

**M.**

# **Strategy Guide: Reimagining Brand Identity for the Age of Adaptability.**



“May you live in interesting times.” This old adage may sound like a blessing, but it is actually intended as a curse. And while its origin has been vigorously debated, the meaning is generally agreed upon: interesting times are uncomfortable and tragic, often defined by political upheaval, civil unrest, war, famine, and yes, even pandemics.

And yet, these periods of human history are also responsible for sparking incredible acts of creative expression. Think of the “British Invasion” and the rock music that came from Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles, in the 60s and 70s during the height of the Vietnam War. Or the free-spirited writers of the “roaring 20s” like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein, who experienced the end of World War I, the women’s suffrage movement, and the beginning of Prohibition.

We don’t go looking for these moments, of course—they find us. And like it or not, interesting times have found us today.

Creatives have been challenged to quickly adapt to not just our current situation but to the world that may exist when we resurface from it. This has been true across industries like art, media, entertainment, and of course, commerce. For their part, brands have radically changed the way they communicate and connect with their customers, carefully navigating the shifting demands of the coronavirus era while continuing to operate, care for employees, and move forward.



# The age of adaptability.

Initially, when the world entered quarantine and brands needed to adapt their creative messaging in advertising, social engagement, and digital experience, many led with familiar-feeling tactics.

Independent artists and agencies came together to spread messages of “hope” and to inform society on how to stay safe and stop the spread of illness. Soon after, almost all advertisements contained a variation of the message “we are in this together” and consumers’ email systems populated with endless notes about safety and communication protocols. Designers, producers, and marketing teams repurposed pre-planned campaigns and ad buys to address the current situation.

Some may argue that changes are never as permanent as we believe them to be in the middle of a crisis. And historically that may be true. But our current situation feels different. Consumer preferences toward digital experiences, social-led branding, and more were already happening, and this confluence of social, workplace, and economic friction are only serving to increase the pace of that change.

**The societal changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic “have vaulted us five years forward in consumer and business adoption in a matter of around eight weeks,” according to a McKinsey report.**



Seemingly overnight, organizations developed technology to enable their operations and advertising to move online. But this sudden shift has left very little room for the brand identity to change with it, despite the fact that creative assets like typography, logos, colors, imagery, and iconography are key to maintaining consistency and driving trust with audiences.

As we move beyond the initial shock of creative pandemic response, it's time to consider the inflection point it represents for a global audience of buyers and brands alike. In a new world, your brand identity will either be an enormous risk or a categorical differentiator.

### **How has your brand - its visual identity, creative assets, and message - changed during the last several months?**

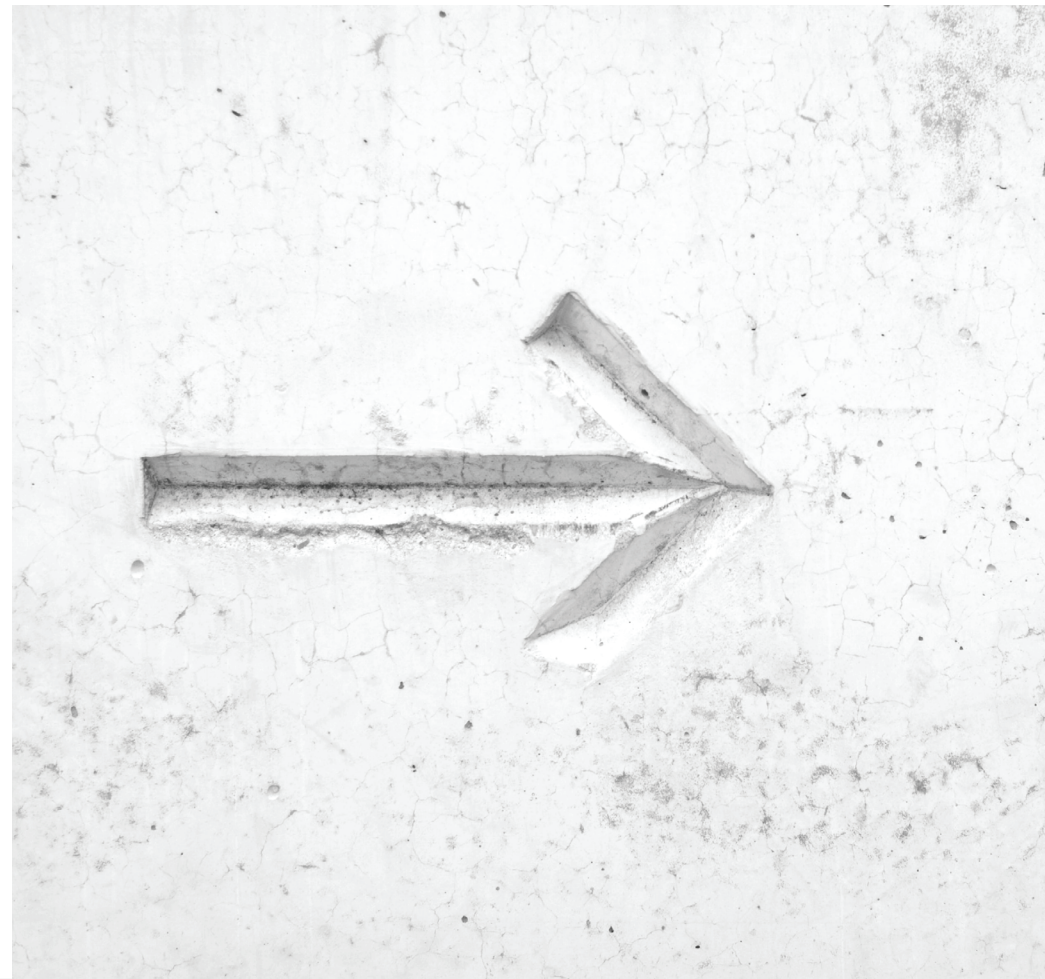
We call this incredible shift the “Age of Adaptability,” as the world of tomorrow will require brands to adapt in myriad ways, including:

- Extending visual identity to new, emerging, often third-party (unowned) channels
- Communicating a consistent message that consumers can trust regardless of where they are engaging with a brand
- Personalizing the brand to all audiences - One brand → unique customer experience
- Enabling distributed collaboration with a remote workforce
- Addressing social issues in authentic and purposeful ways

<sup>1</sup> “Beyond Agility - Adaptive Enterprises Hold The Winning Hand.” Forrester. 05/2019.

<sup>2</sup> “Hopkins, Brian. “This Adaptive For The 2020s.” Forrester. 05/11/20.

Others have highlighted the importance of adaptability for brands in the ‘20’s. In fact, Forrester outlined a broader framework for successful adaptive strategy last year, in a report called “Beyond Agility - Adaptive Enterprises Hold the Winning Hand.”<sup>1</sup> Brian Hopkins, VP, Principal Analyst at Forrester captures the spirit of the strategy,<sup>2</sup> saying, “successful businesses will focus less on accurately predicting future years in advance. Instead, they will become the kind of company that can adapt as events unfold.”





This perspective is proving accurate. According to Forrester's research, firms that were ranked as "more adaptive" were growing 3x faster than their competitors prior to the pandemic. For marketing and brand leaders, there is historical precedent for the value that creative and marketing can bring to long-term corporate health. When McGraw-Hill Research studied the 1981 and '82 recession, it found that companies that marketed aggressively had 256 percent higher sales than those that did not.<sup>3</sup>

Agile. Adaptive. Future-proofed. Whatever terminology you use, success over the remainder of this already historic decade requires a visual identity system capable of accommodating three distinct trends:

- Accelerated digital transformation. Brand experiences have shifted online at a record pace, driven by consumer behavior.
- Humanized brand identity. In a time of anxiety, consumers want brands to align with their values and communicate authentically.
- Distributed creative collaboration. Forced into remote work by circumstance, many organizations are recognizing the long-term benefits and employees are advocating for balance as the economy reopens.

**Let's further explore what is driving each of these trends.**

<sup>3</sup> VanBoskirk, Shar. "How The COVID-19 Crisis Will Impact Marketing Spend Between Now And 2022." Forrester. 05/08.20.



# Accelerated digital transformation.

Nearly every industry has been upended in the coronavirus era. For businesses that lagged behind in digital adoption, the shift to a more digital brand has happened at what feels like warp speed. Retailers, in particular, have had to dramatically rethink the shopping journey amidst an overnight shift toward e-commerce and curbside pick-up.

Shopify has been helping many brands move their consumer experiences online and has unique perspective on the strategies that are bearing fruit. According to Tobi Lütke, CEO of Shopify, the pandemic has brought 2030 to 2020. “We’re seeing the world’s largest and most storied brands abandon legacy platforms. They’re launching direct-to-consumer (DTC) initiatives fast, and slashing costs at the same time.”<sup>4</sup> The company posits that having a DTC strategy can help brands recover from this crisis and protect against future crises, as consumers around the globe have dramatically increased expenditures online while mired in the uncertainty of the coronavirus.

## Consider the following:

- U.S. retailers’ online year-over-year revenue growth was up 68 percent as of mid-April, surpassing an earlier peak of 49 percent in early January.<sup>5</sup>
- UK online retail sales jumped 32.7 percent in May, the largest increase in more than 12 years.<sup>6</sup>
- Consumers who reported shopping and paying for retail purchases online increased from 41.8 percent in 2019 to 56.4 percent in 2020, marking a 34.9 percent increase.<sup>7</sup>

The last statistic, in particular, is telling. Driven largely by the grocery segment, more and more consumers are shopping online for purchases they would previously make in-store. As various countries begin to re-open, it seems unlikely we will simply going back to a traditional store experience.

According to EY, the majority of US consumers (78 percent) think there will be another outbreak within one year, and more than half (53 percent) believe it will be within the next six months. As a result, even in locations where restrictions have been eased, 75 percent of consumers are visiting physical stores less frequently.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “COVID-19 Commerce Insight.” Emarsys and GoodData. <https://ccinsight.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Mulcahy, Andy. “Online Retail Sales Reach Twelve-Year High as E-Commerce Underpins the ‘New Normal!’” IMRG.org. 06/05/20.

<sup>7</sup> “Remote Payments: How Life on Lockdown Has Transformed Consumers’ Spending.” PYMNTS.com. 04/20.

<sup>8</sup> Gramling, Kathy. “EY Future Consumer Index: considering the outcome of easing US lockdown restrictions.” EY Americas Consumer. 05/29/20.



Starbucks is a prime example of how quickly customer sentiment has changed. The pandemic has accelerated plans to increase the number of order-fulfillment “pickup” stores—which don’t have seating—in some cases replacing cafés where people can relax. While this strategy to meet customers’ evolving preferences was planned for a three- to five-year rollout, new demands make this move (worth billions) an immediate necessity.

Many customers no longer want to sit and socialize or work as cafés reopen, either because their routine and habits have changed during the pandemic or because they aren’t comfortable in a crowded café setting. The company said the pandemic forced it to rethink its idea of being a “third place” for its customers, separate from work and home. Now and likely going forward, many customers just want to get their coffee and go.







Fast Company also reports that retail employee-customer relationships will become even more important. Customers may call stores to talk about products, which associates select out for the customer to try at home. Personal shopping may become more popular, with associates making recommendations rather than simply filling online orders.

We can look to China for some more insight into how consumer behaviors may change, as many businesses have reopened following the initial wave of the virus.

Remarkably, 48 percent of consumers surveyed in China strongly agree that the way they live and their values will change significantly in the long-term as a result of COVID-19. Categories like “fresh food,” “personal care,” “beauty and cosmetics,” and “clothing and footwear” are over-indexing as consumers shift priority toward “new essentials.”

For some retailers stateside, this move online has not only balanced revenue but actually led to dramatic improvement in performance.

“Many of our clients are having their best sales ever over the last four to six weeks, even as compared to last Black Friday,” said Dean Dutro, cofounder of Portland, Oregon-based digital agency, Worth Commerce.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> “Consumer Spend Is Shifting to Ecommerce: The Untold COVID-19 Story.” eMarketer. 04/24/20.



## Leaning into a re-imagined identity.

While e-commerce technology, inventory management systems, and other investments are crucial to any online business, maintaining a consistent brand identity across a network of channels is equally and critically important.

For organizations that achieve true brand consistency, there is a 23 percent average revenue increase attributable to that effort.<sup>10</sup> How can that be? A lack of visual consistency creates friction in the buying process. Consumers favor fewer steps in the buying process, and they want assurance that they are making secure purchases regardless of which platform they're buying on. While challenging to measure, studies have shown that purchase friction in the US cost businesses nearly \$150 billion as of 2016<sup>11</sup>, and more than \$300 billion in the APAC region as of 2018<sup>12</sup>.

With many touchpoints to consider, fonts play an important role in connecting the visual identity of a brand across environments. A brand's fonts give shape and structure to the user's experience, simultaneously delivering key messages, directing users through tasks and workflows, and maintaining a unified visual identity throughout every customer touchpoint.

Today's fonts have a lot to handle. They need to perform everywhere: Websites, digital ads, HTML emails, print ads, in-store signage, LED billboards, the list goes on. They also have to work equally well on an enormous range of devices with varying screen

resolutions. Oh, and in many cases, they need to cross geographic and language barriers as well.

In digital environments, where brand real estate is at a premium, fonts can be the connective tissue, providing both functional purpose and immediate brand recognition. Unfortunately, as devices get smaller and smaller, many designers and brand managers overlook the importance of utilizing fonts that deliver legibility and performance in all use cases.

"Designers today are going for an aesthetic where things are of light contrast, with a lot of white space and very small type sizes," notes Monotype Creative Type Director Steve Matteson. "They don't consider the fact that more than 60 percent of people over 20, at least in America, either have or need vision correction." Ensuring your brand has access to the right creative assets to perform in digital environments, where tiny fonts are commonplace, is an important factor in maintaining trust with consumers while reducing risk. A well-conceived visual identity, deployed consistently across this growing set of channels, can serve as a formidable defense against phishing schemes and other online fraud. The harder it is for someone to copy a company's look and feel, the more likely they are to give up or create a poor facsimile that customers will sniff out.

<sup>10</sup> "Media Notes: The Impact of Brand Consistency Report." Lucidpress. 03/14/17.

<sup>11</sup> "How Not to Lose \$147 Billion at Checkout." PYMNTS.com. 02/02/16.

<sup>12</sup> "Why Removing Friction is a \$325 Billion Opportunity for Businesses in Asia Pacific." Facebook IQ. 11/15/18.

We saw this play out in the streaming video industry early on in the pandemic. Over the first three weeks of March, 400 billion minutes of streaming content was played across devices, an increase of 85 percent over the same period last year. The average consumer is now accessing media and entertainment from an average of nearly five different devices.

At the same time, more than 700 fraudulent streaming websites popped up online in just a one-week period in April, all with the purpose of stealing personal information.<sup>13</sup>

Fonts are everywhere in digital environments, from the login screen to the home screen to the transactions, call-to-action text, and yes, the fine print. This means they do a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to achieving a consistent experience for the customer.

Free fonts may be tempting, but provide virtually no protection from phishing or spoofing scams. After all, if anyone can use

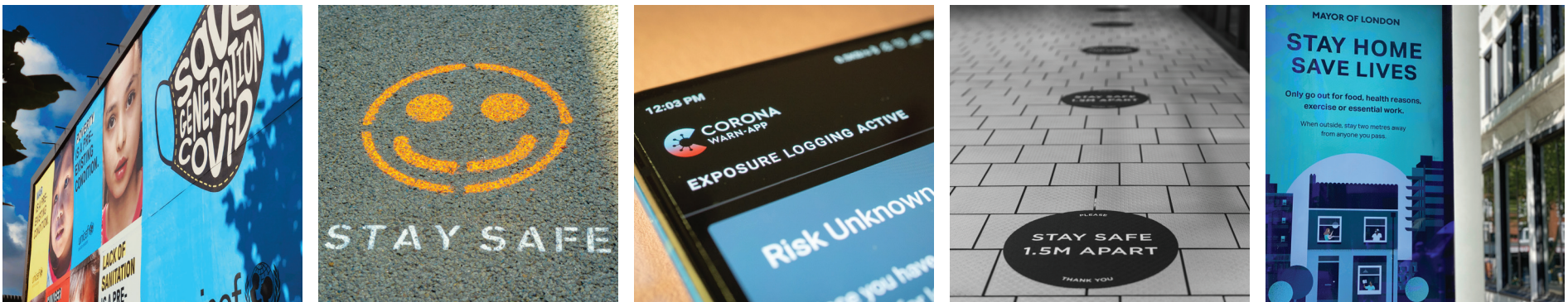
them, anyone can use them, right? Free fonts are also ubiquitous, which dilutes your differentiation. Organizations can protect their brand by using distinctive fonts or even custom designs created exclusively for them.

### **Brand preparedness checklist:**

#### **Accelerated Digital Transformation.**

Does your existing brand identity address the following needs? The ones you leave unchecked may require more dedicated strategy and planning.

- ☐ A consistent experience across all channels where consumers engage with your brand.
- ☐ Assets that perform (functionally and in driving trust) in all environments.
- ☐ Adequate rights to extend your visual system to emerging touchpoints.



<sup>13</sup> Muhlberg, Byron. “‘Dramatic Rise’ in Scam Websites Mimicking Online Streaming Services.” COP Magazine. 05/04/2020.



# Humanizing brand identity.

In prior periods of economic and social anxiety, brands could respond with messages of “hope” and “inspiration” and sort of leave it at that. But the macro events thus far in 2020 have pushed society to the precipice of a revolutionary change. In March, when brands responded to coronavirus concerns with a collective “we’re here for you during this time,” consumers responded by digging deeper into what brands were actually doing: not just for customers, but for their employees and for society as a whole.

In the United States, when the volume was raised on the issue of systemic injustice several months later, the same process played out. At times of crisis like this, brands have traditionally tried to stay out of the fray, lest they alienate a cohort of customers by choosing sides. That has served many organizations through prior periods of civil unrest. But today, consumers are paying attention to who speaks up, and it’s important for brands to use their platform to demonstrate support for their customers’ values.



Demonstrate  
Humanity.

**“What we have to appreciate is that brands hold global influence on many levels, from the consumer to customer to employees and other parties. So for brands to be silent at this time could in fact do more harm than good.”**

**Cephas Williams**

Founder of 56 Black Men in an interview with The Drum<sup>14</sup>

According to a report from 5W Public Relations, 71 percent of consumers prefer to buy from brands that align with their values.<sup>15</sup> This, of course, is not news, as there has been an trend toward purpose-led branding for the last several years. Patagonia donated the \$10 million it saved in tax cuts of 2018 to fight climate change, and TOMS famously made a donation of \$5 million to combat gun violence following the shooting in Thousand Oaks, CA, while kicking off a nation-wide tour to raise awareness.

Last August, 200 CEOs of major US corporations such as Apple, Bank of America, GM and more signed a memo stating that shareholder value is no longer their main objective. Instead, the purpose of business must shift toward “investing in employees, delivering value to customers, dealing ethically with suppliers and supporting outside communities.”

“The public expectations of your company have never been greater... Every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society,” said Larry Fink, Chairman and CEO of BlackRock, Inc. “Without a sense of purpose, no company, either public or private, can achieve its full potential.” For its part, BlackRock has pledged to divest from fossil fuels and offered funds that exclude gun manufacturers.

Consumers have more power than ever before, and with the transparency of information can see through inauthentic virtue signals. Brands must recognize the interconnectedness of all actions and use their position to truly improve the society they inhabit. In recent weeks, brands have taken more pointed steps to address inequality within their organizations.

<sup>14</sup> Watson, Imogen. “Brands show solidarity with George Floyd protests, but can they contribute to real change?” The Drum. 06/01/20.

<sup>15</sup> “Consumer Culture Report.” 5W Public Relations. 11/19.



## Trust begets stronger customer relationships.

The issue of “trust,” and specifically the erosion of it in public institutions like government, media, and brands, has been dissected by us and plenty of others in recent years. In Edelman’s 2019 Trust Barometer Special Report, just 34 percent of consumers surveyed said they trust most of the brands they buy or use. And yet, 81 percent revealed that “brand trust” was a deal breaker or deciding factor when considering a purchase.<sup>16</sup>

To further explore the role of trust in brand identity, focused in the financial sector, Monotype commissioned a study with CITE Research. In it, 49 percent of consumers reported trust being the most important factor when choosing a financial institution, while 46 percent of financial services marketers said creating a trustworthy brand is their primary objective. So, the understanding is mutual.

Extending consistency and trust into mobile and digital environments is paramount. Yet it takes on an even deeper layer of importance within the finance industry, as these brands hold

the keys to a person’s financial security. Consumers need to feel as though they’re interacting with a secure service, which is more challenging to achieve outside of a physical bank location.

Still, a physical bank offers a useful proxy for all industries: think of how difficult it would be for someone to create a convincing carbon copy of a local bank branch. That level of attention must be paid to digital interactions.

In the age of adaptability, consumers will only respond to personalized, transparent, and humanized experiences. So, how do you get there?

Once again, typography plays a critical role in helping brands humanize their identities. Type conveys the personality of a brand, and with tens of thousands of available options, can set a differentiated tone that aligns with the core values of a particular audience.

**34 percent of consumers surveyed said they trust most of the brands they buy or use. And yet, 81 percent revealed that “brand trust” was a deal breaker or deciding factor when considering a purchase.**

<sup>16</sup> “2019 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: In Brands We Trust?” Edelman. 2019.



Mailchimp is best known for its email campaign and marketing delivery system, popularized by designers and non-designers alike. But in 2018, the company had grown into one of the world's largest marketing platforms, providing powerful and sophisticated marketing tools for businesses of every size. To mark its era of growth, Mailchimp invited COLLINS to evolve its brand to reflect and fuel continued business transformation.

Through a process of cultural immersion, Mailchimp's in-house team and COLLINS identified why the company had amassed a cult following with its audience: it personified the notion that

growing older does not necessarily mean growing up; you can level-up your business, without erasing your peculiarities. These are the guiding principles that led the redesign - from the new logo and wordmark (that elevates their beloved mascot Freddie) to a new typeface, colors, and unique, surreal imagery. The resulting design system is consistent and grounded, yet playful and expressive.

The visual identity and use of typography stand out in a sea of lookalike tech-driven brands. It was selected as an inaugural Type Champions Award winner in 2019 by our committee.

## How fonts help customers feel right at home.

Modern consumers are craving some comfort—and yes, this trend predates the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdowns that have forced everyone to stay home. Younger millennials and older Gen Z-ers, in particular, are gravitating toward self-care, hygge (defining moments as charming or special), and homey bliss. They want products that will make them feel like they're at home, even when they're not, and find respite from what feels like an increasingly chaotic world. These consumers are reacting to a hustle culture in which every moment must be monetized, rejecting the attention economy, and dismissing the aspirational lifestyle aesthetic reinforced by flawlessly curated Instagram posts.

“The current design landscape is fixated on geometry, pixel-perfection, efficiency, minimalism, and so on,” says Pedro Arilla, Monotype Creative Type Director. “Moreover, the more we rely on digital services and experiences, the more we notice the lack of physicality attached to them. Therefore, a need for organic shapes, slow design, natural materials, and tactile experiences is growing. It's not about pre-digital nostalgia, it's about the beauty of human imperfection.”

This is the antithesis of busyness, chaos, perfection, and burnout. Instead, people are seeking comfort, security, warmth, ease, contentment, and relaxation. As the world reels from a global pandemic, consumers are turning inward to find a sense of stability and calm. Much of this aesthetic revolves around spending time

with friends and family—just at home (or virtually, for now). So, how do brands cultivate a feeling that's warm and welcoming, but—importantly—sociable?

When it comes to selecting a font, Arilla says there are plenty of options out there—brands can commission a custom font or choose from existing designs. “Brands always want to speak with their own voices. This can be done with new, tailored designs, or with the fresh use of an old typeface,” he says. “There are always new releases that capture this mood, along with reinterpretations of classic designs and old typefaces that are yelling for a second life, like Clearface, Americana, or Bookman. These designs, when used properly, can transport one to very specific places.”

It's up to each brand to determine how a particular aesthetic will resonate with consumers. “If you want your brand to feel warm, your brand fonts should reflect those values,” Arilla suggests. “There are other mechanisms (color, photography, illustration, copywriting) to help, but the main one is type.”

This emphasis on comfort and contentment is a way for brands from all verticals to plug into the personalities of their core customers and become integral parts of their lives. In a recent report, aptly entitled “Brand Leadership for an Anxious World,” Interbrand explores how brands are building resilience while at the same time inspiring hope for an uneasy consumer population.



# PASSION LED US HERE

Among many observations, Interbrand calls on brands to “make the essential emotional, and the emotional essential.”

“In anxiety, household essentials become heroes. Whether you help keep people connected, insured or clean, step forward. Create an emotional bond with your brand. There’s never been a better time,” reads the report. “Or you may be in the business of emotions. As fear wraps the future, hedonism and ostentation will be replaced by an investment in things that endure and hold their value over time. Refocus on your product’s worth and meaning.”<sup>17</sup>

frog design has a similar mandate for brand leaders in its “Disruptor Playbook,” which highlights “Customer Purpose as Brand Offering” as one of five key strategies for brands looking to survive and thrive beyond a period of crisis.

“Why does CVS choose to leave \$2 billion in easy money on the table each year?” the report asks, citing the annual cigarette revenue the company reportedly gave up shortly before changing its name to “CVS Health” with a mission to become “a leader in the healthcare community.”

<sup>17</sup> “Brand Leadership for an Anxious World: Building a Manifesto.” Interbrand. 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Janak, Bret and Ryan Menefee. “The Disruptor Playbook: Five strategies to help incumbent companies survive and thrive in the face of disruption.” frog design. 2020.

“Find the greater purpose that your customers are trying to fulfill, and create offerings that meet those needs under one comprehensive brand ecosystem,” the report states.<sup>18</sup>

A creative identity built to engage with the values of your customers can help tie your brand to a specific value set or personality.

## **Brand preparedness checklist:**

### **Humanizing Brand Identity.**

Does your existing brand identity address the following needs?

The ones you leave unchecked may require more dedicated strategy and planning.

- ☐ Creative assets that convey the personality of your brand’s voice.
- ☐ Identity system that is optimized for relevant channels while consistent throughout the full customer experience.
- ☐ Type, logos, iconography, that address unique needs of all global regions where your brand operates.



# Distributed creative collaboration.

Across industries, creative teams have been working to address digital transformation and humanized brand identity for at least a few years. However, as 2020 has accelerated the need to solve for these trends, it's also important to note that the nature of work itself has dramatically shifted simultaneously.

Beginning in March, the governmental guidance in most countries has been that all employees who are able to do their jobs from home should do so.

For companies that made or were making the transition to a remote-friendly workplace, this sudden shift was probably manageable. At Monotype, for example, we've had teams and individuals working remotely across the globe for years. Many employees also worked from home prior to the coronavirus pandemic, if not full-time then at least occasionally, so there were systems in place to accommodate remote work (thanks IT!). But like most companies, the first few weeks saw their ups and downs as our 600-person company adjusted to a new way of working.



Now three months in, we're all wondering what comes next, and specifically what this means for creative work. Design and creativity are not just central to what we do—it is literally what we do. We've spent a lot of time thinking about the effect the pandemic has had on the collaborative process that drives creative work at companies everywhere, and have gathered some ideas about where things could be heading.

Creative work, whether it's graphic design, typography, or writing, is somewhat paradoxical in that it thrives on two things: Collaboration, and being left the hell alone.

That latter aspect can be challenging in an office environment, where background chatter, random interruptions, bad lighting, and other factors can disrupt a person's creative process. (To be fair, some people thrive in office environments!) Walk through any design department and you'll see a range of coping mechanisms in use: Oversized headphones, zhuzhed-up workspaces, or even people abandoning their desks to work in the privacy of a conference room. Home brings its own set of distractions, but generally offers more control over how you structure your workday.

"Initially, the designers, myself included, enjoyed retreating to our comfy little home design caves and cranking out work undisturbed," says Mike Mandolese, Design Manager at HP Hood in Boston. "Finding a quiet place to get in your zone and do some in-depth designing is so much easier at home than at the office. And I say that as a parent of a 5- and 7-year old."

Gretchen Walker, Senior Designer here at Monotype, concurs. She says working from home has allowed her to balance periods of work with short breaks she didn't always make time for in the office. "Working from home, I now take a few 15-minute breaks throughout the day to creatively reset and it's boosted my productivity," she says. This is good practice regardless of where you're working, but sometimes the nose-to-the-grindstone social pressure of working in an office deters people from taking breaks.

Home may be a more comfortable and productive work environment for many designers, but it raises major challenges for the collaborative elements of the job. All creative work is ultimately a team effort, after all, starting with creative briefs and brainstorming and concluding with a cycle of reviews and revision. And while a lot of that can be scheduled, there is an element of spontaneity inherent in creative collaboration that is difficult to replicate from remote workspaces. "Unless you're careful," says Monotype's Creative Director, James Fooks-Bale, "those spontaneous corridor moments in the studio or impromptu catch-ups at each other's desks can disappear altogether."

Mandolese agrees. "Usually, the feedback and advice we'd give each other would take place off the cuff around the office," he says. "So as time marched on, and new projects started coming in, attention to detail and awareness of our work as a team started dropping a bit. I think about a month into quarantine, we collectively hit the bottom of the bell curve."



There's no substitute for rolling your chair to a teammate's desk or talking through a challenge over coffee. But creatives today are fortunate to have an array of collaboration software available that facilitates at least some of that spur-of-the-moment interaction. Slack, Zoom, and other platforms are all effective at connecting people across physical distances. Still, as Mandolese notes, designers will need to keep up the collaborative momentum long-term, needing to be fully in sync, sharing ideas, drafts, feedback, and brand assets like fonts.

As we look toward a new future, it's probably best not to think of these circumstances as temporary, but instead as a chance (and perhaps your best chance) to adapt for the longer-term.

Companies like Twitter, Square, Shopify, Google, Facebook, Upwork, Microsoft, and many more have announced varying degrees of permanence to a "digital-by-default" workforce (as Shopify put it). More and more, employees are considering the ability to work from anywhere as a critical element of an employment decision. According to a survey by IBM, "more than 75 percent indicate they would like to continue to work remotely at least occasionally, while more than half - 54 percent - would like this to be their primary way of working."<sup>19</sup> Companies, which may have been 5, 10, or even 15 years from embracing the potential of remote work, are starting to wake up as well.

<sup>19</sup> "IBM Study: COVID-19 Is Significantly Altering U.S. Consumer Behavior and Plans Post-Crisis." IBM Newsroom. 2020.



In fact, a Gartner survey revealed that “post-pandemic, 41 percent of employees are likely to work remotely at least some of the time.”<sup>20</sup> Another survey found that 74 percent of chief financial officers “intend to move at least 5 percent of their previously on-site workforce to permanently remote positions.”<sup>21</sup>

What if, instead of moving our in-office experience remote, we could take the best parts of in-person collaboration and merge them with the focus and command-of-schedule that comes from a “work-from-anywhere” policy?

To succeed in this effort, brands will need to integrate their technology with their change management strategies. Workflow friction presents an enormous challenge to brand teams in the age of adaptability, where efficiency and pace of change is exceptionally high. Like purchase friction on the consumer side, workflow friction costs creative teams time, energy, and money.

Researchers at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management alongside the team at Dropbox, conducted a study of virtual collaboration by analyzing the efficacy of research teams at global universities on the platform. They uncovered 5 strategies that lead to impactful performance:

- 1 Go small: Higher-performance is typically tied to fewer collaborators, suggesting that “too many cooks” is as much a challenge in virtual settings as it is in in-person environments.
- 2 Take your time: Successful projects that were studied tended to average 172 days for the top 10 percent of institutions, versus 130 days for the bottom 10 percent.
- 3 Increase same-team collaborations: The highest performers tended to be those that worked on several projects with the same group of collaborators, suggesting that building familiarity has a compounding effect on performance.
- 4 Aim for equality: People at higher-performing institutions tended to share work more equally amongst team members, underscoring the importance of letting team members focus on specific tasks rather than doing all of the “heavy-lifting.”
- 5 Embrace experience: Interestingly, at the top of the performance index were organizations where the senior team members contributed a higher share of project work overall. The team noted that senior scientists were likely to have more experience with defining a vision, framing goals, delegating tasks, enabling stronger performance.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> “Gartner HR Survey Reveals 41% of Employees Likely to Work Remotely at Least Some of the Time Post Coronavirus Pandemic.” Gartner. 04/14/20.

<sup>21</sup> “Gartner CFO Survey Reveals 74% Intend to Shift Some Employees to Remote Work Permanently.” Gartner. 04/03/20.

<sup>22</sup> Pah, Adam and Brian Uzzi and Rebecca Hinds. “A Study of Thousands of Dropbox Projects Reveals How Successful Teams Collaborate.” Harvard Business Review. 07/20/2018.

For companies that weren't remote-friendly before, scaling up these management systems and achieving this performance virtually can be difficult and, in the interim, cause substantial workflow snags and risks to your brand's visual consistency. In a survey we conducted of brand and creative leaders, 25 percent reported a lack of integrated technology as a key challenge to maintaining a consistent brand.

The answer? Simplify your solutions.

Many brands still store assets like fonts on local servers or even individual team members' computers, which creates a major challenge when teams can't access them. Cloud-based asset management, like our Fonts solution, provides a central management system teams can access from anywhere, anytime.

Coupled with cloud-based design programs, this allows your creative teams to work unimpeded in a new marketplace. We are working to make fonts simple for designers, brand managers, and procurement teams to use and deploy. Many notable organizations have developed solutions that can help simplify the management of your entire creative identity in a remote world.

But don't stop there. It's not just technology that creates hurdles to success. Changing the psychology of collaboration when teams aren't together in the same room, and tapping into available expertise to problem solve from afar will take concerted effort from brand and creative leaders in the coming months and years. When Monotype closed our offices, we, like many companies, initially did so for two weeks with a plan to reevaluate when those two weeks were up. That assumption seems laughable today, over three months later and counting.

Fooks-Bale likens the remote work experience to a theme park ride, each of us riding through the highs and lows on our way to something more stable. "There's enough going on that you could be forgiven for thinking it's just destruction, fracturing, and pain," he says. "It's easy to forget that the pain is the sign of something new emerging, something we're working together to create and solve for. It's about all of us individually and collectively defining what post-normal will look like.

"The most important outcome has been the trust that has been built, in many directions; across teams, within teams, upwards and downwards with management," he says. "It shouldn't just stay, it should grow."



**Brand preparedness checklist:****Distributed Creative Collaboration.**

Does your existing brand system address the following needs?

The ones you leave unchecked may require more dedicated strategy and planning.

- ☐ Technology implemented to share visual assets with creatives, agency partners, and third-party entities that may be deploying your brand.
- ☐ Collaboration management strategy to ensure creative teams are effectively working together outside of the office.
- ☐ Low workflow friction: Letting your creative teams do less management of licensing, file sharing, and administrative tasks and more design, development, and activation.



# True adaptability takes a *collective* approach.

So, what now? How can your team prepare itself for the future of creative work and prepare your brand for the age of adaptability?

Finding the right visual assets, technologies, and strategies to succeed through the coronavirus period and beyond is something your team can and should prioritize. But more than ever, it is important to look beyond the four walls of your brand and take a collective approach to transformation.

According to Interbrand, another key strategy for brand leadership in an anxious world is to “make your brand a powerful ingredient.”

“With limited resources, collaboration will be a key model to achieve more, better, faster for your customer. At times like this, the value of expertise and the humanity of collaboration are celebrated more than the muscle of competition...Be unashamed to be the ingredient of a greater ecosystem. Conceive unexpected co-labs. Think of your brand as an active principle with clear benefits. Engage others to build new formulae. Use partnerships as passports to new arenas and audiences.”<sup>23</sup>

In varying industries, these “unexpected co-labs” may take on varying forms. For instance, at Monotype, we focus deeply on

designing typography and technology that performs across environments. But we also partner with leading global agencies, technology providers and the creative community as one critical ingredient in driving brand impact. We’ve been working to more intentionally collaborate with the wider industry to elevate the value of creative across an ever-commoditizing landscape.

What “unexpected co-lab” can you become a part of to raise the volume for your industry? If all ships rise in a high tide, how can we collectively manufacture that tide together?

It starts by putting your focus on your customer. It means creating content, products, and marketing that resonates. In the age of adaptability, consumers expect:

- Personalized digital-first experiences
- Transparency and brand values that align with their own
- Relationships they can trust

Creative teams, like they always have, will determine the brands that succeed over the next decade, and those that fall behind. Which will you be?

Monotype can help your brand ensure it’s ready for the age of adaptability. Contact us today to see how.

<sup>23</sup> “Brand Leadership for an Anxious World: Building a Manifesto.” Interbrand. 2020.

# One world. One Monotype.

## Headquarter USA/Woburn

Monotype Imaging Inc.  
600 Unicorn Park Drive  
Woburn, MA 01801

Registered in the state  
of Delaware,  
Department of State,  
Division of Corporations  
Registered file number:  
3088431  
President and Chief Executive  
Officer: Scott Landers

## Contact

info@monotype.com  
Monotype.com  
Twitter @Monotype  
Instagram @byMonotype  
Facebook @ByMonotype

## USA/New York

1370 Broadway  
Suite 1450  
New York, NY 10018

## USA/Chicago

National Building  
125 S Clark Street  
Chicago, IL 60603

## USA/Colorado

6309 Monarch Park Place  
Suite 102  
Niwot, CO 80503

## USA/San Francisco

995 Market Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103

## USA/Los Angeles

12655 W. Jefferson Building  
Los Angeles, CA 90066

## Argentina/Córdoba

Corrientes 161, 2nd floor  
Córdoba, Argentina

## UK/London

Monotype Ltd.  
TEA Building, 2nd floor  
Unit 2.05  
56 Shoreditch High Street  
London E1 6JJ

## Germany/Berlin

Monotype GmbH  
Spichernstraße 2  
10777 Berlin

## India/Noida

Monotype Solutions India  
Private Limited  
2nd, 3rd & 4th floor  
Tower-B  
Prius Global & Universal  
Plot No. A-3, 4 & 5  
Sector - 125  
Noida (U.P) - 201301

## China/Shanghai

Monotype Shanghai  
Representative Office  
Room 922, 9/F, Tower 12,  
KIC III, No. 333 Song Hu Road  
Yangpu District,  
Shanghai 200433 P.R.China

## Korea/Seoul

Monotype Korea  
805 Seongji Heights  
3-Cha Building, Yeoksam-dong  
Gangnam-gu, Seoul 135-717 Korea

## Japan/Tokyo

Monotype KK  
5th Floor MG Ichigaya Building  
1-9 Gobancho, Chiyoda-ku  
Tokyo 102-0076 Japan