

4A'S STRATEGY FESTIVAL 2017

Every year, the 4A's StratFest runs in conjunction with the annual Jay Chiat awards celebrating excellence in strategic thinking in advertising. The StratFest is an annual opportunity for strategists across the industry to come together and share thinking about the state of the discipline and practices that can advance the strategic practice as a whole.

This year's theme, "Data + Humanity: Planning Redefined" looked at how data has transformed the industry diving into the evolution of Strategy and its ability to link data, insights and activation to drive business results. In this Fast Take, we break down four important themes that emerged from the two-day festival and their implications for marketers.

"People from minority backgrounds can help provide a deeper understanding of where many things in popular culture come from and why they are important"
 – God-is Rivera, Social Media Strategy at VML

#1: CONCENTRATE ON THE "RIGHT" DATA

While the data revolution may mean that strategists have more access to more specific information than ever before, they are often up against expedited timelines to tackle briefs and craft strategies. As a result, it's necessary for marketers and agencies to construct frameworks that allow for the complex decision-making needed for strategists, and their teams, to sift through the wealth of data at their fingertips and get to the most important and useful inputs. "It's not all data; it's which data," as Stephanie Bane and Shawn Quigley of Brunner shared in their workshop called "The Versatile Planner: Doing More with Less."

IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

Collaboration is key. Coming together to determine processes that can be put into place are essential to ensure teams arrive at the right solutions while taking the whole customer journey into consideration. The fundamental question we ask is – How do people make choices in a specific category and what can we do to influence those choices. Most data sources on consumer behavior, attitudes and media are unconnected. Working with your agency team to connect them will illustrate the relationship between what people think, what they do and the touchpoints to accelerate brand growth.

#2: DON'T FORGET THE FUNDAMENTALS

Data has illuminated never before seen opportunities for marketers, but that doesn't mean the role of Big Ideas has diminished. "A great idea is more important than ever; but data helps you apply that idea in more customized ways that will be more profound for your consumers," said David Lubars, Chief Creative Officer at BBDO in his fireside chat with Ed Cotton of Butler, Shine, Stern and Partners.

IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS

Creative Ideas like Snickers' "You're Not You When You're Hungry" and, more recently, Lysol's "Protect Like a Mother" have the power to not only leave a lasting impact on culture, but shift brand perceptions and drive sales. Data should be used in service of arriving at these ideas and making them more personalized and reflective of the multitude of consumer profiles that a brand is trying to reach.

#3: CULTURAL CONTEXT IS KEY

Data is an important input, but without a layer of cultural understanding and connection, agencies and their brands can arrive at erroneous conclusions about how to best use data to inform and plan campaigns. “The Pepsi debacle happened, most likely, because brand managers looked at two data points in isolation: Kendall Jenner as a top influencer amongst Millennials, and protesting as a popular activity. Then, they put them together without the richness of understanding why those things are important,” explained Kodi Foster, Senior VP of Data Strategy at Viacom.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

Ensure that qualitative practices that help unearth and apply cultural context aren't lost and are actively applied to make sense of data. Ensuring that your teams are comprised of individuals from diverse and multi-faceted backgrounds is key. As God-is Rivera of VML said in her presentation on Cultural Resonance & Perspective, “People from minority backgrounds can help provide a deeper understanding of where many things in popular culture come from and why they are important because many of these trends start in their communities, especially online.”

#4: BUILD CONSUMER PROFILES DIFFERENTLY

The proliferation of data means that the normal ways of defining consumers – generational, demographical, etc. – are not always the most effective means of understanding their desires and needs. Now, it's possible to build richer, more nuanced profiles of consumers by looking deeply at their behaviors, relationships and affinities. “When we began working on a pet care brand, we felt like looking at our consumers by age, income, and media consumption would be non-intuitive. Instead, we looked at them based on their relationships to their pets,” said Nelson Freitas of Wunderman in his workshop “Advancing Brands + Humanity with Data Innovation.”

IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS

Look beyond typical consumer profiles and examine how the data can help you understand the different relationships your consumers have with your product and the impact of these relationships on decision making across the purchase journey.

Looking forward, as we strive to work together to drive transformational marketing solutions, the connection between data, insight, technology and content must become a strategists North Star. With a deeper understanding of our audience (including behavioral and attitudinal) and the role of comms to reach that audience, we have the ability to achieve better outcomes and more shared growth for your brands.

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