The 2021 Digiday Technology Awards recognize companies advancing the digital media industry by fostering tech-focused innovation — specifically, the kind that powers relevant and personalized advertising.

This year’s winners helped brands drive performance and acquire new audiences. Partnership leaned into tactics that included testing non-addressable ways to drive traffic and subscriptions with high-quality media. Programs leveraged influencer networks and data-driven content strategies to boost sales. And the winners this year tackled new privacy challenges, innovating to help advertisers reach high-value users on mobile devices in the wake of Apple’s Limited Ad Tracking feature, which requires all apps to acquire user consent before tracking them.

In this guide, all of the winners are in the spotlight. On the pages that follow, each winning program is unpacked for insights into the elements that worked best, and what marketers everywhere can learn from the campaigns and initiatives they helped power.
FanDuel, a sports betting and fantasy sports company, leaned into Smartly.io’s social media experts and technology to fully automate the way it showcases weekly matchups within one Snapchat Dynamic Ads campaign. The pairing allowed FanDuel to integrate live betting inside the creative, something Snapchat’s native tool was only able to do with traditional shopping product catalogs.

Smartly.io’s performance and creativity overcame underlying tech obstacles to put FanDuel in the hands of Snapchat fans with real-time updates that powered action and engagement for the betting platform. In effect, the partnership rewrote the best practices around running creative across longer timeframes on Snapchat, unlocking new approaches to the audience.

This new setup ensured FanDuel’s Snapchat ads were the most relevant matches and real-time odds, with minimal manual work and creation costs. Now, new game-specific ads generate in minutes simply by updating the live betting odds feed.

Within the first month of launching this Dynamic Ad campaign on Snapchat, FanDuel saw a 16% decrease in both Cost per Install and Cost per Registration, as well as a 21% decrease in Cost per First Time Deposit (FanDuel’s number one KPI).
As shoe company Saucony went to market with the brand new Endorphin Collection, the goal for the brand and its agency, iProspect, was to keep pace with a massive audience, 100% on CTV, and motivate and activate consumers to learn more and buy the new line. They turned to Pixability, which worked with Saucony to drive store visits, conversions and brand lift in brand-suitable contexts across YouTube and CTV. Through granularly targeted campaigns, automatic in-flight optimizations and reporting integrated in one dashboard, the campaign saw lift in channels such as Roku.

Marketers are going all in on CTV, especially in 2021, as the channel’s promise of awareness and performance capabilities become a front-and-center consideration for teams. Saucony and iProspect capitalized on that promise with a partner that could simplify and streamline its control over the complex multi-channel space. The proof, as always, is in the outcome, and Pixability’s approach put a spring in the step of Saucony’s campaign.
Program Insights

Free ad-supported streaming TV (FAST) and ad supported video on-demand (AVOD) are experiencing massive growth as streaming audiences configure their viewing lives around programming they can watch where, when and how they want. Publica put a lens on the tools and capabilities CTV publishers need to meet that demand, developing an ad server that features a unified auction of all demand sources (direct and programmatic), supports SSAI and facilitates the creation of intelligent ad breaks that factor in real-time decisioning to construct seamless ad breaks using data.

Insights

Recognizing the rising demand for ad technology that can unlock the opportunities of CTV content, Publica’s quick-to-market activation put essential capabilities into publishers’ hands, helping them grow their share of advertising budgets from traditional TV, digital display and social advertisers in a controlled and transparent way.
Tiled brought its interactive content program to a client challenge in 2021, creating a multimedia, multi-format solution so that the sales team could keep brand materials up to date with their seasonal products. After migrating to the Tiled system, the client was able to replace printed placards in retail stores with iPads showcasing micro-apps. They tailored PowerPoint sales presentations to specific customers or regions and, at trade shows, tweaked and managed booth experiences down to day-of timing — providing deeper levels of information to attendees.

Customers and sales teams work and live in increasingly fluid digital environments, and competitive marketing not only has to show up in all the spaces where a screen can engage, it has to be changeable and responsive in real time. Tiled’s client solution not only unlocked real-time capabilities in store, sales pitches and conference booths, it created cost savings — and a sustainability narrative — for the partner company in terms of the printed materials it no longer needed to produce.
Brightspot was tasked with helping its client hone a competitive edge in the European B2B media space. The goal for the content management system was to provide actionable, high-quality news, data and analysis to professionals across multiple industry segments and through relevant brands. Brightspot needed to achieve scale, plus streamlined and centralized publishing workflows.

Brightspot’s CMS ticked all the client’s boxes: It was fast, possessed enterprise-quality capabilities, and operated as a central, extensible solution for the business. As media companies compete for share in the midst of digital transformation, successful technology powering publishers delivers all three things.
Program

When Wix.com couldn’t find a standalone customer support platform to meet the needs of its users, they built one themselves and called it Wix Answers. The platform gave support agents a 360-degree view of each user, showing the entire history of interactions they’ve had across channels. Furthermore, Wix Answers brings AI solutions to the customer-support equation, further helping support agents streamline workflows and give customers the assistance they need as quickly as possible.

Insights

A true human–machine collaboration, Wix Answers turned out to be a prime example of how AI and skilled staff enable businesses to be authentically customer-centric. The combination unlocked the customer journey for Wix, avoiding the need to make users repeatedly describe their issue, and allowing agents to focus their time, talent and empathy on helping customers resolve concerns promptly.
Program
When a leading household brand needed to boost basket size and drive interest in a range of their core products among back-to-college shoppers, it turned to Quotient’s omnichannel platform and its influencer marketing solution. A network of Quotient influencers created a series of blog posts that linked to a content hub and rewards offers for the brand. Custom, data-driven content was built from influencer creative for each of the products amplified through paid social promotion across platforms — enabling target audiences to engage and click through. The outcome was measurable category growth for the household brand and a successful back-to-college campaign.

Insights
Influencers often prove to be the most powerful marketing voice in the room, but success turns on connecting those voices to the right listeners. Quotient’s data-driven approach to hyper-specific audience segments helped ensure that their client brand’s media was delivered effectively and efficiently.
PepsiCo’s Mountain Dew campaign goal was to increase sales by attracting new customers. With its agency, OMD, and with tech partner LoopMe, PepsiCo sought to maximize campaign reach and continuously improve (ROAS). With the help of IRI’s Campaign Conversion Feed CCF feed integration, LoopMe was able to deliver those outcomes across mobile screens, predicting and identifying who was most likely to purchase and powering real-time campaign adjustments to reach those buyers on their devices. The campaign drove a dollar-per-household sales lift alongside increased ROAS for PepsiCo and Mountain Dew.

Campaign elements are often only as good as the contextual match behind their delivery, and LoopMe’s ability to see — and then act on — context-rich opportunities made the difference for PepsiCo’s campaign. In-flight media optimizations were the competitive edge for bringing new customers to Mountain Dew.
Program

From ad creation to campaign management and mid-flight flexibility, Constellation’s Alexia ad tech software brought together the power of a creative management platform and dynamic creative optimization. As an avenue for reaching consumers who’ve opted against tracking in the digital space, Alexia unlocked additional retargeting capabilities and customization based on audience searches. Post-deployment, Alexia then powered quality control and monitoring against a range of variables.

Insights

Successful campaigns start with a good fit between known customer preferences and ads delivered, but long-term customer relationships and loyalty turn on the element of inspiration. With Alexia, Constellation has unlocked the power of prediction — based on search and social signals — and its dashboard should become a starting point for customer conversations, and conversions, that stand the test of time.
Program

Search engine marketing company Tinuiti offers three technology products: MobiusOS, Mobius Apps, and MobiusX, which are used to help companies bring together, optimize and activate their performance marketing data. MobiusOS synthesizes channel data into one place to provide unified insights, Mobius Apps helps clients customize apps to meet business challenges; and MobiusX is an AI-powered tool that processes more than 150 million product feeds daily across Google, Facebook and other feed-driven channels.

Insights

In an industry where data is often siloed, Mobius products help marketers bring together different data sources and make them interoperable to power a unified marketing strategy. Additionally, the marketing intelligence tools help brands identify and acquire customers across major platforms such as Google and Amazon. Both approaches can help brands seeking to achieve scale with their marketing efforts.
The Clinch platform uses AI-powered omnichannel personalization to inform campaign decisions for advertisers across multiple industries. Clinch’s personalization platform revolves around three pillars: Creative automation, creative optimization and creative intelligence. The platform takes a brand’s single video asset and automatically renders it into numerous and dynamic creative variations, all the while analyzing data points and event triggers to deliver users a hyper-personalized brand experience.

With third-party cookies and other traditional ID trackers on their way out of the advertising ecosystem, marketing teams are seeking new ways to deliver audiences relevant, personalized content. AI-driven platforms with A/B testing tools present an effective alternative, informing brands what creative resonates best among particular groups of consumers.
Program

3DLOOK is the creator of a patented mobile body scanning technology that drives retail innovation by providing personalized fit and size recommendations, as well as virtual try-on opportunities for shoppers. Along with offering a customized shopping experience, the technology gives commerce teams insights to inform design, inventory planning, product development and distribution.

Insights

Men’s apparel retailer Tailored Brands faced the challenge of addressing customer fears of being manually measured as its stores began reopening after pandemic lockdowns. To address that factor, the brand used 3DLOOK’s technology to automate the body data collection process. In-store sales associates used iPads to collect accurate measurements in a contactless way, which ultimately increased sales and provided a safer consumer experience. In the end, 3DLOOK proved to be an example of listening to customers, and then using technology to help them solve a pain point in the places they shop.
Program

Lastmile Retail enables brands that traditionally sell through storefronts to promote local offerings to online consumers who are in the market for their products. The company’s BuyNearby platform is designed to allow major brands and retailers to efficiently manage local marketing across relevant channels, at scale, and to comprehensively represent their stores online and in real time.

Insights

Location data platforms for retailers can open up new revenue opportunities by targeting online shoppers and tailoring product offerings to what local customers need or want. The platform also helps nonprofits drive local awareness and reach, helping these organizations find volunteers and improve fundraising.
Rockerbox is an attribution provider for direct-to-consumer brands that combines paid, organic, digital and offline attribution into a single platform. The platform has more than 100 integrations with solutions used by DTC companies and uses data-driven attribution models to help measure lift and incrementality in online and offline marketing. Rockerbox’s customizable platform also centralizes marketing campaigns and spend in one place, while getting rid of duplicate conversions.

In the constantly changing e-commerce space, DTC brands need to scale their businesses efficiently to stay ahead of the competition. Having accurate, comprehensive attribution that goes beyond channels such as Facebook and Google — to channels that are more difficult to track, such as podcasts and direct mail — is paramount to driving commerce success. One of Rockerbox’s clients used the platform to determine channels in which to spend and test; the client ended up increasing its Facebook ROAS by three times its previous number by using Rockerbox’s attribution tools.
Program
Refersion is a performance marketing platform that helps brand partners drive e-commerce growth by using attribution technology and data-driven insights. The platform helps brands manage, track and grow ambassador, influencer and affiliate marketing programs with first-party tracking, unlimited offers and custom commission structures.

Insights
Affiliate marketing has become a critical revenue driver for many brands amid the ongoing pandemic. For example, when hair salons shut down during the pandemic, one of Refersion’s clients, a luxury haircare treatment brand, used the platform’s affiliate referral links to drive revenue. Hair stylists could share the platform’s digital referral link to customers to get credit for each sale; customers that were stuck at home could purchase hair products from the brand and, in turn, support hair stylists that needed income.
LivePerson is an AI-driven technology platform that helps brands efficiently interact with customers through chat experiences. The technology can be applied to SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Apple’s Messages app, as well as on brands’ websites and apps. Through a combination of AI and human agents, brands are able to answer customer questions and help them make purchases.

For many brands, conversational marketing can be a critical tool for driving conversions. One of LivePerson’s clients, a diamond retailer, saw decreasing foot traffic in stores during the pandemic. To bridge the gap between its digital and physical retail experiences, and better engage customers, the brand deployed LivePerson’s technology to chat with customers. The effort allowed customers more flexibility to purchase where and how they wanted to, and increased sales by more than 110% year over year.
Program
Drift uses conversational marketing and sales to help companies sell complex products and connect with B2B and B2C buyers. The platform uses AI-driven chat tools to help marketing teams, particularly in the digital space, grow revenue and increase customer lifetime value.

Insights
AI-powered automation tools can help companies reach prospective customers and engage with them according to their preferences. Drift’s Virtual Selling Assistants (VSA) chatbot helps clients field live prospect and customer inquiries, qualify sales leads and schedule meetings with sales teams to speed up the sales process. Identity management company Okta used Drift’s VSA to reach prospects and route current customers to support teams appropriately, which helped the company accelerate the conversion from capturing leads to finding qualified sales opportunities.
AdAdapted is a mobile advertising and insights platform that specializes in shopping list marketing — reaching consumers during crucial grocery shopping moments when they’re deciding what to purchase on their next store trip. The platform’s offerings are tailored to CPG brands, agencies and retailers, connecting CPG products with category-relevant customers and through data around previous engagement and list building. The platform’s add-to-list technology allows people to add promoted products to their grocery list on their phone, without leaving their current app.

When marketing CPG products in a pandemic, brands need an efficient strategy to reach shoppers on their phone before they take a trip to the store. It’s crucial for marketers to achieve this using privacy-compliant data that offers behavioral insights for more effective targeting. A beer and cider brand developer used AdAdapted’s platform to drive shoppers to add products to their grocery lists and online carts, while also intercepting browsing shoppers as they built their grocery lists. The campaign increased product sales, ROAS, incremental sales and the add-to-list rate.
Program
One of Europe’s highest-valued private fintech companies sought to launch an ad platform where advertisers could promote deals and products natively within a user’s browsing experience to monetize in-app traffic while focusing on security and response time. They turned to Kevel to utilize contextual targeting and first-party data to deliver integrated server-side native ads that were unobtrusive, engaging, curated and relevant. For example, they could retarget people who have purchased high-end items with ads from luxury brands all within the app. The ad monetization platform delivered by Kevel allowed advertisers to gain visibility with users maintaining their same browser experience, while providing their client with a new high-margin revenue stream.

Insights
For consumers, unobtrusive, relevant ads are likely the only ones they will remember and click on. Therefore, delivering these types of ads is crucial, and Kevel did this without cookies, tags or SDKs, ensuring their client had no data leakage. They also acted as a data sub-processor to store anonymized user IDs for first-party data targeting without their client getting wrapped up in numerous data privacy laws.
Program

As advertising dollars dwindled during the pandemic and misinformation ran rampant, some websites realized they needed different monetization strategies. For this, they turned to Piano. Piano provided them with a single platform to accomplish all of their revenue goals, putting the ability to deploy sophisticated and satisfying user journeys into the hands of marketing teams. As a result, subscription revenue grew by over 100% and revenue per reader increased 11 times.

Insights

At a time when media outlets saw a huge uptick in activity, Piano delivered a platform to allow media companies to accelerate subscriptions, advertising, analytics and personalization initiatives to engage, monetize and measure content experiences. Rather than purchasing multiple solutions or relying on their internal development teams, these companies could use a single platform for all of their needs. Reducing the number of tools, technology, touchpoints and investment needed for achieving successful customer experiences allowed these companies to thrive during the pandemic and set themselves up for success in the future.
With the explosion of online retail sales due to the pandemic, The Home Depot needed to match prospects with the right products as well as display products in ads with the correct local availability and pricing at scale. By partnering with Contobox, Home Depot was able to personalize ads for people who had never purchased from them or visited their site before, while delivering performance display campaigns that drove online sales without cookies or PII. The campaign provided the company with its biggest audience increase on mobile, along with some record breaking statistics.

In Canada, Home Depot is the largest retailer for do-it-yourselfers, those in construction, building maintenance and more. With over 300,000 home improvement products in stock, there are a lot of options when it comes to personalizing recommendations, but the process can be intimidating. Contobox alleviated this stress with their e-commerce technology that drove recommendations, messaging and sales across all devices and formats. The campaign resulted in a record-breaking year-over-year increase in ROAS for Home Depot, while also outperforming the industry ROAS average by 45 times.
Program

With many data privacy regulations in the industry, such as GDPR and the impending demise of the third-party cookie, companies are working to replace their third-party data providers and instead implement first-party data strategies. One company, Axel Springer’s sales house, Media Impact, looked to 1plusX to build targeting segments around their in-house capabilities without adding data costs that would shrink their margins. 1plusX successfully delivered, helping Axel Springer increase inventory performance and significantly reduce data costs.

Insights

Personalized messages are at the forefront of most global media companies and marketers today. They seek to give the right message to the right person at the right time, thereby driving revenue and increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty. By working with 1plusX, Axel Springer was able to display their core strength of targeting based on reading behavior. The 1plusX partnership allowed them to successfully develop and launch their own first-party data rate card, as well as dynamically target reading behavior with bespoke segments and cohorts from client briefings. This helped to ease the pressure on pricing for targeted campaigns, while increasing CPMs without additional payments to outside data providers.
With tentpole events such as the Euro Cup 2020, managing the high-intensity surge of concurrent ad requests generated by such an event can be difficult and unpredictable. RMB, the ad sales arm of the Belgian national broadcaster, RTBF, looked to Smart to deliver an enterprise-class video ad serving solution that could manage the demands of the Euro Cup 2020, which was available for streaming across the country. Smart’s duration-based decision engine constantly re-forecasted the projected viewership so it could adjust pacing and ensure optimal reach and frequency for each advertiser.

For many companies, CTV has become a priority in their marketing strategy. RMB recognized that seamlessly filling ad breaks with the most targeted, relevant and highest yielding campaigns could be difficult with the unpredictable nature of when ad breaks occur during live events. By turning to Smart, they had accurately paced campaigns from a dedicated decisioning logic that prevented over-delivery during peak viewing, while also sustaining in-session delivery to prevent under-delivery. Smart’s solution helped RMB recognize new and incremental revenue by meeting their delivery projections for the programmatic advertisers while also maintaining the traditional linear broadcast advertising business.

Best Video Ad Server

Smart AdServer
When the pandemic hit, many stores had to close immediately. Clarins UK had to quickly shift their entire digital strategy and looked to Hootsuite to do so. They worked together to shift Clarins’ content, social and e-commerce strategies to meet customer needs, resulting in doubled online growth at the end of 2020. Hootsuite also provided Clarins with the social listening data they needed to adjust their tactics, including hosting daily skincare consultations resulting in an increase in Instagram Story completion rates of 75% — the highest they had seen across social channels.

As with many companies during the beginning of the pandemic, Clarins needed to create an entirely new content pipeline, to reflect what was happening in the world, with little to no additional budget. They found new ways to engage and inform their customers online, providing one-on-one consultations to support customers in lieu of them being able to go in-store. Clarins used insights derived from Hootsuite’s platform to develop a social advertising strategy that appealed to cash-strapped customers. By the end of the quarter, social ads drove thousands of site visits with a low cost per click and click-through rates that exceeded benchmarks.
Program

With Apple’s recent tracking updates and Safari blocking third-party cookies by default, non-addressable inventory looks the same to most exchanges, even though its quality varies wildly. When Encantos sought to test new, non-addressable ways to drive traffic and subscriptions with high quality media, they looked to Yieldmo for help. Yieldmo’s Smart Exchange doesn’t need cookies or user IDs to reach the broadest possible audience. They identified and prioritized high quality, non-addressable impressions and drove business results, delivering Encantos lift in both CTR and viewability.

Insights

Encantos wanted to target both Spanish and English-speaking parents who might be interested in their language immersion products for children, but they weren’t sure if non-addressable media would be a source for quality leads that would convert. Yieldmo analyzes all available contextual signals when an ad is served — not just the keywords and content — in real time to curate media and only bid on the impressions likely to deliver to the campaign’s specific goals. Their ability to capture the true value of all a publisher’s impressions helped Encantos reach their traffic and subscription goals without cookies or user IDs.
A large media company wanted to transform themselves into a digital streaming powerhouse to keep up with the digital boom. They knew they had a lot they wanted to accomplish, from having their app launch quickly on devices to reducing login friction, simplifying partner integration and more. To help them accomplish their goals, they turned to Synacor. Synacor’s SaaS platform reduced costs and platform management burdens for their client, while launching low- to no-friction logins, integrating content provider partnerships — all without disrupting current subscribers.

When a company has numerous goals in mind, being able to turn to one platform to achieve them all is a relief. Synacor’s platform was able to open doors for new customer acquisition and subscriber growth marketing platforms for their client. Having the ability to manage app sign-in, content authorization and access via connected devices while also being able to scale to millions of users and support outsized access demand around major streaming events was also a huge benefit.
Program

The pandemic fueled an increase in virtual events, causing companies like TechChange to have increased demand for their services. They needed a platform they could use alongside their existing products that would facilitate immersive and engaging experiences for their attendees. Social Hour met their needs without TechChange needing to build a bespoke solution. Social Hour provided a hybrid layout, combining a stage view and a table view to aid small group interaction while also having someone on the stage, solving TechChange’s key networking challenge.

Insights

When TechChange held a 10,000 person virtual event — RightsCon, the world’s largest conference on tech and human rights — it was crucial to provide attendees with a great experience and simulate the networking in-person events fuel. Social Hour provided a seamless and customizable solution that allowed attendees to naturally engage with others in the way they do with fully in-person events. RightsCon hosted about 100 Social Hour sessions — topical networking rooms — across the five-day agenda, leading to a very successful virtual conference.
Building a fandom and the go-to source is no easy feat, something Revry knows all too well. Many geographic areas limit or restrict the content that Revry could deliver to its viewers, so they needed a video platform that could provide seamless viewer experiences without the downtime that previous platforms suffered. For this, they partnered with Brightcove. Brightcove Beacon enabled Revry to embrace a unique distribution model — the “tribrid” model — that engaged their audience with ad-supported video-on-demand, subscription-based video-on-demand and ad-supported live TV options.

Revry wanted to engage and inspire the LGBTQ+ community across the globe, knowing that representation saves lives, but only if those who need it can gain access to seeing themselves represented on screen. To do that, they needed a way to reach a global audience on all screens, devices and platforms. Brightcove’s Beacon product gave Revry options for live and on-demand programming to give them multiple monetization paths and an unmatched viewer experience to deliver their content around the world.
The Digiday Awards include 14 different programs yearly, with focuses on video, content marketing, media and technology, among others. Competitors’ brands are placed in front of judging panels made up of C-Level leaders from leading organizations, and winners are featured in Digiday’s media coverage, marketing, Awards Guides, livestream galas and other announcements. The Digiday Awards have recognized companies and campaigns since 2014.

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