

Connections London 2017: Storytelling Is the Real Game-Changing Technology



Last week, FGRT's UK team attended talks at Connections London, covering the impact of technology on the creative process and immersive customer experiences. The main points discussed were:

- 1) Digital technology has changed profoundly the development of creative processes, but storytelling remains key in engaging with customers, regardless of the technology used.
- 2) Companies such as Adidas generate immersive in-store customer experiences that entertain store visitors and, at the same time, gather shoppers' body and athletics information used to produce customized products.
- 3) The further development of conversational interfaces and in-store product customization and production are the focus of future projects at Google and Adidas, respectively.

Last week, members of FGRT's UK team attended Connections London, a trade show that connects brands in industries including fashion with the marketing and creative industry. The event was organized by media group Le Book. During the event, two talks discussed the impact of technology on the creative process for brand marketing and how creative processes are used to create immersive customer experiences. Here, we highlight the main points discussed in those two talks.

The Impact of Technology on the Creative Process

The main discussion on day one focused on the impact of technology on the creative process and saw the participation of Samuel Clarke, Global Brand Director at tech brand Microsoft Surface; Matthew Clark, Cofounder and Creative Director at tech and creative firm United Visual Artists (UVA); Mark Adams, Senior Vice President and Head of Innovation at media firm Vice Media UK; and Danielle Atkins, Vice President, Global Brand and Creative at tech firm Eastman Kodak Company. The talk was moderated by Carla Buzasi, Global Chief Content Officer at fashion analytics firm WGSN.

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The discussion was broken down into three parts:

1. How the Participants' Companies Innovate



Source: FGRT

Kodak provided the most significant example. Atkins noted that as technology has changed the way consumers takes pictures—with smartphones rather than with dedicated cameras—the company lost its leading position in photography and had to reinvent itself. Kodak decided to capitalize on its legacy of being a creative brand that contributed to democratizing photography, and launced new products to engage with the digital-native generation, such as the EKTRA smartphone, a professional-quality, photography-first smartphone, and even a line of apparel and skateboarding, Kodak | Girl Skateboard Co., which emphasises the connection between skateboarding and filming.

2. The Impact of Technology on the Creative Process such as Brand Marketing or Content Creation



Source: FGRT

While all the panelists agreed that digital technology has profoundly changed the development of the creative process, Adams from Vice Media UK provided an insightful point by arguing that storytelling is the real game-changing technology. Brands often focus too much on the adoption of a new technology and not on content, according to Adams, who believes it is key to use the technology as a tool to convey the story, and not to adopt the technology because it is nice to have. Digital natives see the technology as invisible. What matters to them is the content, not the form through which it is communicated, Adams remarked. The slow adoption of virtual reality (VR), for example, is caused by the fact that companies are focused more on the adoption of the technology and less on the development of VR-compatible content, making it less attractive to consumers, according to Adams.

3. Panelists Outlined their Main Sources of Innovation



Source: FGRT

For Atkins, how children use digital technologies is a big source of inspiration, as their approach to these technologies is completely different to the one of older generations. Adams looks at what leading and innovative brands such as Adidas (see day two talk below) do in terms of innovation to get inspiration. UVA’s Clark said that facing new challenges and getting outside of his comfort zone is his first source of inspiration for innovative thinking, while Clarke of Microsoft Surface said he focuses on understanding the consumers’ needs as a main driver for innovation.

The Creative Process in Creating Immersive Experiences

The main discussion on day two focused on the creative process in creating immersive experiences, and saw the participation of Nick Cline, Design Director of adidas Global Brand Design Amsterdam; Andre Le Masurier, Group Creative Director at Google; Adam Smith, Director and Co-Creative Director at music project The Chemical Brothers; and Scott Holmes, formerly Chief Technology Officer at tech firm Hewlett Packard (HP). Nelly Gocheva, Global Editorial Director at brand marketing firm T Brand Studio International, a unit of The New York Times, moderated the session.

The speakers presented on projects they have worked on, which are aimed at creating immersive experiences for customers:



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- T Brand Studio collaborated with investment bank UBS in a project named “What it takes to be human,” which aims to examine the emotional side of artificial intelligence (AI), and consists of the possibility for users to chat with Rose, a chatbot that simulates human psychology by having its own personality and unpredictable behavior.
- Google worked with The Walt Disney Company to create Star Wars-themed Google products that deliver an immersive experience to users, such as an app that virtually turns the user’s smartphone into a lightsaber when playing an interactive video game on Google Chrome.
- HP developed an interface to better engage with key IT people within companies. The interface illustrates the benefits of HP’s products in a fun and engaging way, by simulating arcade videogames that today’s IT decision makers have grown up with.
- Adidas launched in London the day of the talk (October 19, 2017) Speedfactory, a new concept store in which technology is used to gather customers’ data to create customized products. Store visitors undertake in-store experiences such as having their feet scanned and taking a one-minute run on a connected treadmill in order to gather the data needed to customize the perfect running shoes for best performance.
- Smith worked with electronic music duo the Chemical Brothers to create engaging experiences for people attending music events. Smith used technology including VR to create visuals on-stage that help overcome the separation between the musicians on stage and the audience. In the presentation, Smith showed an example of these applications of technology, which consists of the image of a robot dancing on stage created by a real dancer wearing an outfit with embedded sensors that generate the computer image projected on stage.

In conclusion, the speakers shared the next projects they have in their pipelines aimed at creating immersive experiences. Among the projects disclosed, Google will focus on conversational interfaces, which will further develop new ways of interacting with smart technology using voice commands, while Adidas will look further at expanding the in-store product customization and localized on-demand production.



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