



Looking back on 2020, virtually every Digiday Content Marketing Awards entry spotlighted the remarkable efforts of creative professionals everywhere as they worked with near-impossible scenarios to keep their campaigns in focus across a year of distraction, upheaval and risk.

As it turns out, this year's winners certainly worked under those conditions, but they also took a stance on finding moments of relief and pleasure — from ways to improve our health and environments to gripping entertainment,

to the ways we could still celebrate the games we play. With quick pivots and avenue to engagement that tapped brands' most passionate fans, the 2021 Digiday Content Marketing Awards put a spotlight on advertisers who inspired audiences to keep moving forward.

In this guide, we look at the winning programs, highlighting what worked best for the creators who made them and what lessons marketers can take from the campaigns that scored the highest.

Best Experiential Marketing Campaign

Ally and CAMP - Virtual Celebrations



Program

Teaming up, Ally and CAMP saw a chance to save the experience of the birthday party during a time of quarantine. Creating a month-long series of free virtual celebrations and surprise birthday gifts, families from across the country were invited to participate, complete with magicians, story time, dancing and of course, birthday cake. As the holidays approached, CAMP and Ally doubled down on the success of the program, hiring out-of-work professional Santas for a month-long program consisting of public and private virtual parties at a virtual North Pole.

Insights

Ally and CAMP turned 2020 into a year of bolstering communities in crisis. When it comes to long-term loyalty, their virtual experiences delivered a gift that few of its families will ever forget — and more than once. The template they built for young people otherwise facing a year without the holidays as usual proved to be the recipe for reinventing how parents and their loved ones could preserve the joy of celebrating together.



Best New Product or Launch Campaign

Canopy Growth and Martha Stewart - CBD Launch



Program

In a campaign designed to further normalize CBD products, Martha Stewart took the reins of the campaign she co-created with Canopy Growth and served as ambassador for the message — Martha CBD as an all-in-one solution for healthy lifestyles. The project included a press push, branded content, social media and relatable storytelling, positioning the OG influencer as not just helping people discover CBD, but helping them discover their own inner Martha.

Insights

Martha Stewart has worn many hats across her career and crafted a lifestyle persona that moves needles for people passionate about food, hosting, style, design and more. Bringing her legacy of craft and care to the CBD space proved a powerful choice — the campaign re-envisioned a sometimes misunderstood product by removing the elements of risk and stigma. For Canopy Growth and CBD overall, that was a good thing.



Best Campaign Pivot

BARK - 'Big Honkin' Pigs In A Blanket'



BARK saw the opportunity to turn a moment of social-media risk into a campaign jam-packed with irreverence and sly humor. When their 'Big Honkin' Pigs In A Blanket' toy turned out to be somewhat suggestive from certain angles in product pictures, the internet did what the internet does. However, with some courage and a great sense of humor, BARK pivoted the campaign to lean into the weird and throw some light on any commenter shade. Later, they added a NSFW grace note to the campaign by launching an extra-large version of the toy and sending proceeds to charity.

Insights

'Big Honkin' Pigs In A Blanket' turned into a win-win: BARK ran a smart, funny campaign by taking the right risks. Consumers saw themselves seen and appreciated in a way that attracted even more attention to the product, and then BARK made a social-impact move in the end. When it comes to the unexpected, this one is a lesson for all brands — courage, smarts and a funny bone keep campaigns out of the doghouse.





Best Activation Pivot

Well+Good and Marriott Bonvoy American Express -'Wellness Daycation'



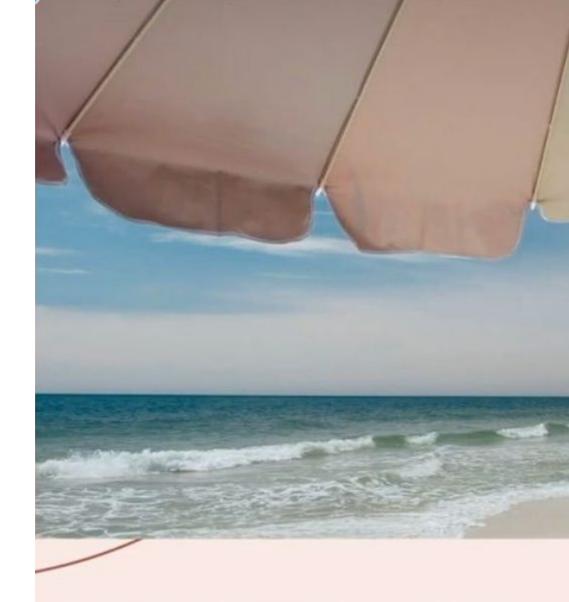


Program

Shortly after Well+Good filmed footage intended to drive its wellness-experience campaign for the Marriott Bonvoy American Express card portfolio, the pandemic sent the very travelers it was supposed to reach into quarantine. In response, the partnership shifted its message to a staycation-focused story, highlighting how the Marriott Bonvoy American Express card could help people level up their wellness goals at home. From workshops featuring the influencers originally slated to promote the campaign to gift boxes filled with inspiration for the homebound audience, 'Wellness Daycation' turned a time of adversity into an advertising success story.

Insights

An operative word for marketers in 2020 was "pivot," and Well+Good made a masterful move by turning its on-property footage and campaign messaging into a new story that stayed relevant for those staying home. The concept of a meaningful campaign is often bigger than its construct, and the partnership and its influencers put that factor to work, staying close to the heart of the wellness message while repositioning setting and context to match the times.



At our Wellness Daycation, @taraanicolas, @nutritionstripped and @jessblackmun shared their tips on how to use your breath to send your mind on a tropical vacation.

Most Effective/ Measurable Campaign

Canopy Growth and Martha Stewart - CBD Launch



Program

Canopy Growth and Martha Stewart brought the beloved ambassador of all things good, real and simple to the Martha CBD campaign. Promoted as an all-in-one solution for healthy lifestyles across articles, social media and other content channels, the presence and reputation of its established spokesperson was positioned to help remove misconceptions about what CBD is and what it does for the people who take it.

Insights

The Martha Stewart mindset has always been marked by the even keel of a smart and unflappable approach to living well and making the most of time spent at home, with friends, good food and thoughtful design. The sense of calm and well-being that's always been a part of her brand proved perfect for the wellness and mindful living that Canopy Growth's CBD line promotes. And the metrics, it turns out, are proof of the effectiveness this team-up brought to 2020.



Response Campaign

GoDaddy - 'Open We Stand'



Program

In a campaign that targeted both upper- and lower-funnel outcomes, GoDaddy brought its site-design thought leadership to small businesses, putting an emphasis on adaptation in a time of quarantine.

Starting just seven days after lockdowns clicked into place, GoDaddy drove traffic to its 2020 content with the help of a standalone microsite, OpenWeStand.org, as well as news feed stories on social to keep a steady drumbeat of inspiration for businesses in crisis.

Insights

Small business owners in 2020 needed a balance of inspiration and information, and GoDaddy struck that balance by telling stories that helped SMBs see that they weren't alone — but also provided practical, tactical steps they could take to help keep revenue alive. The strongest content marketing always includes a mix of industry-wide trends serving as a backdrop for actionable advice that readers and viewers can take back to their teams.



Best Agency/Client Collaboration

Truth Initiative, Viacom Velocity and 'The Daily Show'





Program

With a mission to change young people's thinking about smoking, vaping and nicotine, Truth Initiative teamed up with Viacom Velocity and 'The Daily Show with Trevor Noah' to highlight Big Tobacco's marketing actions during the pandemic and quarantine. Featuring Roy Wood, Jr., the show's senior correspondent — he played the role of a cynical tobacco marketer — the campaign cast Big Tobacco's inventions and ideas in an outrageous light and drove home the idea that tobacco companies were not offering much that would help people stay healthy in the crisis.

Insights

With the world focused on illness and prevention, Truth Initiative took a stand when it came to the known health outcomes of inhaling tobacco smoke and nicotine addiction. As with most medicine, a little sweetener helps the message do down and 'The Daily Show's' humorous format helped deliver a powerful message to viewers, young and old.



Best Brand/ Influencer Collaboration

SuperAwesome and MGA Entertainment - The L.O.L. Remix Music Awards



MGA Entertainment and SuperAwesome developed an interactive program focusing on kids and how to bring them together in a time of separation due to quarantine. In the form of an influencer-led creator-content campaign on SuperAwesome, the kid-safe social platform, fans of the L.O.L. Surprise Doll toy line watched and listened to a bevy of song covers made by remixers across 12 markets. The influencer program delivered more than 61 million views in six weeks, elevated the toy line's new entries and spun off a full-length album to boot.

Insights

New products in beloved toy lines are already primed for enthusiastic reception, but MGA and SuperAwesome leveled up by turning influencers into ambassadors for new experiences. More than 1.8 million kids tuned into the remix competitions and live online interactions that the campaign offered, and they proved yet again that coming together during quarantine was not only meaningful, it made for innovative advertising.







Best User- Generated Content

1000heads and Thomas' English Muffins - #Thomas140



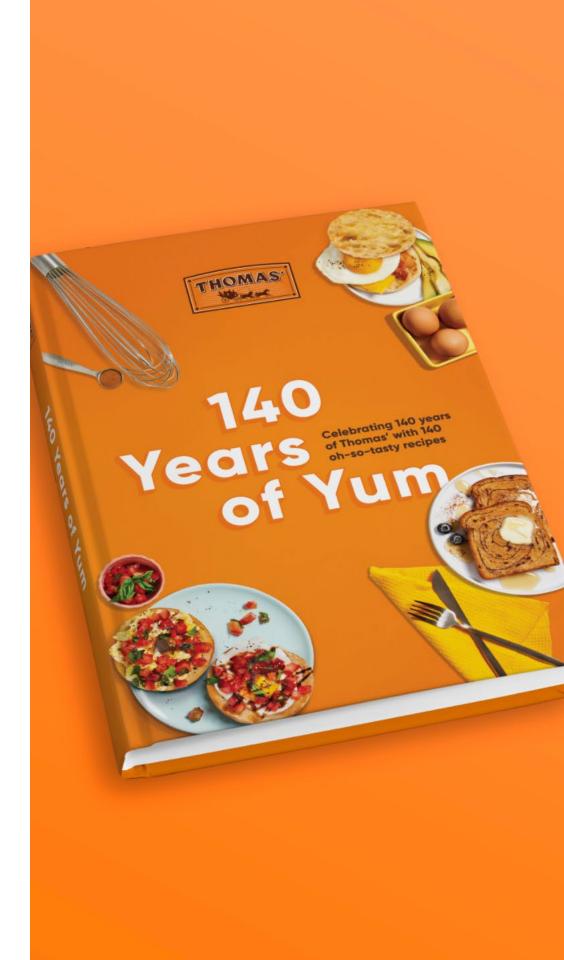


Program

To bring Thomas' English Muffins to the top of younger breakfast-makers' minds, 1000heads and the muffin brand activated the imaginations of connoisseurs who put the nooks and crannies to work in their own recipes. In a user-generated content campaign with the hashtag #Thomas140, fans shared their favorite Thomas'-based creations. Selected entries showed up on the brand's packaging and top picks from the UGC submissions were included in a new Thomas' English Muffins cookbook. Pinterest subsequently helped extend the campaign during quarantine with further at-home muffin inspirations.

Insights

Few activations drive personal affinity and customer word of mouth like finding one's own kitchen creation on the packaging of a favorite brand. Thomas' understood that young consumers consider their own stories to be as meaningful as anything the marketing team could devise — and they often know what their brand means to them in ways that UGC helps to highlight. For a food brand that's been around since 1880, Thomas' proved that not only is it a legacy mainstay, it's a force for fresh ideas in the user-generated space.



Best Use of Native Advertising/ Sponsored Content

AMC Networks and McDonald's - 'The Walking Dead' Universe Twitch Channel Takeover





Program

AMC Networks became Twitch's first content partner with the debut of 'The Walking Dead' Twitch channel, a platform providing fans of the zombie drama series with interactive content via collaborative campaigns with sponsors. The studio worked with McDonald's to create a weekly, co-branded MadLibs game that replaced key words in 'The Walking Dead' scripts with fan suggestions that included McDonald's menu items. Twitch hosts also reenacted the MadLibs scenes live.

Insights

The collaboration showed that Twitch can be a useful platform for sponsors looking to engage tech-forward consumers in an innovative and exciting way. The four-week sponsorship boosted brand engagement for McDonald's, while making consumers aware of its new menu offerings throughout the interactive experience.



Most Innovative Use of Content

Barkley and Haribo - Chewy Channel





Program

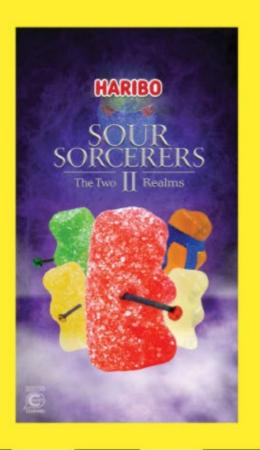
Gummy Bear manufacturer Haribo launched Chewy Channel, a streaming network, ideal for short attention spans because it featured candythemed content viewers could binge-watch in seconds. The service offered stories inspired by signature streaming service offerings — baking shows, family sitcoms and magical dramas — with elements including original scores, sequels and holiday specials.

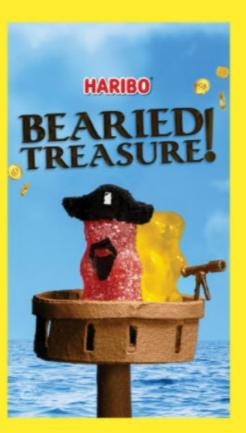
Insights

Chewy Channel is an example of how customers are willing to engage with short and sweet content on a familiar platform — Instagram. Haribo and Barkley built the series for Instagram's native user interface, with original content premiering every month on IGTV.



@HariboUSA







Best Influencer-Generated Content

eos-'The (Almost) Indescribable Feeling of Awesome' Campaign

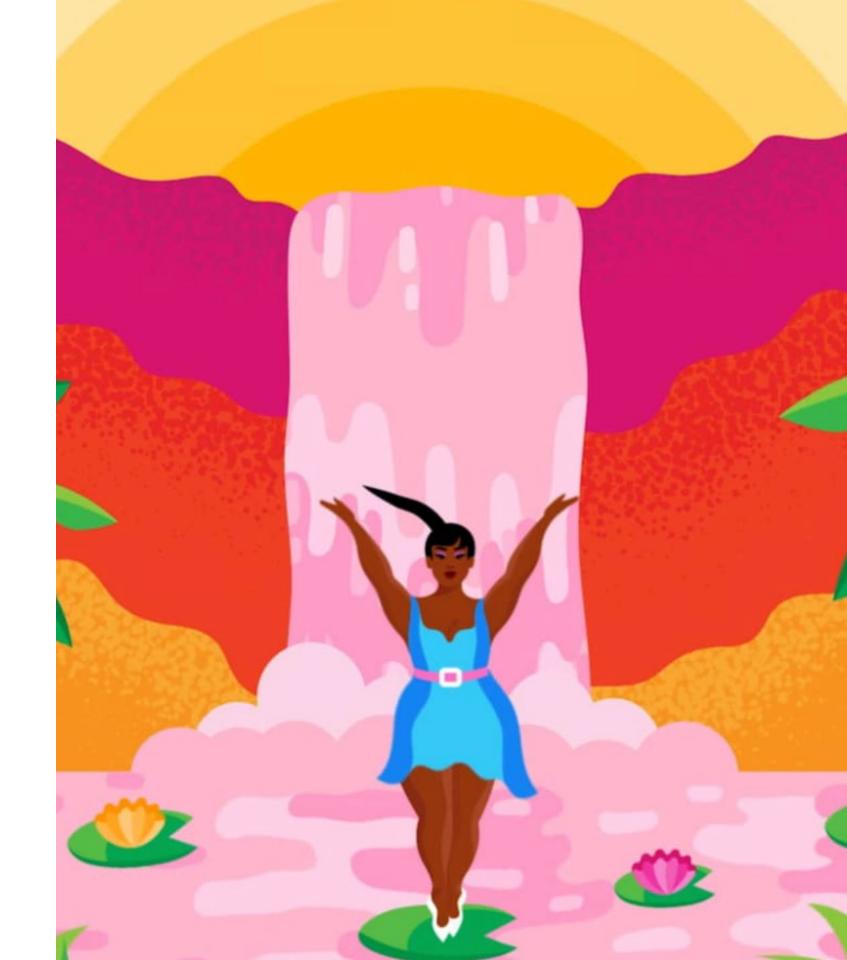


Program

Eos extended its 'Make It Awesome' initiative with a TikTok campaign in which consumers shared how using the skincare brand's products made them feel. The brand partnered with three emerging visual artists — Jade Purple Brown, Eva Cremers and Paul Fuentes— along with musical artist Jany Green, to create expressions of their product experiences. Eos amplified the content through an influencer-led hashtag challenge and a beauty partnership with influencer Bella Poarch.

Insights

The TikTok-based effort demonstrated that Gen Z responds well to social campaigns boosted by their favorite influencers, as well as digital experiences that showcase creativity and originality. Clay artists, animators, dancers, makeup artists and more participated in eos' creative request.



Best Branded Content Series - B2B

Bloomberg Media and Wells Fargo - 'The Way Ahead'



Bloomberg

Program

Bloomberg and Wells Fargo created 'The Way Ahead,' a series promoting the bank's Commercial Bank and Corporate and Investment Bank divisions. The series featured six stories about Wells Fargo customers navigating their way through the pandemic. Wells Fargo customers from companies including Zoom and The Cheesecake Factory shared their business experiences and hardships in 2020.

Insights

Through the content series, Wells Fargo communicated the resilience of its customers and how they pivoted business strategies to adapt to COVID-19 challenges. The campaign also showed the benefit of partnering with a publisher's versatile content studio: Wells Fargo drove reach by presenting the series through videos on Bloomberg Television and Bloomberg.com, radio ads on Bloomberg Radio, audio ads on Bloomberg podcasts and print ads in Bloomberg Businessweek.



Best Branded Content Series - B2C

The Wild and Major League Baseball - 'Bases Covered'





Program

The Wild and Major League Baseball were slated to produce a YouTube series to get European fans excited about baseball — but days before filming, the pandemic halted live sports. In response, the creative agency worked with MLB to pivot the project to 'Bases Covered,' a 10-episode series filmed entirely in lockdown. The series, released on MLB's YouTube channel, tasked sports journalist Max Whittle and influencer Jemel One Five to recruit a roster of celebrity influencers to form their own baseball team; each episode explored a different baseball element and featured interviews with professional players.

Insights

While the series didn't turn out to be what MLB originally planned, the pivot showed that being agile in adapting to change — while keeping consumer interests top of mind — can still result in the intended objective. The series was designed to drive awareness of baseball among an audience of 18–34-year-olds in Europe, despite no live sports occurring at the time. However, the series did manage to conclude with an in-person game in which the celebrity roster played the London Mets. The campaign ended up drawing 3.2 million views. A home run in a time of adversity.



Best Branded Content Site -B2B

Rackspace Technology - Solve



Program

Multi-cloud solutions provider Rackspace
Technology created Solve, a thought leadership
hub for the company to share ideas from
technology experts about critical IT challenges. The
site provides lessons for IT decision-makers through
unbiased content that includes data-filled articles,
podcasts, infographics and roundtable webinars.

Insights

Creating a branded content site like Solve was an innovative way for Rackspace Technology to position itself as a thought leader in the tech space without promoting its services. The content on the site is designed to address questions and pain points that IT experts are faced with, as well as address trends that should be top of mind.



Best Branded Content Site - B2C

Pace Communications and Verizon Wireless - 'Parenting in a Digital World'



Program

Verizon launched 'Parenting in a Digital World' as part of the company's product responsibility initiative. The online portal provides advice to parents with children of all ages through content themed around technology and the challenges and opportunities it poses to different age groups. Essentially, the site serves as a one-stop shop for parents to view resources to help them navigate online safety for their children.

Insights

Branded content sites such as 'Parenting in a Digital World' can deliver informative resources that consumers not only want, but need. The site is home to Verizon's new series of research-based articles to help parents become more knowledgeable about technology. Verizon has conducted independent research, and partnered with the Family Online Safety Institute and research partner Magid, to ensure the site offers fresh, well-rounded and fact-based content.



Best Multi-Channel Content Distribution Strategy

GoDaddy - 'Made In America'



Program

Through its social impact program Empower,
GoDaddy worked with community partners to
produce the second season of the documentary
series 'Made In America.' The episodes
spotlighted everyday entrepreneurs with a focus
on the disparity in opportunities and access
to resources for underserved communities.
The series emphasized GoDaddy's belief that
entrepreneurship should be inclusive for all.

Insights

The setting and timeliness of 'Made In America' was key to the series' success. GoDaddy chose Atlanta as the series' setting because it is one of the fastest growing U.S. cities, and has significant income disparity. As the series took place during the pandemic, it also offered guidance to small business owners looking to adapt to and overcome the challenges brought about by COVID-19.



Best Use of **Data**

Bloomberg Media and Hyundai Motor Company - 'H2 Economy Today'



Program

Hyundai, which promotes hydrogen as a means of fighting climate change, worked with Bloomberg Media to create 'H2 Economy Today' — a study exploring the future of energy. Using a proprietary index, the project measures where countries stand in developing fuel cell technologies powered by hydrogen. The car brand complemented the rankings with video content and infographics highlighting its hydrogen-powered fuel cell vehicles and case studies.

Insights

Brands can use data to not only create content that's important, but stories that encourage change for the better. Through the study, which measured criteria across relevant industries, Bloomberg Media developed a single, country-specific score that designated a country's commitment to the hydrogen economy. The goal of 'H2 Economy Today' is to encourage each country to improve its score.



Most Original Use of Social

Barkley and Planet Fitness - 'United We Move' Work-Ins



As the pandemic swept across the country, forcing closures everywhere, gyms were among the first public places to shut their doors. The results were immediate: Two thirds of Planet Fitness gym members decreased physical activity. Forced to get creative, Planet Fitness partnered with Barkley to launch the Home Work-In, a daily workout featured on Facebook Live to help people stuck at home get up and moving again.

Insights

Perhaps unintentionally, Planet Fitness was able to successfully pivot from a brick-and-mortar model to a digital influencer marketing strategy in only a couple of days. The format appeared to be crucial: Instead of an on-demand model, Planet Fitness chose Facebook Live, broadcasting workouts in real time. In the process, it found members engaged 10–20 minutes longer than they would have on an on-demand workout — and that's a significant difference in the digital world.







Best Use of Video

AMC Networks Content Room and Diageo - 'Bottomless Brunch at Colman's'



The alcohol company Diageo teamed up with AMC's 'The Walking Dead's' Colman Domingo to create a socially distanced "Bottomless Brunch" experience over a series of six weeks with celebrity guests. The entirety of the content series was shot over Zoom, keeping with the current pandemic guidelines.

Insights

For many, watching shows, sipping a good drink and getting together with friends, even if it's over a screen, is better than being alone. And while the digital recreation of social spaces will shift in terms of significance as reopening gradually occurs, AMC and Diageo's creative approach to bonding over favorite stories — and beverage — is among the examples that are leading the way when it comes to hybrid experiences for the future.







Best Use of Real-Time Streaming Video

Verizon Media and NFL Live on Yahoo Sports -'Watch Together' Launch



Program

Verizon Media introduced a new way for fans to engage with their favorite teams and the NFL community at large. 'Watch Together' allows up to four people to watch the game in real time through video chat, and the Yahoo Sports app supports this function free of charge.

Insights

Fortunately for the state of football, there were many ways to enjoy the game, even during the pandemic, from home televisions to virtual tailgate parties. 'Watch Together' leaned into fans' proclivity to gather no matter the method, focusing on not just the accessibility of the game itself, but on the mid-quarantine relief of connecting with friends and family for a shared experience.



Best Branded Podcast-B2B

Rackspace Technology — 'Cloud Talk'



Program

Rackspace Technology was faced with a challenge — how could they position themselves as a thought leader within the technology community? They addressed this by launching a technology-focused podcast series called 'Cloud Talk.' Featuring 28 episodes and 15 hours of content, guests included leaders from Microsoft and Salesforce. The stories Rackspace told helped boost the podcasts' popularity as a top technology and IT-focused interview-style resource.

Insights

Podcasts are a relatively new and increasingly sought-after way to establish thought leadership and even dominance in the content space. But the trick is, the content has to be useful, providing authentic value and also an engaging listen.

Rackspace put themselves on the cutting edge of content in the IT industry, offering a niche look at topics ranging from cybersecurity and insider threats to more commonplace troubleshooting issues as well.



Best Branded Podcast - B2C

Ben & Jerry's and Vox Creative — 'Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America'



With the help of the ACLU and the news and content vertical Vox, Ben & Jerry's launched a six-podcast series called 'Who We Are: A Chronicle of Race and Racism in America,' an extension of Vox's 'Who We Are' project. Each 30-minute episode focused on a specific period of American history that wasn't covered as part of many listeners' U.S. history class, tracing the practices of slavery and racist structures that influence today's societal norms.

Insights

Last summer as tensions rose during the height of the George Floyd protests, brands scrambled to craft a response. While some settled on a black square on social media, Ben & Jerry's went further still, helping to put a spotlight on structural racism in America. The classic but creative ice cream brand managed to thread the needle of looking timely, but not necessarily political, and promoting a definitive call to action. Ben & Jerry's succeeded in engaging with ideas that can change the world.







Best Interactive Content Piece or Series

Known and TikTok - #ItStartsOnTikTok



Program

TikTok, the social media platform that's a favorite among Gen Z users, collaborated with the social media software company Known to deploy its first global brand campaign, driving awareness around TikTok's significant and growing influence. The hashtag #ItStartsOnTikTok highlighted both the platform's reach and the window the content it carries provides into the daily lives of its communities.

Insights

In many ways, TikTok provides an innumerable amount of bite-sized reality shows, where the individual users are the producers, directors and stars. Whether it's copying a trend or just setting an episode of their lives to music, creators can take 60 seconds and transform them into whatever they want. TikTok's unique mashup of social media and UGC platform places it in an innovative space that's appropriate for the changing times.



Best Brand Publication - Print and/or Digital

i-D-Rihannazine



Program

i-D, a well known publisher in the fashion world, partnered with Rihanna and her creative team, spearheaded by her creative director Jahleel, to launch this special zine. Rihanna had full creative control over the issue, which featured content about civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s daughter as well as more mainstream fashion icons like Gigi Hadid. The result was an edition that featured powerful, creative women from the fashion industry and beyond.

Insights

Rihanna wields her creative force however she wishes to. Launch a makeup line? Sure. Launch a lingerie line? Absolutely. Create some of the most innovative music in a generation? Of course. So this step — launching a 1990s-style zine graced with profiles of courageous women of color is simultaneously unexpected and very much Rihanna's brand. It also positions Rihanna as a content creator under the halo of a creative publisher at the top of their class.



Most Engaged Brand Community

Barkley and Winnebago- 'On The Road Again'



Program

The Winnebago community was devastated by the onset of COVID-19. With travel on hold and the annual meetup cancelled for the first time in 50 years, Winnebago decided to launch an uplifting campaign that emphasized a return to traveling normalcy in the wake of vaccine distribution reopening social spaces and the hope that society will turn a corner from times of crisis. By creating a collage of user-generated content, the campaign, 'On The Road Again,' featured road trippers singing the classic song, looking forward to days when highway travel will return to its former glory.

Insights

Like a reminder of fireflies and cookouts when the ground outside is frozen solid, a simple refrain can remind campers what was and what will be again. However, like almost all in-person experiences, singing around the campfire has gone digital, for now. While nothing can replace those out-of-tune ballads, the digital substitute struck a harmonious chord with Winnebago's fans and travelers.





Best In-House Content/ Brand Studio

UPROXX



Program

UPROXX, a Warner Music Group content publisher focused on music industry news and youth culture, sought to create modularity and flexibility in their content creation process. Intending to withstand current and future uncertainty and volatility, the studio rolled out custom remote kits and turnkey video options. With these, UPROXX was able to keep content production workflows moving, in spite of the fluid COVID-19 situation. The result was nine new original programs with marquee brands such as McDonald's, Jack Daniels, Honda and Footlocker.

Insights

Production costs for original content have never been cheap, and keeping a steady stream of audiovisual stories flowing in the midst of COVID restrictions, furlough and retreating advertising dollars presented significant challenges in 2020. By creating smaller, more flexible custom remote kits, UPROXX was able to anticipate potential quality issues with remote shooting and avoided sacrificing quality amidst budget shortfalls and safety protocols.

UPROXX

Content Marketing Agency of the Year

GLOW



Program

GLOW, the marketing agency that creates and launches campaigns for numerous subsidiary properties from WarnerMedia, launched an ambitious content program with equally driven content partners. For example, at the beginning of 2020, GLOW partnered with Spotify to create their best performing content to date for key artists on the platform. Working with GLOW in response to the pandemic, child-education program Blippi thrived during a partnership with Jazwares for a mini-campaign — 'Be Like Blippi' — which encouraged children to stay home and remain safe. And on the mobile gaming front, GLOW helped OnePlus stand out as a top mobile-gaming device with gamer-centric content and the first ever Fortnite co-branded video captured on mobile by an outside agency.

Insights

Some content marketing agencies were able to weather the COVID storms through strategic partnerships, reaching out to partners to achieve and exceed their engagement goals. WarnerMedia and GLOW showed the way, in 2020, particularly in the realm of digital outreach. GLOW's campaigns demonstrated agility and synergy with digital partners, and proved especially effective in engaging mobile-based and social-media audiences.





For more information on this or other
Digiday Awards
programs, visit
digiday.com/awards

Questions for the Awards team?
Let us know at awards@digiday.com