



WHAT'S WORKING AND WHAT'S NEXT FOR BRANDS?

A Special 360PR+ Research Report

We're not post-pandemic yet, but brands are working hard to help us re-set in our daily lives, and it feels like some big clouds have lifted. We're traveling again, packing lunches and sending the kids back to school, cheering on our favorite teams and beginning to think about holiday shopping, which, with widespread predictions of tighter inventories, isn't a bad thing to get an early start on. To help us understand what's working and what's next for brands in the new landscape, 360 conducted research with 200 marketing and communications leaders across the US during Summer 2021.

We were curious: how have marketing and communications leaders responded to the ongoing pandemic? What strategies are helping them, their companies and brands

win in a new environment, one in which customers expect more from brands and, at the same time, have tighter purse strings and shorter attention spans? There are new pressures on brands to sharpen their offerings and how they communicate with stakeholders – their customers, investors, employees and strategic partners.

Participants in our research, conducted in partnership with ENGINE GROUP, included CMOs, CCOs, Senior VPs of Marketing/Communications, VPs of Marketing/Communications, and Senior Directors/Directors of Marketing/Communications at companies with at least \$50 million in revenue annually. Here's what we learned and what it means for you and your organization.

The Pandemic Made Marketers Nimble, More Focused

Almost all of our respondents agreed that the pandemic made them better at their jobs in some way. Three-quarters (76%) said the pandemic helped them prioritize objectives and focus more. Four in 10 (42%) became more nimble, and more than half (57%) said the experience opened their eyes to new approaches. As a positive sign of things to come, almost 9 in 10 (88%) plan on increasing their marketing spend in 2022, with 10% unsure and 2% saying they won't up their spend.

PANDEMIC HAS HELPED MARKETERS TO:

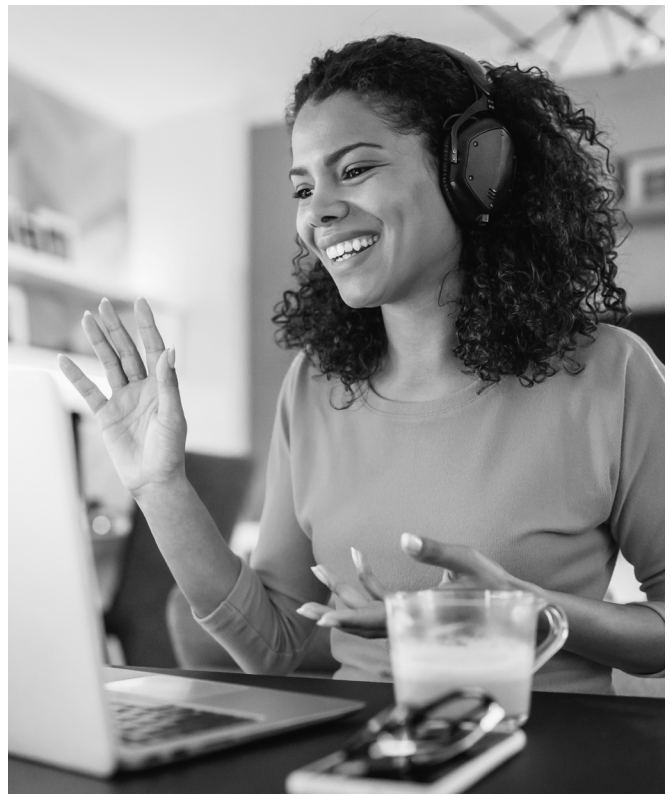
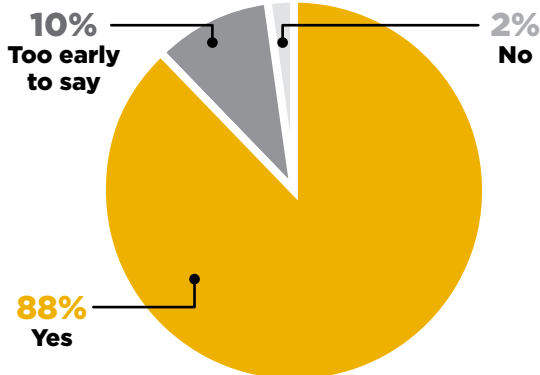
76%
Prioritize

57%
Consider new approaches

42%
Think holistically

42%
Be nimble

PLANS TO INCREASE SPEND



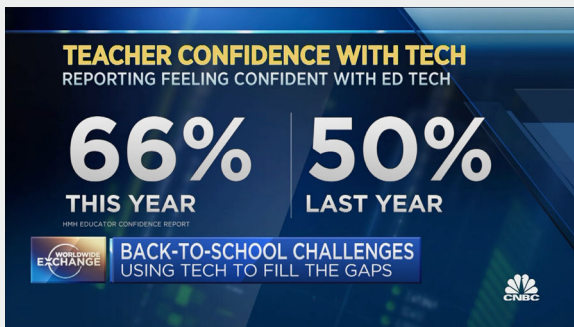
Brand and Corporate Reputation Converging

Almost all respondents in our survey (94%) agree that brand marketing and corporate reputation are converging (57% strongly agree with this statement, and 37% somewhat agree). That helps pave the way for more C-suite involvement in brand communications, with two-thirds (68%) of marketing and comms leaders planning to increase use of senior executives in storytelling in the coming year. In fact, 95% of respondents recognize the importance of their CEO/President (or other senior executive) being an effective storyteller.

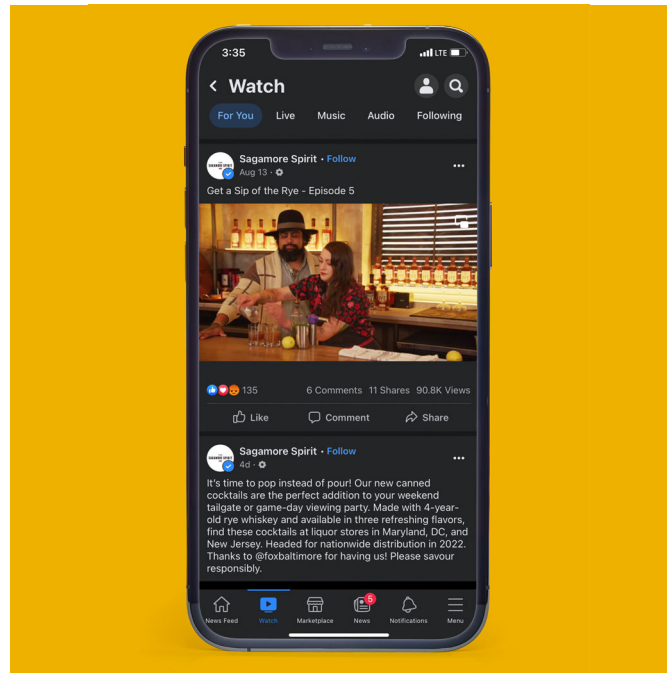
We've witnessed first-hand more companies leveraging their most senior executives for storytelling, and the benefits are undeniable.

2/3 of marketers plan to increase the use of their C-suite executives in storytelling

Media appreciate having access to the top, and senior leaders enable us to tell more compelling stories, with their broad view and insights to the categories they play in, in addition to in-depth knowledge about their own businesses. A prime example is 360 client Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH), the leading K-12 edtech company serving an impressive 90% of US schools. HMH President & CEO Jack Lynch has been a powerful spokesperson for the company's digital transformation and doesn't shy away from tough topics in the news cycle, viewing those moments as opportunities to elevate and differentiate HMH.



HMH CEO Jack Lynch appears on CNBC as part of a recent virtual press tour to discuss HMH's Educator Confidence Report and how teachers have moved "from tech-hesitant to tech-proficient" to help students make gains, according to Lynch.



Diverse Influencers, Media & Content Key to Increasing Brand Reach

Marketing leaders are realizing the importance of connecting with broader groups of people, with 98% of respondents saying they have taken steps to reach diverse audiences. However, there is room for improvement, with 40% saying they have partnered with diverse influencers and slightly more (42%) saying they're focused on creating content that represents all audiences. By way of example, 360 recently paired Sagamore Spirit with Baltimore native and **lifestyle influencer Jason Bass** for a recurring segment on Sagamore Spirit's live monthly broadcast, **"Get A Sip Of The Rye,"** launched on Facebook earlier this year. The ongoing series has exceeded every benchmark for tune-in and engagement.

INCREASING BRAND REACH

40%

partnering with diverse influencers

49%

advertising with diverse media

37%

focused on publicity with diverse media

42%

creating content that represents all audiences

Virtual Events Here to Stay

About half (54%) of marketing and comms leaders expect to hold more in-person events next year, but interest in virtual events remains high – with 44% saying they'll increase virtual events in 2022. And who can blame them? Virtual events can be incredibly efficient, enabling brands to reach a bigger audience



Live from Trek Bicycle's HQ, media heard from Trek master mechanics and got a close-up look at new bike models.

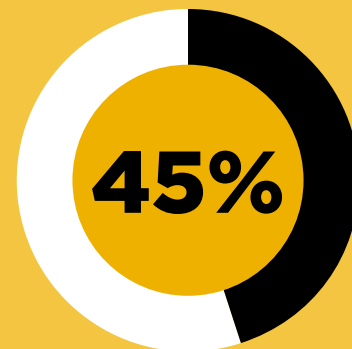
for less, while providing engaging content that can easily live on brand channels and be repurposed for both b2b and b2c customers. In Spring 2021, 360 worked with Trek Bicycle to host a first-ever Trek Master Class for Media, helping media, and in turn their audiences, get

their bikes road-ready and consider a new bike. The one-hour event gave media an inside look at Trek's Waterloo, Wisconsin HQ, without any travel costs, and resulted in coverage for Trek in a range of lifestyle media for several months.

Expect Brands to be Bolder

Social justice moved to center stage in 2020, and that's had a lasting impact with the marketing and comms leaders we surveyed. Eighty-two percent said they expect their brands to take more stands on social issues moving forward, and 57% wish their organization was willing to take more risk.

Nine in 10 marketing and comms leaders (91%) believe company culture plays a role in setting their brand apart. Related to culture, 58% say they'll prioritize purpose as part of their brand communication strategy in 2022, and 45% say they will focus on activating employees as brand advocates – an opportunity to connect the dots between internal and external comms.



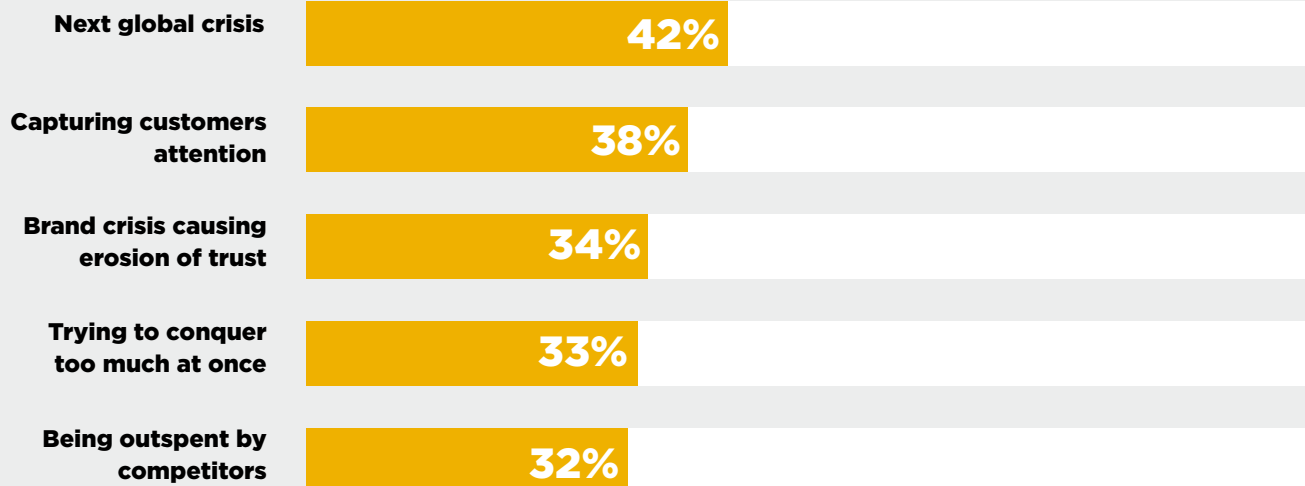
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Preparing for the Next Crisis

Finally, when asked what the biggest threat was to their company or brand's success, the top answer for 42% of respondents was the next global crisis (e.g., pandemic, economic collapse, climate event, etc.). A third (34%) said they're also worried about the potential of a crisis

specific to their brand that leads to erosion of customer trust. Regardless of the root cause, the pandemic has taught us the importance of being prepared to respond in real-time to the issues that your stakeholders care about – and that can be a growing list today.

TOP 5 BIGGEST THREATS TO SUCCESS



QUESTIONS? Contact Daniel Novak, dnovak@360PR.plus.