a commitment to connect deeply on shared values, and become truly meaningful to the consumer in moments that matter. The brands who do, will be the winners of the future.



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Endnotes

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