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We long for an epoch of elegant simplicity

“To live in elegant simplicity, we need to pay attention to three areas of existence: our soil, our soul and our society.”

SATISH KUMAN, ELEGANT SIMPLICITY

Historians like Dr Liam Fox and Yuval Noah Harari told us that the pandemic could be the catalyst that brings about a whole new world.

Business leaders admitted their optimistic view of the pandemic as Mother Earth speaking to us; a wake up call; urging us to awaken in a world where we need to redefine what normality is.

Trend forecasters have advised that consumers are expecting brands to actively improve society rather than ‘just making things’.

The earth seems to be thriving. Images of cleaner canals in Venice, wildlife emerging into our towns, and carbon maps depicting reduced emissions, can be read as encouraging omens.

Where the pragmatist tells us that, historically, the environmental agenda will always take a backseat to economic growth, we reply that we see an opportunity for digital to facilitate a tripod of social, environmental and economic sustainable growth.
“When the world changes quickly, people have new needs, and that means there are more new things to build.”

Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook

In our previous piece, Delight Your Community, Thrive Through Humanity, we explored the conversations that brands were having with their customers at the start of lockdown. Here, we delve specifically into the conversations that digital has enabled around sustainability. Now, brands will need to strategise around how to consolidate these narratives in their brand models and key messages in a post-lockdown era.

We then explore how a brand’s digital assets can become a crucial part of a more sustainable future. These are digital opportunities that we have been sitting on for years, without the impetus to make the most of them. With Pandora’s Box opened, the opportunity is ripe for brands to invest into them. Here we explore the ways in which we advise our clients to do just that.
A sustainable narrative
The service sector (restaurants, bars, hotels, spas)

As restaurants, bars, hotels and spas closed their doors to their guests, they opened up their digital windows. As they did, conversations opened up around local and seasonal produce, transparent supply chains and sustainable travel.

As supermarkets hosted empty shelves, customers started to ask questions around the locality and seasonality of what we eat. What does eating from a British larder look like, and what are its benefits? Fortunately, social media enabled brands to engage in two-way conversations around these questions whilst makeshift e-commerce sites allowed them to expand their offerings into retail to cater to life in lockdown.

As demand surged for recipe boxes, like Gastronomics, restaurants embraced the food delivery model. This enabled them to keep their supply chains open, some members of staff employed and their doors, digitally, open. As many restaurants delivered high-quality, locally sourced and in-season alternatives to supermarket ready meals, they introduced the British public to a new way of eating. Restaurants like Spring opened up online supermarkets to sell their producers’ goods direct to the consumer.

In fact, many of these farmers and food wholesalers set up their own e-commerce sites, directly accessing their end-consumer for the first time. Launching #BuyLocal, #FeedTheNation, #SupportOurFarmers and #ReadThePacket campaigns, they were able to generate income at the source and educate customers on the origins of the food we eat.

Meanwhile, as flights were docked, the consumer was forced to re-assess their relationship with travel. In turn, tourism brands took to social media to advise their guests on more sustainable ways to visit other countries, whilst fostering loyalty by providing social followers with useful, free content.

“A recent poll from CGA reveals that 57% of consumers will be scrutinising what they want from venues more carefully than before while 63% of consumers say it’s now important for them to know how fresh a venue’s produce is. In addition, 46% of consumers say transparency [of ingredients] has increased in importance. CGA also found that nearly a quarter of consumers are buying more healthy foods to protect their health.”

RESTAURANT MAGAZINE
The goods sector (fashion, beauty, homeware)

Similarly, in the goods sectors, customer activism put increasing pressure on brands to give depth to their claims about transparency and sustainability. As customers flooded to social media, digital platforms gave brands the opportunity to engage in conversations around sustainability with them, allowing them to look down their supply chain.

In fashion especially, the crisis has shifted the conversation from environmental impacts to labour rights. With coronavirus plummeting millions of garment workers into unemployment, new questions have been raised about the extent to which brands are responsible for the workers in their supply chains. As digital enables direct interactions between a brand and their consumer, honesty around sustainability has become a marker of a brand’s success. #Greenwashing and #COVIDwashing campaigns call for brands to put their money where their mouths are.

A more ethical tilt to the consumption of goods can be seen through the boom of the sharing economy during lockdown. In May, Vestiaire Collective secured a €59 million fundraise, demonstrating that resale is one area of luxury that investors are optimistic about. Similarly, second-hand platform Depop saw a 90% increase in traffic from the beginning until the end of May, suggesting that lockdown is slowing down the way we shop. Digital has enabled brands to adopt more sustainable second-hand models.

“I think ultimately change will be consumer-led—it always is—but the industry has an opportunity and frankly a responsibility, actually, to do the right thing and to change some of these systemic issues in the industry... That’s why listening to customers is crucial to the success of any business.”

STEPHANIE PHAIR, CCO, FARFETCH
A digital-assisted future: e-commerce
The service sector

As restaurants, bars, hotels and spas tentatively open up their doors, they should not close their digital windows. Instead, the service sector will benefit from their digital rendezvous. Now is the time to optimise those makeshift e-commerce sites to streamline your offering for the consumer in your building, and the one ‘safe’ at home.

Even when restaurants re-open, there will still be demand for food delivery. At first, this will be because people will be cautious about re-entering the restaurant space. But actually, even when this caution dissipates, there will still be a demand for restaurant quality food at home. The growing trend for eating quality meals at home is something that we discussed in our January insight piece: The Death of the Dinner Party, The Rise of Supper with Friends.

We are similarly optimistic that #BuyLocal initiatives will guide people away from supermarkets, and towards local businesses. By investing in their online offering, farmers and wholesale sellers can nurture the direct to consumer relationships that they began during lockdown.

Hotels and spas similarly have a lot to learn from their peers in the goods sector. By creating retail goods, they can extend their offerings beyond their four walls and allow their consumers to interact with their brands in their own homes. Just as Shinola Hotels demonstrates the benefits of a luxury goods business expanding into the hospitality sectors, hotels, like Oetker, are benefiting from setting up digital boutiques that make their experiences shoppable. This extension of brand loyalty will be important in a future when consumers increasingly consider the social and environmental impacts of travel.
The goods sector

Quarantine has accelerated the shift to online shopping. Whilst we remain optimistic that there will be a (most probably reimagined) use for bricks and mortar stores once quarantine lifts, it is likely that some of our digital shopping habits will stick.

Now is the time for brands to enhance and optimise their reactive, makeshift e-commerce sites, making their digital assets a proactive part of their future. This is not about e-tail taking over from where physical sites left off. Instead it is about a brand marrying its online and offline offering to expand consumer knowledge and maximise outreach.

Technology helps to bring consumers new experiences and enables brands to extend their influence. There are huge developments in technology around size and fit technologies, virtual fashion, and augmented retail that can feed into the experience of buying online. We love Diptyque’s collaboration with artist Bas Meeuws, who interpreted the classical floral scents into digital bouquets.

A big part of luxury is the ceremony around the shopping experience. Online shopping can become very functional. So, how do you use both digital and in-store to their best potential?

We suggest looking to the Most Interesting Store in the World, Showfields NYC, for an insight into how digital, retail and the arts can live together in the future. Showfields Live curations are weekly shopping events, where tastemakers from around the globe invite consumers on a digital shopping trip with them. These interactive experiences allow viewers to digitally explore the store, feel inspired, and purchase items in real-time.

“When safe, consumers will return to physical stores (possibly with a renewed passion for in-real-life experiences), but some digital shopping habits built during the outbreak will stick — especially if brands raise their game in online assortment, user experience and digital marketing.”
A digital-assisted future: live streaming, e-vents and VR
The service sector

Showfields’ shopping events demonstrate how online events (or e-vents) can not only forge a more sustainable option to their real-life counterparts, but can provide more exciting experiences for customers and foster greater brand loyalty.

As tourism halted, hospitality brands considered how the pandemic could be an opportunity to introduce slower, fairer, more sustainable travel, using digital as a tool to push their offering beyond their physical sites. Customers were already thinking about the social and environmental implications of their holidays. They were already examining their over-consumption habits and considering a slow living alternative.

Brands have the opportunity to use digital to extend their service offering beyond their four walls. The pandemic has seen a surge in hospitality brands expanding their offering to foster brand loyalty through digital communities. We’ve seen previously exclusive wellness hospitality brands uploading a plethora of free content, like meditation sessions, livestream cooking classes, and live chats with health professionals. Launching the At Home With Six Senses online platform, offering free videos, tutorials and advice, the brand’s e-newsletter subscriptions jumped 800% in the first month. In a future where we travel less, and more cautiously, this virtual content will be crucial to a brand’s success.

Additionally, live events and streams give customers the opportunity to interact with the brand ambassadors that live within the business. As mistrust grows around influencer and celebrity culture, brands who invest in their live assets can put their chefs, mixologists, gardeners, farmers, housekeeping and therapists into the spotlight.
The goods sector

Before lockdown, designers were already starting to rethink more sustainable ways of conducting their fashion shows. In 2019 the Swedish Fashion Council cancelled Stockholm Fashion Week entirely, citing concerns about its environmental impact. Gabriela Hearst made headlines when she offset the carbon footprint of her spring 2020 fashion show in New York, as Extinction Rebellion’s protests made waves in London.

E-Vents offer a more sustainable alternative. But more than this, they give brands direct access to their customers and create opportunities for entirely new experiences. Fashion weeks used to be one-way dialogues, but now audiences can interact, comment and give feedback. In a Business of Fashion article, Isabelle Chouvet told us that “the consumer holding a smartphone is an influencer in itself who wants to be an integral part of the life of the brand.” Digital can give viewers behind-the-scenes access, front row viewing, and interactive purchase opportunities.

Brands who pivot towards a digitally native, online-first mindset can curate sales and brand loyalty in exciting ways. They can enhance the experiential dimension of events by building studio sets with streaming in mind, ditching keynote presentation formats and incorporating interactions with VIP celebrities and influencers.

Chanel’s The Cruise 2020/21 Collection and Begg & Co’s The Lido Inspiration demonstrate how beautifully crafted videos can replace, and arguably supersede, fashion shows. British Fashion Week’s new online platform showcased the Men’s Spring/Summer 2021 Shows in June, showcasing the added texture that can be given to these events when viewed online.

“In a bid to be “the Netflix channel for fashion”, the British Fashion Council is relaunching a new London Fashion Week hub that includes virtual showrooms, panel discussions and interactive offerings.”

VOGUE
What Does this Mean for Your Brand?
With the above insights in mind, how will digital sustainability be part of your brand’s future?

How can your brand achieve an holistic 360-degree message from on-line to in-hand? A genuine message which means something to its customers, making natural, real connections.

At Delight we help our clients to navigate the following questions around brand strategy and creative assets.

**Strategy**

How have your brand model and key messages shifted during the pandemic?
For many businesses messaging has pivoted around creating a more sustainable future for a post-pandemic world. Now is the time to examine your brand model and ensure that the conversations around sustainability are built into your business and its key messages.

Do you need to reconsider your brand’s tone of voice, catering to a consumer who values authenticity and transparency? It is important for brands to demonstrate vulnerability alongside authority. The brands who have avoided being tarnished as COVIDwashers or greenwashers are those who have held their hands up to their faults and shown willing to better themselves, inviting their customers on the journey with them.

**Creative**

Does your brand design reflect your new brand model and key messages?
How can you visually represent the strategic changes that have taken place beneath the surface of your brand?

Do your website and e-commerce site facilitate one another? Have you considered investing in your e-commerce site to make it a permanent part of your future? Have you considered how your digital assets can support your in-store experiences?

What do events look like for the future of your brand? If you have been exploring live streaming, webinars and e-vents during the pandemic, do they match your brand aesthetic and follow your new brand guidelines?

How does your print and packaging reflect your sustainable goals? If you have created an e-commerce store, how do you package your goods? How can you use your packaging to maximise the unboxing experience whilst still showing your dedication to sustainability? Have you considered how your print and packaging will stand out in the retail spaces of the future?
What are your next steps? Talk to us.

Whether it’s just a casual conversation about the market right now, or a more productive chat about working together to creating an exciting future for your brand, you can contact us at contact@wearedelight.com.

In our next insight piece we will be exploring the Sustainable Future of Print and Packaging for Luxury Lifestyle Brands.
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