



Six Trends for 2021

It's cliché at this point to talk about what a strange and “unprecedented” year 2020 was. So we won't. And the truth is, when it comes to marketing – when it comes to understanding consumers – there is no such thing as normal.

That's why we take a fresh look every year at the ever-evolving mash-up of human needs, innovation and changing consumer expectations that we call Trends. Some of these trends we've been tracking over time. These are the big ones that slowly and steadily build and are cemented across multiple generations. Many of these trends were amplified or accelerated by the 2020 situation-that-shall-not-be-named. Some of them emerged because of the situation, and some are just ticking along on their normal lifecycle.

Trends 101

Trends 101

WHAT

Consumers are changing.

When basic human needs, wants and desires collide or connect with our constantly changing world.

WHY

What do consumers want?

Success boils down to two fundamental questions:

What do consumers want?

What will consumers want next?

HOW

Trendspotting tools.

Watching innovations and finding patterns to uncover why the changes are happening.

[Trendwatching.com](https://www.trendwatching.com)

[Intel Trends](https://www.mintel.com/trends)

01

Value Brands

02

**Creative
Communities**

03

Brandcare

04

**Permission
Seekers**

05

Skill Selling

06

**Contactless
Economy**





Value Brands

Consumers want brands to do
the good work for them.

HUMAN TRUTH

Status Signaling

For decades now, we've watched as consumer choices have become increasingly aligned with one's personal identity and the story about themselves they want to tell the world: "I'm smart! I'm healthy! I'm connected!"

In today's "woke" culture, consumers care ever-more about the values and purpose of the brands they engage with. They need those values to tell a positive, status-accruing, Instagram-ready story about who they are and what they believe. To say, unequivocally, "I'm ethical!"



One, two, three

Value Brands

1. FADING

Human Brands

Increasingly aware that personality, purpose and profit can be compatible, consumers seek brand relationships that go beyond the superficial and transactional, embracing brands that stand for something.

2. FOREMOST

Good Inside and Out

The digital revolution made the world more transparent, and corporate culture as a manifestation of brand values came into even sharper focus during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. FUTURE

Value Brands

Increasingly sceptical of short-lived marketing initiatives, consumers seek brands that embed values at the very heart of their strategy, with the expectation they'll deliver more than lip service.

Why Now?

Looking for More Than Empathy

Whenever people are troubled or hurting or dealing with serious problems (like, say, a global pandemic, racial injustice, economic insecurity, political polarization, misinformation and general daily uncertainty dominating our lives), they want to feel that other people understand what they are going through and are concerned. But empathy alone feels less than adequate these days.

The Value of Values

Today, empathizing with your consumers means caring about the things they care about, and this goes well beyond the baseline expectations of convenience and price, with environmental and social good standards rising in importance. This will shift how brands need to engage and interact with customers as they become more critical and selective of brands that resonate with their own values.



“It is imperative for brands to develop ethical campaigns and socially responsible ideas that tackle issues that consumers are passionate about.”

Fjord Trends 2021

Accenture

Airbnb

EXAMPLE



Airbnb launched Open Homes in response to harsh restrictions on refugee entry in the U.S. The worldwide program encourages its hosts to offer free housing to refugees through their platform.



This Amsterdam-based grocery store raises prices to reflect hidden social and environmental costs. The funds are used to support harm-reduction projects via selected NGOs.

**FOR EVERY
MATCH MADE
ON BUMBLEBFF
TODAY,
BUMBLE WILL
DONATE
10 CENTS TO
PLANNED
PARENTHOOD.**

#BUMBLETAKESOVER
#GIRLGANGSUNITE
#GIVEAHOOTPROTECTYOURCOOCH



Bumble announced it would match 10% for every match on its BFF platform, turning 438,790 matches into a \$50,000 donation to Planned Parenthood in one day (they rounded up).

What Can Our Clients Do?

Talk the Talk

What issues companies decide to address, what they do and how they talk about it matters a great deal. But mastering the art of shaping that narrative has never been harder as issues become more and more divisive. Make your choices an open narrative and make sure they align with the brand's core purpose. Don't take on too many, as that might paralyze efforts or (perhaps worse) appear insincere.

Walk the Walk

Increasingly cynical of "bolt-on" CSR strategies, switched-on consumers are looking for brands that Contribute Something Real. Brands have to gradually showcase their progress to keep consumers aware they aren't just putting out rhetoric toward a goal that won't be acted upon.

2025 is shaping up to be a defining year for expectations of value with several long-term benchmarks around sustainability and business ethics coming into focus. How will your brand compare?



Creative Communities

The pandemic got consumers' creative juices flowing again.

HUMAN TRUTH

Need for Connection x Self-Expression

Connection

We have an innate need for connection, which quarantine posed a threat to. To cope, we are looking for new online platforms that will help us form safe connections online.

Self-Expression

Whether it's through style, music or other creative outlets, we have a need to express who we are visually, verbally and now virtually. When we find an enjoyable way to express ourselves, we often form bonds with those who share those passions.



One, two, three

Content Communities

1. FADING

Engaging Content

Engaging content used to be enough to capture consumers' attention, but no one is capturing attention now that everyone is trying.

2. FOREMOST

Audience-sourced

Brands are tapping into consumers' newfound love of creativity by collaborating with them to produce content. Whether that be a video or even an innovative product idea. Brands will not only gain engagement but could also source some cool new ideas.

3. FUTURE

Content Communities

Brands can use their digital platforms as hubs for like-minded brand fans to bond and connect. Not only will this create a sense of brand community, but potential collaboration between fans will drive innovative and creative content for the brand.

Why Now?

The Skill Sprint


Consumers are reasoning: “If I’m stuck at home, I might as well gain some knowledge or engage in creative pursuits.”

Online education platform Coursera saw a 1,500% uptick in month-over-month demand for courses, and U.S.-based e-commerce platform Etsy saw a 100% increase in vendors selling their wares in Q2.

Creative Therapy

Another factor driving consumers to immerse themselves in imaginative pursuits? Stress, which 83% globally report experiencing (Cigna, September 2020).

Consumers are turning to creative activities due to their scientifically proven ability to reduce stress. Just 45 minutes of flexing one’s creative abilities alleviates anxiety.

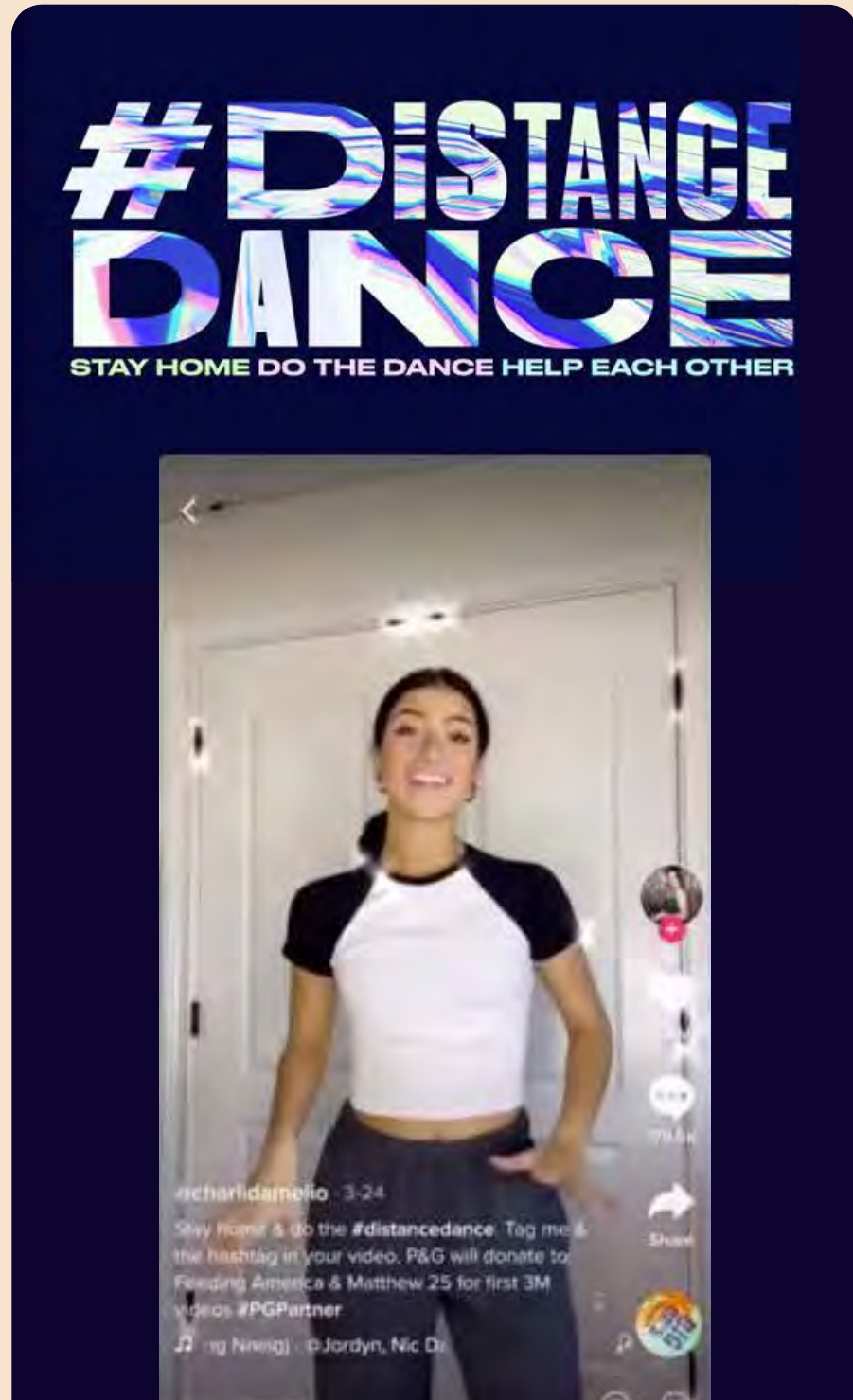


“Globally, 58% of consumers are trying new cooking methods and 47% are trying new hobbies or returning to old ones.”

Accenture
2020

#Stayathome Dance

EXAMPLE



TikTok

P&G teamed up with TikTok mega-influencer Charli D'Amelio to start the #DistanceDance challenge, which garnered 1.7 million imitation dances.

Album Cover Design

EXAMPLE



Adobe, Pixar and Disney invited consumers to create their own “cover art” using assets from the movie, with one inspired design winning the \$10,000 grand prize.

Culinary Innovation Hub

EXAMPLE



Plant-based egg brand, *JUST Egg*, opened a culinary innovation hub teaching top chefs how to use its plant-based food products.

What Can Our Clients Do?

Foster & Build Communities

What if you started treating digital and in-person platforms not as a chance to engage one-on-one with customers but as an opportunity to bring your consumers together over their shared interest, your brand.

There is strength in numbers – and even more strength when those numbers are connected.

Consumers as Collaborators

What would it look like if you treated your consumers as collaborators, working together toward a shared goal?

This would get consumers more engaged with your brand as they get to guide decisions that directly impact them.

You would also gain access to a host of talent and resources that can help you develop innovative solutions at a lower cost.

Q3

Brandcare

Welcome to the health
(not healthy) economy.

HUMAN TRUTH

We Are Unwell

While the pandemic has challenged the notion of healthy living and accelerated the normalization of mental health, 2020 was still a roller coaster of societal ups and downs. There's no doubt consumers' well-being has declined since 2019.



One, two, three

Brandcare

1. FADING

Wellness, But Make It Trendy

The keto diet, Pilates classes, matcha, yoga retreats, “getting your steps in” and essential oils... Consumers adapted their lifestyles and experiences in the hopes of becoming better versions of themselves and preventing the need for expensive, inconvenient healthcare services.

2. FOREMOST

It's OK To Not Be OK

We joke about gaining the quarantine 15 and living in yoga pants, but the mental and physical well-being of consumers and their families is not a joke. It's a concern. Wellness-related experiences are limited, and the ability to maintain our previous lifestyles has been difficult.

3. FUTURE

Wanted: Healthy Everything

Consumers will expect brands they interact with to prioritize their physical and mental well-being. They're still going to binge-watch Netflix and bake sourdough, but they'll expect brands and their products/ services to help counteract their bad habits and get them back to their best health.

Why Now?

The Feels Have Been Accelerated.

Losing trust in government.


Many consumers are dissatisfied with governments' coronavirus responses and are looking to brands to fill the gaps.

Normalizing mental health.

The demand for mental health services is rising. As the world returns to normal, some causes (like isolation) may fade, but others (like finances) will be amplified.

Demanding preventative healthcare.

The renewed focus on preventative health is rooted in COVID-19 concerns but is also a reaction to the causes of the pandemic. Regardless, interest in preventative healthcare is on the rise, and big tech is taking notice. Building off Amazon's launch of Amazon Pharmacy in November, we can expect big tech to disrupt the healthcare industry over the next year.



“73% of consumers believe brands need to embrace wellness as part of their core mission.”

Ogilvy – The Wellness Gap
October 2020

Hinge x Headspace

EXAMPLE



Hinge

● headspace

Hinge teamed up with Headspace to help consumers breathe through first-date (or even bad-date) jitters.

Amex & Calm

EXAMPLE



Calm

Card members can receive a complimentary year of Calm Premium, plus half off the following year upon automatic renewal.

Peloton Beyond the Bike

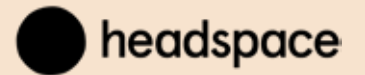
EXAMPLE



Capitalizing on consumers' hesitation to go back to in-person fitness classes, Peloton began offering pilates and barre classes, promising consumers they won't even need the studio again. (Bet you buy the bike, too.)

Teams x Headspace

EXAMPLE



No longer have that rough morning commute? Time for Teams-integrated Headspace. Instead of rolling out of bed and logging in at 9 a.m., wake up early and start your day with a meditation. You'll be all ready to deal with that morning person on your first call.

What Can Our Clients Do?

Empathy With Action

Remember the COVID-19 campaigns simply speaking to solidarity and camaraderie? In 2021, saying you care won't be enough.

Practice some informed empathy and show you understand your consumers' needs. Are they stressed parents trying to balance home-schooling and home-working? Young people concerned about future prospects? What help do they need?

If you're looking to provide Brandcare but don't know where to start, ask your employees. How can your staff offer insights into people's needs?

Think Ethically

Don't just use ambiguous terms like "natural" or "clean" – consumers expect more. Products and services designed to support consumers' well-being should be developed with health professionals.

When it comes to caring for consumer's health, there are endless opportunities to explore, but it should be approached lightly.

Successful companies will move beyond old boundaries to monetize new ways of enhancing and ensuring well-being. It's essential to find a credible fit between industry and health that presents brand opportunities.

04

Permission Seekers

With the vaccine arriving, keen ears will be listening for new cultural tones.

HUMAN TRUTH

Respect and Belonging

In the U.S., a collectivist mindset has taken hold in a culture long defined by its individual ideals. All the while, newly formed social norms have helped govern acceptable behavior.

As the dynamics of the pandemic shift, an innate desire for respect and belonging means conscientious consumers will be on the lookout for social cues that validate a return to their personal pursuits.



One. two. three

Permission Seekers

1. FADING

Shaming (En Masse)

Traditional and social media firestorms targeting large cross sections of society (i.e., the “young invincibles” celebrating their spring breaks).

2. FOREMOST

Our Winter of Discontent

While society has largely coalesced around pandemic behavioral norms, individual nonconformists continue to raise the public’s ire (a certain celebrity family posting splashy Christmas gifts, for example).

3. FUTURE

Happiness as Socially Acceptable

As 2021 heralds the beginning of the end of the pandemic, the question on many minds is: “When will I be able to treat myself or celebrate a moment of happiness without feeling bad about it?”

Why Now?

Social Proof

Following high-profile examples of “cancel culture” and social media shaming, people are more sensitive than ever to the potential consequences of nonconformist behavior.

Now with the arrival of vaccines, a new sense of optimism is in tension with the ongoing struggle.

Fearful of finding themselves out of step with the pack, consumers will be looking for validation before indulging.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Experts acknowledge that feelings of joy and happiness are completely valid and should be embraced, even during a pandemic.

However, we know that many default to a feeling of “survivor’s guilt,” which can be harmful to mental health.

Recent medical breakthroughs stand to tempt more people to want to express themselves in ways that may be taboo today.

“Start Planning”

EXAMPLE



Disney

Walt Disney World welcomes
2021 with a song:

“There’s a great, big, beautiful tomorrow,
Shining at the end of every day,
There’s a great, big, beautiful tomorrow,
And tomorrow’s just a dream away.”

Social Proof

EXAMPLE



COVID-19 health pass apps are being designed to allow people to prove they've been vaccinated. These literal "permission slips," the adoption of which is still unclear, place practical benefits at odds with potential moral and equality considerations.

What Can Our Clients Do?

Keep Ears to the Ground

Whether your brand is anxious to take the lead in ushering in a new day or more comfortable waiting until new post-pandemic norms are firmly established, listening to the social media conversations of your customers will help inform on when that time is right.

Trust Your Instincts

Consumers and brands are likely to engage in a sort of lead-and-follow dance in 2021, with each looking to the other for behavioral cues. Given this inherent ambiguity, major brand communication decisions will likely come down to trusting your instincts.



Skill Selling

COVID-19 rewards ingenuity
and entrepreneurship –
crystalizing “results-driven”
consumerism.

HUMAN TRUTH

Order Instead of Chaos

There are simply too many choices, opinions and options to systematically and exhaustively eliminate unknowns or undesired outcomes and still have free time at the end of the day. Still, this is exactly what we want: reduce uncertainty and maximize our self worth (i.e., the decisions we made were the right ones).

This very human tension is exactly why the idea of “life hacking” has become so stubbornly rooted in the popular lexicon – and has been for decades. We can skirt the labor, reward ingenuity and still arrive at the right result.

In the year of our lord COVID 2020, there were a seemingly endless number of unknowns and undesired situations to address, and the only way to maintain self worth was to exert a small amount of control over a chaotic year.



One. two. three

Life Hacking Through the Years

1. FADING

Entrepreneuria

Fueled by accessible tech and an optimistic outlook, hackers step up and set up business solutions in burgeoning industries.

2. FOREMOST

Human (minded) Brands

Brands step in and use innovations to address redundancies and add agency/leniency to consumers' lives – effectively helping them feel like hackers by just being consumers.

3. FUTURE

Skill Selling

Brands embrace a cooperative posture by offering training schemes and feedback loops so they can integrate with and amplify the ways consumers want to hack their worlds.

Why Now?

Can't Outpace Innovation

The idea that businesses can unilaterally lead – or completely own – digital transformation is a fallacy. Brands cannot control or dictate the pace of transformation because – as we have seen with COVID-19 – external events will always bring change to your door.

When push comes to shove, people will hack their ways into and out of situations. For example, 50% more businesses were created in June 2020 compared with the same month in 2019.

Or popular video games grew their entertainment mandate when users demanded more “community” features (i.e., digital concerts).

Agency Is Altruism

Especially during a pandemic (but always present), people want to feel in control. COVID-19 stole that from many. Indeed, brands felt a demand from their constituencies (both consumers and employees) to help them regain a sense of ownership over their day-to-day.

Case in point, demand for online tutorials and how-to videos rose dramatically from March 2020, with Google reporting a 65% increase in watch time.

Learn In

EXAMPLE



Launched in April 2020, Learn In helps companies manage learning sabbaticals and learning-while-earning hybrid arrangements. Employees can continue to work at their company while also attending a learning bootcamp. Companies pay for access to the service, as well as a tuition fee per employee supported.

Botik by Boticário

EXAMPLE



 Boticário

Following the launch of its new skincare brand, Boticário announced plans to train women to become digital influencers. Candidates apply through the website by sending in mini-biographies relating to self-esteem and self-care. 200 candidates were then entered in an online influencer course. After, they will be accompanied and supported by the brand.

HGTV “DIY (with help)”

EXAMPLE



HGTV has put out an open casting call for anyone who has a home renovation project they’ve been putting off but finally want to conquer as they spend so much time at home. Selected participants will receive a DIY box in the mail that’s full of custom materials and supplies for the project at hand. They will also be virtually connected with an HGTV expert to guide them through the project.

What Can Clients Do?

SKILL SELLING



Commercialize Expertise

As consumers look to exert more control over their worlds and the brands that occupy them, consider how you might leverage the knowledge your brand has acquired over time. How might the passions, skills or insider know-how that helped form your brand be used by your consumers to improve their day-to-day?

Open Source It

In a world where nothing is truly finished (i.e., consumers lifehack their worlds and iterate on products or use them in novel ways), take the opportunity to involve passionate brand fans in the development process. Release specs, collaborate and listen. You may discover a new application, audience or purpose for your product simply by opening the process.



Contactless Economy

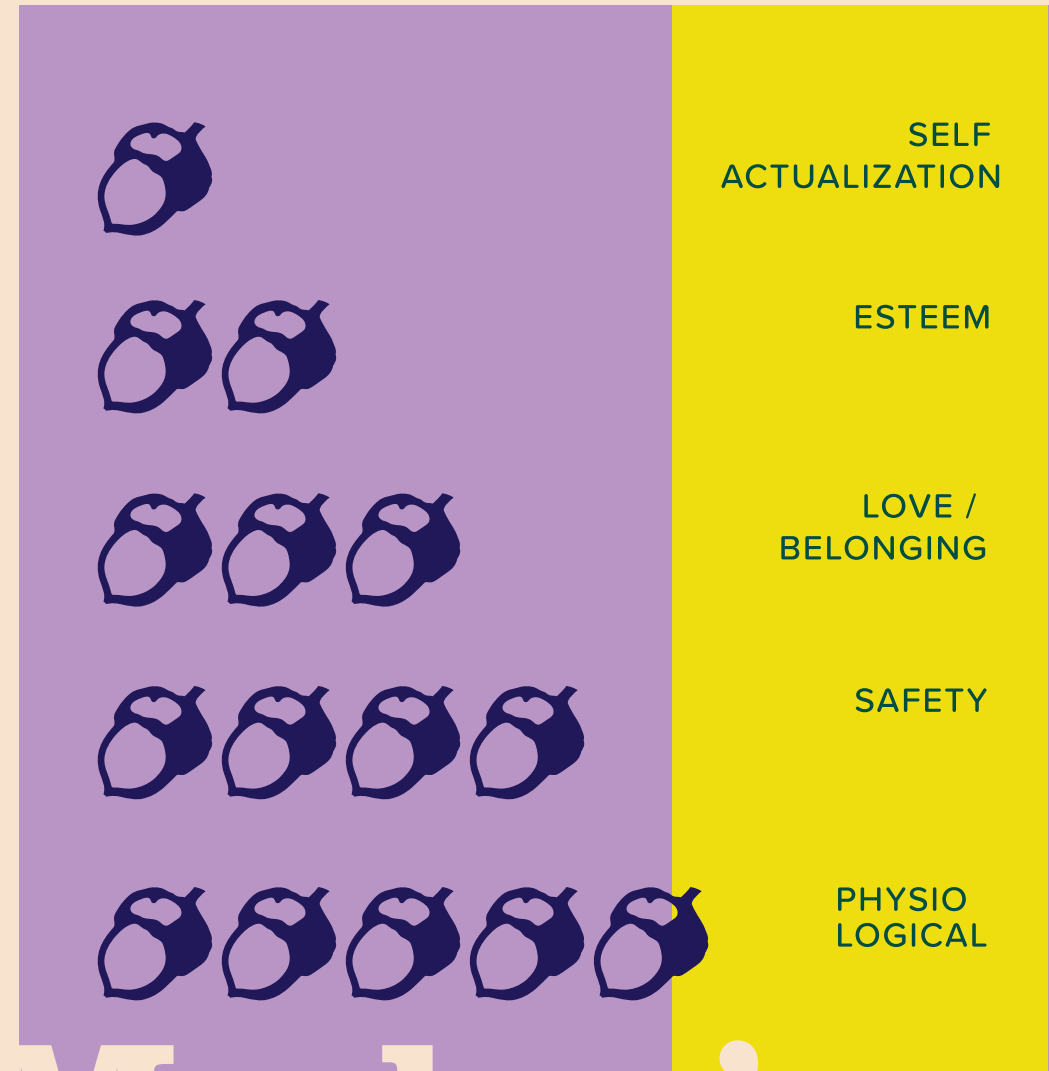
Our desire for safety and security is accelerating the adoption of touch-free solutions.

HUMAN TRUTH


Peace of Mind

Security is the most basic of all human needs. We value health and safety for ourselves, our loved ones and for society as a whole.

From a global pandemic to man-made terrors to natural disasters – occurring once-in a-lifetime or every day – there’s a lot to worry about! We’re looking for convenient ways to mitigate or eliminate risks for ourselves and others for peace of mind.



Maslow's Hierarchy



“7 out of every 10 consumers would prefer a shopping excursion that doesn’t require any human contact.”

Sense Photonics

August 2020

One. two. three

Contactless Economy

1. FADING

Cash Isn't King

Paper money can carry more germs than a household toilet. 78% of global consumers have adjusted their payment methods due to hygienic concerns, accelerating adoption of contactless transaction methods and canceling cash.

2. FOREMOST

Removing Human Element

73% of U.S. consumers have tried a new shopping behavior, including digital and contactless services.

QR codes have been widely adopted as a contact-free way to access information safely, linking the physical world to a contactless digital world.

3. FUTURE

Unmanned and Automated

The contactless experience will be weaved into every consumer touch point along the journey – product discovery, demonstration or trial, order and purchase, payment, delivery and post-support sales – with the potential to leave some brands and consumers behind.

Why Now?

New Realities Revive Old* Technology

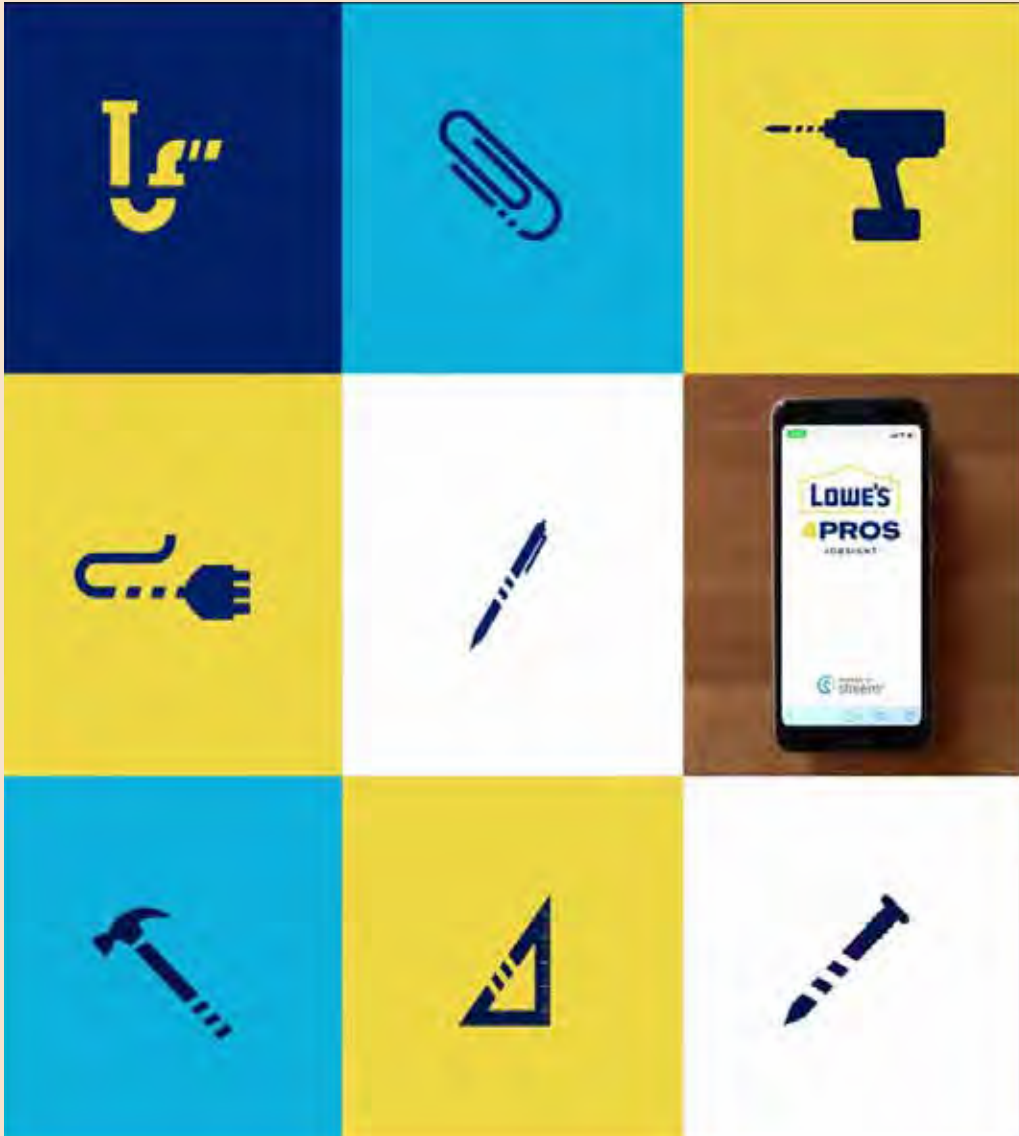
Contactless technologies – including touch-free payment systems – have existed since the 1990s, but the pandemic has accelerated the demand for convenient and easy solutions that deliver prevention, protection and new forms of security.

Businesses across the globe have pivoted to provide safe, contactless experiences for consumers – removing the human element faster than ever before.

It's estimated the global contactless economy will double to USD \$3 billion by 2024.

Lowe's4Pros

EXAMPLE



In June 2020, U.S.-based home improvement retailer Lowe's introduced Pros JobSIGHT, a free tool allowing carpenters, electricians, plumbers and other home professionals to consult with customers virtually. Using augmented reality to identify the parts needed, professionals can guide homeowners through repairs using an on-screen laser and drawing tool.

Holo Industries

EXAMPLE



In July 2020, U.S.-based Holo Industries unveiled a line of holographic menus that allow diners to order without interacting with touchscreens. The units, retailing at USD \$2,500, are touch-responsive – when users touch a “button” in midair, an audible response is triggered.

What Can Our Clients Do?

Adapt & Pivot

Evaluate each touch point in your consumer journey, the human contact required at each stage and the “risk” levels consumers are comfortable with – adapt your response accordingly.

Consumer shopping behavior is evolving – shifting the challenge for brands away from convincing consumers to adopt the solutions to keeping up to date with the ever-advancing convenience of technology. Brands that are slow to pivot their approaches to incorporate more contactless experiences, regardless of risk-levels, may be left behind.

Ensure Access for All

The tech-fueled rush to a contactless economy may leave behind consumers with limited digital skills or access to Wi-Fi or digital devices.

Consider solutions for those that may need extra assistance.

SIX TRENDS FOR 2021

Thanks!

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