



VIP+ VARIETY INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM



Digital Marketing Impact Report

An in-depth exploration of
content promotion from 40+
marketing executives at the
leading media companies

PRESENTED BY





The Collective Wisdom of Media's Master Marketers

Entertainment marketing doesn't get enough attention. Sure, Times Square billboards and Super Bowl commercials have a way of coming into focus every now and then, but that's really just the tip of the iceberg.

As you'll learn in this special report sponsored by Spotify, digital marketing is where all the momentum is these days. Don't take it from me — just listen to the 40-plus executives in these pages as they go deep on the tactics and techniques they're employing to get their products noticed in a crowded marketplace. From search to social media, digital marketing

is where studios, networks, streaming services and more put their dollars to work, and it can be the difference between success and failure in entertainment. Great creative is a must, of course, but there has to be a plan in place to make sure the right eyeballs are seeing your content.

The old days of Madison Avenue's spray-and-pray approach have given way to a much more sophisticated strategy that slices and dices audiences into targetable segments. The secret sauce is the data digital platforms can deliver in real time, allowing the fine-tuning of marketing campaigns that are able to change in

response to how consumers are receiving them. Word of mouth isn't what it used to be. It's a brave new world of hashtags and programmatic buying, one you can't afford not to understand. Luckily, we've rounded up just the right people for you to hear from on the subject.

Andrew Wallenstein
President and Chief Media Analyst, VIP



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2020 WINNERS: UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Variety Marketing Visionary Award Presented by Spotify

Over the course of the global pandemic, Universal Pictures was the first studio to bypass theaters and release select films via streaming, strike the only deals with major exhibitors to amend the theatrical window and introduce a hybrid window that straddles theaters and homes. This was a year full of bold moves for the trio of Universal marketing executives receiving the Variety Marketing Visionary Award Presented by Spotify: Michael Moses, Dwight Caines and Simon Hewlett. The following is an interview conducted with Moses and Caines on Nov. 4. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

It's an understatement at this point to say COVID upended your business. Suddenly, dozens of movies scheduled over dozens of months in thousands of multiplexes worldwide have to be completely rethought. Michael, you've been at Universal for 20 years. Has what COVID brought to the table been as challenging and interesting a dilemma as you faced in that time?

MICHAEL MOSES: By a magnitude! I think so, absolutely. It's not unique to our business, but our business definitely felt it in some pretty dramatic ways, as we've seen and are still undergoing. So even though we're in



MICHAEL MOSES
PRESIDENT,
WORDWIDE
MARKETING



DWIGHT CAINES
CO-PRESIDENT,
DOMESTIC
MARKETING



SIMON HEWLETT
PRESIDENT,
INTERNATIONAL
MARKETING

kind of an L.A. bubble that hasn't had theaters over the course of the last eight months, there are some signs of life out there once you get beyond that. But for the most part, we are still contending with the upending of a business we've gotten very used to doing one way and had to quickly adapt to some very new ones.

Let's talk about one of the first ways you adapted. It started with the unthinkable: taking movies like "Trolls World Tour" and "The King of Staten Island," keeping them out of theaters and letting audiences stream them at a completely different price point, something referred to as premium VOD. That's got to mean a lot of changes to a marketing campaign. What are some of the key shifts when you make a movie like that?

DWIGHT CAINES: Our chairman, Jeff Shell, not only announced that we would be moving to a work-from-home scenario at about mid March but that we'd be moving the move to a premium format in the home. So you can imagine in launching [the "Trolls"] campaign on April 10 — the original theatrical date — we had a lot to do. We had to reconfigure our media balance, the mix between linear TV and digital. We had to collaborate with our home entertainment colleagues to get up to speed on the retail partners who would help facilitate those transactions in the home. And we had to figure out how to make our publicity activity promotable. How will we take away the live in-person events, premieres and junkets and facilitate those remotely? So a lot to do in a short period of time.

Whatever you guys did, it worked — at least one time. Comcast shared publicly that "Trolls World Tour" earned an astonishing \$100 million just in its first three weeks. Looking back, was there anything the marketing department did that you think was they key to its success?

CAINES: We sat with our theatrical and home entertainment teams and agreed that we needed clarity of

Universal/Focus Features Theatrical Releases: Q4/20-Q1/21

Distribution Label	Film	Release
Focus	Come Play	Oct 30
Focus	Let Him Go	Nov 6
Universal	Freaky	Nov 13
Universal	The Croods: A New Age	Nov 25
Universal	All My Life	Dec 4
Focus	Half Brothers	Dec 4
Universal	News of the World	Dec 25
Focus	Promising Young Woman	Dec 25
Universal	The 355	Jan 15, 2021
Universal	Marry Me	Feb 12, 2021

message. And we just decided on very simple on-demand messaging as being the clearest way through. Then with the movie's landing page and even in some other tactics, we tried to simplify the consumers' journey in a way that wasn't visible but let us lead them to the movie and also helped us gather data to really know who our audiences were and how they transacted so we could [circle back to] inform them of later campaigns as well.

How big a game changer is that data, because I assume you're seeing quite a different mix in what you get via typical theatrical distribution.

CAINES: We have built a habit of targeting consumers during a movie's campaign flight and then driving people who watched the trailer with an ad to a ticketing page to go see that movie in a theater. We did have to pivot and say, "If you visited this landing page and clicked on anything or spent any time here, we will find you later and let you know what you can do with that transaction."

There was an audio marketing campaign from our sponsor, Spotify, for "Trolls World Tour" that enabled consumers to build these customized playlists. What does a campaign like that do for a movie like this?

CAINES: I think one of the things we continue to talk about, especially when we're trying to be a premium choice, is how to eventize a movie. And so innovation is something we always lean toward. We would build you a playlist on the fly where you can listen to all of the [movie's] types of music from the Spotify library. It was really about just tying into the thematic of the movie. That was a way to take a partner, apply what that partner does — delivers music in the moment — to our movie and get that experiential lift.

Dwight, you've been working on digital-first campaigns your whole career. You're really the first digital-first executive to reach president level at a studio. You did a lot of that work back in your Sony days and moved over Universal in 2018. What brought you to the studio?

CAINES: It was the way in which this was a company that intentionally had different voices in front of and behind the camera. I remember seeing how provocative the "Get Out" campaign was even before I joined the company. And it just floored me, because I was like, "Wow, that is a risk nobody's taking." It was something you could see if you were looking for it —

the way in which diversity was just built into the fabric of what this company was doing.

Are the things you're learning now going to stick in the long term, or do you think a lot of what you're doing is about a particular time and place and may not be applicable to the future?

MOSES: That's a good question, and I wish we absolutely knew the answer. I will say we've always been a studio that depends on a portfolio of all different kinds of films. And as we kind of glimpse into the murky future of whatever the new normal is going to be in a post-COVID world, we know people are going to be more discriminating about which movies they go out and see. Jeff Shell uses an analogy of food — you can cook at home, you can have Postmates, or you can go out to eat. And yes, there's a fast-food option. But if you're really going to pay and have the experience of going out, you want a different experience than what you can get at home. So we believe that, yes, there will be the big four-quadrant blockbusters for everybody that continue to be the big events. But at Universal, I think we also believe there will still be room for the movies that were kind of engineered for a single audience to deliver either an identity-statement movie or a specific experience that can grow into a mainstream hit. It's been the key to many of our successes in a lot of different ways, from "Get Out" to "Mama Mia" to "Pitch Perfect" to "Girls Trip."

CAINES: Having to adjust to talent and doing things remotely proved to be something we'll continue to do on some level. The efficiency of having talent do many, many interviews with different kinds of press — even smaller, fan-driven but highly engaged press — that just don't make the list for a junket. We were able to extend that opportunity, and I think we'll look at that as something we continue even when the world gets back to normal.

MOSES: I think there's one more macro change you'll see — shorter campaigns. I don't think you'll be seeing



The truth is — the truth has been for quite some time — that for nearly all movies, 80 percent of the box office is achieved in the first three weeks. And it just started to seem like a little bit of a relic that you would have to wait three months after a film was released to experience it in the home."

MICHAEL MOSES

PRESIDENT, WORLDWIDE MARKETING,
UNIVERSAL PICTURES

year-long campaigns that begin with a teaser and take a long journey. We'll be living in a more crowded, competitive atmosphere, so the really high-impact, shorter campaigns are going to be part of the new normal.

Universal has the new movie "Freaky." It's one of a number of titles, including "The Croods: A New Age" and "All My Life," using this new hybrid strategy. Talk about what got you there, starting with this unprecedented deal you struck with AMC Theaters to shrink the theatrical window from three months to 17 days.

MOSES: It's no secret that when we made the decision to shift "Trolls" away, theaters were still

open but they were struggling. And we could see the trending that was happening, so there was a little bit of a public war, and some grenades were launched our way that we were in some ways diminishing exhibition in the theatrical experience. But then by proving over the course of the summer that different sizes and audience-driven movies can really work in this space, it actually opened a door that had been somewhat shut for a long time to discuss with exhibition to more accurately address how the consumer behaves in this day and age.

The truth is — the truth has been for quite some time — that for nearly all movies, 80 percent of the box office is achieved in the first three weeks. And it just started to seem like a little bit of a relic that you would have to wait three months after a film was released to experience it in the home. So those negotiations and those conversations accelerated, and we were able to enter into an agreement with AMC in which they are a participant in the performance of PVOD that we believe will not cannibalize the audience but will actually expand the audience for all of these films.

Now we will have a very dedicated theatrical release where our event-building and messaging and everything we do will be very intentionally driving toward a theatrical opening. But we have the optionality at three weeks to bring that movie into the home and continue to play in theaters because, especially as exhibition and moviegoing returns to a state of normalcy, we believe there will still be people who want to go to a theater, even if a film is available in the home. So from "Freaky" onward, this is going to be our release strategy, this shortened window. It gives the marketing team the chance to really be more efficient and have one campaign leading to the two optionalities of how to consume, instead of spending a lot of resources on one, pausing and then trying to lift that back up. And that's really a benefit of our studio being decisive in this space and not pushing but pivoting. You know, I see a lot of these other movies that are going to have

to do restarter campaigns when they come into the home, and that's a costly proposition. We really believe this is going to be increasingly the new normal, not just for us but hopefully for the industry.

It goes without saying you guys have plenty going on in 2020, but the truth is this all pales in comparison to what you've had to delay to 2021 — your biggest franchises, "F9," "Minions" and partnering with MGM on the latest Bond title, "No Time to Die." What do you even do with these movies in this strange, unprecedented situation where these titles are just sort of sitting on the sidelines? How do you keep them fresh?

MOSES: You don't! You know, our philosophy has kind of been — it's a bit of a hackneyed phrase — to keep our powder dry. And so what we've been doing during the pandemic is getting everything ready. We have to be in "campaign readiness," as we call it, because the competitive corridors remain very fluid and things are moving up and out and we need to be ready for any eventuality. But as we said earlier, campaigns will

The first Universal title getting a hybrid release is horror-comedy "Freaky," with Kathryn Newton.



be getting shorter, so we will definitely know three months from the release of those big films what their destination is. And for the most part, we're looking at ad campaigns that'll be three or four months out from those big releases, where we'll hit the ignition button again and restart those campaigns.

You guys avoided the pitfalls many other studios faced in 2020, where they had to move their biggest titles once, twice, maybe three times. But the truth is, who's to say if what dates you've parked these big titles on in 2021 could have to move again as well. What does that uncertainty do to your planning?

MOSES: It throws it into a lot of disarray! The comforting thing about it is we're not going through it alone — everybody is. If it was just Universal can't get their act together, we would be facing a real deficit. But our advertising partners are experiencing this, too. So the challenges of getting live sports back, of getting live competition shows back to places where we really like to do broad-reach marketing — it's all a jumble right now. But as we've shown with this pivot to PVOD, we've got a really flexible and agile group. I'm very lucky to be surrounded by people who are as smart and seasoned as they are but aren't set in their ways. Those don't always go hand in hand.

CAINES: I would just add to that, the company has demonstrated a level of decisiveness that has enabled us to do exactly what Michael's talking about — have that "campaign readiness." And even when you think of the return to production, our company was one that said let's lead the way, getting "Jurassic World: Dominion" back into production safely. The idea was it's not that you would never have a positive [COVID] case, it's that there was a plan in case there was one. We are really proud of that. And that's one of the ways in which we've been able to protect our assets by making sure we are decisive in planning and looking at the future with that big macro lens. So it's been an interesting experience for us, to say the least.



ALEX SANGER

EVP, DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES, UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Universal's "Trolls World Tour" was one of the first theatrical releases to jump to PVOD when COVID-19 hit. "We had to pivot in real time from a massive theatrical [marketing] campaign to something that would work for in-home viewing," Sanger says, adding that he focused on "democratizing" the debut. "We wanted to make it clear everyone was invited." The team collaborated with Twitter on a watch party — "an industry first" — with the director and voice talent and a virtual photo app that let users take red-carpet selfies using augmented reality. "The premiere was a tremendous success — it bore a lot of fruit for us." New technology like AR has become a major focus for Universal marketing. For slasher comedy "Freaky," Sanger collaborated with the team behind the visage-swapping app Reface to let users put their selfies on characters in the film. The goal, as always, is to engage and entice. "It's not exclusive to the time of a pandemic. It's just how digital marketing is evolving. The technology changes, and you have to figure out how to leverage it."



KJERSTIN BEATTY

**EVP, MEDIA STRATEGY & PLANNING,
NBC ENTERTAINMENT**

The key for marketers in 2020: Stay nimble. With an unprecedented mix of coronavirus, an exceptionally divisive election season and ongoing street demonstrations, Beatty says, “You really needed to be able to pivot on a dime.” Part of NBC’s strategy has been counter-programming. “One of my favorite shows is ‘This Is Us,’ ” which just kicked off an eagerly awaited season five. “You become part of that family, and that extends across social media.” The network turned the premiere into a two-hour event, playing up the family-time, watch-together aspects, which rallied viewers online. “There’s a great hunger for quality scripted programming in the absence of theatrical films and for content that encourages community.” With so many engaging directly with content on social media and other channels, listening to consumers and constantly evaluating campaigns in light of reception to a show are critical. “There’s so much more competition it’s harder to break through. Media and creative have to be so connected.” But while noting that digital marketing is a marathon, not a sprint, Beatty says, “I’ve been doing this for such a long time I can just feel whether the pieces are in place.”



SWETA PATEL

**VP, ENGAGEMENT GROWTH
MARKETING, ROKU**

Patel joined Roku in March after stints at Apple, Hulu and Disney, just as the pandemic hit. It was a time when the company saw an uptick in usage and activations as consumers had to cocoon at home. Welcoming the new eyeballs, Patel and her team rolled out “Home Together” to familiarize people with Roku, even partnering with premium carriers for free or extended trial periods, spotlighting live news, recorded concerts, family entertainment, horror and home fitness, among others. The marketing department stepped in to develop awareness campaigns harnessing newsletters and social media. “We wanted to make streaming TV a little easier.” With the AVOD Roku Channel now expanded to iOS, Android and Amazon’s Fire TV devices, there are many opportunities for the company to grow its partnerships, and so there is much to promote. “We launched NBC News in the Roku Channel in time for the final presidential debate and election results, expanding the overall reach and monetization for NBC News alongside its standalone app,” Patel says, adding that consumers are seeing the service as an all-in-one. “We’ve seen strong consumer demand for ad-supported viewing.”



UKONWA OJO

**CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
PRIME VIDEO AND AMAZON STUDIOS**

Ojo is a recent arrival to showbiz, joining Amazon in September after years strategizing for the cosmetics business at MAC and Coty. “I’m loving it so far,” she says of the e-commerce titan. “Beauty and entertainment have a lot of similarities on a marketing point of view. Both are about evoking emotions through a brand and generating excitement in the culture for must-have products.” The pandemic has been a challenge for her field, but Ojo particularly likes where the company is positioned. “The advantage of being a streaming service is we’re already in everyone’s home. And you couldn’t ask for a stronger brand than Amazon.” With so many landmark series already under way, Ojo is focused on tapping into consumer zeal. “Our goal is lofty but simple: Establish Prime Video as a home for storytelling people love and can’t stop talking about. We’ve already made incredible progress on that front.” She points to the success of “The Boys” and “Borat Subsequent Moviefilm.” Looking forward, she thinks post-COVID audiences will want culturally relevant storytelling that reflects the world around them. “And we’ve got an incredibly strong and compelling slate coming up.”



SHANNON RYAN

PRESIDENT,
CONTENT MARKETING,
HULU AND GENERAL
ENTERTAINMENT

While marketing content on linear TV and on-demand platforms can be more alike than different, these times present unique challenges for linear. “We are far more focused now on making sure audiences watch our programming within a monetizable window,” says Ryan, who came over to Disney in its 2019 megadeal with Fox. As the coronavirus halted production, ABC brought back stalwarts “The Bachelorette” and “Dancing With the Stars” for new seasons. “We had the dual job of launching the series but also signaling to viewers that the shows they’ve been waiting for are back with originals.” This required some novel approaches. “We heaved up our paid media across digital and social with some key placements.” The tactics worked, as the two shows remain up year-over-year. Ryan also faced the challenge of relaunching shows on the Hulu streaming platform after pandemic-prompted delays. “We launched the second season of ‘Pen15’ over a year and a half after season one. We had to reengage this dedicated fanbase, so we created a campaign featuring funny custom digital executions and a nostalgic mailer that influencers went crazy for on social.” The result: More new subs than in the previous season, “which is huge.”



JENNIFER STORMS

CHIEF MARKETING
OFFICER, EVP, CONTENT
STRATEGY,
NBC SPORTS

Few marketers faced 2020 challenges like those in live sports. “It required a very quick pivot,” says Storms, who has been at NBCUniversal for the past five years. “Sports is gone, but we have tens of millions who engage with us daily and we don’t want to lose that conversation.” Part of the solution was NBC’s #OneHomeTeam. “Olympians created content for us about how they’re maintaining focus and training in the face of the Games being postponed.” Ever aware cooped-up Americans are hungry for diversion, Storms’ team tried something new: “We even had some of our on-air talent broadcasting mundane activities as if they were sporting events. It kept the conversation going.” Phase two for Storms involved preparing for the inevitable return of live sports. “We knew people wouldn’t be able to watch big events together, but for the Indy 500 and Kentucky Derby we sent out in-home party packs. We tried to bring a big-event feel to watching something at home.” The goal, as always, was to engage and attract viewers. Looking ahead, adaptability is key. “We have the everything-back-to-normal plan, then we have two or three sub plans. It’s like dressing in layers.”



NICK TRAN

HEAD OF GLOBAL
MARKETING,
TIKTOK

One of the nuances of the sort of rapid, user-fueled growth experienced by TikTok over the past two years is it’s hard to roll out a brand story the way you might want. To tackle that challenge, Tran formulated the “It Starts on TikTok” campaign. “I remember listening to the radio in my car, and I realized, even though I’m not a big music guy, I knew all the songs because they were all already on TikTok,” he says. “I started looking at other verticals, and sure enough, all areas of culture are finding a start on TikTok.” That became the genesis of the service’s first branding rollout, which began in October across linear TV, radio, digital and social media. In addition to the music and memes made popular by the app, Tran, who came to TikTok from Hulu in April, has been focusing on promoting its talents’ off-platform growth. Dixie D’Amelio parlayed her TikTok skills into a music and acting career. Sarah Cooper grabbed eyeballs for her lip-synch parodies of Donald Trump and landed a Netflix special. And Lil Nas X rode his “Old Town Road” to worldwide acclaim. With the proper promotion, Tran says, “careers start on TikTok, too.”

While 2020 has been difficult for everyone, BET's 40th anniversary has been a year like no other. With racial justice demonstrations erupting nationwide and the COVID-19 pandemic throwing the economy into chaos, the marketing division knew it had to step up. "BET has always had a dual mission: serving compelling and authentic content to the Black community but also being part of that community, a voice for the community," says Paige, who signed on in 2019 after stints at Coca-Cola, Coty and Sundial Brands. "I call it 'pandelution' — a combination of 'pandemic' and the revolution roiling our community, and I think our response is a testament to why BET exists."

When the shutdown hit, she adds, "we knew 10 days in that COVID would decimate our community. Only about 20% of the Black population can work from home. We knew there were going to be some really difficult decisions our community would have to make in terms of paying bills, putting food on the table." That stark realization led to an on-air fundraising drive that brought in more than \$18 million in two weeks. "And 100% of it went to the hardest-hit, highest-skewing African-American cities."

Getting out a message of unity was key for the BET marketers. As part of the network's \$25 million social justice campaign entitled "Content for Change," they produced "Dear Black People," a haunting, austere spot with black lettering unfurling against a gray background and an inspirational soundtrack. "We made a major buy starting in June, a couple weeks before the BET Awards aired," Paige says. "It was really meant as a kind of love letter to the Black community amid this storm, a sort of a much needed hug."

Meanwhile, where BET may once have owned the market for targeting a Black audience, that landscape is more competitive today, as streaming services com-



pete for viewers. "Black consumers are highly, highly engaged with content, and it's incredibly competitive right now," Paige says. "We're constantly thinking about what is the right programming strategy. We are trying to have a more multifaceted approach." But where to put their energies? "The linear channel is facing challenges, so we're focusing more on digital: What are the real building blocks to unlock creative growth? How do we punch above our weight? Looking at new verticals, how do we best leverage our brand?"

One way BET can punch above its weight is by taking advantage of the merger between its parent, Viacom, and CBS. "What the merger gives is more ability to scale," she says. "The BET Awards was simulcast on CBS for the first time, and BET is now in the premium portfolio with Showtime. In this day and age, there's going to be a higher ask for all brands."

The centerpiece of BET's \$25 million social justice campaign was the 30-second spot "Dear Black People," which bowed in June.



KIMBERLY PAIGE
EVP & CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, BET NETWORKS



JOSH KORNBLIT

SVP, MARKETING & DIGITAL, FOCUS FEATURES

Focus had “Emma” and “Never Rarely Sometimes Always” in theaters when the COVID shutdown hit. “We moved them to PVOD but quickly had to rethink how to reach the audience,” says Kornblit, who’s been with the company since 2014. “Suddenly we had to access people who might not go out to the theater.” Regardless of the stay-at-home orders, the studio aims to create an event around a film, to tap into why it’s a must-see. The presidential doc “The Way I See It” went to a few theaters before moving to a commercial-free airing on MSNBC and then Peacock. “We were able to roll that up in our marketing and, within a five- or six-week window, get the film out to an incredibly large audience.” For all its pain, the downtime has proved instructive. “We rely so much on digital platforms to find the right audience for our specialty films. But with PVOD, we’re working with a whole new group of partners, like Amazon and Apple. They have an amazing amount of data on their audience.” And Focus’ social media community has grown to 700,000 users so far. “It’s a [new] kind of direct engagement ... We’re learning so much more about our audience.”



DANIELLE DE PALMA
EVP, DOMESTIC MARKETING, PARAMOUNT



TAMAR TEIFELD
SVP, DIGITAL MARKETING, PARAMOUNT



FAYE UGOLNIK
EVP, MEDIA, PARAMOUNT

beyond these challenges, Ugolnik adds, “People are becoming accustomed to watching premium content at home. We need to make sure we give people a compelling reason to get out of the house.” De Palma expects the new approach to marketing to remain even after movies return to the big screen: “There are a plethora of new platforms, formats and influencers that have exploded during this time, offering many new opportunities to connect with fans. Hyperfocused content marketing and frequency will be more important than ever.” But some things never change, says Ugolnik: “We’ll continue to look for new partners who can help lend an authentic voice to our films.”



SONO MITCHELL
SVP, PROGRAM ADVERTISING & MARKETING, HBO



JIM MARSH
SVP, PROGRAM MARKETING, HBO

While the COVID shutdown impacted all of entertainment, but HBO marketers found a means to their end — engaging viewers. “Consumers have always had unique tastes, and having programming to satisfy those tastes is [the goal],” Marsh says. “That said, cultural programming is probably more important to society right now than in the past.” Take horror drama “Lovecraft Country,” a pivotal series about 1950s systemic racism. “We were planning in-person influencer screenings,” Mitchell says, “but that got shut down. We ended up creating a custom microsite and a community where influencers could invite someone to a virtual screening.” The draw clicked because it clearly struck a nerve. “Consumers have their own unique tastes,” Marsh says. “That said, cultural programming is probably more important to society right now than in the past.” With innumerable accolades for high-quality programming, HBO is in the midst of a strategic shift. Production has ramped up, HBO Max rolled out, and parent company WarnerMedia is restructuring as part of its AT&T integration. But these consummate marketers stay on course. “HBO continues to be HBO,” Mitchell says, and Marsh concurs: “We thrive on change. We view [it] as an opportunity to continue connecting the consumer with our programming.”

Even before COVID-19, the Paramount marketing team was focused on how to engage directly with consumers. “We did a TikTok challenge with [teen influencers] Charlie and Dixie D’Amelio for ‘Sonic the Hedgehog’ before the pandemic tripled TikTok’s growth,” De Palma says. “But we’re more focused than ever on how we connect with audiences on social media.” Engaging directly with new digital marketing and distribution partners has also been key. “Relationships with our partners, old and new, have never been more important [to campaigns],” Teifeld notes. Looking ahead to a 2021

The COVID shutdown impacted all of entertainment, but HBO marketers found a means to their end — engaging viewers. “Consumers have always had unique tastes, and having programming to satisfy those tastes is [the goal],” Marsh says. “That said, cultural programming is probably more important to society right now than in the past.” Take horror drama “Lovecraft Country,” a pivotal series about 1950s systemic racism. “We were planning in-person influencer screenings,” Mitchell says, “but that got shut down. We ended up creating a custom microsite and a community where influencers could invite someone to a virtual screening.” The draw clicked because it clearly struck a nerve. “Consumers have their own unique tastes,” Marsh says. “That said, cultural programming is probably more important to society right now than in the past.” With innumerable accolades for high-quality programming, HBO is in the midst of a strategic shift. Production has ramped up, HBO Max rolled out, and parent company WarnerMedia is restructuring as part of its AT&T integration. But these consummate marketers stay on course. “HBO continues to be HBO,” Mitchell says, and Marsh concurs: “We thrive on change. We view [it] as an opportunity to continue connecting the consumer with our programming.”



The iconic notes in *Jaws*. The hum and buzz of the lightsaber. The 80s-retro synths of *Stranger Things*. Entertainment is the industry of sight, sound, and motion, but before screens showed scenes, it was radio that described vivid worlds we could only imagine. In 1938, Orson Wells delivered his infamous *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, setting off near panic and civil unrest in the echo of the theatrical imagination of thousands of terrified American listeners. Was it fake news? Great drama? Both? In 2020, we're in a new audio renaissance, and the future has never sounded better. Every Spotify listener has a front-row seat in the theater of the mind, and they're enjoying the show.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IS CHANGING

As social distancing took effect, many of us spent time at home turning on screens to relax and unplug. In fact, over half of Spotify users say they've been streaming movies (60%) and shows (59%) more than before the pandemic. But they're not just watching more, they're listening more, too: 62% of Spotify users have been streaming more music during the pandemic, and 1 in 2 Spotify Free listeners say they've been turning to audio due to screen fatigue and/or a desire to balance their video streaming. So what's the logline? Based on our streaming intelligence, we see that after people turn off the TV, they turn to music and podcasts to immerse themselves in the worlds they just experienced on the screen. Audio has always been a critical ingredient of any movie, film, series, or game — so why wouldn't it be the same for your marketing campaign? The possibilities are endless — just put on your headphones and click [here](#).

LIGHTS, CAMERA, AUDIO: FROM EYE TO EAR

2020 has been unprecedented a really unusual year, especially for entertainment. At Spotify, we've worked closely with studios, streaming, and gaming partners to help them pivot to the new normal.

From movie theater to home theater, PVOD has become the leading star of the screen, and Universal pioneered the 2020 at-home strategy with *Trolls World Tour*. To help Spotify users get closer to the music genres in the film, we crafted the ['Harmoniser' digital experience](#) that allowed users to drag genre rings up and down to create a harmonized playlist that reflected their all-genre tastes. [Audio ads](#) were voiced by everyone's favorite trolls (Justin Timberlake and An na Kendrick) who also produced bespoke [video content](#) for the campaign. World Tour indeed - Spotify supported the marketing globally, including the US, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Taiwan, Singapore, and other markets.

We've also worked with [Netflix](#) on their audio branding efforts. After sharing best-in-class tips to create impactful audio that captures listeners and

PARTNER CONTENT

utilizes 3D audio, sonic branding, and recognizable titles & characters, Netflix created stand-out spots that [featured users sharing their favorite show](#) and [transported listeners to various Netflix worlds](#).

From fictional worlds to real ones, we partnered with the [BBC Studios](#) to build a dynamic [Seven Worlds, One Planet playlist experience](#) that included a [welcome video](#) by Sir David Attenborough himself, the show's soundtrack by Hans Zimmer, and seven [videos](#) representing each continent, weaved throughout the multimedia playlist. To drive listeners to the experience and transport them to nature, we used audio recorded during the series to create seven 3D soundscapes showcasing the sounds from each world, like [this one](#).

PLAYLISTS ARE THE POST-SHOW

When the show ends, the soundtrack continues on Spotify: 75% of Spotify Free users agree, "I like it when movies or shows have official playlists/soundtracks available on streaming audio services." And if they don't find it, they make it: for example, just ask the more than 3,500 listeners who created their own *Stranger Things*-themed playlists. This year, Spotify's podcast teams gave [The Office](#) and [The Wire](#) a second life with episode-by-episode deep dives into those well-loved shows — and our audience enhanced that listening by creating more fan playlists to complete the experience.

Together with Spotify Editorial's team, we can create and curate a soundtrack for your title that acts as an always-on destination for fans. Check out [Insecure](#) by HBO or [Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist](#) from NBC.

THE FUTURE OF ENTERTAINMENT IS AUDIO

With many titles being pushed to next year, 2021 is set to be "The Year of the Release." Like so many industries, the entertainment world is going through deep disruption and uncertainty - but audio is poised to help us get through these times and take us into the future, making 2021 "The Year of Audio in Entertainment."

Schillace's career in television traces back to many of the corporate changes in the TV business over the past two decades. He first joined Disney-owned ABC in 2003, moving over from Walt Disney Parks & Resorts. After a two-year stint at the Oprah Winfrey Network, he returned to Disney as senior VP of marketing for ABC Entertainment then to his current position atop marketing at Fox Broadcasting after it was split off from the other parts of 21st Century Fox that had been acquired by Disney.

"You have to learn to live in a world that's changing," he says of entertainment. But the small-screen landscape "is growing more competitive by the day. You have to be able to adjust."

Adjusting has certainly been the name of the game in 2020 once the production shutdown hit due to COVID-19. "We quickly pivoted by adjusting our summer and fall schedules to be the only network to feature all original programming during premiere week," Schillace says. While the strategy helped Fox land two series in the season's top five entertainment shows — reality competition "The Masked Singer" and procedural drama "9-1-1: Lone Star" — he actually wishes there had been more of a head-to-head, as many channels delayed the start of the season or pulled back on shows.

"Being there for the viewer [in the fall] was a plus for us, after a sort of chaotic summer, but collectively there's a brighter shine on broadcast when all the networks are out there promoting," he says. "I would have preferred if our competitors were there with us."

As the business has evolved, so has Schillace's approach to promotions. "With the fragmenting of the business, we've had to fragment our own marketing. We work with a lot of different partners to reach different audiences in different ways. We've had to learn to be much more targeted than the scattershot approach [that might have worked] in the past."



Fox promoted the new season of hit reality competition series "The Masked Singer" via a Times Square billboard.

To market for a linear network like Fox, it means conveying a sense of urgency for everything on the schedule. The goal is to grab the attention of the audience so you don't lose it. "We know you have your binging option whenever you want it, so we're trying to make sure our appointment viewing remains just that. For us, that means making things seem must-see — must-see and as close to live as possible."

The upside to all the competition in which Schillace and his team thrive is higher-quality programming. "Production is a year-round thing now. We have writers' rooms working all the time," he says. "One result of that is people are spending more time developing and nurturing scripts, and better television is coming out of it. With scripted, if you don't swing for the fences, you shouldn't bother because there's too much other good stuff out there to watch."



DARREN SCHILLACE
EVP, MARKETING,
FOX BROADCASTING



MICHAEL ENGLEMAN

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
SHOWTIME

Engleman, who came to Showtime from Turner in 2019, says readily, “Sometimes marketing is about starting from scratch, sometimes it’s about fueling a conversation already happening.” When season three of inner-city drama “The Chi” bowed as protests over George Floyd’s killing were erupting, he saw a chance for unity. His team moved quickly to stage a virtual YouTube concert, “The Chi With Love,” headlined by Common, to benefit the Equal Justice Initiative. And the audience has grown by double digits. While COVID-19 disrupted many 2020 plans, Showtime was already in transition, “undergoing a business model and cultural transformation from our roots as a premium network to a more agile streamer.” Engleman showcased the creative prowess of Showtime’s topical series to face the day’s challenges. Enter “The Comey Rule” miniseries. “We’re very proud of how we marketed it. We weren’t in the business of taking sides but wanted to harness the conversation already out there” And while scripted shows were interrupted, the channel’s nonfiction arm had shows ready. “It gave us an opportunity to start building a brand around our docuseries and documentaries.”



JASON PHIPPS

SVP, MARKETING,
FX NETWORKS

As a dramatized documentary on the Jeffrey MacDonald murders, the 2020 FX miniseries “A Wilderness of Error” was something of an odd duck, given that it centered on a 1970s case. But Phipps, who joined FX in 2006 after four years at Disney, saw a myriad of promotional opportunities — the first being director Marc Smerling’s companion podcast exploring MacDonald’s friendship with author Joe McGinnis, who chronicled the case in the bestseller “Fatal Vision.” For the veteran marketer, the potential was clear: “If you can grab someone for 20 or 30 minutes and get them engaged, you have someone who will transfer that interest to the show.” Knowing the tale has captivated the world for decades, Phipps’ team developed a “skill” for Amazon Alexa for ready access to the podcast and a segue to the series. “People have these devices in their home, so it’s an opportunity to engage very directly.” Ideas flow fast for Phipps when there is good product to promote, as in “American Horror Story,” an FX smash. “The fan base is very passionate, so each year we create some sort of experience around it that reinforces the sense of community. Every year it just continues to build.”



VIKKI NEIL

EVP, GM, DIGITAL
STUDIOS GROUP,
DISCOVERY NETWORKS

For Discovery Networks’ HGTV, Food Network and Travel Channel, the name of the game for Neil and her marketers in 2020 is resiliency. “We’ve had to be very fluid in planning campaigns because the delivery of series has been very fluid,” she says of COVID-19’s impact on production schedules. And yet the starkness of the pandemic has opened roads that might not have been taken. To promote the latest season of HGTV’s “Good Bones,” which involved host Mina Starsiak Hawk’s struggle for a second child, Neil’s team developed the digital series “Mina’s IVF Journey,” chronicling her efforts to conceive. “As life has gotten more real, it’s given us a bit more liberty to showcase our talent dealing with real life,” Neil says. The COVID-imposed limitations also proved fruitful for Food Network. “We shipped phones to all our talent so they could shoot themselves cooking at home ... when in the past we would have just shot on set.” The result, they found, was a more intimate connection to viewers. “It forced us to rethink what TV and digital content should look like, to get more authentic in our marketing, and I think that will continue.”



LAUREN VU

HEAD OF STUDIOS
MARKETING & DESIGN,
SPOTIFY

social and digital media. Video is very important when you're trying to reach people who may not listen to a lot of podcasts." And tracking is key, with Vu's team pivoting as needed. "Understanding when people are listening, where they're listening, what else they're listening to is critical. We scrape the data as much as possible."

When Vu joined Spotify in 2019 to oversee podcast marketing after a career at Warner Bros., HBO and Hulu, she asked herself, "How do you market a product you can't see?" "I learned you market it the same way you market film and TV," she says. "You have to understand the story, understand the host, understand the audience." For many, podcasts are personal. "The audience is often very connected to the host and feel they have an almost one-on-one relationship, so it's important to engage the host in the marketing, working through their social media or other podcasts, because they're the one who has the relationship with the audience." And as seen in "The Michelle Obama Podcast," Vu realized podcasts travel. "[If there are] followers in non-native English-speaking countries, you can definitely reach a global audience." Obama's podcast has been given the full weight of the Spotify marketing machine. "We've done video trailers, audio trailers, paid



ELIAS PLISHNER

EVP, WORLDWIDE DIGITAL
MARKETING & DATA
ANALYTICS,
SONY PICTURES
ENTERTAINMENT

ner believes will outlive the pandemic. "It's where I think all marketing is headed: pulling all the levers yourself."

With almost the entire Sony Pictures 2020 theatrical slate shifted to 2021, Plishner had time on his hands, and he used it well. "Yes, the world turned upside down," he says of the collective straits, "but it also gave us a chance to rethink how we use our tools." Over the last few years, SPE has formulated a data warehouse, incorporating box office and audience data as well as findings from social media, search, location and other digital signals. "We've developed tools to look at who the audience is at a very granular level. It's about getting closer to our customers and taking control of our data destiny." Another big focus has been investing in Sony's own capabilities. "We're now buying our own programmatic, search and media [advertising]." And doing things in-house has its upside. "We're able to refine and adjust [our campaigns] in near real time, building tools and processes to cope with uncertainties." Like other studios, this year SPE has had to embrace the virtual for press access to its films — surprisingly beneficial tactics Plish-



MICHAEL VOLLMAN

EVP, MARKETING,
DREAMWORKS ANIMATION

Marketing to kids has always been tricky, but the shift from linear to OTT has brought a change in children's viewing habits. "It used to be Disney

Channel, Nick and Cartoon Network. Now the favorite brands are Netflix and YouTube," says Vollman, who joined DWA in 2019 after stints at Disney, Paramount and MGM. "You need to find ways to keep kids engaged when you don't have new content." One trick: Grab them with games. DWA has created games based on "Voltron," "Spirit Riding Free," "She-Ra and the Princesses of Power" and other series. "It's a great way to keep up engagement between drops of the main IP." Another danger of on-demand is it can dilute brand equity. "Something could be popular, but if there isn't anything to engage, two months later they forget it exists." Apart from a short consulting stint for the Oprah Winfrey Network, DWA has been Vollman's segue to television after a career of campaigns for the big screen. "Movie marketing is all about, 'Can we open that movie on that weekend?' and you put all your effort into that. TV is more like a marathon — it's nonstop. The rhythm is totally different."

By the time Tiedt joined YouTube as chief marketing officer in 2012, it had been owned by Google for six years, but it still had the shaggy, not quite ready for primetime feel of a startup. After 15 years at buttoned-up Microsoft, the switch was something of a culture shock. “When I started here, the biggest challenge was to reposition YouTube away from being a place for [videos of] dogs on skateboards,” she says.

Oh, how things have changed. Today, YouTube is a \$15 billion global behemoth and a vital daily source of both entertainment and information. So when coronavirus descended on the world, Tiedt knew the company needed to respond. “Two of our biggest pillars are learning and connection. YouTube has really been essential for connecting during COVID, especially with young people, who are experiencing high levels of mental health issues. We could see that in all the data on our platform.”

Part of the company response was through its #WithMe campaign, which solicited the likes of “Cook #WithMe,” “Clean #WithMe,” “Jam #WithMe” and many others as a force for unity. As the nation shut down in March, the videos saw a 600% increase. From that, Tiedt enlisted popular YouTube personalities to create pandemic-prompted videos tagged “StayHome #WithMe” and soon expanded to include curated lists “GetBy #WithMe,” “Graduate #WithMe” and others. The campaign ultimately generated more than 1.1 billion views globally and 2.3 billion social impressions.

Tiedt’s marketing approach was integral to the launch several years ago of YouTube Music, which has since ballooned to 30 million subscribers. “The thing that really accelerated our positioning was rethinking subscriptions,” she says. “About 60% of our subscribers have multiple subscriptions. It had us scratching



our heads at first, but when we dove deeper into the data, we saw that people really perceived [YouTube Music] as a totally different beast. It wasn’t a trade-off with Spotify — that really freed us up.”

Livestreamed concerts, which have exploded in popularity since COVID shuttered performance venues, have also become a major focus for YouTube marketers. “We need to roll out new monetization models,” notes Tiedt. “What does a best-in-class livestreamed performance look like?”

She and her team plan to build campaigns to grow the interest in concerts from home, as a near-term return to live touring is unlikely. “Unfortunately, I don’t think we’re escaping the reality we’re in for quite some time, especially in the U.S.,” she says. “Things won’t look much different in 2021.”

So ahead they will. “Livestreaming is a great medium,” says Tiedt, “but there are so many things still to figure out as a business about how to make it into something more than that we’re doing it because we can’t do live concerts.”

YouTube helped its users cope with the pandemic via #WithMe, which generated more than 1.1 billion views.



DANIELLE TIEDT
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
YOUTUBE



DAVID G. EDWARDS

SVP, GLOBAL MARKETING STRATEGY, LIONSGATE

Not many predicted last year's surprise holiday hit, "Knives Out." But Edwards, who's been with Lionsgate since 2012, wasn't surprised: "We were seeing an incredible [reception] everywhere we screened the film, across all age groups and genders." So his team did a campaign that targeted different audiences they thought "Knives" would appeal to, playing up unique aspects for each. "We knew we had an incredible film on our hands, but I thought we could really swing for the fences." The confidence was strong enough for the marketers to see franchise possibilities, and Edwards is already eyeing the greenlighted sequel. When the pandemic shut theaters, he was faced with how to keep moviegoing vital. The result: "Lionsgate Live: A Night at the Movies," a series of livestreamed events using popular catalog titles including "Dirty Dancing," "John Wick" and "La La Land." "Movies aren't just about content, they're about community," he says. "We looked for ways to create the sense of community. People around the world could watch together, and we created social media hubs for them to engage." It also benefited furloughed theater workers through the Will Rogers Film Pioneers.



CASSANDRA BUTCHER

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, BRON STUDIOS



ALISSA NORBY

VP, DIGITAL CONTENT & STRATEGY, BRON STUDIOS

As a standalone prodco, Bron has to work with studio partners to spread the word on its films, and the company has done major projects like "Joker" with Warner Bros. and "Bombshell" with Lionsgate. The team conceives the campaign before production, and studios step in for implementation. "There are some where we're chasing the marketing and others where we work really closely to amplify [studios'] messaging," says Butcher, with Bron since 2018. It also does more targeted films, including 2021's Kevin Hart tearjerker "Fatherhood." "We think in terms of psychographics, not demographics," notes Norby, who worked in marketing at Fox Searchlight, Legendary and Warner Bros. before coming to Bron in 2019. "We have everything from social-listening tools to machine-learning tools. It's about understanding the audience from the beginning of a project's lifecycle." For next year's powerhouse bio-drama "Judas and the Black Messiah," she adds, "Blair Rich at Warners has been great at keeping us in the loop." One new partnership is with Epic Games, maker of Fortnite. "We're working with them to develop stories," Butcher says. "We'll be pitching those to streamers."



SHANNON WILLETT

VP, U.S. SERIES MARKETING, NETFLIX



VINICIUS LOSACCO

VP MARKETING LATIN AMERICA, NETFLIX



BOZOMA SAINT JOHN

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, NETFLIX

Unlike theaters and live venues, Netflix saw a surge in subscribers and time spent as a result of the COVID-19 shutdown. But even the mega-streamer has had to adjust how it promotes its content due to constraints on production and the splitting up of creative teams forced to work from home. "The biggest challenge was to find creative ways to produce and deliver the campaigns to consumers in a safe way," LatAm marketing head Losacco says. A planned live taping of the season finale for "The House of Flowers" (Mexico) had to be jettisoned, so the team touted a virtual special, with series clips and fun narration. Forced shifts in viewing habits also posed a challenge. "We've always been heavily focused on the digital and social spaces, but the key this year was for us to create the feeling of community when people couldn't actually be together," Willett notes. "This included virtual table reads, digital viewing parties and really focusing on great creative assets to live online." Saint John, who joined Netflix over the summer from Endeavor, agrees and points out the paradigm shift in consumer habits: "We have to ask ourselves, 'How has my own behavior changed?' and then go from there."



Crosby is now responsible for overseeing Hulu's marketing efforts across the company, including B2B, on-demand and live TV. "Our goal is to offer the most complete TV experience out there but deliver it across whatever screen or platform the consumer wants."

Part of that has been making Hulu viewers aware they can get live sports in addition to on-demand entertainment programming. Crosby's team designed the "Hulu Sellouts" campaign to roll out on NBA All-Star Weekend, using, appropriately, pro ballers Giannis Antetokounmpo, Damian Lillard and Joel Embiid to promote the platform's live-TV feature on their own social media accounts. The hook: The messaging was designed to tell the world straight up that, yes, these sportsters are being paid to promote — complete with hashtags that unabashedly come clean.

"At its core, it was a digital influencer campaign. We decided to be transparent about the fact that Hulu was paying athletes to tell consumers you can watch live sports on Hulu," Crosby says. "At first we weren't sure how the athletes would react to the transparency, but they loved it. I think there needs to be a lot more transparency generally about influencer marketing."

Since its launch in 2007, Hulu has undergone multiple corporate restructurings, from its original tripartite studio ownership through Comcast's acquisition of one of the partners to it now being fully controlled by Disney, where it lives alongside Disney+. Crosby sees the final landing spot as a great springboard for creativity. "Disney has been beneficial to us. Having it as owner and partner in what we're doing has been positive," he says. "It's never bad to have a huge content producer behind you."

Still, with production slowed to a trickle in 2020 due to the COVID-driven shutdown, inventiveness is key. "We've been able to highlight some of the content from our back catalog to plug some of the holes," Crosby says. "We've got an abundance of content that may not be brand new, but maybe you haven't gotten around to seeing it yet."

Before landing at Hulu in 2018, Crosby spent nearly four years as vice president of global consumer marketing at gaming stalwart Activision Blizzard. In the years since, the two industries have come to resemble each other, with TV series such as Disney's "The Mandalorian" being shot on virtual sets using AI and VR technology developed in gaming, while video games have evolved into spectator sports with their own broadcast platforms, as in Twitch and YouTube Gaming.

In fact, Crosby says, "Understanding some of the technology in games has definitely helped me in the rapidly evolving world of television." The mediums also share an approach to marketing. "On both sides we're working to build fanbases and franchises. The goal is to give people a feeling of being part of a community."

Whether engaging an audience via an ongoing story or virtual world or marketing individual franchises,

Baker Mayfield and Saquon Barkley were just two of the athletes featured in the "Hulu Sellouts" campaign, which was transparent about the pitchmen being paid to promote the service.



RYAN CROSBY
VP, MARKETING,
HULU



**ASAD
AYAZ**

PRESIDENT, MARKETING,
THE WALT DISNEY STUDIOS

When theaters closed due to COVID-19, Disney looked to VOD for its high-profile releases, starting with the revered “Hamilton.” Ayaz, who’s been rising up the company’s marketing ranks since 2005, says, “This was a very, very important property for us,” says “We made the decision for ‘Hamilton’ go on Disney+, and it was really good timing. There was a lot happening that was not very positive, and ‘Hamilton’ is a celebration.” The campaign was two-pronged. “We knew there was a passionate fan base out there and we needed to reach them. But we were also introducing a cultural phenomenon to people who hadn’t seen it. With Plus, we were able to bring ‘Hamilton’ to new audiences.” But different releases require different approaches — as in, “Mulan,” which would charge subscribers an additional \$20. “We launched the [theatrical] campaign last year and the interest we were tracking was very positive,” Ayaz says. “But we worked with the Plus team to communicate what the premium release was all about, that it was a transaction people had to make from within Plus. There was some confusion because it was a new concept, but we feel we got it right.”



**ALLISON
GOLLUST**

EVP, NEWS AND SPORTS, CMO AND CHIEF
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, WARNERMEDIA

As a former communications director for New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, Gollust is no stranger to rough-and-tumble politics. But by any stretch, the sustained fire aimed at CNN from the White House amid a contentious election year, a global pandemic and a national racial reckoning, 2020 has been the roughest. Still, Gollust, who steers public perception of the network, notes the WarnerMedia news brand can take the pressure. “More people are looking for information these days, and they’re coming to us. Our trust numbers are as high as ever, and we’re enjoying the strongest ratings in our 40-year history.” That is a direct result of consistent messaging. “Even after 2016, there was a lot of negative attention coming from the Trump administration. It did make us think about how it might affect brand.” But Gollust’s team stayed the course. “We now do brand campaigns three or four times a year instead of once or twice, but we haven’t seen any erosion.” And it’s precisely that solid reputation that helps people process the COVID quandary. “The pandemic obviously has global implications, but I think we’ve been particularly well positioned to cover it because of that strength.”



**JOE
EARLEY**

EVP, MARKETING & OPERATIONS,
DISNEY+

After a long career at Fox, mostly on the television side, Earley joined Disney in January 2019 following its 21st Century Fox acquisition and got to work on marketing Disney+ in advance of its launch. “From the moment I heard about Disney+ and the unparalleled brands that will be brought together on the service, I felt it was the model for the future of entertainment,” he said at the time, not realizing the prescience of his words. Disney+ rocketed off the launch pad, soaring to 60 million subscribers within the first nine months and meeting its 2024 goal of 60 million to 90 million subs four years earlier than forecast. And Disney+ has been a key platform for franchise extensions. One of its biggest hits has been “Star Wars” spinoff “The Mandalorian,” with its introduction of marketing goldmine Baby Yoda. The success of Disney+ also helped lay the foundation for the Mouse’s embrace of a direct-to-consumer future, as reflected in company’s recent strategic reorganization that will see all content, including feature films, funneled through a single distribution operation to determine its optimal marketing and release strategy.

If you ask Wall, marketers really stepped up amid the vast uncertainties brought by 2020. “The adaptive creativity of the marketing community has been incredible, and not just at Nickelodeon,” she says. “We had no production, but we still had to create ads. We still needed to talk to people. It ended up making a lot of our communication more authentic. People came out with a lot of incredibly creative marketing.”

For Nickelodeon, that meant devising ways to engage with families at a time of confusion. As the pandemic took root and children’s worlds shifted right under their feet, she and her team seized an opportunity for learning. Enter Kristen Bell, who hosted a one-hour special, “#KidsTogether: The Nickelodeon Town Hall,” featuring SpongeBob and other Nick celebrities giving kids their own guide to the coronavirus. The network also created playdate specials with “Blues Clues & You” host Josh Dela Cruz.

“With everyone staying home and watching [TV], we tried to create some semi-normal time for people and families to spend together,” says Wall, who returned to Nickelodeon last year after stints at Netflix, Hulu and HBO. “But we also wanted to use our IP to help kids get through this incredibly anxious time, to keep them engaged and teach them about washing hands and social distancing.”

In the wake of the waves of cultural unrest, Wall’s marketing team developed a guide to race relations and a compilation of resources on NickHelps.com, a corporate arm aimed at keeping children engaged and informed during the shutdown. The network also



relaunched the long-running “Nick News” series that had ended in 2016 with the hour-long special “Kids, Race & Unity,” hosted by Alicia Keys. The special featured the three founders of Black Lives Matter, as well as a host of kids-world stars and influencers, answering questions and offering tools for families to have conversations about race and inclusiveness. To grab kids of all ages, the show also aired on TeenNick, Nicktoons, Nickelodeon YouTube and the network’s Pluto TV channel.

“Studies show kids start to become aware of racism around 2 years old, and by 11 or 12 it’s pretty embedded, so it’s important to target that time,” Wall says of the network’s messaging. “We wanted to use our IP to help kids understand things they may not be learning in school. We talked about Emmett Till, we talked about the Little Rock Nine.”

And the outreach was well received. “We’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback from parents, and we learned it’s possible to talk more maturely to kids than I might have thought in the past.”

As 2020 flooded kids with a perfect storm of confusing societal issues, Nickelodeon beefed up its NickHelps.com with resources and explanations from the network’s stars and kids-world influencers.



JENNY WALL
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
NICKELODEON



BLAIR RICH

PRESIDENT, WORDWIDE MARKETING, WARNER BROS. PICTURES GROUP & HOME ENTERTAINMENT

LISA GREGORIAN

PRESIDENT & CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, WARNER BROS. TELEVISION GROUP

It will be the end of an era at the close of 2020 when Warner Bros. sees the departure of both Rich, who joined out of college in 1997, and Gregorian, who came over from Lorimar in 1986. Each oversees marketing across all distribution channels on the film and TV sides, respectively, helping the studio tie together messaging throughout a property's lifecycle. That seamless coordination proved critical in 2020 as film release dates slipped and TV viewing habits shifted due to COVID-19. The marketers came together to launch FanDome, a one-time-only August event spotlighting the studio's DC Multiverse with footage from upcoming films and TV series, a fan art showcase, merchandise and a behind-the-scenes look at DC artists, animators, filmmakers and performers. Initially conceived as a live event, FanDome did the pandemic pivot to virtual, and the grand experiment wowed with 22 million views from 220 countries and territories and more than 150 million trailer views over its 24 hours. While Gregorian is moving on, Rich is readying for a tentpole-heavy release slate in 2021, including "Wonder Woman 1984," "Space Jam: A New Legacy" and "The Suicide Squad."



STEPHEN BRUNO

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, MGM

Sometimes, digital marketing can be a snap. For last year's animated big-screen "The Addams Family," Bruno and his team launched the "Snap-Along" social media campaign built around the franchise's famously catchy finger-snapping theme music. They enlisted a diverse group of influencers to create their own Snap-Along videos that were then compiled into a mashup viewed more than 8.8 million times. With theaters shuttered by the pandemic, mass entertainment in 2020 has been a challenge, but Bruno, who joined the studio after guiding Netflix global marketing for several years, remains optimistic. "Audiences will be hungry for communal experiences once it's safe to return to theaters," he says. "It's on us to remind them of the one-of-a-kind feeling that comes from the big screen." MGM's biggest franchise, James Bond, was set for a massive marketing campaign for its 25th film, "No Time to Die," but the release is now pushed back to mid 2021, as is the highly anticipated Aretha Franklin biopic "Respect," starring Jennifer Hudson. "We're fortunate that our upcoming films have strong IP, so reigniting interest once our audience is ready should be seamless. Regardless, once some normalcy returns, I think we're going to see a major moviegoing resurgence."



CHRIS VAN AMBURG

HEAD OF MARKETING, APPLE TV+

In 2018, Van Amburg signed on to head up marketing for the nascent Apple TV+ after more than a decade at Sony, where he oversaw marketing strategies for the likes of "Breaking Bad," "Better Call Saul," "Outlander" and "Shark Tank." With Apple TV+'s launch in November 2019, he and his team devised strategies to help it find its sea legs after a somewhat wobbly start with only four original series and a limited slate of movies. Now a year in — and the word out — the streamer has shown itself quite adept at the slow burn, with its highest-profile series at launch, star-studded "The Morning Show," reeling in a slew of Emmy nominations and wins. Van Amburg oversees the streamer's most promising series, "Ted Lasso," which debuted in August and is already planning its third season. Apple has used the industry-wide pandemic production pause to bolster its film offerings — nabbing rights to the Tom Hanks WWII actioner "Greyhound" and Sofia Coppola's "On the Rocks" — and sign up the beloved Charlie Brown holiday specials after 55 years on broadcast television. Campaigns await for Apple's deal that brings Jon Stewart back to current affairs in a one-hour, single-topic series, already greenlighted for multiple seasons.

The coronavirus pandemic changed a lot of job descriptions in 2020, but none more so than tour marketer. Until March of this year, the job entailed overseeing ticketing creation, gathering creative assets, working with promoters on how the marketing budget would be spent, developing audience targeting strategies and shepherding promotions through radio and sponsorships.

But when concert venues suddenly became off limits and touring was no longer an option, Lawson acknowledges that most of marketing's essential elements had to be mothballed. Instead, as performers pivoted to explore the possibilities of digital platforms and virtual events to maintain contact with their fans, "tour" marketing shifted to a purely electronic affair. "Pre-COVID, digital was important, the biggest part of our marketing efforts," says Lawson, who spent five years in label relations at Warner Music Group before joining Paradigm in 2015. "Post-COVID, it's basically the only part."

Now Lawson and others who build campaigns to energize the masses for in-person performances have had to scramble to figure out the wild West of livestreaming. One of the biggest differences is ticket marketing. "With livestreaming, you basically have unlimited tickets to sell, and you're marketing to the whole world," she says. "Before COVID, the two biggest windows for selling tickets were right after a tour is announced and then in the final two weeks before the show [in each city]. But with livestreaming, 70% of tickets are selling within the last 24 to 48 hours before the show, so we really have to focus on marketing on those last few days."

Lawson and her team have also had to rethink the VIP access and meet-and-greet elements that are an integral part of live touring. For Billie Eilish's "Where Do We Go?" livestream, Paradigm enlisted direct-to-consumer and artist services firm 23/7 Global to host virtual meet-and-greets with the artist, which actually opened the opportunity to a wider group.

"This had us thinking about those experiences in a whole new way," Lawson says, pointing to new strategies designed to promote concerts via computer. "There are now one-on-one virtual meet-and-greets, online group Q&A sessions with fans and even things like cooking classes with an artist. We really feel that even though things have changed, we can evolve and bring a memorable live experience to the consumer."

Like many in the music industry, she thinks live-streaming will stick around even when artists can tour again. "In beginning of the pandemic, people were doing things on Twitch. It was basically impromptu because they couldn't tour. Now artists are really starting to push the envelope creatively. We're seeing the evolution of the live event into kind of an extension of the music video." But in-person concerts will one day return, and at some point, she says, "we're going to have to figure out how to market them in conjunction."



JESSICA LAWSON
VP, TOUR MARKETING
PARADIGM AGENCY



Billie Eilish's "Where Do We Go?" livestream incorporated virtual meet-and-greets with the artist.

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