

# Five key marketing lessons to guide your brand in 2023



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# Foreword

It was a delight to be so deeply involved in the first ever edition of Brandweek Europe, gathering an incredible crowd of talented marketers and creatives, thinkers, and creators, in the impressive architecture of the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel. I was fortunate to share the stage with Madeleine Meline, from Electrolux and Lauren Walker, from Accenture Song to discuss how brands and retailers can balance their content marketing efforts and utilize the voice of their customers.

This hybrid conference structure held up a perfect mirror to a lot of the change that was being talked about in our industry. We can see hybridity in how we approach customers, as division between channels and different levels of the shopping funnel melt away. The consumer's voice is now directly delivering insight to supercharge sales, product development, and more. We can see it in how branded content which was once closely-protected is now starting to flow more freely, joining other sources and reaching more people as part of a fully-fledged content supply chain. And we can even see it in the way that businesses are structured. Sales and marketing functions are becoming more integrated, while the CDO and CMO roles are rapidly converging as businesses target the single digital and physical shelf.

With so many opportunities, but also so many changes, taking place in commerce while consumer wants, needs and expectations continue to rise, it's easy to get caught up in the headwinds of trying to find the next new and key trend. Brandweek Europe reminded us all that consumers are the driving force behind everything we do, so we need to continue to listen with a keen ear and allow their voices to resonate throughout our businesses. As a diehard consumer and a commerce and marketing practitioner, I can't be more energized about the new world ahead.

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**As we move between challenging opportunities, this is the kind of innovation we'll need to keep up. We'll be back at Brandweek Europe next year to see how the industry is continuing to push forward towards a more creative, more reactive, more conversational, more connected way of working.**

Zarina Stanford, CMO,  
BAZAARVOICE

# Introduction

Marketing is constantly evolving. As marketers, it's our job to stay ahead of the latest marketing trends and lessons.

With that in mind, Bazaarvoice recently attended **Brandweek Europe**, which brought together brands, agencies, and leaders from across the marketing industry to discuss a diverse range of topics and ideas. From environmentalism and Web 3.0 to Christmas TV spots and creator partnerships, it felt like little escaped the breadth of the event. When that much is on offer, it can be difficult to digest into clear and actionable strategies.

That's why we've collected the **five most important marketing lessons** from the event, from the importance of giving up some control when it comes to your content, to the big changes we're seeing in creator marketing. We've covered it all.

Everyone at the event will have taken something different away with them to think about, but we hope that these ideas will, whether you were at Brandweek Europe or not, help you to refresh and reengage with the inspirational thinking on display.





# What about the information you already have in ratings and reviews?

Lauren Walker, Managing Director,  
**ACCENTURE SONG**

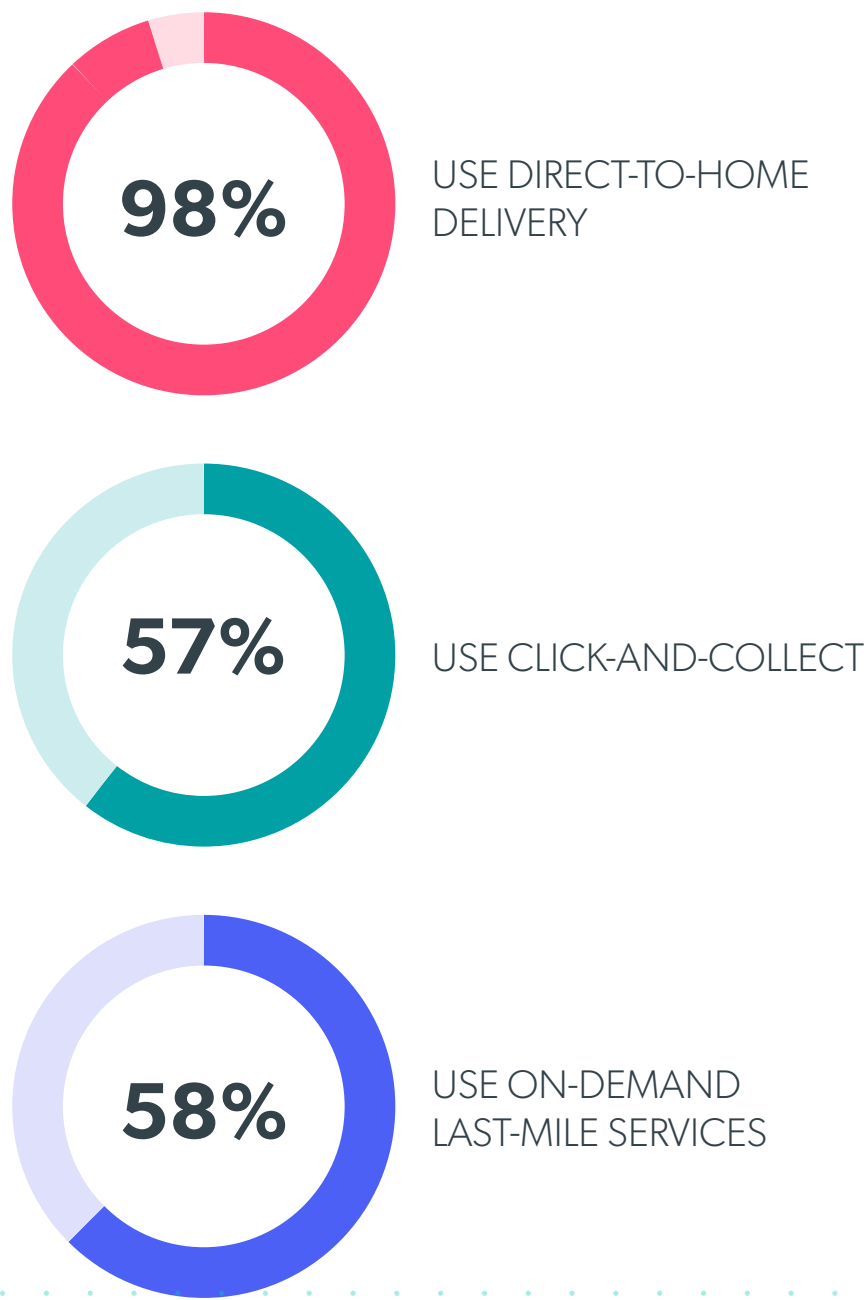
# Ratings and Reviews

One idea that came up more than once over the course of the day was Google’s much-discussed, much-trailed, and much-delayed winding down of third-party cookies. While the idea has been widely debated in recent years, few at Brandweek Europe saw it as a significant threat. The potential loss of cookies as a tool for digital sales and marketing teams has stimulated important thinking around how the industry can make more effective use of different, better data to modernize how insights are attained and customers are understood.

First-party data platforms build a picture of a consumer based on analyzing direct touchpoints between them and the business, rather than attempting to track them through the open web. These platforms are delivering results for some in the form of more effective campaigns which are both personalized and privacy-respecting. Others are looking towards new consent-based advertising platforms which promise to change how advertising works online, giving consumers greater control over and more tangible benefits from their data.

In all of this, it could be easy to overlook the wealth of information that consumers already willingly share on a daily basis. Ratings and reviews, alongside unstructured data like product questions and answers and product photos, contain customer insights and feedback that hold much broader significance.

## Of the 92% of consumers who now buy digitally



Source: Lauren Walker/Accenture Song research

We already know that consumers place significantly more stock in content from fellow shoppers than they do in the branded content: over half of people state that user-generated photography makes them more confident in their purchase decision than professional photography. What’s more, those consumers look beyond star ratings and sales rankings to delve into the human stories that others are telling.

**In other words, user generated content (UGC) is no longer a nice added bonus in online retail. It’s seen as something that knows the brand better than the brand knows itself.**

As digital-first behaviors provide the opportunity to give feedback on an ever-greater share of what we use and buy, that knowledge base will only deepen.

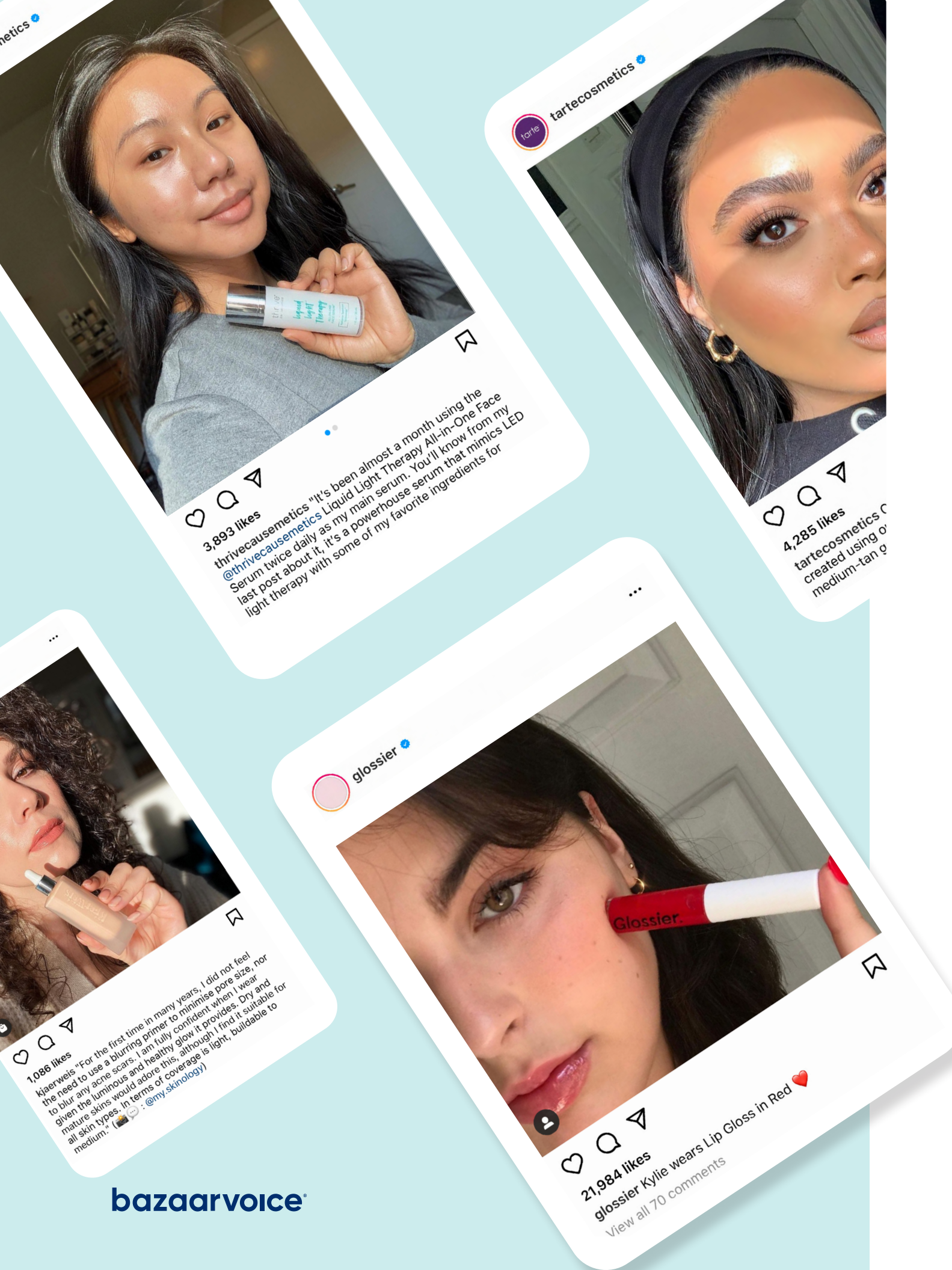
That all means brands should take ratings and reviews seriously as a source of insights, allowing them to collect, analyze, and better understand their customer sentiment. For brands that engage seriously with this freely shared customer voice, consumers’ reactions are more than just a measurement tool. They become a 24/7 focus group which can be relied on to inform decisions on everything from reactive marketing tactics to product development processes.



**You've been trained to  
focus in on the content you  
have the most control over**

Doug Straton, Chief Customer Evangelist

**BAZAARVOICE**



# Command and control no longer works

The well-honed approach of building brands through high-profile, branded content is alive and well. Indeed, at Brandweek Europe, hero ads from Dove, ASDA, PlayStation, Johnnie Walker, and others were shown in order to shape and sharpen the topics being explored.

**Consumer appetite for content, however, has for a long time been growing at a far faster rate than the industry’s capacity to produce it.**

Across film, creatives, writers, animators, strategists, audience researchers, project managers, and more, producing a major brand campaign has costs which are difficult to reduce. Audiences, meanwhile, have rapidly adopted a digital lifestyle which offers what is now a functionally unlimited range of content, across a functionally unlimited breadth of channels. It’s in this context that marketers must compete for attention.

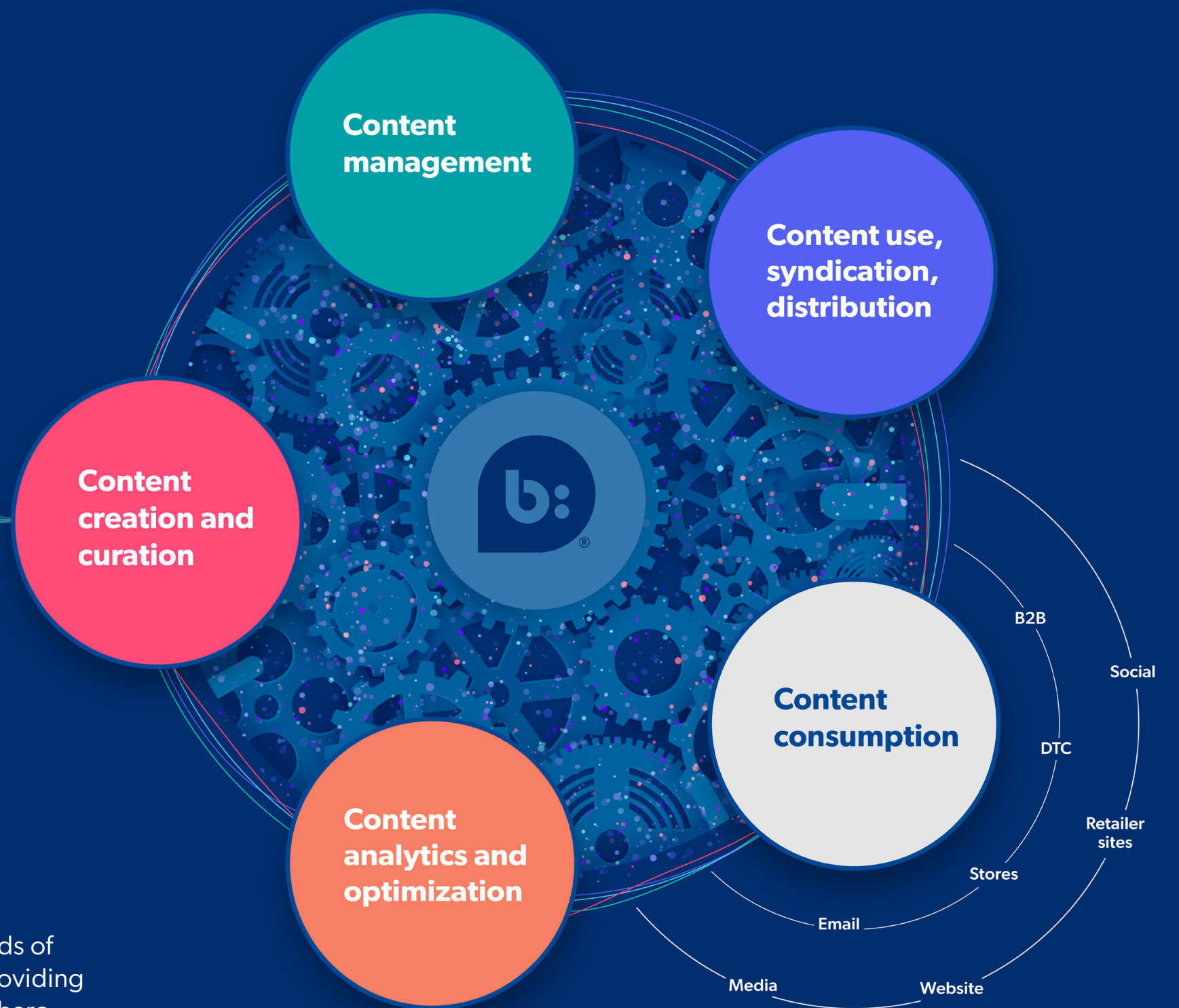
If the ‘command and control’ approach to campaigns that most marketers working today were trained in no longer meets audience needs, we need a different model to operate in. It’s notable that few brands spoke about activation without also discussing things like PR outreach, creator partnerships, out-of-home experiences, and retail marketing. All of that coupled together makes this a much more complex landscape to operate in.

One way to make better sense of it all is to borrow ideas from those who are well-versed at dealing with diverse and complex markets. In economics terms, high demand for a good or service incentivizes others to supply it, and it’s the work of businesses to efficiently enable that supply to meet demand. In this framing, the work of marketing content creation might be seen not as a singular relationship (in which a creative team simply delivers an idea to an audience) but as a whole content supply chain. That means we need to coordinate diverse content formats being created in many places to enable and drive conversation among core audiences, even as tastes and expectations shift.

User-generated content (UGC), like customer reviews and images, in particular is a highly-efficient means to generate content at scale, delivering outputs which are highly informed about and aligned with brands and products. The challenge, of course, is to collect UGC and drive it throughout the customer-facing journey, especially in ways which align across broader sales and marketing operations. To get there, brands will need to invest time into new processes and ways of working, but the advantage of agile, relevant content is worth it.

# CONTENT SUPPLY CHAIN

The goal is a well-structured content supply chain that covers different kinds of content creates mutually supportive effects, with content consumption providing demand signals to inform what owned content should be produced, and hero creative stimulating and guiding the creation and curation of other forms of content. In short, the destination is not a content free-for-all, but a system for working with content efficiently and effectively at the scale and speed of culture.





**Creator marketing has just changed  
so fundamentally in the last few  
years from that fake, bubblegum life  
into [something] real**

Emma Harman, Chief Content Officer,  
**WHALAR**

# Creator marketing has changed

Democratized access to production and distribution may be an enormous opportunity for brands to gather, curate, and share content that resonates with consumers — but great content is also being produced by regular people at least as easily as professional, branded marketing. We're living in a time when anyone with a smartphone can create content. And they're doing so daily.

This massive growth of content, and on different content channels, over the last decade means that branded communications must operate in a significantly more competitive environment. The very content which draws users to social platforms also represents competition for attention from the perspective of businesses choosing to advertise on those platforms.

Of course, with YouTube now approaching its 18th birthday, none of this is news. Nonetheless, marketers still have more to learn about interacting with this new entertainment space and supporting branded campaigns by engaging with these creator communities. At the same time, creator communities are developing knowledge and insight which marketers should be keen to draw on.

These individual creators, who seek similar results to those that agencies might dedicate whole teams to, can feel under significant pressure from the often unpredictable trends around content

formats and the technological changes that platforms introduce. The most important issue for creators though, is forging partnerships with brands that align with their own personality, interests, and audience expectations.

That's because, while other content tends to be just one ingredient in a broader program, success for creators lives or dies on how each piece performs. So, anything that risks alienating their audience can have serious long-term consequences.

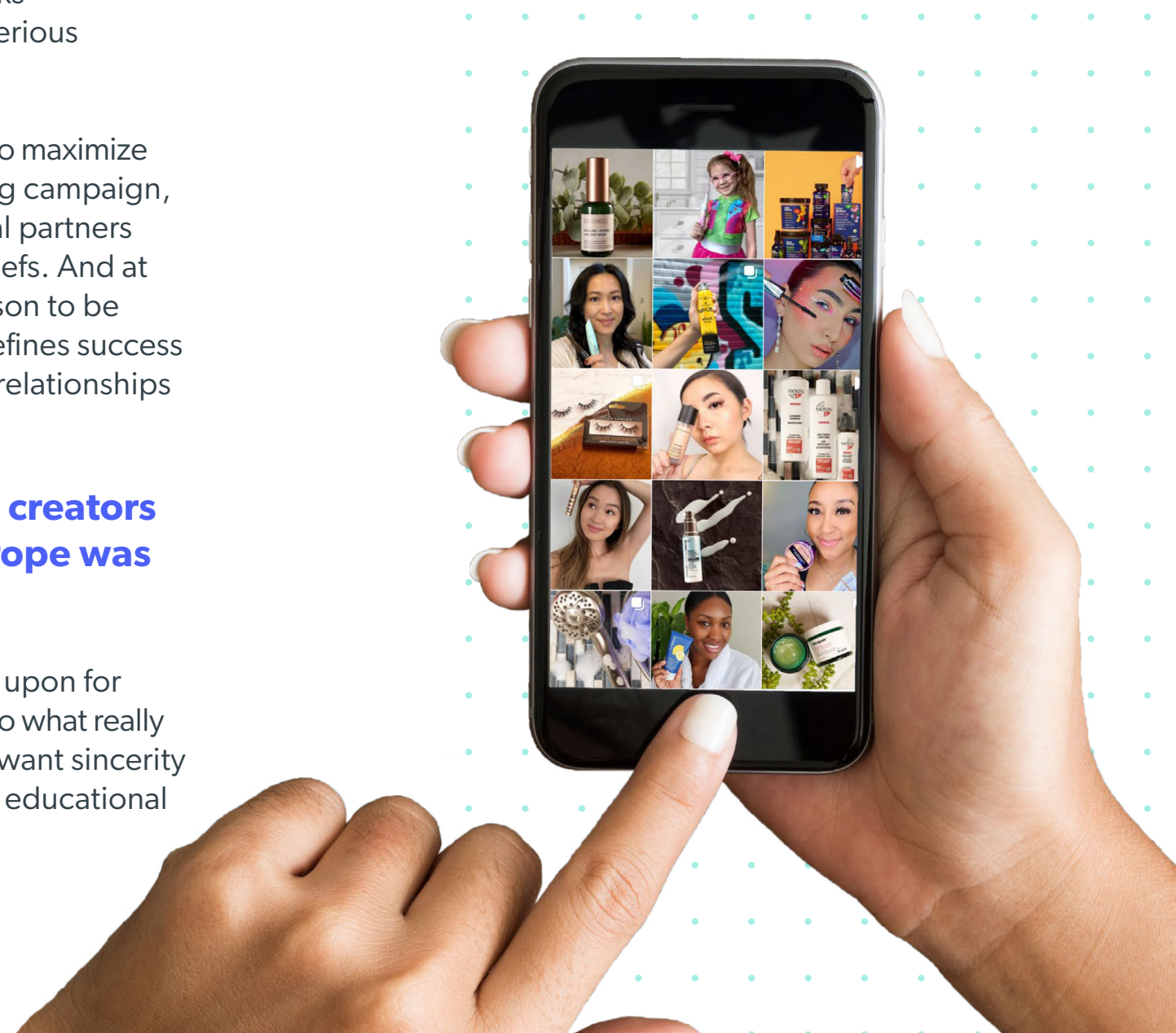
There's important steps you can take to maximize the success of your creator marketing campaign, like thoroughly researching potential partners and providing personal, detailed briefs. And at the same time, there's a broader lesson to be learned from creators about what defines success when it comes to building personal relationships with your audience.

**The clear message from the creators speaking at Brandweek Europe was that authenticity is key.**

Social content is often looked down upon for being too glossy and manufactured, so what really delivers is the opposite – consumers want sincerity and honesty. Whether that's sharing educational

resources on activism, introducing new products to people, or simply being open when they need to take a break, creators see their highest ROI when they're honest, open, and authentic.

And in the modern content market, that should be something that every marketer pays attention to.





**If you can't make  
people feel something,  
you're dead**

Dom Boyd, MD, Strategy and Data Business  
**KANTAR UK INSIGHTS**



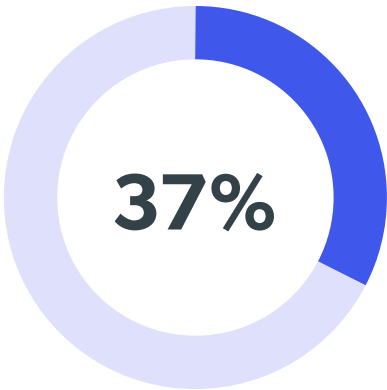
# Make people feel something

## When was the last time a marketing campaign really made you laugh?

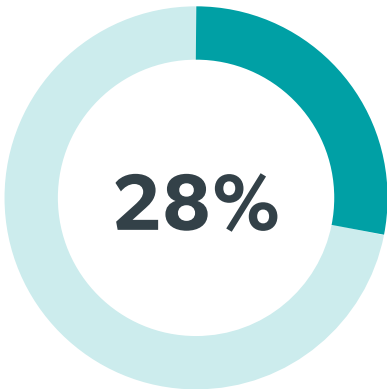
If you're a marketer, that's a question you might have an easy answer to. But, it's one that the average consumer is likely to struggle with. Data from Kantar suggests that the use of humor in marketing has been declining steadily over the last twenty years. Ads just don't try to amuse us like they used to — and so it's hardly surprising that the self-reported enjoyment of ads has also halved since the mid-1990s.

While the evidence for this trend is clear enough, it's more difficult to definitively state why this might be the case. A sense of greater public scrutiny, changes in typical creative workflows, and shifting corporate assumptions about what advertising is for are all possible factors.

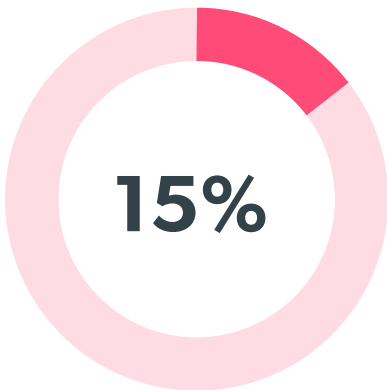
One major clue lies in the fact that brands over that period have trended towards channels which are relatively less likely to be used humorously.



OF TV ADS INCLUDE HUMOR



OF DIGITAL ADS INCLUDE HUMOR



OF PRINT/OOH ADS INCLUDE HUMOR

Source: Dom Boyd/Kantar Link Database

All of this matters because what hasn't changed is how consumers receive marketing. Emotional connection — particularly humor — is still the strongest factor influencing marketing effectiveness. To be funny has a bigger impact on audience receptivity to an advert than special visual effects, celebrity appearances, or even the ad's soundtrack.

This is a real opportunity for brands to think about how emotional resonance can be brought to life across different channels. According to the Brandweek Europe panelists, it's not about changing how we ideate and create content, but about the "biggest creative act of all": developing a clear brand strategy which has space to accommodate multiple executions, while maintaining a core message.

A clearly articulated strategy has always been a necessary step for emotionally-stirring marketing. In the example campaigns discussed at the event, the emotion was not the brand message itself, but a hook to catch attention which is then directed to the actual brand message. Pulling that off requires a brief which is both precise about what needs to be said and open about how it can be said.

**In the new and more diverse world of content marketing we work in, the trick is to:**

- Extend thinking beyond your professional, creative team
- Build strategies and guidelines that include the creator perspective
- Allow experimentation with different versions of messaging
- Curate UGC that's on-brand but personal and relatable

After all, there's no shortage of humor in UGC. Just as with traditional advertising, it's one of the key factors that delivers success and influence on social media platforms. Isn't it time that brands tapped into that resource too?





# Bring the outside in [...] and bring the future forward

Dom Boyd, MD, Strategy and Data Business  
KANTAR UK INSIGHTS

# Bring the outside, in

The major common thread at Brandweek Europe was one of change. On the one hand, a period of accelerated digital transformation has forever changed how consumers make buying decisions, often leaving marketing and sales teams with quite different workloads compared to their pre-pandemic careers. And on the other hand, the emergence of a newly challenging financial climate is raising questions about how much capacity marketing departments will have for those workloads in the near future.

Of course, it’s widely acknowledged that a financial downturn can also be an opportune time to invest in marketing, with brands that manage to do so receiving dividends from having built strength ahead of the inevitable pendulum swing back to growth. To do so effectively, you’ll need to build teams that make sense in a new landscape of consumer behavior.

One example of this can be found in the long-standing divisional separation of sales and marketing teams. Yes, both teams work to drive sales. But the reason why these two revenue-driving workflows often operate distinctly is clear: one tends to prioritize the short-term, maximizing the flow of consumers going from consideration to purchase, while the other takes in a longer-term scope, building reputation and brand equity in a process that might take years or even decades.

It turns out that such assumptions are increasingly mismatched with actual consumer behavior.

For example, if a brand introduces a direct-to-consumer offering, the marketing platform and the sales platform might suddenly become the same thing – and those teams will need to work in unison to deliver results.

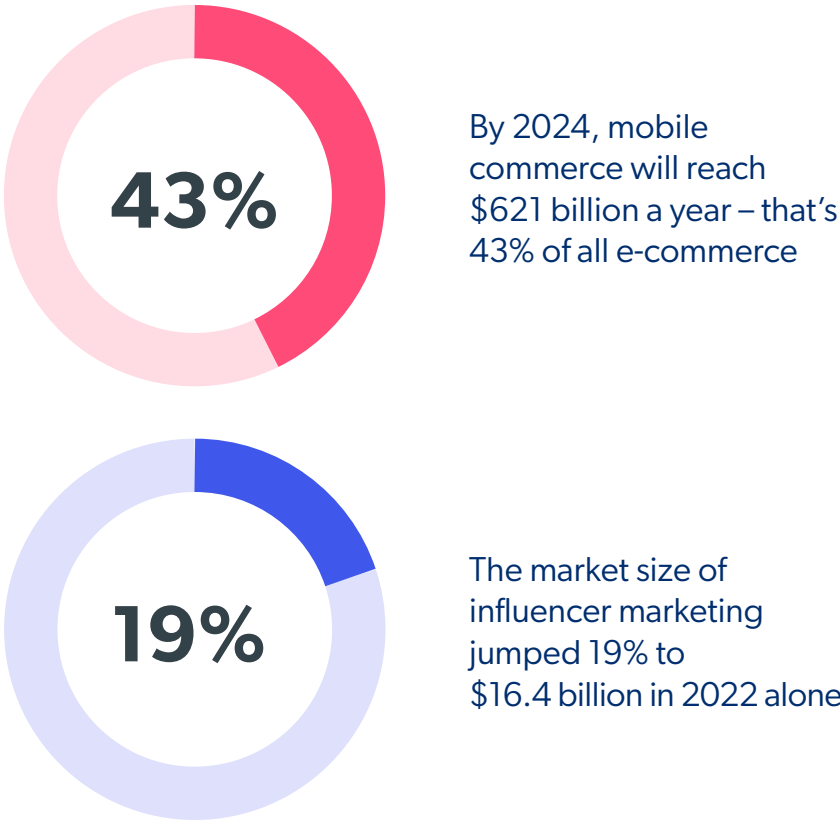
Ideas like these are behind the growing notion that “there’s only one shelf”. It no longer works to treat physical stores, owned online channels, third-party resellers, and emerging buying options (like social selling) as distinct challenges. From the consumer’s perspective, all digital and physical touchpoints need to have a unified message for them to be truly effective.

In response, we’re already seeing the start of significant innovations to the infrastructure of our industry. Some corporations are looking to how departments can be restructured to put marketing and sales activity under the same growth umbrella, seeking to grow brand equity all the way through the customer journey. New technology platforms are also being called on to manage that customer journey as it takes more complex paths through more varied channels. And both of these shifts are putting data closer to the heart of the work, testing and learning how best to unify a brand’s approach to consumers.

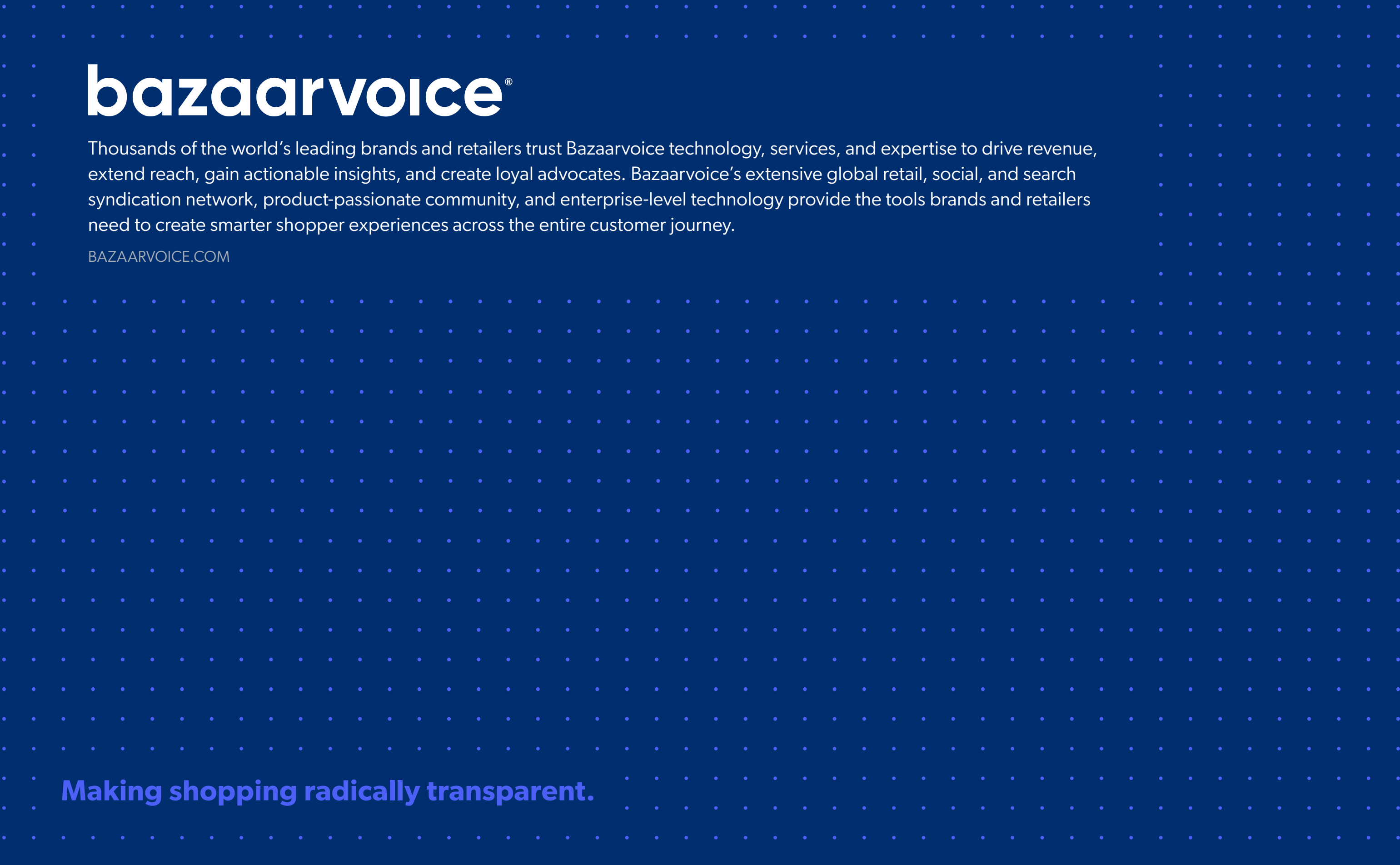
All of this is especially important now precisely because the nature of the challenge that brands are facing is rapidly changing. When the pandemic arrived, some necessary interventions in how businesses work could be stood up almost

overnight. But managing wholesale organizational change takes much longer. Now’s an opportune time to start making sure that both the teams businesses have and the tools they work with are fit for purpose in a digital-first consumer environment.

## The change is already with us, and growing rapidly:



**\$80B**  
Social commerce will grow to \$80 billion annually by 2025



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