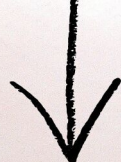


# ADVANCE

JUNE 2023



## The Creative 100

The most groundbreaking and inspiring talents in media, marketing and culture

Keke's  
Key

to  
Creativity

With her new digital platform, Keke Palmer refocuses her spotlight on a new class of creators.

BY EMMY LIEDERMAN

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THE MONTH IN MEDIA AND MARKETING

# Upfront

## IF ANYONE CAN SAVE TWITTER ...

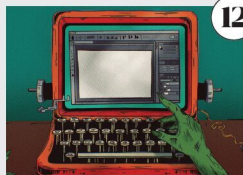
IT'S NEW CEO LINDA YACCARINO. BY TRISHLA OSTWAL



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Celebrating the powerful and sustaining force of human creativity.



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For a mental break from his agency job, Ian Sohn runs marathons.

**COVER**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRACY NGUYEN FOR ADWEEK

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**Elon Musk's** pick of NBCU ad sales chief Linda Yaccarino to lead Twitter—her first day on the job was June 5—has left marketers on the edge of their seats.

"I have an unbelievable level of confidence in Linda's ability to turn Twitter around," said Lou Paskalis of Ad Fontes Media.

Since Musk's tumultuous takeover last October, the platform has hemorrhaged advertisers. Experts Adweek spoke with outlined a long road to win them back.

**Fix brand safety:** Yaccarino's priority should be restoring Twitter's content moderation tech team that Musk fired, Paskalis suggested. She should also consider reinstating Twitter's "influence council," a group of four dozen marketing execs from former major advertisers.

Reversing the purging of legacy verified blue check marks could be another peace offering to marketers, said Amy Gilbert of The Social Element.

**Compelling ad products:** Avi Ben-Zvi of Tinuti suggested improving the performance, consideration or awareness part of the funnel. "Can they get back to a place where they're developing interesting ad products while emphasizing safety and ad revenue for advertisers?" he said.

**Controlling Musk:** Ultimately, the question industry leaders still ask is whether Yaccarino can rein in Twitter's new owner. "Linda can hit the ground running," said Paskalis, "unless Musk interferes and loses control of his impulses."



Why mess with a good thing? Because you've got something to promote. After nearly a century on the streets, Oscar Mayer's Wienermobile has been transformed—courtesy of Johannes Leonardo, Zeno Group and Kraft-Heinz's in-house marketing team The Kitchen—into the Frankmobile. The brand is shifting away from wieners to all-beef franks: Wiener Whistles are now Frank Whistles, Hotdogs are Frankfurters, and anyone named Frank gets a coupon for the new hot dogs for stopping by the iconic, 27-foot vehicle this summer. —Sara Century



### BIG NUMBER

15

**CBS TAKES THE TOP SPOT IN LINEAR TV VIEWERSHIP FOR THE 15TH TIME IN THE 2022-23 SEASON**

### ON THE MOVE



**Chris Licht** is out after a turbulent 13 months at the helm of **CNN**



After 33 years in the industry, **Conny Braams** exits **Unilever**



**Diego Scotti** is leaving as **Verizon** CMO for 'new challenges'

### INSIGHTS

## FROM NIKE TO MASERATI

Davide Grasso has been CMO of Nike, CEO of Converse, and now heads up Maserati, taking the carmaker from deep red into the black in less than four years.

He shared his marketing wisdom exclusively with Adweek. Here's the first tip; find the rest at adweek.com.

**1. Trends in other categories will affect your category.** SUVs have transformed from practical vehicles into status objects. Grasso saw this coming because of jeans. "Twenty years ago, I was in the U.S. and there were two or three types of denim over \$100—now, there's like a thousand," he said.

So look out for brands that seemingly distant ways are changing right now, because that change can easily leapfrog into another segment. —Robert Klara

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES; CREATIVITY: UNILEVER; DAVE GRASSO: GETTY IMAGES; MASERATI: MASERATI; NIKE: NIKE; CONVERSE: CONVERSE; TIMBERLAND: TIMBERLAND; KACY SUBLETTE: KACY SUBLETTE; OSCAR MAYER: OSCAR MAYER; FRANK WHISTLES: FRANK WHISTLES; HOT DOGS: HOT DOGS; IAN SOHN: IAN SOHN; CHRIS LICHT: CHRIS LICHT; CONNY BRAAMS: CONNY BRAAMS; DIEGO SCOTTI: DIEGO SCOTTI

## LESSONS LEARNED

## TAMARA LITTLETON

THE SOCIAL ELEMENT FOUNDER PIONEERED REMOTE WORK AND PRIORITIZED INCLUSIVITY BEFORE IT WAS COOL.

BY KATHRYN LUNDSTROM

In 2002, Tamara Littleton founded her agency, Emoderation, to help brands create communities online. That was before the era of MySpace, when the most popular social media platform was Friendster.

"It was the dot-com boom days," Littleton recalled. "I was working in content and communities, and I had a vision about that. I felt very strongly that brands would want to be in online communities."

That vision, of course, turned out to be more true than most people could have imagined. More than two decades later, Emoderation has rebranded to The Social Element—to recognize the agency's social media



focus—and now employs about 280 people, working with multinational brands including Oreo, Peloton, Visa and Dr Pepper.

become the agency-of-the-future model," she said.

### Learn to cede control

As the company has grown, Littleton has been forced to delegate major operational responsibilities to her staff, which wasn't easy at first for the self-described "control freak."

Littleton has learned over the years that staying relevant requires bringing in fresh perspectives. Hiring and promoting people like Ashley Cooksley, CEO for North America; Kendall DiBella, managing director for North America; and Linn Frost, managing director for Europe, has been critical to The Social Element's continued growth, she said.

"What's vital for the growth of an agency, to keep innovating and to make sure that we're at the cutting edge: You have to let go," Littleton said. "You find people better than you, and then you stand back and let them be entrepreneurial themselves."

### Stick to your guns

Littleton established the agency as a remote-first company from the beginning, long before Covid-19. Being fully remote had financial incentives: As a startup, her budget was lean and she didn't think it made sense to pay for office space.

It also allowed her to build a diverse and internationally representative workforce. But it wasn't always easy.

"It felt like people were kind of questioning it," she said. "They would often say, 'Well, how do you trust the people are working for you, and how do you keep them motivated?'"

Looking back, Littleton feels she let those concerns shake her belief in a model that she knew was working well for her company and her employees—and one that, following the pandemic, "has

### Use your platform for positive change

As an openly queer female founder, Littleton has also learned the value of using her platform as a way to push for positive social change. "It took me a little while to actually realize I had that privilege, but also I had a responsibility to speak up," she said.

Over time, Littleton began to realize the value of simply being open about her identity and experience, serving as a role model in public forums and running The Social Element in an intentionally inclusive manner.

"It's never been a big deal that I've been out. That, again, is a privilege because so many people join our industry and either go back in the closet or don't feel safe to be themselves in different agencies or [on the] brand side," Littleton said.

"It's all about normalization and representation, about what can I do to make sure that everyone always felt safe at my agency."

### WORK HISTORY

Before 2002, Littleton didn't exactly have a linear career path. She "fell into publishing": After college, Littleton joined a hockey team in London, and the team captain hired her as a publishing assistant for an engineering trade magazine. There, she helped with the group's digital transition in the early days of the web.

That led to a job at Chapman and Hall (now Thomson Science), and subsequent roles in online operations and web publishing at the BBC Online and internet provider Chello Broadband. After Chello offered her voluntary redundancy, she took the leap and founded her agency.

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# CREATIVELY SHARING THE SPOTLIGHT

AFTER BREAKING DOWN DOORS FOR TWO DECADES, KEKE PALMER HEADLINES THIS YEAR'S CREATIVE 100.



**WHEN I WORKED** at People magazine earlier in my career, the staff would regularly host meet-and-greets with up-and-coming performers, who would try to charm their way into being offered a magazine profile that, their respective teams hoped, would help them become the next big thing. However, many of those encounters were instantly forgettable, and more often than not, that person would never break through in a meaningful way. But every once in a long while, our guest would make an instant, indelible impact—which was definitely the case when I met Keke Palmer some 15 years ago.

At that time, Palmer was wrapping up her run on Nickelodeon's True Jackson, VP, and was preparing to navigate the near-impossible feat of transitioning from kids TV star into a more substantive acting career. Few have been able to pull it off—but even back then, it was clear that Palmer had the confidence, verve and determination to make it happen. She was whip-smart, and while hungry for success, she also wasn't interested in conforming to whatever box Hollywood wanted to put her in.

Now, 15 years later, that same drive and resolve have helped Palmer blaze her own distinctive path. She did it her way, and now,

with her digital platform KeyTV, she wants to share the spotlight, giving opportunities to diverse creators that never existed for her. In our cover story, Palmer spoke with Emmy Liederman about finding her voice and sharing her industry expertise with the next generation of creatives, especially when it comes to navigating the business.

As she uses her artistry and innovation to help reshape the industry, Palmer was the ideal face of this year's Creative 100—overseen by European creativity editor Brittaney Kiefer—which recognizes visionary talent breaking ground across advertising, marketing, media and much more. That extraordinary lineup of Creative 100 honorees, in turn, is part of our June theme around Creativity x Culture, examining the intersection between creativity and business. It's a conversation that we'll continue later this month at the Cannes Lions



**Jason Lynch**  
Senior Managing Editor,  
TV and Features  
@jasonlynch

International Festival of Creativity, where from June 18-22, Adweek will gather some of the most influential voices in marketing and advertising to talk about the business case for creativity over a series of panels and fireside chats on the beach at Whalar House.

Plus, after you've read this issue, you can find even more in-depth features examining this theme in our expanded Creativity x Culture digital package online (scan the QR code below), which includes a deeper dive into perhaps the starkest example yet of the complicated relationship between the industry's creative and business interests: how the prolonged WGA strike could upend this year's upfront negotiations.

Whether you're reading these stories on La Croisette or your couch, they should provide you with plenty of creative inspiration.



**THE CREATIVE 100**

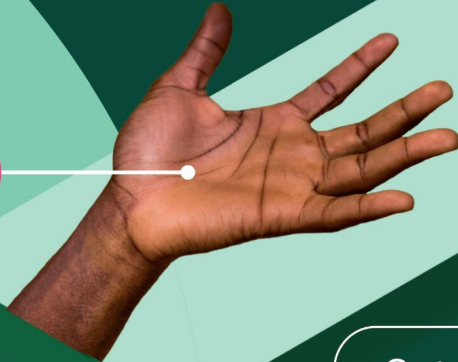
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# Insights



## What to Expect From This Year's Cannes Lions

THE FESTIVAL TURNS 70 WITH MORE BRAND MARKETERS, LOTS OF AI TALK—AND INCREASED REPRESENTATION. **BY STEPHEN LEPITAK AND REBECCA STEWART**



It's been 70 years since Cannes Lions first took over La Croisette. The International Festival of Creativity has now become the preeminent event in the advertising industry's calendar, with thousands of delegates from around the world swarming to the South of France each June.

As Cannes Lions turns 70, this year's festival—taking place June 19-23—is looking to the future under the theme of "In the Making." Cannes Lions CEO Simon Cook told Adweek that there would be "a few surprises" throughout the week to honor the event's heritage, with sessions focused on "looking forward and resetting for the next 70 years."

This year's festival highlights include the June 23 final awards ceremony and a showcase of winning work over the past seven decades.

New for 2023 is the "Creative Impact" content track, introduced following feedback from 2022 delegates who asked for a greater focus on creativity.

But beyond the official programs and events, the festival is seeing an uptick of interest and attendance from brand marketers, who flock to Cannes primarily to conduct pitches and strike deals.

"Marketers increasingly understand that growth can't happen without long-term investment in both brand and performance, and they're moving away from the short-term thinking of the past," said Michael Kassan, CEO of MediaLink (which will have its own daily programming during the festival). "They're coming to Cannes not just to be inspired, but to get down to business: inking the deals, forming the partnerships, and writing the strategies that will take them through the second half of the year and beyond."

Kassan also expects a big presence this year from streaming platforms and retail media networks, which first got a taste for the festival in 2022. "We can also expect a bigger presence from creators, especially as brands increasingly seek them out for efficiency and authenticity," he said.

## All about AI

Once marketers have landed, slung on their Birkenstocks and worked out the lay of the land, they will likely spend much of their festival time talking about artificial intelligence. With machine learning set to uproot the creative, advertising and media industries, nervous agency execs want to figure out what AI will mean for their business models, while clients will seek out meetings with the pioneers behind this new technology.

On June 20, Brad Lightcap, CEO

## ADWEEK'S CANNES PLAN

As usual, Adweek will have a can't-miss presence at the Cannes Lions festival. From June 18-22, we'll be joined by some of the most influential voices in marketing, creativity and advertising—including FYI CEO and founder will.i.am, Instacart CMO Laura Jones, Walmart svp and CMO William White and Andréa Mallard, chief marketing and communications officer for Pinterest—to discuss the business case for creativity over a series of panels and fireside chats on the beach at Whalar House. On June 20, we will also celebrate this year's Brand Genius honorees, who will be featured in Adweek's July issue.

at OpenAI—the company behind fast-growing generative AI tools like Dall-E and ChatGPT—is sitting on a session with Goodby Silverstein & Partners about how these tools will affect the future of creativity.

Having launched its own conversational chatbot, Bard, Google has hinted it will be capitalizing on marketers' appetites for AI solutions on the Google Beach via "discussions on AI's creative possibilities and how it can help businesses now," a Google spokesperson told Adweek.

Instacart CMO Laura Jones is eager to discuss her company's new AI tools during the week, including on June 19 as part of Adweek's own Cannes Lions programming lineup (see sidebar). "I'm excited to not only share how we're deploying AI and machine learning to enhance our product and creative outputs, but learn from my peers and industry leaders on how their companies are leveraging AI for good," said Jones.

## Awards highlights

While AI talk might dominate the week, Cannes is still primarily about awarding humans for their creativity.

In 2023, the number of award categories has grown with the introduction of Creative Maker of the Year, which will go to legendary filmmaker Spike Lee.

In another shake-up, a gaming award called the Entertainment Lions for Gaming will celebrate creative work that has connected people to brands through gameplay. With brands like Nike and Lego having entered the metaverse realm in the last 12 months, tapping into platforms including Roblox and Decentraland, there will be no shortage of entries for judges to consider.



Adweek abroad at Cannes in 2022

"Finally, gaming has its own category," said Mark Eaves, founder of London-based digital agency Gravity Road. "For too long, it's been pinned onto the broader entertainment landscape, when it is its own very nuanced combination of creative and audience engagement."

Elsewhere, the heavily restrictive pharma category has also been revamped to sit alongside the rest of the health and wellness ad category, which aims to raise up work that brings science and innovation to life.

The jury president for this year's Health and Wellness Lions, Mel Routhier, chief creative officer at VML&R Chicago, said there is "no doubt" that "the continued elevation of great thinking that's raising the bar of what's possible in this space" will be reflected in the 2023 winners.

"Brands are increasingly looking to spotlight the importance of understanding and supporting the health of the human mind. It's going to be fascinating to see the innovations coming through," said Routhier. "With AI also continuing to trend—should we take bets on how many AI ideas we'll see?—the health industry is evolving at warp speed."

## Improving Riviera representation

While Cannes Lions has long had a diversity, equity and inclusion track, advocacy groups have criticized it for failing to make diverse groups feel connected and included in what, at times, can feel like a very exclusive space.

That could change this year, as Cephas Williams, founder of the Black British Network, and Cannes CEO Cook have launched "Black Out 2023," a new campaign to drive Black

representation at Cannes Lions. The "Black Out 2023" program will see the festival secure attendance for up to 50 Black ad professionals, with flights, accommodation and associated costs financed by industry backers.

"Black Out" gives Black talent the authentic proximity they need to develop themselves personally and within the industry, building meaningful relationships while connecting with a community of people on a similar mission," said Williams.

The festival will also work with advocacy groups PerifaLions, the Black Executive CMO Alliance (BECA) and the Britton Finishing School to ensure talent is represented on the ground and given access to events at this year's festival.

Black at Cannes has been supporting the organizers with the New Creative Maker of the Year Award, while The Cannes Car: Diversity Collective will bring its Inkwell Beach back for the fifth year to highlight diversity, equity and inclusion.

A collective of women-focused industry bodies [Bloom and WACL] have partnered to offer female delegates "a safe space" within a beach space being hosted by Women in Programmatic across the week, too.

Meanwhile, Google is serving as Cannes Lions' official accessibility partner, helping ensure the festival itself is built for people with disabilities. This includes providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and using Live Transcribe for real-time captioning.

The tech giant will also host an official Pride celebration showing solidarity and support for the LGBTQ+ community.

# True LGBTQ+ Brand Allies Can't Run Away

AS THE NHL, AB INBEV AND TARGET STUMBLE IN THEIR SUPPORT, GEN Z CONSUMERS SAY THEY'LL REWARD COURAGEOUS COMPANIES.

BY JASON NOTTE



**Each February since 2017**, the National Hockey League has touted its "Hockey Is for Everyone" month, focusing on DEI initiatives. Anheuser-Busch InBev has claimed in its corporate diversity, equity and inclusion statement that "a future with more cheers is one where everyone belongs." And Target touts on its website, "Being true to yourself and your community is something to celebrate, all year long."

Their Pride-celebrating, diversity-embracing webpages still say that. But as Pride Month arrives, they haven't just backpedaled from those ideals this year—they've seemingly sprinted in the opposite direction.

Earlier this year, multiple NHL teams abruptly dropped plans to wear Pride-themed jerseys during warm-ups as part of their respective Pride Night events, blaming संबुद्ध concerns about religious teachings and Russian anti-LGBTQ laws. AB InBev created a few Bud Light cans featuring transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney's face to celebrate March Madness and her "day 365 of womanhood," but responded to right-wing backlash by putting marketing executives

on leave, abandoning Mulvaney entirely and offering statements about "bringing people together over a beer" while framing the brand's partnership with Mulvaney as "one can, one influencer, one post and not a campaign."

Target, meanwhile, pulled products celebrating the trans community from its stores after bigots destroyed in-store displays and threatened staff. The retail chain cited "safety" concerns for its decision.

Skulking away from LGBTQ+ influencers and audiences doesn't sit well with many young consumers. Collage Group, a culture-based consumer research organization serving more than 300 brand partners, released a survey in April noting that 55% of Gen Zers 18-22 were unhappy with the way their sexuality was portrayed in advertising. That jumped to 65% for LGBTQ+ members of that group. Though roughly 1 in 5 adults 18-22 would reward brands that challenged gender stereotypes by buying their products and services, 56% of LGBTQ+ Gen Z felt the same.

"Every brand needs to be prepared to stand by their decisions," said Eric

Bloem, senior director of programs and corporate advocacy at Human Rights Campaign, which suspended AB from its Corporate Equality Index in May for the brand's reaction to the backlash. "Businesses shouldn't be shying away from opportunities to be engaged with these important market segments—the LGBTQ+ community. All of us are part of the fabric of society, and that's not going to change."

## 'Actionable, measurable change'

According to Gallup, 7.2% of people in the United States identify as LGBTQ+, a figure that has nearly doubled over the last decade. That percentage jumps to 11.2% for millennials (ages 26-42) and almost 20% for Gen Z (18-25).

But broader, more confident identity hasn't made life easier for the younger LGBTQ+ community. According to Collage Group, 57% of LGBTQ+ Gen Z have experienced discrimination, and 63% say that discrimination has affected their ability to find employment. As a result, another 38% said their mental health has declined over the past year.

Allies within the advertising industry have noticed and are doing their best to make brands understand those audiences' needs. Rana Reeves founded his RanaVerse creative agency in 2018 and works with brands including Coach, Airbnb, Citi and Smirnoff to have direct conversations about cultural issues, find middle ground and have them support societal change both effectively and authentically.

"The first thing for me that you look at is, 'What is the actionable, measurable change for good that your work can do for that community, so that it's not performative?'" Reeves said. "Putting Dylan's face on a can on TikTok is not going to change queer homelessness, queer suicide rates or queer food insecurity."

## Putting in the long-term work

Even in an environment where the HRC counted more than 520 pieces of anti-LGBTQ legislation introduced at the state level since the start of 2023, Reeves noted that brands like Nike and Disney have had more success pushing back against bigotry because of their prior support of marginalized groups. Reeves said that public outcry against Maybelline for teaming with Mulvaney ended up being far less than that against AB and Bud Light largely because of Maybelline's more committed context and more accepting consumer demographic.

Katya Skogen, Collage Group's director of cultural insights, used Oreo's "Proud Parent" campaign from 2020 as just one example of how brands must stand their ground and maintain support if they want to earn the trust and loyalty of LGBTQ+ consumers.

Oreo's PFLAG partnership for National Coming Out Day included a spot showing a young woman bringing home her girlfriend for the first time, a #ProudParent social media campaign and a website where parents could get more information and support. More importantly, Oreo maintained its partnership with PFLAG and stuck to its message in the years that followed.

"They put their money where their mouth is, and then wrapped it up in a nice, beautiful piece of marketing collateral as well," Skogen said. "Everybody has to start somewhere, but that is something that now Oreo can continue building onto going forward."



JASON NOTTE IS AN ADWEEK STAFF WRITER COVERING BRAND MARKETING. @NOTTEHAM



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# Making the Business Case for Creativity

THESE BIG BRAND SWINGS PROVE THAT WELL-EXECUTED CREATIVE MOST RELIABLY REAPS REWARDS. **BY KYLE O'BRIEN**

## Upwork had an awareness problem.

The freelancing platform had been around since 2013, but it didn't have wide recognition in the industry. Along came agency Alto with a creative idea based on the fact that the old ways of working were dead, using a zombified CEO to drive home the point.

"This is How We Work Now" features the dead CEO, Jack, singing about how his ways shouldn't be the ways of the future. The epic ad, and its many iterations, jacked up awareness of the company. In the six months following the campaign's launch in September 2022, unaided awareness grew more than 30%, with unaided awareness among large businesses increasing by more than 140%. From the third to fourth quarters of 2022, ad recall jumped 45% among large businesses, with 58% growth in top-of-mind awareness, according to Upwork's earnings call.

While the ad world is always enamored with the latest tools—like AI, data and VR—creativity is the constant that moves the needle when executed correctly. But to the chagrin of creatives, creativity has increasingly

taken a back seat over the past decade to those shiny objects. Some brands like Upwork, Tinder and Ocean Spray are bucking trends and leading with well-informed creative to not only entertain and inform, but also make a strong business case for top creative ideas.

"Putting your brand out there and having a take on the world will be more important than ever, and that's where creativity comes in," said Hannes Ciatti, founder and chief creative officer at Alto.

## Don't be ignorable

Tinder snagged a reputation as a hookup app, but the brand aspired to be more than that. It tapped agency Mischief @ No Fixed Address to unearth ways to show people they can find lasting love on Tinder as well.

"It Starts With a Swipe," Tinder's first global campaign, succeeded with its target Gen Z market, thanks to creative driven by real insights on love and connection from singles around the world, according to Melissa Holey, CMO at Tinder.

"When Mischief shared that a

'one-night stand' often turns into 'two-night stands,' I think my jaw dropped. It exactly hit on the perception shift that reflects real data: 40% of people on Tinder are looking for something serious," said Holey, who previously worked with Mischief at dating app OkCupid and saw the power of building a creative process based in consumer truths.

"People make decisions emotionally. The goal for us is to find a human insight that touches some sort of emotion. Honestly, we feel like the riskiest thing that a brand can do is be ignorable," said Kevin Mulroy, partner and executive creative director at Mischief, adding that it was critical for the creatives to know "what we're doing exactly, what we're trying to say, and to whom we're saying it before we start to try to execute."

To Mulroy, it's not about selling clients ideas, but rather solving "business problems with creativity." In other words, good creativity doesn't happen without doing a lot of legwork.

"You can't unlock growth and new thinking without wicked, brilliant creativity," said Holey. "What happens

if you don't champion creativity? One answer: You can kill your brand."

## Finding the right cultural moment

Great creative should spark discussion, push boundaries and create meaningful connections with consumers, but should be rooted in universal human insights and mirror culture to make those connections.

Ocean Spray decided to lean into the moments when its cranberry sauce makes people happiest: during the holidays. Its "Power Your Holidays" campaign from agency Orchard Creative went viral for the way it highlighted the sauce's jiggle as a party starter.

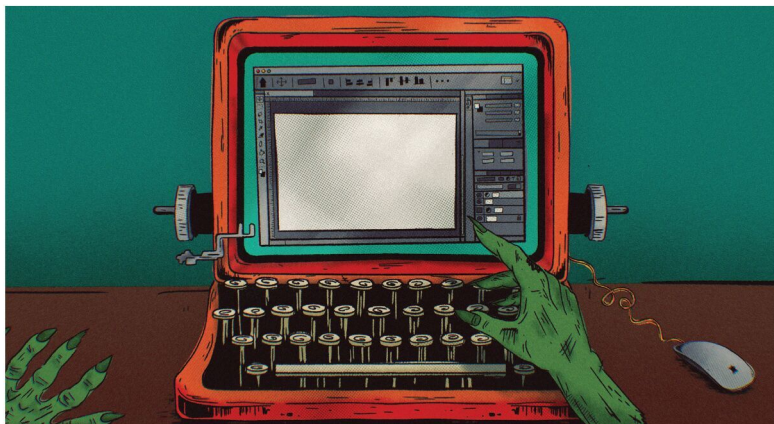
Eliza Sadler, head of brand elevation at Ocean Spray, said that to make a case for creativity as a core part of a brand's advertising efforts, brands and their agencies must identify a cultural moment and own it, unlock a key universal truth and be authentic.

In Ocean Spray's case, it's the "power to transform the boring or mundane to fun. We embrace what makes us uniquely Ocean Spray and lean into it unapologetically—embrace the cult love people have for cranberry sauce, the jiggle in all its glory," said Sadler.

## Relatable and relevant

Creativity is always a moving target, but a good idea based on solid insight will always help brands make a case for leaning into creativity.

"A good creative campaign brings to life our role in consumers' lives. It should feel relatable, human and relevant to culture today and be born from the uniquely ownable story we want to tell," said Sadler. "It shouldn't feel manufactured or be a moment in time."



KYLE O'BRIEN IS AN AGENCIES REPORTER AT ADWEEK. HE PREVIOUSLY WORKED AT THE DRUM. @KOBRIE

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**'Dove has evolved from a bar soap to an agent of change.'**

**Take a stand**

According to a survey commissioned by the Dove Self-Esteem Project, about 76% of young people in the U.S. say social media makes them want to change their appearance. Mary's story is the story of so many young girls around the world.

The film, which has been viewed more than 19 million times, is part of a joint campaign with advocacy groups Common Sense Media and ParentsTogether Action to advance the Kids Online Safety Act in Congress. The legislation would create design standards and safeguards that protect children online.

Brands can play a role in creating a more equitable society and standing up for their consumers. Partnering with nonprofits and community-based organizations is an important way to build a brand's understanding of the issues and earn credibility when it comes to taking action. In turn, brands can use the power of their platforms to support meaningful legislation.

The Cost of Beauty and political activism are meaningful steps to ensuring that Mary's story does not continue to be repeated. We need more brands like Dove working to solve societal problems.

# Brand Purpose In Action

ONCE AGAIN, DOVE DEMONSTRATES HOW TO SHOW UP FOR CONSUMERS. **BY MITA MALLICK**

The negative impact of social media is back in the headlines, and Dove's latest campaign film, *The Cost of Beauty*, depicts just one of the real stories that happen when girls and women are faced with impossible standards of beauty.

In the film (pictured above), a woman named Mary develops an eating disorder as a result of consuming unrealistic images. The cost of beauty for Mary is a battle for her life.

While social media can foster innovation and build community, it's also one of the biggest threats to children: 8 in 10 youth mental health specialists say that social media is fueling a crisis among young people. For girls, the impossible—and, often, unhealthy—beauty standards they see online can lead to a negative body image, eating disorders and even

suicidal thoughts.

Dove's ongoing campaign calling out these toxic standards shows how brands can take on the responsibility of using their platforms to be a force for good, especially when our policymakers aren't stepping up to intervene.

## Understand how you can have an impact

When it comes to personal health, Dove has evolved from a bar soap to an agent of change. The brand started the work of challenging beauty standards back in 2004 with "The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty," which used real women of different races and body types. The brand's marketers understand that they can have an impact on the specific challenge of toxic beauty standards.

Marketers, do the research on where your brand has the credibility to stand up for issues that matter to your consumers. Don't race to start talking about climate change, anti-Asian hate crimes, the caregiver crisis or any other issue without understanding whether you can make a credible impact. Attaching your brand to an issue where consumers don't see the connection can do more harm than good.

## Amplify your consumers' voices

Dove has an incredible track record of amplifying what its consumers are saying. The brand understands that its purpose is to amplify Mary's voice, that it is her story to share with the world in her own images and words. And in turn, consumers see themselves in Mary's story.

Marketers, it's time to think bigger. Don't simply use consumer insight to develop a product or "check the box" for a campaign idea.

Find insights that really connect to a bigger story that reveals the consumer's journey, the ups and downs, the struggles and the wins, the highs and the lows. Because when you amplify the voice of one consumer, you amplify and connect to many more.



**Specs**  
**Claim to fame** Author of *Reimagine Inclusion* and head of DEI at Carta  
**Base** New Jersey  
**Twitter** @MitaMallick2

DOVE

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# The Skeptical Consumer

TAKING A STANCE ON SOCIAL ISSUES CAN BACKFIRE—IF BRANDS DON'T MEAN IT. **BY PAUL HIEBERT**

In recent weeks, Target and Bud Light have faced significant backlash for marketing or merchandise that supports LGBTQ+ individuals.

After backpedaling on their positions—Bud Light put two marketing executives on leave; Target stopped selling certain LGBTQ+ items—the brands upset a whole other segment of the population, who called them out for shallow advocacy.

Considering these events, companies may want to reevaluate their level of dedication to social issues this Pride Month. If they're willing to take down their rainbow flags at the first sight of angry tweets, maybe they shouldn't go up to begin with.

People across the board are skeptical of corporate activism. A new survey from Big Village suggests 76% of U.S. adults believe brands only take a stand on

social issues to help generate more sales. If revenue begins to decline, however, most shoppers expect these companies to reverse course.

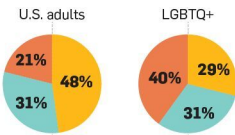
"Brands should take an active approach to managing their engagement with societal and cultural issues," said David Albert, general manager of insights at Big Village, a global advertising, technology and data company.

Additional numbers show more Americans say brands are getting too involved in social issues, compared with those who say brands are doing either the right amount or not enough.

Another aspect to consider: On a global scale, U.S. adults appear less committed to purchasing goods and services from companies that share the same social values than consumers in other nations, according to recent figures from decision intelligence company Morning Consult.

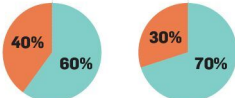
## How involved are brands in social issues?

- Too involved and should stick to business
- Involved to an appropriate degree
- Not involved enough and should do more



## I am willing to boycott a brand that comes out in favor of a social issue I disagree with

- Agree
- Disagree



## Brands only take a stand on social issues to make money

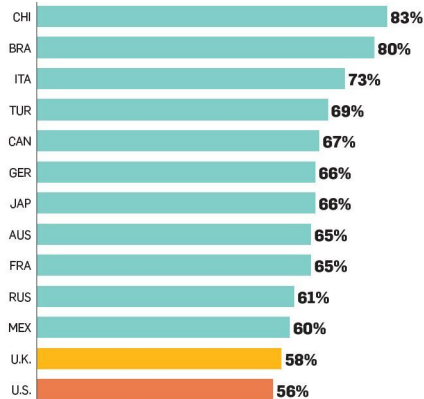
- Agree
- Disagree



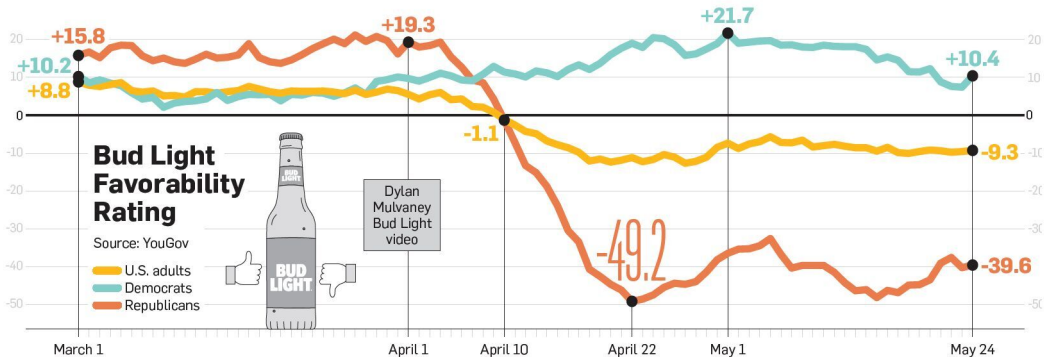
Source: Big Village

## Adults who prefer to buy goods and services from companies that reflect their social values

By country



Source: Morning Consult







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# ADWEEK<sup>®</sup> CREATIVE 100

**T**hough warnings about the death of creativity are nothing new in an age of rapid technological innovation, this year the threat has felt more acute amid economic turmoil and the rise of generative AI. However, for proof that human creativity continues to be a powerful and sustaining force, look no further than the honorees of Adweek's 2023 Creative 100.

Now in its ninth year, the Creative 100 celebrates the most innovative and visionary talent across advertising, marketing, social media, TV and streaming, visual art, literature, filmmaking and more. These figures are helping to shape culture while breaking new ground in their fields. Congratulations to this year's winners—the future of creativity looks bright. —**BRITTANEY KIEFER**



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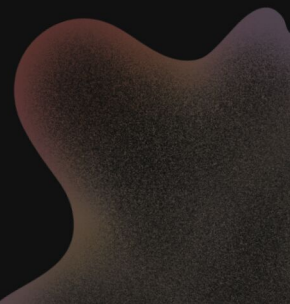
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# Queen of





# Creativity

After spending two decades grabbing creative control, Keke Palmer is sharing it with the next generation of diverse talent on her new KeyTV platform.

BY **EMMY LIEDERMAN**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **TRACY NGUYEN**

# W

earing an ankle-length dress and a glossy updo while posing outside her Los Angeles home, Keke Palmer decides that intermissions are for entertainment. In the quiet moments between takes of her Adweek photo shoot, Palmer belts out Destiny's Child lyrics for a skeleton crew of photographers, stylists and assistants. With these impromptu concerts, it's as if the actor, singer (she released her latest album, *Big Boss*, in May) and now emerging media mogul is recalling the performances that helped put her on the map—and the public persona, untethered to a single role, that has kept her career thriving for two decades.

Following her acting debut as Queen Latiifah's niece in 2004's *Barbershop 2: Back in Business*, Palmer had her breakout role as a spelling bee phenom in the 2006 drama *Akeelah and the Bee*, and spent three seasons as the title character in Nickelodeon's *True Jackson, VP*. More recently, she starred in critically acclaimed hit films like *Hustlers* and *Nope*.

But as her acting career unfolded, Palmer recognized the limitations of staying in front of the camera in a space that can lack talent accessibility and creative autonomy. Embracing the power of crafting her own narrative, she began exploring the unscripted side of entertainment while taking hold of ideation and production.

The self-proclaimed "millennial diva" now uses online spaces to confidently capitalize on fan access to both rehearsed creative and off-the-cuff commentary, which often goes viral

in a typically engineered digital environment. Through KeyTV, her free digital platform that she launched last November as an industry entry point for diverse creators, Palmer wants to present new talent with access to the creative control that she has long worked to establish for herself.

"I had to exercise patience and believe that one day I would have the independence, both financially and creatively, to say and do the things I wanted with full force," she said.

Palmer sat down with Adweek to talk through the creative process, artistic ownership and purpose-driven ambition that has carried her from child stardom into her unlikely personal brand.

*(This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)*

**Adweek: You rose to fame as an actor, but you've said in past interviews that building your public persona outside of TV and movies is what you enjoy most. Is that still the case?**

Keke Palmer: I think so, and I've had even more fun with it since having my son [in February]. The whole process of pregnancy, motherhood and then meeting and getting to know him, it just brings so much beauty and joy into my life. It has inspired me to be even more creative. Because nothing is more important than him. I think there's also an ease and a quality to things being not that big of a deal because he's here.

**You talk about motherhood changing your perspective on creativity. What does your creative process typically look like?**

I do so many different things. It could be having a conversation with someone or sitting down and having a writing session. It could be improvising on set or talking to one of my writing partners, and creating a character on the spot based on a video we just saw. In every moment that I feel it, I'm not afraid to create it. Creativity does not have to be bound to a specific scenario. When I don't feel it, I definitely don't force it. **Between acting, making music and now running KeyTV, you are involved in many different projects. How do you balance your time? How do you decide what to say "no" to?**

As years have gone on, saying "no" to things I don't need to be doing or calls I don't have to be on has gotten a lot easier. I'm putting myself first so I have the energy to do all the other things that I need to do. Having boundaries

and saying, "Hey, this may not be able to happen right now," or, "Hey, maybe this isn't that important to me" is just a part of my reality.

**Throughout your 20 years working in the industry, you say that launching KeyTV is what you're most proud of. What does that reflect about your personal and professional development?**

I want to make myself accessible to the next generation coming up, so they can see that what I've done is possible and they can do even greater things. Because I started my career so young, I said, "How can I share that with others who don't have the access that I had, or the parents that I have or aren't even certain what their dream is?" KeyTV is another version of opening myself up and giving [new talent] access to my world.

**You talk about wanting to uplift new talent and democratize the entertainment industry. How do you identify talent for KeyTV?**

We do the casting process as normal, but you don't necessarily need an agent or to go through some of those typical doors of a traditional vetting process. I'll see somebody online and say, "Hey, I think we need to talk to this person," and people email us or reach out on Instagram. It's all very open, but there is also structure to it because I want people to understand the protocol of working in this business.

It's just somebody with talent and skill. Somebody who can know their lines but isn't afraid to make a performance that is filled with a choice. As an actor, I'm always looking for other actors who aren't afraid to make a choice, even if it's a quirky one.

We also welcome actors that we haven't seen in a while. Especially with me being an entertainer since I was a kid, I know maintaining your momentum from being a child entertainer to being an adult is really difficult. I also want to bring back some of those faces I grew up with.

**After getting your start as an actor so early in life, how did you predict your career would unfold? Did you ever look for more of a say in your roles?**

When I first started out, I had no idea what I would amount to. I definitely didn't imagine having a brand at any point. There were times as an actress when I wanted to say more and do more, but I didn't because I was a kid and I hadn't found my voice yet. I didn't know exactly what I wanted or have the financial capacity

to do some of my own things. I do think that's a big part of creativity. Being creative is expensive, and that's not something that people talk about enough.

I had to exercise patience and believe that one day I would have the independence, both financially and creatively, to say and do the things I wanted with full force.

**You seem to engage in purpose-driven work while maintaining a lighthearted energy, which is also reflected in your brand campaigns. How do you pick the brands you want to work with?**

I think about the longevity I can have with the brand, and also how [the relationship] will be perceived by my audience. If there is no opportunity to give back and benefit my community, or to just have fun and have balance, then I don't want to do it. Most brands come to me with their content already "Keke-fied." They are already speaking in my voice.

I've always had a lot of fun with McDonald's, simply because I've worked with the brand since I was 16 years old. The beginning of the Keke Palmer brand, which was birthed from Akeelah and the Bee, is my community-based and mentorship kind of space. I've gone from doing singing competitions with them in the early 2000s to working with their change leaders. In 2023, we're actually giving hundreds of thousands of dollars to young people to start and create their own businesses.

It feels really awesome to work with such a popular brand in such an impactful way.

**Behind casting talent in your KeyTV shows, how else are you supporting a new generation of creatives?**

There are so many great opportunities when it comes to entertainment and democratizing the industry that lends itself to a multitude of products, from fashion to beauty to just community-building. I'm definitely excited to take the opportunities that have been solely for me, Keke Palmer, and anybody that's directly connected to the Keke Palmer brand, and expand that to KeyTV, which is about so much more.

The first half of our slate was introducing our content. We now have a[n interview] series coming up called KeyMakers, which is about the people who created our shows. I think they'll be really excited to see people of color in positions behind the scenes. A lot of people immediately think about being a celebrity or being on-camera. But there are a lot of other impactful ways to establish a career for yourself that you either may not know about or may not have had access to.

**What was the inspiration behind KeyTV's business model, and how does that relate to the platform's purpose?**

It is important to me that KeyTV is free. Maybe somewhere down the line, we can have a pay-per-view or subscription service for longer content, but at this point, I want it to be some-

thing that everyone can access. Growing up, being able to access PBS was huge. We didn't have cable for a long time, but we were able to watch Dragon Tales and Barney and Sesame Street. If they had a TV, every child was able to have these iconic shows that we all know and love.

**What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced when planning and executing KeyTV?**

I've had people say, "I don't even know how to do a deal," but it's not really ethical for me to walk them through that. That's difficult when I'm the one giving the opportunity, but I can point you in the direction of what you should do. I'm really having those raw conversations that maybe most executives wouldn't have because I do want to give new people an opportunity.

People all the time online are like, "Why don't we see anybody new?" It's not because new people don't deserve the opportunity, but it's easier to work with somebody at a fast-food restaurant that already knows how to flip burgers. You need to have a lot of patience, but that's what makes us different. Not just for the viewer looking for a new face, but for the person who wants to know they can have a chance.

**In your documentary Big Boss, which is available on KeyTV, you capture your experiences in the music industry with**

## How Palmer Pushed Visa Out of Its Creative 'Comfort Zone'



→ Palmer has amassed an impressive array of brand partnerships—including PepsiCo's Starry soda, Olay, McCormick, Uber Eats and Ugg—but she is particularly proud of her creative collaboration with Visa. When the brand tapped her to voice a series about creator ingenuity last fall, Palmer said she was impressed by its ability to already speak in her language. The actress narrated three spots for Visa's "Anyone Can Change The Game" campaign, each focusing on how transaction solutions can foster unlikely business growth.

Chronicling a modest food truck outperforming an upscale restaurant, a nail tech setting up shop at her school library and a lackluster little league football team celebrating their new equipment, Visa identified the Palmer persona that delivers inspiration with endearing boldness.

"I like when brands either show they know my voice or are welcoming me to help them get it right," said Palmer. "I remember thinking, 'They know what side they want. They want the one with flavor.'"

While Visa came to Palmer with a solid hold on her brand already, it also encouraged her to make additional creative changes. In one spot, spotlighting the young entrepreneur who is "doing nails at school to pay for school," Palmer responds to the student being shushed by a librarian with, "Hold on, Ms. Lady," instead of a safer and more forgettable "excuse me" from the original script. This was the first time the brand had put that degree of creative trust in one of its celebrity collaborators. "We gave her the freedom to say, 'If you want to use my voice, then let it be my voice,'" said Visa head of North America marketing Mary Ann Reilly of working with Palmer. "She was our first foray into releasing our control and pushing out of our comfort zone." —E.L.

lines like, "Silly me to ever think they would fuck with me just off the strength of my talent." How did it feel to offer people that tone?

It was really empowering to have the space to showcase something like that and give it to my audience for free. I think people would be more surprised thinking I'd have a different experience than other young women or people in the industry. It was an artistic pursuit and therapeutic for me to get that off my chest and hopefully allow that testimony to ring true for others.

**Are there any common misconceptions about breaking into the industry that you want to teach your network at KeyTV?**

I'm sure there are a lot of people who want to film their own movie, but it's quite expensive. We sell our IP and masters as creatives because we can't afford to do it ourselves. It takes a lot of money to complete, and a lot of money to promote. And a lot of creatives don't have a full view of what it means to have business literacy.

When you are doing a collaboration, there is going to be a give and take. If I'm doing business with Paramount, I can't expect to own 90% if they're giving 50% of the budget. Big Boss was on KeyTV, but for an amount of time it was licensed out because

that's what was comfortable for me. And then I was able to give it to my audience. Business literacy could be talked about a little more so creatives can negotiate smarter.

You also have to look and say, "How much

**'Being creative is expensive, and that's not something that people talk about enough.'**

-KEKE PALMER

am I benefiting from this?" A lot of people have been quiet about what they've given up because they felt the popularity was worth what they

sold. Having the transparency to say, "If this is not comfortable for you, then we shouldn't do business" is necessary as a creative.

**How have you used social media to build the Keke Palmer brand? Have you ever had reservations about the emotional impact of platforms?**

I'm very conscientious of how the algorithm works. I definitely overuse the "not interested" button. I don't use it in a way that would give me stress like I did plenty of times growing up. Aside from that, I use it to learn about my audience and be able to engage.

What's most important to me is the freedom that I have through these individual platforms. It's really a way to talk to my audience and build different content around what they love.

**What's next for you? Do you want to maintain full creative responsibility and freedom on your projects?**

I'd like to continue to be creative, for sure. I don't know if I'll always be at the forefront of it, but being the individual talent is really enjoyable for me. But if there ever comes a time when it's not, then hey, that's fine, too.

But I'm always going to be creative and I'll never stop working in the industry because it's my industry, whether I'm the star of the project or not.



## Unlocking KeyTV

➔ When she launched KeyTV last November, Palmer wanted to outline the breadth of industry opportunity for young creators while offering a more accessible entry point. As an industry veteran who encompasses the value of creative freedom, she also hopes to facilitate community for BIPOC talent by offering a collaborative space that doesn't confine them to a single task.

The initial slate featured both scripted shows like *Heaux and Tell*, a miniseries starring three best friends that offers honest conversations around sex and sexuality, and unfiltered content like *Make It Make Sense*, which follows creators as they dissect the nuances of internet culture.

KeyTV has also offered Palmer some catharsis: She produced and released the documentary *Big Boss* (left) on the platform, which outlines the discrimination in a male-dominated music industry that ultimately led to the launch of her own label. —E.L.



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# Agency Leaders

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## Madison Utendahl

FOUNDER, CEO,  
UTENDAHL CREATIVE

**An empathetic entrepreneur:** As founder and CEO of Utendahl Creative, a hot agency founded in 2019, Utendahl's got a blue-chip entrepreneurial résumé. She sat on the founding team for Last Week Tonight With John Oliver, Refinery 29's 29Rooms and the Museum of Ice Cream. But the success burned her out. She talks openly about it, using her own experience to lead the agency from a place of empathy.

**The Burnout Burner:** "I've discovered the power of authenticity and self-worth within the workplace on an individual level and have made it my mission to fundamentally change the way we work via leadership and policy at my agency," she said. This year, the agency launched The Burnout Burner: a guide to managing work-related burnout and stress that's now available to the public.

**On being Black-founded and entirely female:** "Currently, only 3% of graphic designers are POC, only 3% of creative agencies are founded by women, and less than 1% are founded by Black women," Utendahl said. "We've also designed and launched a series of groundbreaking brands, demonstrating that there is an ROI in betting on small, POC and female-founded agencies." —**Olivia Morley**

# Thasorn 'Pete' Boonyanate

CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, BBDO BANGKOK

**Lucky 13:** A multiple winner at Cannes Lions, D&AD, Adstars and the Andys, Boonyanate has spent 13 years in advertising. Since 2022, he has been creative leader at BBDO Bangkok—the youngest CCO in the agency's history.

**Something to sing about:** Last year, the agency launched 15 campaigns. A standout was a long-form, user-generated ad for restaurant chain Five Star Chicken, "The Movies That Made (From) Us," which saw members of the public offer ideas for ads that the brand would then re-create in its own

film. Meanwhile, Listerine's "The Cleft Choir" allowed him to explore his love of songwriting. A choir of children who had cleft surgery sang an adaptation of Thai composer Boyd Kosiyabong's hit song "You're My Breath" to raise funds for 50 other kids to also have the surgery. "This is why I'm still working in advertising, to contribute something good to society," Boonyanate said.

**Generating emotion:** One of the main challenges creatives face in the industry is creating campaigns that generate an emotional response, especially empathy, rather than "just another ad," said Boonyanate. "The world is changing so fast. The algorithms of each platform change faster than ice melting, which is why the most memorable work is one that consumers search for, not ads that are scheduled."

—**Stephen Lepitak**



KANAFEE CHOKPAIBOON; DANIEL SEUNG LEE

# Thas Naseemuddeen

CEO, OMELET

**A twisty career:** The Omelet CEO stepped into the C-suite in 2015 as CSO. That led to an expanded CSO/managing director role and, eventually, to the top job. "My career path has twisted and turned," she said of a résumé that includes a long-ago stint at an ice rink in a San Diego food court, an MBA program and training at renowned legacy agencies Chiat Day, BBH and Deutsch. **Google's "big love letter":** Omelet's "Heroes of Small Business" campaign for Google, in which people were asked to nominate their favorite independent enterprises to win a prize, "felt like a big love letter to small businesses and the communities that they rally and inspire," Naseemuddeen said. Emmy-winning Karin Fong directed the spot, which resulted in 10 times as many nominations as Omelet had hoped for.

**Being many things:** "Our agency has been many things (as an Omelet does)," Naseemuddeen said. Tech, entertainment and gaming are focus areas, but another one of Omelet's sweet spots is developing the kind of fandoms that leave consumers with lasting impressions. —**O.M.**

## Linda Knight

PRESIDENT, CHIEF CREATIVE  
OFFICER, THE OBSERVATORY

**Upside Down, and all around:** In her leadership role at Observatory, Knight is a pioneer in the intersection of entertainment, culture and advertising. Recent successes have included "Live From the Upside Down," a partnership between Netflix and Doritos for Stranger Things that took viewers back to 1986 for the greatest concert that never happened; a Snoop Dogg action figure for wine brand 19 Crimes; and a "Lil Interns" campaign with Kenan Thompson for Old Navy.

**From Australia to LA:** Knight started her career at McCann Erickson Sydney. She was one of the first international hires at Wieden+Kennedy, spending nearly a decade in the Portland and Amsterdam offices, predominantly on Nike. After moving to Los Angeles, Knight freelanced for more than 25 agencies before becoming ecd at TBWA\Chiat\Day LA, leading the Miller Lite, Intel, QuickBooks and Grammys accounts. Before Observatory, she was CCO at Phenomenon.

**How she builds success:** "We try to make things that people want to engage with. It could be a series, movie, or even an audio documentary—which is not only a powerful way for brands to show their personality and values but gives consumers more than a 30-second ad," said Knight. "Once you hook people with great content, they'll be much more engaged in the 360 campaign around it." —**Kyle O'Brien**



## Oriel Davis-Lyons

CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER,  
MOTHER NEW YORK

**From the kitchen to the creative cooker:**

Davis-Lyons was raised in the U.K. but struggled until he landed in New Zealand. He used to be a chef but ultimately decided to swap the long hours in a kitchen for equally long hours in a creative department, eventually moving to the U.S. He joined Mother New York last December after working at Spotify, where he was head of creative.

**Training the next generation:** In 2020, Davis-Lyons founded The One School—the first free, online portfolio school for aspiring Black creatives. To date, The One School has graduated 160-plus creatives who are now working in some of the industry's top creative departments. As the school's head, he mentors current and former students, oversees growth and writes the curriculum, ensuring that all graduates represent the school's ambition to be "Creatively Excellent" and "Unapologetically Black."

**A rewarding challenge:** "We have to prove that this industry can be a place where new voices and perspectives are valued, that we can put empathy and respect at the core of our business model, and that we can still achieve the heights of creative excellence we all aspire to," he said. —**K.O.**

# Daniel Malikyar and Karam Gill

CO-FOUNDERS, MGX CREATIVE

**Kids of the internet:** “During our formative teenage years, [we] started to see social media amplify the voice of youth culture. We began working with brands and musicians on digital campaigns that authentically connected with younger audiences,” said the

duo. Founded in 2017, MGX has produced every piece of content for DJ and musician Marshmello to help him grow from 25,000 to 50 million YouTube subscribers in four years.

**Making, and marketing, movies:** In 2022, their feature documentary, *Untrapped: The Story of Lil Baby*—written and directed by Gill and produced by both of them—debuted at New York’s Tribeca Film Festival and was acquired by Amazon Prime Video. “Because of the integrated nature of how MGX works, Amazon also commissioned us to handle aspects of the marketing campaign, which included

cutting the official trailer,” said the duo.

**How to really talk to Gen Z:** “Right now, there is an overwhelming amount of content being created, and a lot of the initiatives designed to activate younger audiences don’t cut through the clutter. We believe the idea of ‘youth culture’ is actually a feeling; it’s something that transcends age and feels curious and provocative. A lot of what is commissioned to hit this demographic isn’t even made by the demographic itself, ultimately missing these core storytelling elements.” —**Luz Corona**



EMMANUEL ARINNTIRE

Explore the full Creative 100 list at [adweek.com](https://adweek.com)

**Jason Campbell**

Chief creative officer, Translation

**Ignacio Flotta and Nicolás Vara**

Chief creative officers, David Buenos Aires

**Garrett Garcia**

President, PPK

**Greg Hahn**

Co-founder, chief creative officer, Mischief @ No Fixed Address

**David Kolbusz**

Chief creative officer, Orchard

**Josh Loebner**

Global head of inclusive design, Wunderman Thompson

**Madison Long**

Co-founder, CEO, Clutch

**Alex Wilson**

Executive creative director, Amplify

**Rob Baird**

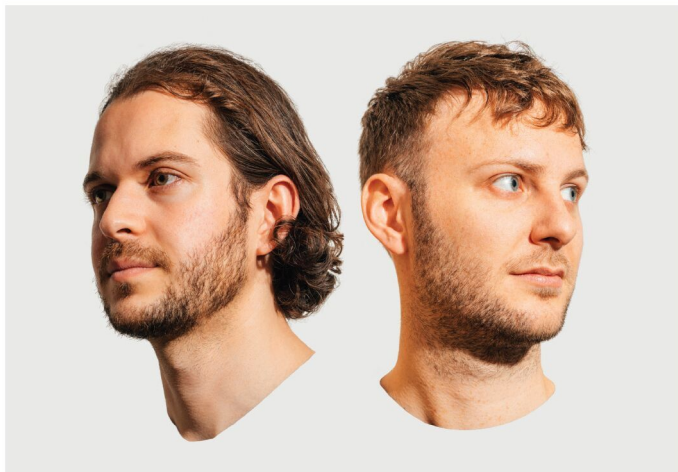
Founder, chief creative officer, Preacher

**Emily Bibb**

Co-founder, Breef

→ Meet emerging creatives whose work is already cementing itself in culture

# Rising Agency Talent



## Xander Hart and Edward Usher

CREATIVES, ADAM&EVEDDB

**Career path:** After meeting on singlecreatives.com, Usher and Hart got their first job in 2016 at the BBC's in-house agency, BBC Creative, where they made the D&AD Yellow Pencil winner "The Tapestry" for the 2018 World Cup and the 2018 film "Wonderland." In 2019, they joined adam&eveDDB. Their standout work at one of the U.K.'s largest agencies has included two PlayStation ads, the International Paralympic Committee's Emmy-nominated #WeThe15 campaign and a film for the V&A Museum that was added to its permanent collection.

**The biggest job in British advertising:** The pair got their shot at one of the most coveted briefs in U.K. advertising with last year's Christmas campaign for retailer John Lewis & Partners. "The Beginner" shone a light on the care system by telling the heartwarming story of a dad preparing to meet his new foster daughter. "We had multiple messages of gratitude from people who've experienced care for portraying the issue in the way that we did," the duo said.

**Advice to aspiring creatives:** "Never give up on a brief—it can always turn into something. And try to remember that this job should be fun."  
—Brittaney Kiefer

Explore the full Creative 100 list at [adweek.com](http://adweek.com)

**Jason Burke and Erin Evon**  
Associate creative directors, Saatchi & Saatchi New York

**Mary Buzbee and Lauren Meadows**

Senior copywriter and senior art director, Barkley, founders, The Workshop

**André De Castro and Eliza Florendo**  
Creative director and associate creative director, social, Gale

**Hemal Dhanjee and Steve Ierullo**  
Associate creative directors, Courage

**Julian Gamboa-Ramos**  
Senior social media director, Maximum Effort

**Monica Herman**  
Vice president, group creative director, Giant Spoon

**Trevor Joplin and Eleanor Rask**  
Associate creative directors, Mischief @ No Fixed Address

**Chrystel Jung**  
Creative director, BETC Paris

**Clara Malley and Eli Williams**  
Senior creative strategist and director, creative strategy, Day One Agency

**Hope Nardini**  
Creative director, Droga5 New York

**Sara Singh**  
Strategy director, Deutsch LA

**Christopher Chance and Kelechi Mpamaugo**  
Copywriter and art director, Johannes Leonardo



## Lena Laque-Almond

ART DIRECTOR, VIRTUE WORLDWIDE

**A historic point of pride:** Laque-Almond served as a lead art director for Planned Parenthood's response to last summer's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. The project was helmed by women and people of color and became "possibly the most important work" Laque-Almond had ever done, she said. "The metaphor was simple: We the disenfranchised, the previously unheard, are a great storm that will come together and surpass this moment in time."

**Maintaining one's agency:** Virtue's breadth and diversity of clients keep Laque-Almond's schedule varied. "The main thread throughout all of the work we do is partnering with brands and businesses that have a true love of culture, and a genuine curiosity for stories that haven't been told before," she said.

**Speak plainly:** "[The advertising industry] separates itself from the rest of the world. On the most basic level, look at the language of ad people when they speak with each other, about 'laddering up' to a 'sticky idea' that 'generates buzz' ... if I can't even speak the language of the audience I am trying to reach, how will I ever communicate with them?" —Jason Notte

## Quynh Tran

COPYWRITER, GOODBY SILVERSTEIN & PARTNERS

**Chemistry and creativity:** Tran, a copywriter at Goodby Silverstein & Partners, works alongside her partner, Toan Mai, and their chemistry helps unlock a level of creativity that is hard to replicate. "I still count myself lucky every day for just being able to wake up, go into the office, sit around ping-ponging ideas with my creative partner and end up laughing till we both need to take a break," said Tran.

**Hacking Cannes:** To recenter the creative advertising at the

heart of Cannes Lions, Tran and Mai undermined the paywall of the organization by hyperlinking all of its creative works to a domain where they can be viewed publicly. The organization has threatened to sue, but the domain—lovetheworkmore.com—remains live.

**Embracing obscurity:** "You're new, young, clueless, and frankly you're nobody in this one gigantic industry. So use that to your own advantage and do whatever feels right to your own guts," said Tran. "Worst-case scenario: No one will talk about you. Best-case scenario: Everyone will talk about you." —Mark Stenberg



LENA LAQUE-ALMOND: TOAN MAI; ISTOCK

# Branded Content Innovators

➔ These brand leaders are cultivating communities and telling long-lasting stories



## Helya Mohammadian

FOUNDER, CEO, SLICK CHICKS

**Slick start:** Mohammadian wanted to work in fashion for as long as she can remember, founding accessible underwear brand Slick Chicks in 2014. "I worked for Carolina Herrera, Cynthia Rowley and Bergdorf Goodman, to name a few. But I was never fulfilled until I started my company and created a product that impacted someone's quality of life," she said.

**Marketing debut:** In January, for the brand's first-ever marketing campaign, "Slick Chicks teamed up with Angel City Sports for 'Any Other Day,' a campaign that celebrates accomplished writer and champion adaptive athlete Jamey Perry," said Mohammadian. "With the help of Slick Chicks' adaptive clothing, Jamey balances life as a mother, writer and athlete, exploring what it means to celebrate disability, an 'ingenious way to live.'"

**The challenges facing accessible fashion:** "Many people are unaware of the challenges faced by people with disabilities and the importance of accessibility," she said. "At Slick Chicks, we are trying to address those issues and raise awareness through education and advocacy. In addition, we love to collaborate with disability advocacy groups and organizations to raise awareness and promote accessibility as a core value across different sectors." —**Kathryn Lundstrom**

Explore the full Creative 100 list at [adweek.com](https://adweek.com)

**Katie Beal Brown**  
Founder, CEO, Lone River Beverage Co.

**Clint**  
Founder, Corteiz

**Elizabeth Gascoigne**  
Founder, CEO, Absence of Proof

**Laurel Stark**  
Co-Creative director, The Sims

**Tina Maher**  
SVP, brand and franchise management, Hartbeat

**Kayla Sutton-Meyer**  
Senior social marketing manager, Amazon Studios

**Alice Tonge**  
Group creative director, Apple (London)

**Emma Tully**  
Chief brand officer, Savage X Fenty

**Pinky Cole**  
Executive director of brand and creative, Founder, Slutty Vegan

**Angelic Vendette**  
VP, head of global marketing, Alo Yoga



# Amanda Morrison

CO-FOUNDER, PRESIDENT, JULIE

**Centering “otherness”:** After building Mented, a cosmetics brand that centers women of color, Morrison connected with other founders in the beauty space on identifying and addressing “otherness.” “[We] wanted to apply these learnings to women’s health ... to create a product and community for those that have historically felt forgotten or left out of the conversation,” she said. Thus, emergency contraceptive brand Julie was born last year.

**The big sister everyone needs:** “The voice and tone of Julie that we created is

this cool, welcoming big sister who has some experience in medicine, but she’s still a mess, she’s clearing out her life. By using this persona, we’ve been able to have these grounded and relatable conversations with women in a way that they’ve never had before,” said Morrison.

**Navigating the cultural nuances of contraception:** “Even though I’ve lived in New York since 2008, I’ve been shaped by a family-oriented, religiously centered, slower and Southern way of life. Everyone is polite and mindful of what they share in public. Being in the world of women’s health has kind of blown the lid off that—it’s made me rethink what I know to be true versus what needs to be said.” —K.L.



JULIE PRODUCTS INC. / JASON SILVERMAN



# Armando Turco

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF BRAND AND CREATIVE, OATLY NORTH AMERICA

**“Chief dot-connector”:** Though he recently spearheaded a multiyear sponsorship between Oatly and Minor League Baseball, Turco doesn’t take credit for the quirky elements of the deal that are unfolding at stadiums across America this summer, among them a half-a-halftime show, an oat field, a Sixth Inning Shrug and an Eighth Inning Eye Roll. In fact, even after working in branding and advertising for 20-plus years, Turco says he feels less like a “classically trained creative” and more like a “chief dot-connector.” “It’s my job to make sure that the riskiest ideas get the oxygen and resources they need to become a reality,” said Turco, an alum of ad agencies McCann and BBH and Vox Media’s branded content division, who joined Oatly last year.

**Going against the grain:** The industry’s ongoing obsession with measurement is “making everything look exactly the same,” said Turco, whose plant-based brand touts its mission of transforming the food system via its calculatedly off-kilter marketing. “As for data-defined best practices? Well, we despise those.”

**Advice for aspiring creatives:** “Your potential is not defined by your job title or the box you occupy on an org chart. Resist labels at all costs.”

—T.L. Stanley

# TV and Streaming Innovators



➔ With television at a crossroads, these talents are captivating audiences

## Amelia Dimoldenberg

BROADCASTER, YOUTUBER, COMEDIAN

**From chicken shops to global fame:** Dimoldenberg founded her production company, Dimz Inc., in 2021, but has spent nearly a decade building her YouTube channel and Chicken Shop Date web series, in which she goes on dates in local chicken restaurants with stars like Ed Sheeran, Keke Palmer, Burna Boy, Jack Harlow, Daniel Kaluuya and Phoebe Bridgers. The series won a Streamy Award in 2021 and has elevated her to an international spotlight. Dimoldenberg's YouTube channel now has 1.9 million subscribers, 287 million views and 16 million hours of content watched. She has also worked with brands including Coach, Olay, Google and Candy Crush.

**Golden moment:** After presenting at shows such as The BRITs, The NME Awards and The Mercurys, Dimoldenberg made her U.S. red carpet debut at the 2023 Golden Globes, where she interviewed celebrities including Anya Taylor-Joy, Letitia Wright and Guillermo del Toro—and went viral following a flirtatious moment with Andrew Garfield.

**Addressing media's biggest challenge:** "UK journalism has a significant diversity problem in terms of ethnicity, with nonwhite journalists vastly under-represented. This is a systemic problem," she said. "I mentor young people, fundraise for arts access and youth service charities and am passionate about supporting projects which empower and uplift young people. There is so much more that I and others could be doing." —**B.K.**



## Dave Burd (‘Lil Dicky’)

CREATOR, STAR, DAVE

**That’s a rap:** It started with a rap music video that hit more than 1 million views in less than 24 hours. Today, Burd is the co-creator and star of Dave, the critically acclaimed, hit FXX show loosely based on his life.

**Goodby times:** Long before taking the entertainment world by storm, Burd was an assistant account manager and copywriter for Goodby Silverstein & Part-

ners from 2010-2013, where he learned production and made his first videos. “If I didn’t work at Goodby, I don’t think I would have been the success that I am,” he told Adweek in 2020.

**“Revolutionary” projects only:** As he focuses on Dave, which wrapped its third season in May, Burd has been turning down most other job offers. “I’m not going to play, like, the comedic side character in a shitty comedy. I want to be in things that are up for Best Picture discussion, or I want to make my own revolutionary comedy or drama,” he told The Hollywood Reporter. —**L.C.**

## Jenny Han

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER,  
SHOWRUNNER, WRITER

**The Summer I Turned ... to production:** Han got into producing after one of her books, *To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before*, was adapted into a movie by Netflix, which eventually turned it into a trilogy. She was an executive producer on all three films, while also selling a Prime Video adaptation of her other book series, *The Summer I Turned Pretty*. While developing *Summer*, she sold *XO, Kitty* (a *To All the Boys* spinoff series) and started her production company, *Jenny Kissed Me*.

**XO, Jenny:** When it comes to work, Han wants to focus on the things that only she can do, and she puts a lot of time into those projects. For instance, Han executive produced and was co-showrunner for *XO, Kitty* for Netflix while also working on another series for Amazon.

**To all the genres Han loved before:** Han focuses on the YA genre, which has led to collaborations with brands such as American Eagle and Forever 21. She said her love of YA goes back to her own coming-of-age story: “I spent most of my childhood in the library. The bus dropped me off there every day after school, and I stayed until closing time when my mom got off work. I read the whole YA section, and then I ended up being a YA writer.” —**Bill Bradley**



Explore the  
full Creative  
100 list at  
[adweek.com](http://adweek.com)

**Alec Berg**  
Executive producer,  
co-creator, Barry

**Daisy May  
Cooper**  
Actor, writer

**Neil Druckmann**  
Co-creator, Naughty Dog;  
co-creator, The  
Last of Us

**Angela Kang**  
TV writer, producer,  
showrunner, The  
Walking Dead

**Janine Nabers**  
TV writer,  
executive producer,  
showrunner,  
Naberhood  
Productions

**Brittani Nichols**  
Television writer,  
producer, actor,  
Abbott Elementary

Explore the  
full Creative  
100 list at  
adweek.com

**Barrett Adair and Carter Leigh**  
Creators

**Anitta**  
Singer

**Cori Amato Hartwig**  
Creator

**Ice Spice**  
Rapper

**Wisdom Kaye**  
Model, creator

**Kristen Kish**  
Chef

**Little Simz**  
Rapper

**Jenna Ortega**  
Actor

**Oliver TwiXt**  
Musical artist

## Aubrey Plaza

ACTOR

**April grows up:** Plaza may have gotten her start as TV's favorite nihilistic, deadpan intern-turned-assistant in Parks and Recreation, but the last year has solidified her stardom as much more than April Ludgate. In 2022, she played award-winning roles in HBO's *The White Lotus* and indie film *Emily the Criminal*, which she also produced. In April, Plaza fronted the national milk processor organization MilkPep's "Wood Milk" campaign, poking fun at the burgeoning plant-based milk market.

**Fulfilling a family dream:** "I feel very much like there's some kind of ancestral, generational thing going on, just in my DNA," Plaza told *Vanity Fair* in May. "There are a lot of people in my family that are just so creative. It makes me wanna cry. And I got lucky. I have the means to somehow do it. It feels like a weight, almost. Not a bad weight, but like it was meant to be or something. I make so many of them so proud, and it feels personal, because they all had a hand in raising me."

**Guiding philosophy:** "I'm just as insecure as anybody, and I'm probably way more shy than people think. But obviously the way I deal with that is, like, extreme behaviors," she told *Vanity Fair*. "If all else fails, at least be authentic." —**K.L.**



PETER YANG/ISTOCK

# Influencers and Celebrities

➔ These celebs and online creators are challenging norms



## Michael B. Jordan

ACTOR, DIRECTOR

**Guarding Rocky's legacy:** Not long ago, few may have guessed that Michael B. Jordan would become the creative force he is now. After making his directorial debut with *Creed III*—the highest-grossing *Creed* film yet—he has cemented himself as the man to take the *Rocky* legacy into a post-Sylvester Stallone future. Next up: a remake of *The Thomas Crown Affair* and an adaptation of Tom Clancy's novel *Rainbow Six*. Plus, this summer he will serve as an instructor alongside Harvard professor Michael Sandel on its new virtual learning platform *Varsity*, offering the course "Tech Ethics: Critical Thinking in the Age of Apps, Algorithms and AI."

**A growing advertising force:** In 2021, Jordan appeared as Amazon Alexa's human form in a Super Bowl ad. He has since also starred in campaigns for Gatorade's Propel, Calvin Klein, Chase Sapphire Reserve and alongside his *Creed* co-star Tessa Thompson in a PSA against cybercrime.

**"Positive disruption":** When asked what impact he hopes to leave on the industry, Jordan told *Variety*, "A positive disruption of old things. A fresh set of eyes is something that I've learned can be very helpful when you have tunnel vision." —S.L.



## Dylan Mulvaney

ACTOR, INFLUENCER

**Chronicling transition:** When creator Mulvaney started chronicling her gender transition with the video diary "Days of Girlhood," TikTok users stuck around. Through clips about the physical changes that accompany hormone replacement therapy to her new makeup routines, fans grew to appreciate the intimacy and candidness of Mulvaney's content. She has garnered 10.7 million followers on TikTok, and while her popularity has long attracted the attention of big brands including Instacart and Nike, a small partnership with Bud Light exposed Mulvaney to a new audience.

**Silencing hate:** The brand, which sent her personalized beer cans to celebrate "365 days of womanhood," faced backlash for refusing to protect Mulvaney while she received widespread hate from its consumer base. In her highly anticipated video response, which started with "It's day 9,610 of being a human," Mulvaney stressed she wants to focus on the support she does have while sharing new glimpses of her personality that has "nothing to do with (her) identity."

**Moving forward:** The backlash around the Bud Light partnership has not seemed to slow down Mulvaney's career: She has since appeared on Chelsea Handler's podcast, *Dear Chelsea*, and sat down with Judy Blume to promote the movie adaptation of *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. —**Emmy Liederman**



## Stephanie Hsu

ACTOR

**An unexpected path:** When a classmate told Hsu in high school that she should consider pursuing acting in college, "I had no idea that was even a path that a person could choose," said Hsu, who received a Best Supporting Actress Oscar nomination this year for *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. "I ended up going to NYU Tisch School of the Arts, studying at the Atlantic Theater Company and Experimental Theater Wing. Along the way, I worked at Pinkberry, cafes, bars [and] a woodshop, and side hustled by reselling secondhand clothing."

**Year of change:** "Everything Everywhere All at Once" premiered at SXSW March of 2022 and one year later, the week after [the movie won Best Picture at] the Oscars, I headed back to SXSW to premiere my next movie, *Joy Ride*. I feel so grateful to have had a one-year anniversary in Austin, to really feel how much change has happened not only in my life in one year, but in the industry as a whole for the AAPI community," said Hsu, who also appeared this year in *Poker Face* and *American Born Chinese*.

**Advice for aspiring creatives:** "Think 'go deeper,' not 'climb higher.'" —K.L.

# Media Innovators

→ These talents are forging new pathways to elevate diverse voices and conversations

## Stephen Mai

FOUNDER, CEO, EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, WOO

**Isles seat:** Mai previously led marketing at Potato Head Family, Boiler Room, LadBible Group and Vice Media. While at LadBible, he notably oversaw the media brand's Cannes-winning "Trash Isles" campaign, which addressed the ocean's plastic pollution crisis.

**Innovating for Gen Z:** Woo describes itself as a "new-generation media brand and marketplace redefining wellness for Gen Z." Since its launch in 2022, Woo now reaches an average of 78 million people a month, has featured 4,500 products in its marketplace, and introduced content formats such as "higher frequencies," which merges pop stars and DJs with sound frequencies curated by neuroscientists to help people feel calm. Besides revenue from its marketplace, Woo also set up an in-house creative agency and incubator, Woo Studio, this year. The studio works with brands to target Gen Z through "feel-good" content and digital storytelling.

**Not a "content factory":** As media brands from BuzzFeed News to Vice shut or scale down, Mai said Woo is addressing the sector's challenges in several ways: "We're building a commercial model tied to an alternative to advertising from the offset (e-commerce). We're not here to be a content factory. Everything we do is intentional and designed to drive brand equity, engagement and build our credibility in the new 'wellness' culture we've created. We're platform agnostic, meaning we design our output and distribution with Gen Z consumption habits in mind." —**B.K.**





## Joy Harden Bradford

PODCAST HOST, THERAPY FOR BLACK GIRLS

**Overturing stigma:** An experienced psychologist and host of the Webby Award-winning mental health podcast *Therapy for Black Girls*, Joy Harden Bradford is committed to reducing the stigma related to mental health in the Black community. She does this by making mental health topics more accessible and relevant while using pop culture to illustrate psychological concepts.

**Speaking to women:** Through her podcasts,

Bradford helps Black women recover from breakups, manage the transitions related to college and graduate school, and create their own ideas about who they are as women and what their lives should look like. "I wanted to give people the resources and the language that would help them really talk about some of the everyday mental health things that come up in our lives," Bradford told *Glamour* in 2022.

**Favorite life advice:** "Making sure that you understand that your career is only one part of your life—it's not your entire life. Some of Toni Morrison's words always ring true to me: You should save the best of you for the people in your life, not necessarily for your work," Bradford told *Glamour*. —**Trisha Ostwal**

Explore the full  
Creative 100 list  
at [adweek.com](https://adweek.com)

### Jessica DeFino

Journalist, beauty culture critic, *The Unpublishable*

### Glennon Doyle

Author, activist, podcaster

### Fuhad Dawodu and James Duncan

Hosts, *ShxtnGigs* podcast

### Brad Haugen

President, *Westbrook Media*

### Steve Jones

Founder, CEO, *Pocstock*

### Kiana Moore

VP of content production and *Epic Stories*, *Vox Creative*, *Vox Media*

### Jonathan Nunn

Founding editor, *Vittles*

### Jayde Powell

Founder, head of creative, *The Em Dash Co*

### Ronnie Singh

Digital marketing director, *2K Games*



## Lori Leibovich

EDITOR OF WELL, THE NEW YORK TIMES

**New Year, newsletter:** After launching its pop-up newsletter, the 7-Day Happiness Challenge, on Jan. 1, *The New York Times*' Well desk generated 110,000 email subscribers in just over a week. Leibovich, who leads the vertical, plans to incorporate more capsule newsletters into Well's editorial strategy, as they enable the team to capitalize on key moments in the health and wellness calendar.

**Fact-checking TikTok:** "In health journalism, in particular, we are battling misinformation on social platforms like TikTok and Instagram," Leibovich said. "At Well, we combat this every day by providing readers with science-backed service journalism and news coverage that can help them make informed decisions about their health."

**Health matters:** Health has long been an object of intense focus for a certain subset of the population, but the Covid-19 pandemic brought the issue front and center across the world. By applying *The Times*' rigorous reporting to the subject, Leibovich and her team have been able to turn a source of anxiety into a success story: In 2022, four of *The Times*' top 10 most-shared articles came from the Well desk. —**M.S.**

Explore the full  
Creative 100 list  
at [adweek.com](https://adweek.com)

**Lola Bakare**  
Author, strategist,  
CMO adviser

**Laura Dave**  
Author, co-creator,  
The Last Thing He  
Told Me

**Sadie Hartmann**  
Editor, author and co-  
owner of Night Worms

**Elizabeth Ito**  
Animator, writer, director

**Ellen Kane**  
Choreographer

**Shirley Kurata**  
Stylist, costume  
designer

**Stephanie Williams**  
Comic book author

# Authors and Artists

→ These artistic talents are expanding the limits of their craft



## Michelle Zauner

AUTHOR, MUSICIAN

### Her music journey:

Zauner was born in Seoul before moving to Eugene, Ore., when she was less than a year old. Now based in New York, she is best known as the front woman behind the indie-pop band Japanese Breakfast. She studied creative writing at Bryn Mawr College, then spent her early 20s waiting tables and trying to get her music hustle off the ground, eventually finding her feet in Philadelphia-based rock band Little Big League. In 2016, she started to gain a following online after releasing *Psychopomp*, her first record under her current moniker, which received critical acclaim.

**Writing and Crying:** In 2021, the same year she released her third studio album, *Jubilee*, Zauner also published her first book, *Crying in H Mart*. She penned the memoir, about family, food, grief and growing up Korean American, after she lost her mother to cancer. It spent more than a year on *The New York Times* Best Seller list and was revered by reviewers for its raw honesty. The film adaptation is now underway, with the artist issuing an open casting call for an actor to play her.

**On writing books versus writing songs:** "There's a lot more involved, a lot less to hide behind," Zauner told *Asia Blog*. "Writing a book felt like I was really feeling around in the dark. It's also a much lonelier, insular process."

—Rebecca Stewart





## Jennette McCurdy

AUTHOR, I'M GLAD MY MOM DIED

**Writing her truth:** McCurdy, who first rose to fame opposite Miranda Cosgrove as Carly's funny best friend, Sam, on the hit Nickelodeon show *iCarly*, made her publishing debut this year with *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, her best-selling memoir about her difficult upbringing as a child star with an abusive, now-deceased mother. She's now working on her first novel and developing a feature film.

**Taco Bell time:** "I also did not come from wealth, and I think you can feel that in my voice," said McCurdy. "There's something about the way I write that just screams 'she knows her way around a Taco Bell dollar menu.'"

**In her free time:** "I'm a full-fledged, no-shame Disney adult," McCurdy said. "Fourteen pairs of ears and counting."

—Catherine Perloff



## Brandon Deener

ARTIST

**Afrofuturism artist:** Deener was a producer for hip-hop and R&B artists such as Timbaland, Missy Elliott and Lil Wayne before becoming a visual artist and musician. He calls himself an artist of Afrofuturism—a genre exploring the intersection of African diaspora culture with science fiction—who focuses on painting the Black community. Earlier this year, he held his third solo exhibition, titled "In Unison," in New York.

**Art meets music:** An only child raised by a single mother, he was part of a musical family, including an uncle who is a bishop and plays drums, and cousins who sing. Music still influences Deener's work, and the artist said he listens to 1960s improvisational jazz during his creative process. Describing the portraits shown in "In Unison," he said, "There is music in the faces."

**Black pride:** "Given the history of Blackness and art and the lack thereof being represented and represented in the work, I have a duty or dedication to depicting us, always," Deener told *The Guardian*.

—Colin Daniels



## Clarkisha Kent

WRITER, CULTURE CRITIC

**Sharing her Manifesto:** Nigerian American writer and culture critic Kent is committed to telling inclusive stories. In her debut memoir, *Fat Off, Fat On: A Big Bitch Manifesto*, Kent recounts her journey as a "fat, Black and disabled queer woman," and reveals how she overcame an abusive childhood home, racialized fatphobia and ableism. "It has been in the works since 2020 after a house fire almost cut my life short. I am so proud of the finished product and the reception it has received," she said.

**An avid journalism supporter:** "In digital media, the shuttering of so many media outlets and newsrooms is not only depressing but a dark omen of what is to come as we head into the misinformation age. To combat this, I've started to subscribe directly to the Substack accounts of journalists I follow and send what little money I can to newsrooms seeking funding/community support," she said.

**Advice for aspiring writers:** "If you're entering this industry—both digital media and any other creative industry—purely for the money, reconsider." —T.O.

## Raine Allen-Miller

DIRECTOR

**The path to filmmaking:**

Allen-Miller, who was born in Manchester and grew up in south London, began her career as an art buyer, then worked in creative at an ad agency before breaking into directing. She started by directing commercials for brands including Squarespace, Nike, Pepsi, TurboTax, Virgin Media and ASOS, before moving to her first feature film: 2023's *Rye Lane*, a romantic comedy set in south London. One of the biggest industry challenges is "trying to make sure there are more interesting voices—not just the same people on set and in the creative process," she said.

**Advice for aspiring directors:**

"Get a job where you can be creative and make money, then hustle your way into what you want to do while your finances are good," said Allen-Miller.

**Personal mantra:** "I don't work with knobheads."

—B.K.



SHANE ANTHONY SINCLAIR/GETTY IMAGES FOR DISNEY

# Directors

→ These filmmakers have birthed the year's most compelling stories

# Gina Prince-Bythewood

WRITER, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER

**"Centering Black women":** Over a 22-year span, Prince-Bythewood has made feature films such as *Love and Basketball*, *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Woman King*, with significant gaps between projects,



REESE SHERMAN; CJ ENM; ISTOCK

which she attributes to "the types of stories that I want to tell ... centering Black women, telling Black stories," she told *Essence* recently. "Those are absolutely the hardest films to get made and absolutely take the most fight."

**Fighting for "concrete change":** *The Woman King*, an action-packed historical epic that pulled in nearly \$100 million at the global box office in 2022, was passed over at Oscar time. In an op-ed piece for

*The Hollywood Reporter*, Prince-Bythewood rejected the term "snub," instead calling the lack of nominations "a reflection of where the Academy stands and the consistent chasm between Black excellence and recognition" prevalent in Hollywood and other industries. She later told *Variety*, succinctly: "We need concrete change."

**Voices carry:** Prince-Bythewood was recently named one of the most inclusive directors in Hollywood, per a USC Annenberg and Adobe Foundation study. The data-driven research, which examined hiring practices and story elements, identified creatives who are "ushering in a new era" for representation.

—T.L.S.

Explore the full Creative 100 list at [adweek.com](https://www.adweek.com)

**Chinonye Chukwu**  
Director

**Sara Gunnarsdóttir**  
Director

**Jim Jenkins**  
Director, O Positive

**Karyn Kusama**  
Director

**Megaforce**  
Directors, Riff Raff Films

**Sarah Polley**  
Director, writer

**Alice Wu**  
Director

# Park Chan-wook

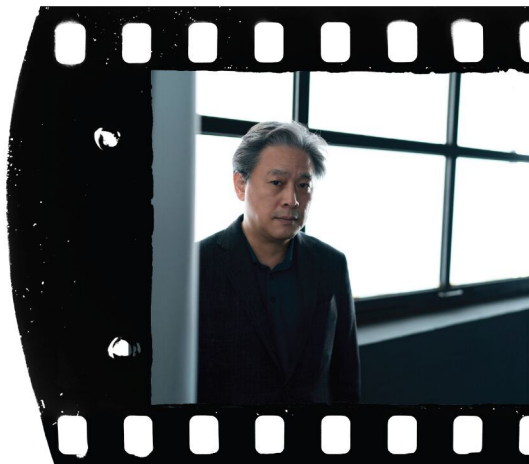
DIRECTOR

**A visionary storyteller:**

Already a renowned filmmaker in his home country of South Korea, Chan-wook began receiving international recognition with his 2003 film *Oldboy*. His latest film, 2022's critically acclaimed *Decision to Leave*, is a crime drama that tells the story of a detective who investigates the death of a man in the mountains, before meeting the deceased's mysterious wife.

**"I don't know which film I'm making":** "When I make a film, even when I'm writing the script, I don't know which film I'm making. I'm just telling the story that I feel is going to be entertaining and fun for the audience," Chan-wook told *The Guardian*.

**A Dream of an ad:** Chan-wook put his vision to use in the marketing world when he directed a cinematic ad for Apple last year, "Life is But a Dream," as part of the brand's "Shot on iPhone" series. At over 21 minutes long, the film mixed martial arts, romance, dark comedy and "pansori," a Korean genre of musical storytelling performed by a singer and a drummer. —S.L.



ON THE ORIGINS OF BRANDS AND THE PEOPLE WHO BUILD THEM

# Perspective

## THE LOGO

Like the name itself, the Timberland tree badge was the handiwork of a Swartz family neighbor.

## Timberland Boots

HOW A WATERPROOF BOOT FROM NEW ENGLAND ADAPTED TO THE STREETS OF THE BRONX.

BY ROBERT KLARA

## THE COLOR

It's known as wheat, but Timberland trademarked 'The Original Yellow Boot' for good measure.

## THE SEAM

Injection molding, first used in 1968, is what seals the water out of these boots.



**For the last two decades**, London's iconic Phonica Records has been the place for vintage vinyl fans who've devoted their weekends to bin diving. But in November 2018, shop visitors had an experience that went well beyond LPs on markdown. A door at the back of the store opened into a tunnel lit with purple neon and, beyond that, a low-lit gallery with limited-edition boots sitting inside acrylic cabinets: Timberland boots.

What did a New Hampshire-based hiking boot brand have to do with a hipster London record store? Well, only everything. Phonica Records' 2018 exhibition was an homage not just to Timberland, but also to the hip-hop artists who adopted it, influenced it and saved it from mediocrity.

As marketing vp Ezra Martin encapsulates it: "The Original Yellow Boot became widely embraced by hip-hop artists and became an icon."

Not that anyone saw it coming. In 1955, entrepreneur Nathan Swartz bought Abington Shoe Co., which did decent business making private-label shoes for retailers. Soles got stitched to uppers in those days, a costly step that Swartz eliminated when he adopted injection molding—a process that also made the shoes impervious to water. In 1973, the company began selling a waterproof boot it called Timberland—which makes this year its 50th birthday. It proved so popular that, by 1978, Swartz chucked the Abington name altogether.

Timberland aimed its boots at blue-collar guys with rough, outdoor jobs—a loyal demographic that was also, by the 1980s, slowly disappearing. And then something strange happened: In New York's nascent rap scene, Timberland boots caught on big. Mobb Deep and Tupac sported Timberlands in public, while Biggie Smalls and Nas wore them and rapped about them. Reportedly, an emerging star named Jay-Z bought a fresh pair every week.

"Timberland is wrestling with a sort of, uh, concrete success it has never sought," observed The New York Times in 1993.

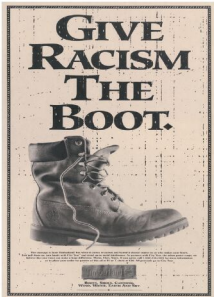
"At first, Timberland didn't know how to merge its work and outdoor heritage with its newfound place in hip-hop culture," Martin said. "But today, it is very much embraced as a legendary part of the brand's history."

A big part. The Timberland story is one of adaptation—of product and marketing alike. Once the company realized who its core fans were, it began to focus on them, rolling out new styles and colors and, importantly, doing collaborations with brands like Pharrell's Billionaire Boys Club. (Those boots in the Phonica Records exhibit were collabs with Stussy and Opening Ceremony.) That strategy continues to serve Timberland well. Earlier this year, it rolled out its purple and gold Hip-Hop Royalty Boot.

Meanwhile, thanks to hip-hop lyrics we can't print here, the classic Timberland boot even got a new name: "Timbs." Google it.

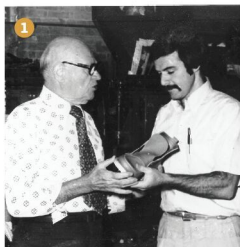
## BOOTS ON THE GROUND

Opened in March, Timberland's flagship 550 Broadway location in New York is, according to North America vp Tracy Smith, "one of the ways we are honoring the communities that helped make Timberland the brand it is today." To draw loyal shoppers, the store offers in-house customization and a new membership program.



## KICKING UP A FUSS

In 1993, when The New York Times asked evp Jeffrey Swartz (Nathan's grandson) about his brand's hip-hop credentials, he admitted: "Timberland is being adopted by a consumer that we didn't know existed, relative to our target audience." The quote rankled some, who charged that Timberland didn't want "urban" customers. But Swartz was simply stating a fact: Timberland had long positioned itself as a rugged outdoor brand. As for its politics, the company pointed out that its "Give Racism the Boot" campaign was underway and, for years, it had given millions of dollars to City Year, a nonprofit group that tutors students in underserved communities.



## FROM OUTDOORS TO ONSTAGE

Nathan Swartz, shown here with son Sidney, (1) introduced Timberland waterproof boots in 1973. A decade later, the workwear brand was adopted by hip-hop fans after stars like Biggie Smalls (2) and Jay-Z (3) began performing in them.

# Going the Distance

Iris North America CEO Ian Sohn runs marathons to unplug from the stresses of agency life.



Sohn faced challenges during the 2022 Grandma's Marathon in Duluth, Minn., but completed the race.

Nearly a decade ago, agency vet Ian Sohn began transitioning into leadership roles, a career shift that also ushered in increased stress and anxiety. So he started running as a way to unwind.

What began as small-distance running five days a week soon turned into half marathons of 13 miles, and eventually full marathons covering 26 miles. Since then, Sohn has run seven full marathons, including the Chicago Marathon and Minnesota's Grandma's Marathon in 2022.

Today, Sohn—now CEO of North America at creative agency Iris—is preparing for his first 40-mile ultramarathon in June over mountain trails in West Virginia, covering the Monongahela National Forest, Timberline Mountain ski resort and Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, finishing at Canaan Valley Resort State Park.

"If you don't have an outlet—could be [even] watching comedy specials on Netflix—it can eat you up inside," said Sohn, who usually runs at dawn.

For Sohn, running long distance is only partially about savoring a runner's high, those euphoric moments where the body releases endorphins. But he also cherishes the solitude of disconnecting from the outside world, including screens.

Still, these moments of seclusion require massive amounts of commitment and dedication: Sohn spends at least 10 hours every week training for marathons.

"The big commitment is on weekends when you do long runs ranging from 10-30 miles," he said.

And as with most sports pursuits, Sohn has experienced setbacks.

A year ago, in the final seven miles of the Grandma's Marathon, Sohn's body gave up. He recalls how his leg muscles felt disconnected from his brain, as though somebody had cut a hole in his legs and poured concrete over them. Albeit terrified, Sohn managed to finish the race.

"You spend all this time training for this one day, and it doesn't go how you imagined," he said.

This experience made Sohn doubt his ability to complete his next marathon. But his body remained faithful.

"I always think after these marathons that it is remarkable what we are capable of accomplishing," Sohn said. "Especially when you look at it at the beginning and you think, 'There's no way we can win this pitch, or retain this client or recruit this person to be on our leadership team.' But if you're putting in the work, it's remarkable what you can accomplish."



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