

Agency Business Report 2022: TikTok, the metaverse and NFTs emerge as trends in 2021

The consumer sector still leans heavily on the power of influencers, but it's the new buzzwords that agencies need to educate themselves on.

by [Diana Bradley](#) / Added 8 hours ago



In collaboration with Netflix's "Bridgerton," Tanqueray launched its Make it T-Time campaign starring singer Joe Jonas and superfan and comedian Phoebe Robinson. (Credit: Tanqueray)

Alison Brod Marketing + Communications owner Alison Brod

2021 saw the return of the retail consumer and people back out and about again. Embracing this, Alison Brod Marketing + Communications created a few pop-ups that don't actually sell anything. For instance, the agency was behind a Coors activation

called Future Mart, meant to hype the removal of plastic rings from all global packaging by 2025.

More brands are also using humor to bring historically taboo topics, such as menopause and incontinence, to life, says the agency's owner Alison Brod. In April, Fridababy and Frida Mom held an event where celebrities Serena Williams and Chrissy Teigen discussed pregnancy's unglamorous side.

Brod has also seen more billboards and print ads being used as PR assets. Popeyes launched its We Come in Piece chicken nugget campaign with a *New York Times* print ad, which was a play on the "chicken wars" caused by the introduction of its now iconic chicken sandwich.



More billboards and print ads were used as PR assets in 2021, with Popeyes going big on its We Come in Piece chicken nugget launch campaign.

“We suggested the brand ease the pain of competitors who would lose sales, and keep the ‘peace’ by buying 1 million chicken nuggets, which were done in the form of gift cards from chains and donated to Second Harvest,” says Brod.

Crazy and fun collaborations will continue, she predicts, as will attention-getting food ideas with unexpected flavors.

Hunter CEO Grace Leong

With supply shortages affecting certain products and making some unavailable in stores, many had to preserve brand equity and prevent consumers from permanently switching to other brands, says Hunter CEO Grace Leong.

The pandemic also led to a rise in new businesses, with nearly 5.4 million startup applications filed in 2021, based on Census data, many requiring promotional advice.

“All those businesses are creating new entrepreneurs and they need consumer marketing help,” says Leong.

On social media, meanwhile, TikTok, Twitter and metaverses are booming. But Facebook and Instagram are getting filled with promoted content.

“Will consumers accept that it’s the new Times Square where you see all the billboards?” she says. “Will they still go to those platforms because that’s all it is — no more personal content?”

Leong predicts brands will try to be more interactive with their marketing, “combining IRL with digital,” similar to Coinbase’s QR code ad, which ran during Super Bowl LVI.

Despite warnings of inflation, consumers are still spending money on goods, travel and parties after denying themselves for so long amid the COVID-19 crisis. However, Leong warns “the cliff is coming.”

Coyne PR EVP Lisa Wolleon

Some consumer marketing trends are holding steady. Coyne PR EVP Lisa Wolleon is seeing a continued focus on purpose for brands.

“It’s not just about being functional — consumers want an emotional tie to a brand and seek out those that are authentic to who they are,” she says. “Brands that demonstrate a true impact on society are the ones that create great consumer loyalty.”

Wolleon also sees influencers becoming a staple in integrated comms plans.

“Consumers are looking more and more to influencers they trust,” she explains. “It is not about likes and reshares anymore. It’s about trust and credibility.”

Coyne has leaned into digitally and socially led programs. “So much now starts in social and stems into mainstream media,” Wolleon says.

The agency is bringing more clients onto TikTok, such as Peeps, which joined the platform in March 2022. “This is a good opportunity to bring forth the ‘peepsonality’ of the brand to consumers in a fun, lighthearted way,” adds Wolleon.

The agency is keeping an eye on the metaverse, which Wolleon says comes up in almost every client brainstorm.

DKC EVP of consumer lifestyle Taryn Owens

An influx of celebrities are starting their own companies. For example, Harry Styles, Ariana Grande and Jennifer Aniston entered the beauty industry with their own brands in 2021.

“For many years we’ve seen celebrities used as a spokesperson or endorsement or one-off campaign,” says DKC EVP of consumer lifestyle Taryn Owens. “We’re now seeing celebrities who want equity; they want to get into the consumer space as a founder and owner or invest in brands they have a passion for and become part of the C-suite or board or executive team.”

Unexpected collaborations are also ramping up. When ice cream maker Van Leeuwen and Kraft Heinz teamed up to create a limited-edition [macaroni and cheese-flavored ice cream](#), it dominated the news cycle, notes Owens.

“It was a smart idea for both sides from a brand awareness perspective,” she says. “People like the unexpected.”

Interest in DE&I is also growing, with many clients asking for counsel on navigating that space, investing in communities and programs that support BIPOC consumers and other groups. DKC formed its DKCulture practice last year to focus on that.

Clients are asking for campaigns that include social and digital, influencers and experiential elements. New asks include the metaverse and NFTs.

Day One Agency CEO Josh Rosenberg

“Inclusive exclusivity” is an area more brands are delving into, says Day One Agency CEO Josh Rosenberg, especially in relation to building and activating communities on platforms such as Twitter Spaces and Discord.

“That’s almost an extension of the drop model, where brands are creating limited-edition products to build hype and then building community around those products,” he says.

Omega and Swatch's partnership in March to create a collection of 11 models called the MoonSwatch stood out to Rosenberg.

"They had lines around the stores. It helped reinvigorate both brands and a huge community online was talking about it," he says.

Rosenberg has also seen an uptick in brands eschewing external media to tell their stories. Last September, unisex apparel label Telfar launched Telfar.TV.

"More brands are publishing and distributing themselves, versus going through a network," he explains.

Other consumer trends Rosenberg noticed in 2021 included innovation around electric vehicles; internet conversation impacting stock prices for AMC Entertainment and GameStop; and interest around NFTs.

In 2022, he's monitoring the metaverse and the rise of the "editfluencer," journalists and creators building audiences through their own newsletters, podcasts and social media channels.

LaForce president Olita Mills

Last year, LaForce president Olita Mills continued to see the rise of the creator economy and brands working to support creators in various ways.

"Brands are going beyond tapping influencers or creators for one-off things," says Mills. "They are working with dedicated people they can grow with, who are entrenched in the brand and help connect with the consumer."

She adds that creators are a "valid and important part of a business class that is coming."

Most brands now do dedicated programs on TikTok, working with influencers on the platform to reach Gen Z. But Mills warns brands should continue to have multiple touchpoints. "Not ignoring any social channel or traditional media channel is important," she says.

LaForce has also worked on a number of NFT programs in recent months. "People are trying to figure out how to tap into that space," says Mills.

Campaign highlights

Hunter: In collaboration with Netflix’s second season of *Bridgerton*, Tanqueray launched its Make it T-Time campaign starring singer Joe Jonas, who learns “how to become a Bridgerton” with the help of Jonathan Bailey, who plays Anthony Bridgerton, and show superfan and comedian Phoebe Robinson.

“An example of being in a moment of culture and what consumers are paying attention to and having an authentic story for a brand,” says Hunter CEO Grace Leong.

Coyne: After conducting a survey in which 72% of parents said they felt their family didn’t spend enough time outdoors, Claritin developed The Outsideologist Project to fix that. Country star and dad Thomas Rhett was brought on as the official spokesperson.

“A purpose-driven mission rooted in changing consumer behavior,” says Coyne EVP Lisa Wolleon. “We knew aligning it with authentic voices to show up in those relevant places to break through was critical.”

DKC: Hello Bello, maker of baby and family care products, launched the Diaper Registry Fund in March to take on the critical and growing diaper need that currently affects more than 1 in 3 U.S. families. “Over 10,000 funds have already been created,” says DKC consumer EVP Taryn Owens.



Chipotle Mexican Grill hosted a virtual job fair on the comms platform Discord last May. Over 3,700 people signed up for the brand’s Discord server during the event.

Day One Agency: Chipotle Mexican Grill hosted a virtual job fair on the communications platform Discord last May. Over 3,700 people signed up for the brand's Discord server and 700 to 850 people participated consistently in the event, which included a variety of chatrooms in which Chipotle leaders could talk about benefits and career paths. That same month, the burrito chain said it would raise its average hourly pay to \$15. Both events led to Chipotle receiving 24,000 employment applications in one week.