WARC releases ‘Rethinking Brand for the Rise of Digital Commerce’, a new white paper reframing brand-building in the post-pandemic era

The report brings together the latest thinking and contributions from major players, including James Hurman, the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, Facebook, Google and Wavemaker, enabling marketers to plan the most effective approach to communications as they move into digital commerce.

22 June 2021 – In Rethinking Brand for the Rise of Digital Commerce, WARC, the global marketing intelligence company, responds to the sharp drop in brand-building budgets in the past 12 months, and brings together the latest evidence to show why brand-building still matters as digital sales grow.

The white paper features fresh and exclusive analysis by former strategist and researcher James Hurman, who sets out why marketers will need to plan brand and performance together to generate maximum impact, as well as interviews with leading CMOs, plus new research by Adgile, Amplified Intelligence, Analytic Partners, the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, Facebook, Flywheel Digital, Wavemaker and more.

“We need to rethink brand-building and channel assumptions,” says David Tiltman, VP Content, WARC. “The events of 2020 saw deep cuts to investment in marketing, and brand-building in general. If we hold that a strong brand is key to the long-term health of businesses, marketers now face a profound risk to their reputation as drivers of growth.

“With this white paper we bring together the latest evidence to help marketers continue to understand the role of brand in the accelerated digital commerce landscape, and to counter some of the assumptions in the market.”

Key takeaways highlighted in Rethinking Brand for the Rise of Digital Commerce are:

1. Rethinking ‘brand-building’ as ‘future demand’

   Marketers are having to increase investment in performance techniques as their sales shift online – known as ‘digital rent’. A balance between brand and performance is still required, but new language may be needed to reframe ‘brand’ in a way that appeals outside the marketing department, and makes sense at a time when platforms are becoming ‘full funnel’.

   James Hurman, Founding Partner, Previously Unavailable, and contributor to the report, lays out an alternative way of thinking about brand and performance that helps bring the two closer together as complementary techniques. He advises: “We need to be creating future demand at the same time as we’re capturing existing demand. When these two things happen concurrently, growth is sustainable, and sustained.”

2. Strong brands still have an advantage in digital purchase environments

   Brand-building remains important in the digital economy, as demonstrated by the growing investment in brand advertising by FAANG companies (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Alphabet’s Google), which now account for 4% of the total global adspend, per WARC Data.
Companies selling through digital platforms need a strong presence close to the point of sale. But those that have taken a cohesive approach to building and communicating their brands still retain an advantage from search through to purchase decisions. This advantage is driven by four factors: fame, mental availability, recognition, and perceptions of value.

**Conny Braams, Chief Digital & Marketing Officer, Unilever**, comments: “*Strong brands do well in e-commerce. The convergence of media, entertainment and commerce offers many exciting opportunities for brands to grow... Brands need to provide unmissable services, content and experiences.*”

3. **Ending the brand-building ‘silo’**

It has also become clear that a siloed approach to brand-building and performance is counter-productive. The two are clearly different approaches and different mindsets. They might involve different teams. But they need co-ordination to maximise their effectiveness. The need to resolve this will become more acute as digital commerce platforms offer ‘full-funnel’ formats.

Changes in the media market make this need more acute, as digital commerce platforms make a pitch for ‘full-funnel’ ad investment across the purchase journey.

It will finally be time to drop the distinction between ‘digital’ and ‘traditional’ media, and consider combinations of channels that are right for a brand, its audience and its objectives.

New measurement models like attention will gain traction as marketers look for the best opportunities across different channel types and ad formats.

**Tamara Rogers, Chief Marketing Officer, GSK Consumer Healthcare**, says: “The relationship between awareness and purchase is evolving and therefore how we plan needs to be approached in an integrated way. Given the strong shift to e-commerce across all categories and channels/properties, we are seeking to balance our investment along the consumer experience journey. The weighting depends greatly on the category, current brand awareness and strategy.”

This white paper is available to download [here](#).

A presentation of Rethinking Brand for the Rise of Digital Commerce will be given by David Tiltman and premiered today at [Cannes Lions Live](#) 13:30-13:50 (BST). The keynote will also be available on Cannes Lions Live On Demand, alongside three other WARC sessions on effectiveness; and shortly after, available to all, on [warc.com](#) with a series of webinars and podcasts to follow.

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For further information, please contact:

Amanda Benfell
Head of PR & Press, WARC
amanda.benfell@warc.com
+44 (0) 20 7467 8125
www.warc.com

**About WARC – The global authority on marketing effectiveness**

WARC is an Ascential company, the path-to-purchase business that combines intelligence, data and insights to drive growth in the digital economy. We do this by delivering an integrated set of business-critical products in the key areas of product design, marketing and sales.

For over 30 years WARC has been powering the marketing segment by providing rigorous and unbiased evidence, expertise and guidance to make marketers more effective. WARC services include 18,000+ case studies, 90,000+ best practice guides, research papers, special reports and advertising trend data, webinars, awards, events and
advisory services; has 1,200+ client companies, 21,500+ active users in 100+ countries; collaborates with 50+ industry partners; has offices in the UK, US, China and Singapore.