Today, scrolling through your social feeds is the equivalent of strolling through Times Square—sensory overload. Clickbait is king, but so is binge-watching. This issue embraces these contradictions to examine our most valuable resource: attention.
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

January 14, 2016

In the photo on the right, I am standing inside the blank canvas of what will become our new home this March. We are plotting the development of a new workplace specifically designed to help us achieve our agency mission—to be the go-to agency for brands worldwide with an experience story to tell.

While I remain confident in our ability to do remarkable things, I’m vividly aware of the contradictions that are manifesting themselves in the marketplace. I admit I’m a bit nervous—we’re making some strong bets on what the future of an unpredictable media industry holds. How do I design a workplace and growth strategy around the chaos that can catalyze changes in direction and speed that most of us are unprepared to predict?

We live in an era that gave birth both to the text message and the phrase “binge-watching.” Brevity may be the new black, but not while we’re binge-watching four episodes of Homeland back-to-back from the comfort of our couch.

We live in an era where consumers have access to quite literally any kind of content they want to consume—accessible on a mobile device that fits beautifully in their pocket. Yet the average consumer uses only five apps in a meaningful way. We’re self-selecting a path that reinforces the world that we know rather than the world we could know.

We live in an era where effortless connectivity has broadened what’s possible for remote human interaction, yet live event industries are experiencing record-breaking years in revenue and attendance.

How do you innovate amongst a marketplace of contradicting forces? I know I’m not alone in asking this question. And that’s why this issue of Situation focuses on the excitement and angst that coexist in the promises of today’s media ecosystem. The Attention Paradox is real—and the only way out is through dialogue, experimentation, and the will to listen.

Happy Reading,

Damian Bazadona,
President and Founder, Situation
@bazadodg

DAMIAN BAZADONA in the construction site that will be Situation’s new office space at 469 7th Ave.
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- Damian Bazadona,
  Situation
In recent years, short-form content has grown exponentially in popularity. From the hundreds of millions of users who flock to Twitter daily to trade information 140 characters at a time, to the billions of monthly video views on BuzzFeed, the site that launched the listicle craze. Is the popularity of such bite-sized, “snackable” content linked to the way the human brain functions? Developmental molecular biologist Dr. John Medina, author of the New York Times bestseller Brain Rules and an Affiliate Professor of Bioengineering at the University of Washington School of Medicine, explains how our minds process visuals versus text, what our impulse toward imagery could mean for the future of consumer consumption, and the potential pitfalls of digital distraction.
1. VISUALIZING THE WORDS WE READ
“The brain may simply see text as ‘little pictures,’” Dr. Medina explains. “Pieces of information are more likely to be recalled if they are first presented as pictures rather than as verbal propositions, such as text. The brain prefers—and processes better—pictures over text, a phenomenon known as PSE, short for Pictorial Superiority Effect.”

2. BOTTLENECK ON THE CEREBRAL SUPERHIGHWAY
“Text presents a processing-speed bottleneck,” Dr. Medina says, citing researcher Deborah C. Moore, who explored the concept of a content bottleneck in a letter to the scientific journal *Nature*. “A word is unreadable unless its letters are separately identifiable,” according to Moore. “Our reading efficiency is limited by the bottleneck of having to rigorously and independently detect simple features.”

3. COMFORT IN BITE-SIZED CONTENT
“Reading large blocks of text is an extremely unpleasant, energy-intensive task for the brain to perform, especially on a website” says Dr. Medina. “Reading takes almost 20 milliseconds per letter to perceive, and the brain has to inspect every letter in every word, often revisiting certain letters in the same word, just to make sure it has the apprehended the content correctly.

“Having an instantly recognizable, defined, bite-sized block of text may telegraph to the brain that the painful experience is limited, providing relief.”

4. GETTING TO THE HEART OF GOOD CONTENT
“Turns out the human brain loves content laden with emotional overtones, especially if social interactions are involved.” Dr. Medina goes on to explain that this content has been given a name: Emotionally Competent Stimuli (ECS). “Attention lags when there are too little ECS in the content stream. Psychologist Bill McKeachie found that during lectures, attention tends to peter out in 10-minute cycles. If you are giving a presentation, you will need to add an ECS of some kind every ten minutes or so.”

5. THE NEXT BRAIN-FRIENDLY TREND
“One maturing technology that is extremely brain-friendly, and in the right hands, could easily be part of a future blockbuster platform, involves holograms, virtual reality, and any adaptive three-dimensional projections of information. The brain loves moving and three-dimensional objects. It follows that the more moving, three-dimensional you can make your information, the more likely it is to ‘stand-out’ from the crowd, to be paid attention to, to be remembered.”

6. DESTRUCTION IN DISTRACTION
“It is entirely possible that digital over-consumers are increasingly prone to distraction, especially high-input digital consumers,” says Medina. “The damage is that they become less good at identifying and filtering out information irrelevant to a given task, losing the cognitive tenacity for sustained concentration. It is not that their brains are permanently rewired. It is just that their brains—just like our brains—are surprisingly plastic. Consuming multiple inputs at high rates over a long period appears to change our ability to focus.”
Traditional audience measurements fail to take into account that not all eyeballs are equal—the ones that are most passionate, engaged, and committed are disproportionately more valuable.
We live in a new golden age of media. In terms of sheer quantity, we have more options in what to watch, listen, read, or browse than ever before in human history. And astoundingly, this quantity hasn’t come at the expense of quality: More of these things are actually worth consuming than our increasingly scarce leisure time can possibly accommodate.

All of these choices have produced a radical fragmentation in our media consumption habits. Audiences that were once funneled into a handful of mass offerings are now scattered across hundreds of channels on dozens of platforms—and shifting, streaming, and side-loading that content in ways that are increasingly challenging to track. For media creators and distributors, this potentially represents extinction-level threat, because the measurements used to assess the size and value of audiences are becoming less and less accurate, less and less useful, and less and less credible.

Time magazine critic Jamie Poniewozik aptly summed up the current state of TV, the medium most impacted by the shattering of the mass audience, as follows:

It’s a common and understandable myth that TV shows stay on the air by getting as many viewers as possible. They don’t. In commercial television, shows stay on the air by making money, something that relates to, but does not correlate directly to, getting as many viewers as possible. If you’re a network that airs commercials, you make money chiefly by getting as many viewers that advertisers are willing to pay to reach as possible. Figuring out who those viewers are, and how to count them, is probably the biggest challenge networks have today.

This points us to the crux of the issue: In this post-mass era of media, it’s not about just grabbing eyeballs, because not all eyeballs are the same.

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This points us to the crux of the issue: In this post-mass era of media, it’s not about just grabbing eyeballs, because not all eyeballs are the same. Marketers, whose dollars fund the creation and distribution of media, want to connect with those consumers that are most likely to actually buy their products and services; exposing audiences to advertisements is only a means to that end. That’s why, for example, TV ratings focus on the 18 to 49-year-old members of the viewing audience only, a segment that’s popularly referred to as “the key demo.” This 30-year bracket represents the peak consumption years of the average American. Viewers younger and older are assigned zero value, because marketers see them as less likely to respond to their messages and thus irrelevant to the financial proposition of advertising.

What’s clearly needed is a new way of thinking about audience valuation that weighs individual viewers according to the degree to which they’re engaged with the media they’re consuming.

WHAT IS THE FAN ECONOMY?

At The Futures Company, we’ve been working on developing a framework we call the Fan Economy. It reflects the reality that someone with an ardent, extended, and multifaceted relationship with a media property is inherently more valuable than one with an indifferent, transient, and unidimensional one. In short, “fandom” matters because fans have a vested interest in the content they love — and for marketers this means that they pay more attention to brand messages associated with their beloved content. They respond to them more readily and assign positive goodwill to the brands behind them.
Our preliminary research shows three critical dimensions that must be taken into account when valuing audience fandom:

- **Relationship**: How long has an individual’s connection with a media property lasted, and how long is it likely to last? (A single show, a single season, years, a lifetime, across multiple generations?)

- **Engagement**: How many different touch-points and expressions of the media property has an individual chosen to embrace? (Online extra content, social media feeds, fan communities, live experiences, conventions, merchandise, and collectibles?)

- **Passion**: How intense is an individual’s commitment and passion for a given media property? (Preferential, loyal, dedicated, obsessed, evangelical, all-consuming?)

The core idea behind our work is that rather than treating all audience members as if they are the same, they should instead be scored for relationship, engagement, and passion and weighted appropriately according to their scores. Two programs might both score a 1.5 rating, but if one of them has an audience that scores low on these three fan traits and the other has an audience that scores high the latter should be valued at a multiple of the former.

As Mark Duffett writes in his book *Understanding Fandom*, “Media fans resemble ideal brand consumers: They snap up the latest thing, buy extra merchandise, participate in promotions, join official fan clubs and build collections. [And] they form a particularly stable market [because] the 80-20 rule says that 20% of the audience (i.e., fans) create 80% of the profits.” Targeting fans is a highly efficient investment for both media properties and their advertisers: Fans are the captive audience, the “home team” consumers that are hair-triggered to respond to communications.

And by identifying their most intense fans, the Superfans, who score high on all three of these traits, a media property can refine its audience to separate out the most valuable asset of all: Individuals who are ready, willing and able to participate by providing feedback, message amplification, and active evangelism to their personal social networks and to any strangers they might happen to encounter. Superfans are worth their weight in gold, and creators and advertisers should stop counting them as eyeballs and start treating them as partners—with brains, hearts, minds, hands, and feet, they’re eager to put to work on behalf of their beloved media.

JEFF YANG is Senior Vice President of Consulting and head of the technology and media practice at The Futures Company, a WPP/Kantar subsidiary focused on foresight-based consumer research. He is a regular contributor to the *Wall Street Journal*, CNN, *Slate*, Quartz and NPR. @originalspin.

“someone with an ardent, extended, and multifaceted relationship with a media property is **INHERENTLY MORE VALUABLE** than one with an indifferent, transient, and unidimensional one.”

- Jeff Yang,
The Futures Company
CONSUMERS VS. FANS

The Futures Company's research has highlighted some critical differences in how ordinary consumers and “fans” approach the marketplace.

“CONSUMERS” ARE:

- Motivated by need, aspiration, and impulse
- Inspired by brand communications to act on key messages
- Moved down a purchase funnel through various “moments of truth” managed by the brand
- Assigned a value based on a transaction or series of transactions that they subsequently conduct in reaction to brand communications

“FANS” ARE:

- Motivated by loyalty, community, and culture
- Full if not equal participants in the positioning, messaging, and content around a brand—whether the brand knows or cares, or even if the brand resists
- Focused not on moments of truth, but shared mutual investment perceiving themselves to be stakeholders in the brand and participating caretakers of its present and future
- Assigned a value based on the intensity, breadth, and longevity of their relationship with their preferred brand
In the “war for attention,” the competition is fierce; certain content and content creators rise to the top. To win the war, brands have to predict consumer impulses, pivot to meet demand, and present best-in-class content. To get to the bottom of how brands end up on top, I reached out to a few colleagues working in the entertainment landscape and asked them to finish this sentence:

“The brands that win the war for attention...”
...Are the ones with which we have a positive emotional identification—this can be products, books, films, and even stars that tap into something deep—or a fantasy factor that makes us feel good about ourselves and included in contemporary culture. In the theater I note that shows about misfits, people struggling to succeed, or “a stranger comes to town stories,” can all hook an audience with a deep, emotional connection. When Marlon Brando said, “I coulda been a contender” in *On The Waterfront*, he knew it would move the audience. Everyone is striving for something.

ROBYN GOODMAN
Theatrical Producer,
Aged In Wood Productions
(Avenue Q, In The Heights, Rodgers + Hammerstein’s Cinderella)

...Are always thinking “fan first.” They look at every video, every sweepstakes, even every image and gif and think to themselves, “If I was a fan, would I care about this? Would I actually do this or watch this?” Often, marketers chase shiny pennies and “first-to-market” ideas then inadvertently create initiatives that are industry-focused and fall flat with consumers, completely tone deaf to their wants and needs. Brands that are winning are those that keep fans top of mind consistently.

GRACE LEE
Director of Social Strategy,
HISTORY/A&E (A+E Networks)

...Are those that can develop and maintain deep one-to-one relationships with their most ardent supporters. Just producing a great product or content and having wide distribution is not enough today. You also have to engage with your fans so that they can advocate passionately on your behalf. Consumers often cite peer recommendation as the number one reason to try a new product or show, and brands who understand that dynamic are the ones who will prevail in the war for attention!

KRISTIN MIREK
Vice President of Multi-Platform Development & Marketing,
TV Land (Viacom Media Networks)
The Super Bowl, the World Series, the Final Four—sports captivate millions of rabid fans, consistently rule the ratings, and arguably keep the traditional linear TV business model afloat. To investigate why and how the sports business dominates our TV sets and to examine the sports industry’s impact on the transformation of the media landscape, I sat down with Tom Richardson, a sports media veteran who is a professor of digital media and marketing at Columbia University and a long-time consultant to the sports and media industry. We tackled the end of the “TV industrial complex,” the demise of the wholesale consumer relationship, and how the NY Giants are going to win the Super Bowl next year (okay, I made that part up).
Damian Bazadona (DB): I’m feeling a combination of fear and excitement in the media business. As the world shifts to on-demand, many sports properties are quickly trying to mobilize their efforts to rule the over-the-top (OTT) media ecosystem where great content crushes the discriminating curation principles of the past. From your expert vantage point, what’s happening and how did we get here?

Tom Richardson (TR): We’re witnessing the decline of “the TV industrial complex,” which has been at the core of the broadcast world for the last 65 years. We’re seeing a big change in the “the short head and the long tail” model. Look at any form of media—television, film, book publishing. In the traditional model, there were a small number of very successful products and a really long tail of stuff that was unprofitable or unsuccessful. The curators—the studios, the networks, the publishers—would tell us which books they were going to put out and which movies we should pay attention to by flexing their promotional muscle.

Consider the music industry. The last 15 years have seen a dismantling of the old model, which was a comfortable, very profitable ecosystem for those power brokers.

DB: Who do you think the winners will be in this changing ecosystem?

TR: Everybody references the power of a great live sporting or entertainment event—The Super Bowl, the Academy Awards, the Emmys. It’s still true. Look at the National Football League or March Madness. All the networks are envious of those ratings. Why did CBS give up Thursdays, a key night, to buy a very expensive contract with the NFL? To create a bankable franchise: A new night for viewing football. Right now, investing in NFL games is probably a safer, long-term bet than pouring money into developing comedies and dramas. The idea that sports has both perceived and real value is reflected in these mega rights deals.

The other winners will be the “attacker” brands that figure out the right OTT strategy. You can do lots of great things with lower production and distribution costs . . . and have access to a worldwide audience.

DB: Is it safe to say that the rights holders are winning in the current state of the media business?

TR: Most of the major sports properties have done quite well with their rights fees because the networks in the linear TV model pay the fees knowing that it’s their best chance of getting good, predictable ratings. Remember, we’re still living within the interruptive advertising structure, despite all the technology advances with DVRs, ad blocking, and ad skipping.

Before their deals with Turner and ESPN expired, the NBA preemptively extended those deals with a threefold increase in rights. So while we all witness the decline and fall of television, the NBA negotiated a huge increase!

DB: Yet, you can’t flip through any major media or advertising publication without reading a story about the “cord cutting” movement. What gives?

TR: That is the contradiction. Yes, these rights views are going up because everyone acknowledges the value of live sports. But on the frontlines, paid TV subscriptions—deals between consumers and cable companies, telecommunications companies, and satellite companies—are declining.

Look at ESPN. There is a topline decline in revenue even though they’re the worldwide leader in sports. Same goes for Fox Sports and NBC. That’s the massive cord-cutting trend. As this decline in the paid TV model continues, we’ll see an increase in OTT while the power brokers, the rights holders, and the producers are all desperately trying to figure out how to navigate that change.

DB: Where does this change take us?

TR: Nobody can tell you exactly how this is going to play out. It’s all experimentation right now. Every television network has a limit in their addressable market in the US. Ten years ago, if you considered putting your show on the Discovery Channel, you’d ask the Discovery Channel president, “How many households are you in?”

He might have answered, “We’re in 61 million households.”

But, National Geographic might have said, “We’re in 72.” As the content holder, you know 72 is better than 61.

Now, let’s take that same programming and put it on the internet for an OTT presentation, and guess what? You just got an audience of billions, literally. The addressable market is way, way bigger. That’s exciting.

DB: Any examples of who’s attempting to evolve through the demise of the “TV industrial complex” you mentioned earlier?

TR: WWE is one of the high profile examples in sports and entertainment. They decided to forgo the linear TV approach of all the other major league sports. After years of discussion, they launched WWE Network as an OTT channel, which by 2015 reportedly had a subscriber base of nearly 1.5 million.
WWE has a very robust content offering: tons of programming, including lucrative pay-per-views, weekly shows, a vast archive, etc. So they built a rich OTT package. As an incentive to get subscribers to get comfortable with a $9.99 monthly subscription price, they took all the pay-per-views and put them in package. They’re the first big player to go their own way.

Is it successful financially? I speculate that they don’t expect to be successful for a long time. Was ESPN successful in 1979, halfway through the year after their launch? Was Fox Sports successful after they invested a huge amount of money in the NFL as a way to build that network as a legitimate contender?

DB: Plus, WWE owns the customer at this point. That’s the enormous difference, right?
TR: That’s the thing. Everyone in this business is realizing that to be successful in modern media and entertainment, you can no longer rely solely on the wholesale model—you’ve got to build some kind of retail model. You’ve got to build a relationship with your customers. You’ve got to know who they are, what they like, etc., especially if you’re trying to sell advertising around them. Also, you’ve got to use them to help spread the word about your “product.” There’s no choice—media companies have to become growth hacking marketers, just like the good software companies.

The entire business of media and entertainment was built on a wholesale model for years—think back to that short head/long tail idea. Now if you’re a brand creating content, you can achieve success on your own with knowledge of your consumer.

DB: So as a sports fan, based on everything you’re telling me, is it safe to say that we are about to enter a phase of on-demand possibilities that never existed before?
TR: I’ve got a great example. There was a milestone in sports media this season when the NBA announced that it was going to sell individual games. Right now, you can go online and buy an individual game for $6.99. That is less than the cost of a beer at Madison Square Garden.

DB: So what’s holding up replication across the whole sports spectrum?
TR: Remember, these rights deals with the biggest media companies in the world are quite complex. It’s not like you have unfettered opportunities to go out and keep slicing up the bologna. That’s all going to be really tightly controlled.

How was the NFL able to sell a single game to Yahoo for close to $20 million? Their lawyers looked at the network contract, found a little opening, and said, “Yeah, we could sell a game, no problem.” But the network guys were in their office, reading the press release, and wondering how “their product” could have been resold to Yahoo.
DB: At what point will the NFL see Yahoo, Google, or other digital properties as more valuable than the networks? They have unlimited addressable markets. And, as importantly, they are built on customer data and personalization platforms where broadcast media networks are not. I’m hard-pressed to believe that the future live TV experience won’t have to become even more social and customizable than it already is today to remain relevant.

TR: Right now, there’s no customer relationship management (CRM) resource because it’s the wholesale, network model. Think about what could be achieved in the sports world. You have these tribal loyalties and passions; there’s an immediate market for personalization. In five years, your customized Damian Giants’ Game Day VR package will take you to the side lines, down in the tunnel, listening to the locker room speech.

DB: As a sports fan, that’s something to look forward to.

TR: Absolutely, I think that’s what it’s going to become and I think we’re going to laugh ten years from now and say, “Remember when we used to watch whatever they showed us on TV, and we just sat there flipping the channels?”

TOM RICHARDSON is a media and marketing veteran with broad experience in management, consulting, and teaching. A former executive at the NFL, the NHL and AOL, he is president of Convergence Sports & Media, a digital media and marketing consultancy whose clients have included NBC Sports, IMG, Bloomberg, WWE, and the U.S. Olympic Committee. Richardson is also a professor in the Sports Management masters program at Columbia University.

BRAND SHOWCASE

Golf Channel is experiencing incredible growth—even in the midst of cord-cutting mania. Golf Channel Director of Digital Marketing, Carolina Castaneda, tees up the new model of consumer loyalty.

In the last few years, you have shattered records in ratings, viewership, and digital platform engagement. What’s the secret?

We’re not afraid to take risks as we develop programming which is easily consumed on any platform the viewer desires.

What’s surprised you the most about your audience these last few years?

We have always known golf fans are hardcore; we have been happily surprised to see them engage with Golf Channel, not just through linear viewing, but through our site and apps; they live-stream content and are vocal about the game on social media. Our fans are early adopters and are always providing feedback on how we can serve them better.

How do you connect with fans as they shift away from traditional set box viewing in favor of cordless viewing?

Golf Channel is more than just a network; we are at the intersection of the golfer and their lifestyle. By creating an array of opportunities for our consumers to connect with us, we have increased their engagement. Our social media following has grown over 60% year-over-year for the past two years because our fans know we listen to what they tell us. Meeting golfers where they are is our passion; it’s the way we strengthen connections and build loyalty.
We’re constantly inundated with assertions that Millennials and Generation Z are the most distracted, attention-deficient humans to ever walk the earth. A 2015 Microsoft study even asserted that a goldfish has a longer attention span than a Millennial. Marketers are working overtime to capture the attention of tech-savvy, multitasking young people. To test these assertions and get to the truth of the matter, we traveled to the frontlines of this generational “attention war” to learn from the true masters: Middle school teachers.
True or false: It’s more difficult to hold students’ attention in the classroom today than it was a decade ago.

Vincent Gassetto (VG): I think the world outside the classroom is different. Think about the world of video games—those are incredibly challenging, intense, fast-paced environments. I think, in many ways, curriculum hasn’t caught up to that; things are still slow and boring and solitary when, especially adolescent boys, are used to going home and tackling these exciting challenges with instant feedback—pass or fail, win or lose—in their video games.

Susana Temprano (ST): I do see a new impatience to finish—work, lessons, subject—that wasn’t there before.

So, what do you have to do to capture and hold students’ attention?

Stephen Jackson (SJ): I came from the Caribbean, where a lecture-centric model was the norm. That doesn’t work here. We must be student-centric. We break material up into ten, fifteen, twenty minute chunks. We incorporate multimedia elements; students move around.

VG: Yeah, students aren’t learning in the lecture style anymore. That’s not the way they find information on their own, outside the classroom. So, we’ve tried to integrate what we call “struggle time.” Students like to do the work; they want to be the ones researching, trying to figure out the solution. Now, as teachers, we try to get out of the way. We present the issue or the problem and then get out of the way. That’s where these kids are going to learn and remember.

SJ: Absolutely, and for me, the most important factor is if the students can make real-life connections. Does the material matter to them? Can they connect the lesson to their lives?

Why do you love working with middle school students?

ST: (laughs) They keep me young!

SJ: With this age group in particular, you work with kids who want to learn, who are excited to experiment. As a teacher, you feel like the students are still moldable; you can have a real impression on their learning.

VG: It’s so rewarding to see pride and confidence build in these kids, who so often have so much working against them. To be on the team that’s cheering them on and giving them the resources they need to achieve their dreams is a gift.

VINCENT GASSETTO is the Associate Principal of MS 343 in the South Bronx.

STEPHEN JACKSON is a seventh and eighth grade science teacher at PS 278 in Inwood.

SUSANA TEMPRANO is an eighth grade math teacher at PS 278 in Inwood.

MS 343 and PS 278 are partners of The Situation Project, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to connecting high-performing, arts-deficient public schools with meaningful cultural experiences. SituationProject.org
Q&A
SECOND SCREENS, PUBLISHING, AND THE FUTURE OF BOOKS

BY PETER YAGECIC
Executive Director of Technology & Emerging Platforms, Situation

Peter Costanzo, formerly of NBCUniversal and now Digital Publishing Specialist for The Associated Press (AP) is a content and platform expert who lives within the noisy ecosystem of new media. We recently caught up and chatted about second screens, publishing, and what it takes to capture consumer attention.
Peter Yagecic (PY): Has the trend of the second screen experience, or the evolution of e-books more broadly, developed in the way that you thought it would?

Peter Costanzo (PC): Unfortunately, the interest level of the average consumer for those kinds of products just hasn’t grown to the extent that everyone in the publishing industry had hoped. The types of products we were creating at NBC tied to TV shows, movie releases, and corporate initiatives, were generally released for free. The challenge for publishers of similar products is how they sell once a price tag is put on them, which in most cases is necessary to recoup the publisher’s development costs. But even with prices as little as $2.99, these interactive reading experiences just haven’t resonated with consumers in a significant way.

PY: We’ve seen some native app and mobile web experiences that have attempted to supplement the TV-watching experience in real time. Breaking Bad comes to mind specifically. Have apps usurped the potential that e-books had as a second screen companion for TV?

PC: I don’t feel they really were competing. The second screen interactivity that media companies were hoping to achieve through apps was more about engaging with the viewer while they were watching TV to share thoughts on what’s seen as it’s happening. And all with the hope to integrate advertising of some kind. Again, a challenging concept. That was very different from what we were doing with e-books that were published weeks before fans were going to watch a show or upcoming movie. Rather they were free marketing vehicles that featured purchasable content, but content that fans wanted because it was all directly associated with the film or program they enjoyed. So the e-books were complementary instead of competitive with the social media-oriented apps. Our department was focused on a whole different mission.

PY: In the agency, we often talk about the ephemeral nature of the random thought versus the more evergreen nature of a well-told story. Where do you think e-books live on this continuum? Do you explore that tension at all?

PC: I think it depends on what your intention is with the type of product you’re creating. One of the attractive things about e-books is that you can quickly put out a product that’s capitalizing on the immediacy of something that’s happening. Literally, I’ve produced products that have been released within forty-eight hours of an event occurring. That said, generally these days the majority of products I focus on are ones that we believe are going to be evergreen.

Here’s an example. For the fortieth anniversary of the Vietnam War, Peter Arnett wrote Saigon Has Fallen for AP about that experience. That’s a project that didn’t just capitalize on the anniversary date, but it’s also one that a year from now, five years, ten years from now, somebody can read and learn from. And it will be as impactful then as the day it came out.

We have a book coming out soon by Kathryn Johnson, a former AP journalist who reported on most of the major instances that occurred during the civil rights movement, called My Time With the Kings. It’s releasing in January, shortly before the Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend. Because of her intimate coverage of the King family during the 60s, she was the only reporter allowed in the King household after his assassination. The only reporter. So she has this
When we decide to put out something like that, we’re thinking in terms of a long shelf life. And whether digital or in print, we try to put out content that really gets people thinking about particular moments in history and how it reflects on what’s happening today.

PY: Because they’re digital, you have the opportunity with e-books to gauge attention spans. You can see how long someone stuck with what they were consuming, or whether or not they made it to the end. Does that impact your editorial voice, or are you curating content because you know it needs to be a certain length for maximum consumption?

PC: Editorially, we work hard at thinking, “What should this be? What would make sense for a product coming from the AP? What would people expect to see from us?” What might we publish that they wouldn’t expect, like our recent collection of holiday stories called *Mulligan’s Christmas Stew*. Analytics
“People of all ages are just getting used to getting content the way they want to.”

- Peter Costanzo, The Associated Press

are fine and I don't think that's information that should be ignored since it can help inform and guide decisions. But ultimately, my personal goal with these projects is to take myself out of the production process and try to think in terms of, “What would I want to see if I were the consumer?” We have a lot of discussions at AP about that. If we're not excited about what we're putting out, I can't imagine why anybody else would be.

PY: Do you think the fact that more people are consuming content on devices that can render all types of content, from e-books to web pages to online videos, is a key component of why we're so distracted? Is that a challenge for authored content where you have a narrative voice?

PC: It's interesting. I think depending on the audience you're trying to reach, it's definitely something you have to think about. For younger audiences, I think it's pretty clear they are used to multitasking and looking at various things simultaneously. But the reality is, people of all ages are just getting used to consuming content the way they want to.

We've seen a number of companies try a subscription based-model for books, but already a number of those companies have closed shop. I do think that the Netflix model has had tremendous influence on any kind of digital product consumption.

We are seeing some of that with Amazon's Kindle program called Kindle Match, where if you buy the print book, you're also offered the opportunity to buy the e-book for an incremental amount. In some cases, the e-book's actually free with the purchase of the print book. That's a model that probably has traditional publishers very concerned.

At the same time, it's a model that makes sense from a consumer standpoint. If I'm traveling, the idea of being able to read the same book digitally that I own in print is very appealing. What's not appealing is "re-buying" it digitally for an additional $9.99 so I can read it on my iPad or Kindle when I already have the print version sitting at home. I think people are saying, "I want it in all formats upon purchase to be able to consume it the way I choose at any given moment." The book business needs to figure out how to successfully accommodate those readers.

PY: I think it just underlines your point about the need for a compelling story. If people are interested in the content, if there's a narrative arc and a point of view that makes them want to keep coming back, then they will.

PC: Reading is becoming more of a luxury since most people are very busy running around living their lives. Let's face it, it's really hard to find the time required to sit and enjoy a good book. So publishers have to think about how to make reading digitally easy, so that if for that flash of a moment when a potential customer gets on a train or the treadmill or is standing on that long line at the DMV, they say, “I'm going read that book I'm enjoying at home right now.” If we can make it as attractive for them to make that choice, then we have a better chance of engaging them time and time again.

PETER COSTANZO is a Digital Publishing Specialist for The Associated Press. He is an award-winning book producer who also teaches the “Digital Trends in the Book Industry” and “New Media: Technology and Devices” courses at NYU. @PeterCostanzo
It’s official, kids: Those technological soothsayers have consulted their crystal ball and virtual reality is our future. While in its flyscreen infancy now, companies are heaving billions into this emergent technology, hedging bets that this is the One True Thing that could revolutionize it all.
Virtual reality is, of course, impressive. Don a set of goggles and you're in the middle of an Avengers fist-fight or walking with lumbering dinosaurs. But the industry has acknowledged that the hardware and software have a tough journey ahead before it's ready for mass market. And we, as filmmakers, marketers, and advertisers have a large role to play in that journey.

Unlocking VR's potential requires a reexamination of how we tell stories. This starts with admitting that the why of this will never disappear. Humans are inherently narrative-driven and will forever be—the need to consume stories is a universal truth that must be acknowledged. However, the mechanics of executing a story in a completely immersive world pose extraordinary new questions as to the role of a storyteller and his or her relation to viewer agency.

**REDEFINING DIRECTING**

As a director, chief amongst my responsibilities is to tell a story. Broadly, this involves building a structural framework—a beginning, a middle, an end. Within each of these acts belong moments, and behind each of these moments is a technical confluence of sound and image that, if fired correctly, serve a larger story. This invisible symphony works to push a viewer into feeling something, understanding something, or simply comprehending two separate shots as a logical sequence. This experience has traditionally been a tightly controlled one. But the inherent nature of VR breaks this apart: If I can't control where a viewer is looking, I've immediately lost the omnipotence I require to tell a story successfully.

In the brave new world of VR, a scene is transmuted into an experience. Imagine watching a tense argument play out in an apartment. In traditional cinema and advertising, we typically establish the setting and then use the conflict as an engine to drive our editing style. In virtual reality, the viewer could watch this take place. Or they could turn around and watch a vase of flowers sitting idly in the corner (I suppose those begonias are delightful). Editing is one of storytelling's most powerful tools—without it, does the immersive world become harder to understand?

Sound design demands similarly fresh thinking, as much of our understanding of visual media is subconsciously processed through audio cues. The heretofore ignored reality of VR is that audio spatialization is its lifeblood. Without it, we feel even more untethered. With it, the world gains an exciting texture. As filmmakers we know that audio is a horror movie's best weapon—now imagine it in a terrifyingly immersive VR world. Sound has an almost preternatural ability to transport us to time and place, and creative audio design should be at the forefront of any developer's mind as they begin to scribble down their first VR story.

To look to the future of narrative VR, one must examine what others are doing best. With 3D as their native environment, video games will almost certainly be the platform's undisputed king. And with their ongoing commitment to weaving great stories into graphically rich worlds, they may well pick up the narrative torch and never get it back. Great work is also already being done in journalism—a pair of VR goggles can transport a viewer to remote conflict zones, refugee camps, and the ocean's depths in dauntingly immersive ways.

Effective storytelling in VR may well be a soup of these great mediums: a hearty blend of cinema's passive emotional beauty with the active immersion of video games. What's undeniable is that future viewers will require a new visual language to navigate the three-acts of undiscovered story worlds. How do I lose myself in a great story I must control? How am I directed to feel at any given instant? How do I subscribe meaning to moments? How pretty are those begonias?

The promise of VR means we experience everything more acutely and beautifully than ever before. The reality is that no one really knows when and what that format will be, but as filmmakers and storytellers we must insist on being VR pioneers. We collectively have a responsibility to protect storytelling, to explore what it is, and what it can be—whether that be one, two, or three dimensions.

**CHRISTOPHER HAWTHORNE** is the Video Director at **Situation** where he makes video content for world-class entertainment and media clients. His most recent film **Bender** won Best Short Film at NiteHawk Film Festival.

*“The promise of VR means we experience everything MORE ACUTELY AND BEAUTIFULLY THAN EVER BEFORE.”*

- Christopher Hawthorne, Situation
I wanted to start this piece with a statistic, but it was too depressing.

- Only 4% of broadcast TV characters in 2015 were LGBT and less than 1% portrayed a disability.¹
- Only 27% of film characters in 2014 were non-white.²
- Only one new Broadway play in the 2014-2015 season was written by a woman.³
- Only 14% of children’s books were written by or about people of color in 2014.⁴

Those are just a few of the hundreds of sad stats about the current state of the arts, entertainment, and media landscape. So many low numbers, so little time!

So, let’s scratch the stats for now. Let’s be hopeful instead of dismal. Let’s talk about what we can do to improve.

In the midst of today’s “attention war,” it’s more vital than ever that our organizations are mindful of the stories we create, and intentional about the voices we choose to amplify. Consumers are inundated with content—more content than they could ever consume in a million lifetimes—but is it the right content? Is it the best content? Does it reflect the reality of our world, and the diversity of our experiences?

The numbers say “no.” And we have a lot of work to do if we want to push the needle to “yes.”

As creators of content, marketers of content, or consumers of content, we all have a role to play in increasing equal representation on the page, stage, and screen. It’s up to us to “pass the mic,” so to speak, and to bring attention to underrepresented stories.

I spoke with a group of game-changers to find out how they’re passing the mic and inviting more voices to the table. Their work is inspiring, invigorating, and incredibly pertinent in today’s marketplace.
Below are six themes that emerged from our conversations—six ways your organization can join the fight.

**EMBRACE A LONG-TERM MINDSET.**

Cast one disabled actor. Produce one LGBTQIA play. Hire one woman, and call it a day.

Not so fast, says Christine Bruno, Disability Advocate at Inclusion in the Arts. Equal representation in entertainment is about long-term goals, not one-season quotas. Organizations that make a real difference are the ones that treat the issue as an ongoing conversation instead of a “one and done” checklist.

Shakina Nayfack, transgender theatre artist and founder of Musical Theatre Factory, agrees. “When people talk about ‘diversity’ or ‘inclusion’ and in the back of their minds they are only trying to fulfill a quota or manage appearances, the disingenuous nature of their efforts is palpable,” she says.

Even when organizations do great work bringing attention to new voices, the positive press attention can backfire and make us think that we’ve crossed the finish line. Bruno uses Deaf West Theatre’s acclaimed Broadway production of *Spring Awakening* as an example.

“The show is an amazing achievement,” she says. “However, with all of the positive attention, people tend to think this means we’ve ‘solved’ the problem of disability on stage. They forget that the last big Broadway musical featuring deaf actors was Deaf West’s production of *Big River* twelve years ago. We have to make sure these performers don’t wait twelve years for their next opportunity.”

**ASK YOUR ORGANIZATION THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS.**

When you’re in the planning phase for upcoming projects, there are an overwhelming amount of factors to take into consideration—strategy, staffing, budgets, and deadlines. Make sure you include questions about equal representation as part of the planning process and leave room to resolve those issues.

“Our friends over at the OpEd Project ask ‘who narrates the world?’” says Leigh Stein, co-director of Out of the Binders, a nonprofit dedicated to increasing the diversity of voices in the media and literary arts. “I think that’s a great question. Whose stories are we hearing, and who’s getting paid to write them? It’s time to revise the canon, re-think our mastheads, and realize how many voices we still aren’t hearing.”

“Unequal representation is already the status quo, and it is so ingrained in our assumptions and biases,” says Erica Rotstein, producer of the #MakeItFair viral PSA.

“Just last week, I was curating a panel of new musicals for an upcoming conference, and it wasn’t until after I had generated a list of shows that I remembered to ask myself whether any of those projects had creative team members who were not white and male. Sure enough, only one of them did.”

For Kristen Fitzpatrick, Director of Public Exhibition and Acquisitions for Women Make Movies, these big questions are at the heart of their non-profit’s mission.

When deciding which film projects Women Make Movies will distribute, she asks: “Do stories like this already exist? Is this a new, nuanced angle? Who’s telling the story? For example, are women from the West speaking for women from the East, and is it problematic? How politically urgent is this story?”

Above all, Fitzpatrick says, “we work to connect humanity through the powerful medium of stories on film. These are important stories. They are not, as so often thought, niche or supplementary to a larger story.”
SET BIG GOALS AND RALLY THE TROOPS.

Work within your organization to establish long-term goals that go beyond surface-level diversity quotas. Think big, think bold, and inspire your team to make real change.

“Inclusion in the Arts has a wishlist for 2016, with two tall orders,” says Christine Bruno. “We’d like to see an actor with a disability play a leading role in a film, a TV show, and a Broadway show all in one year. And we’d like to see a director of color tapped to direct a Broadway show that is not culturally-specific to the community to which he or she belongs.”

“The Jubilee is a totally, radical idea we announced in 2015,” says Jamie Gahlon, senior creative producer of Howlround and committee member for the Jubilee, a new initiative announced in October of 2015. “We’re inviting every theater in the United States of America to produce only works by women, people of color, artists of varied physical and cognitive ability, and/or LGBTQIA artists in the 2020/2021 season.”

“One common misconception is that in prioritizing representation in the theater, you are somehow sacrificing artistic excellence,” Gahlon says. “But, see what happens when you tell a story that you don’t normally tell—not only to yourself, but to your audience.

“Just speaking a big idea into being changes the landscape of the conversation and makes people think,” she adds. “That’s the beginning of how change happens.”

HIRE AN ARRAY OF PEOPLE IN POSITIONS OF POWER—AND LISTEN.

If the makeup of your organization doesn’t reflect reality, how can your content? Take a hard look at who you work with and commit to increasing representation across the ranks—including leadership and creative roles.

“Gender and race bias in showbiz is an ugly, persistent reality,” says Julie Crosby, former producing artistic director of Women’s Project Theater and advocate for women in the arts. “I’ve been on a million panels during the past two decades. We talk and talk about increasing representation across the ranks—including leadership and creative roles.

“Let’s stop talking,” Crosby suggests. “Let’s just hire women and minorities. Let’s pay them the same as we do our white, male friends. I hire women and minorities. I just do it. I can’t imagine working on projects that don’t have a rich diversity of people involved.”

Erica Rotstein produced last year’s #MakeItFair PSA to focus on this very issue. The viral video included facts like “13 out of 13 new plays on Broadway during the 2014 season were written by men” and “Men make up 95% of Fortune 500 CEOs.”

Rotstein says: “We wanted to put a bee in the bonnet of all of our viewers so that the next time they (male or female) were working on a project or making a new hire, they would stop and ask themselves whether there is enough diversity on their team.”

Jenn Baker, creator of the Minorities in Publishing podcast, agrees. On each episode she interviews industry professionals who identify as marginalized—be they writers, editors, agents.

“It’s been enlightening to speak with others at various levels of the industry,” Baker says, “to hear how they started, what battles they’ve fought and still fight to gain respect as a person of color, being in the LGBTQIA community, and/or being disabled.
“A lack of representation promotes IGNORANT THINKING. More representation leads to EMPATHY AND UNITY.”

- Jenn Baker, Minorities in Publishing

“I want listeners to know that they are not alone and can still be successful even if they feel like it’s an ongoing uphill battle,” says Baker. “These conversations are very important for marginalized artists to hear.”

ASK FOR HELP.

When you don’t know how to start or where to turn, remember: You’re not in this alone.

“I invite people to use Inclusion in the Arts as a resource when they have questions or concerns about issues of representation,” says Bruno. “We provide no-fee consulting services, and we are here to help.”

One recent example is the New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players’ production of The Mikado, which was cancelled after widespread media and social outrage at its use of yellowface.

“Our main goal was to get the company to understand what the issue was and try to redirect their thinking for future productions,” says Bruno. “We specialize in partnering with organizations like the Asian American Arts Alliance to facilitate these kinds of conversations.”

COMMIT, COMMIT, COMMIT.

I started this piece with some depressing statistics. Now, I want to leave you with something more optimistic.

- According to UCLA’s 2015 Hollywood Diversity Report, films with relatively diverse casts have the best global box office performance.
- From the same report: TV shows with diversity in both the writers’ room and cast are most popular among the coveted 18-49 demo.
- According to the NEA’s 2015 study, “Arts attendees more strongly value listening to others’ opinions and diverse perspectives, compared with non-attendees.”

You heard that right:

- Diverse content makes more money.
- Diverse content is more popular.
- Arts audiences strongly value diverse stories.

So, let’s commit to telling those stories and sharing those perspectives. Let’s commit to making intentional choices and taking strong actions. Let’s treat the “attention war” as an opportunity to spotlight new voices.

In other words: let’s pass the mic.

BIZZY COY is a creative writer and copywriter for the biggest names in culture and entertainment, and the Artistic Associate of musical theater company NO HOPE Productions. bizzycoy.com

ADVOCATES FOR CHANGE

JENN BAKER
Creator, Minorities in Publishing
Find the MiP podcast in the iTunes store.

CHRISTINE BRUNO
Disability Advocate, Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts inclusioninthearts.org/resources

JULIE CROSBY
Producer
Story Incubator launching in early 2016

KRISTEN FITZPATRICK
Director of Public Exhibition & Acquisitions, Women Make Movies wmm.com

JAMIE GAHLON
Senior Creative Producer, HowlRound @HowlRound

SHAKINA NAYFACK
Founding Artistic Director, Musical Theatre Factory mtf.nyc

ERICA ROTSTEIN
Producer, The Make It Fair Project #makeitfair

LEIGH STEIN
CoDirector, Out of the Binders bindercon.com
It's rough out there. Right now, there are countless brands shouting and wildly waving their virtual hands 24/7. It's noisy; it's unrelenting; it's war.

We're knee deep in it every day—firing off social posts, video releases, or live activations. It's pretty fun, but it's a delicate balance. To get it right, you walk the line between attention and over-saturation. You need to follow but not stalk, be compelling but not crude. It might take ten right moves to win but only one wrong move to lose it all.

We asked members of our Situation creative team for their take on the war and their strategies for emerging victorious.
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Chris Powers, Executive Director of Creative

Use each interaction as a way to learn as much about your audience as they learn about you. Find ways to incorporate that knowledge in a way that benefits and intrigues your consumers. And, above all, tell a little more of your story each time. Your communications become more welcoming and inviting. In time, consumers will seek you out. You won’t just win the war; you’ll find yourself in a relationship.

HUMAN CONNECTION DRAWS US IN

Eric Smith, Creative Strategist

Find ways to nurture attention by using short-form segments to tell a longer form story. “Humans of New York” on Facebook is a great place to check out for inspiration. Though it started as cool photos with short captions, it has evolved into 11-post epics that dive deeper into the lives of the subjects and create a real human connection. And isn’t that what we’re all seeking?

MARKETING IS EASY; COMEDY IS HARD

Kevin McAuley, Junior Copywriter

Break out some punderful wordplay and don’t take yourself too seriously! Nothing stays with a person like chuckle-worthy content, especially on a Wednesday that’s feeling longer than a Republican Primary Debate. (Wocka! Wocka!) So loosen your proverbial necktie and let the blood flow to your funny bone. Your customers will notice...they might even laugh!

WHAT DOES YOUR AUDIENCE CARE ABOUT?

Stephanie Sciandra, Creative Strategist

As marketers, we can’t be naive to the fact that we’re fighting for a sliver of an already minute share of consumer attention. There are things people truly care about: family, friends, hobbies and careers. The more we create valuable content and experiences around those things, instead of disrupting them, the better off we’ll all be.

THE ART OF HIERARCHY

Fern Lim, Designer

Design is about beauty and style, but its real power comes from the hierarchy in which it’s presented. The hierarchy of elements within our work is critical not just to capturing attention but to ensure the right message is being delivered. To win the attention war you need to understand how consumers view your work—from their scanning patterns to inherent layout preferences—then use this insight as the foundation onto which you apply beauty and style.
We live in a world oversaturated with information and stimulation, and deciding where to invest our attention can be a constant battle. Often the question becomes, how do we prioritize our time? Where do we direct our energy to best optimize our happiness and live more meaningful lives?

Here’s one thing I have found to be true: experiences with those we love make us happy, and we should find the time to prioritize them.
This belief comes from a personal journey and has been validated by thousands of people who have found happiness—and even peace of mind—through their experiences. Here are a few things I’ve learned about guiding your attention to the moments that truly count.

MEMORIES MATTER.

The power of experiences lies in the memories they help us create.

Thirteen years ago, I was given the wake-up call of a lifetime when my wife, Jill, was diagnosed with Stage IV cancer at the age of 40. Jill and I realized early in Jill’s fight that the disease was not just attacking her body, but our family as well. We were determined to formulate something positive and tangible out of the unfair and cruel. We knew for our kids, Jamie and Jake, strong memories of special times together would be their greatest inheritance.

Jill’s life and death inspired our creation of the Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation (JAJF). Since 2006, JAJF has given families, facing the imminent loss of a parent to cancer, opportunities to create positive, cherished, and lasting memories.

Memories have medicinal impact as validated by our partnership with many of the leading cancer institutes throughout the country. Oncologists ‘prescribe’ a ‘time-out’ for young late-stage moms and dads because they understand that, though a trip cannot heal a body of illness, these shared experiences have a measurable and meaningful impact on the family.

Not only do these experiences deliver immediate happiness, but the anticipatory pleasure has a tremendous impact. I have seen big dads cry at the anticipation of going somewhere with their children as a family. These memories stay with the families of loved ones long after their loss. Memories transcend the momentary.

After my wife’s passing, it was my children’s memories with her that helped them through. Investing in family time continues to frame our priorities.

I recently heard from a young, late stage family who was treated by JAJF. They said, “We cannot stop time, nor can we slow it down. We can only embrace the time we have...as a family together. Thank you for believing in the importance of positive family time. This peace is everlasting.”

Memories matter, and we should turn our attention to actively making them.

HURRY UP AND LIVE.

When you are given a diagnosis, priorities change in an instant. Life’s little stressors and countless distractions suddenly seem tremendously less important, and turning your attention to spending time with your loved ones takes the forefront.

One of the best ways we can come together is by sharing experiences. There are countless experiences to be had and lasting memories to be made: concerts, ballgames, sunsets, roller coasters or just strolling along the beach or a resort pathway together. A JAJF family is headed to NYC for the holiday season where they’ll experience the magic of the Rockettes thanks to the generosity of the folks at Madison Square Garden Entertainment. Through my work with JAJF, I’ve learned that it doesn’t truly matter where they go—it matters that they go.

We are educating and reinforcing to children and adults alike the importance of family time and the long term value and “greatest gift” of family experiences. Because while life is messy and pulls us in hundreds of directions, it is the experiences that truly matter. It’s the memories we cherish, and, ultimately, spending time with those you love is the greatest gift of all. We all know this to be true. But it shouldn’t take a terminal diagnosis to help us remember.

Each and every family we’ve worked with over the last ten years has reinforced our most salient and poignant mantra: Memories become our greatest inheritance.

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JON ALBERT is the founder of the Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation, a 501(c)(3) tax exempt national public charity. He was honored as the 2010 Humanitarian of the Year in a ceremony sponsored by American Airlines and in 2011 as the Avis National Spirit recipient at Yankee Stadium. US Travel named Jon their inaugural National Inspiration Award honoree in 2015. www.jajf.org
THE LAST WORD

**Brandemonious**

(bran·do·mon·ē·əs) **adjective**

**DEFINITION:**
Harmonious branding in a world of fragmented attention and an abundance of stuff, implying seamless content integration and delivery in its truest form.

**USE IT IN A SENTENCE:**
Heineken is truly brandemonious; their marketing personifies a lifestyle their consumers aspire to have!

**ETYMOLOGY:**
From the 19th c. English *brand* (that of a trademark) and the 15th c. Greek *harmónios melodious* (literally, fitting).

**RELATED FORMS:**
Brandemony, noun
Brandemoniously, adverb