

“Creative courage” is the go-to strategy for tech marketers in a post-pandemic age, Shaped By study reveals

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New Shaped By (<https://shaped-by.com>) study of over 200 senior tech marketers reveals that 74% believe the sector is ‘brave’ when going to market

Three quarters say the pandemic has sparked greater creativity and imagination

66% support courage and risk-taking in their go-to market approach

Design and creativity emerges as a lead priority for 60% of UK and US marketers

98% have expanded and experimented with marketing channel activities

Tech marketers looking to carve out a competitive edge in the post-Covid world are embracing creativity and taking more risks, according to a new survey (<https://shaped-by.com/perspective2021/>) carried out by Opinium (<https://opinium.com>) on behalf of creative studio Shaped By (<https://shaped-by.com>). At the same time, social and mobile marketing are key strategic responses to decisive shifts in customer behaviour.

Creativity more highly valued post-pandemic

In the survey of over 200 senior marketers at UK and US tech brands, three quarters (74%) say their organisation was more creative with its go-to market approach in 2020 than previous years – while 73% report that the pandemic triggered more imaginative audience strategies.

Underlining the need for companies to adapt to rapidly-evolving audience demand, 66% of tech marketers in the Shaped By study assert that creativity in marketing is more valued by their organisation than a year ago. Similarly, design and creativity has emerged as a lead priority for 60%, as tech marketers seek alternatives to tried and tested methods. This is ahead of performance marketing (57%) and market research (55%).

Tech sector also encouraging more risk-taking

In parallel, the survey shows a trend towards bolder, more courageous, decision-making. 74% of participants in Shaped By’s survey believe the tech sector is ‘brave’, and 66% say their organisation supports courage and risk-taking in their go to market strategy.

That said, just 12% say the pivot towards a more risk-oriented, differentiated strategy is down to Covid-19. Instead, Covid-19 is acting as an accelerant for profound changes already in motion.

Marketers experimenting with new channels

One impact of the pandemic is that tech marketers have embraced new communication channels, with 98% expanding activities on lightly-used channels or experimenting with new ones. Before the pandemic, online

advertising and social media were the most common channels used, mentioned by 42% and 38% of marketers respectively. During the pandemic, channels used for the first time have included:

Online events (25%)
Webinars (23%)
Social media (21%)

The Shaped By survey shows a disparity between large companies (+1000 employees) and smaller companies (between 50-499 employees). Compared to smaller counterparts, big brands were twice as likely to use online advertising and digital events, nearly three times as likely to use social media, and four times as likely to use SEO.

Social marketing proves its worth

Tactical use of online events and webinars during Covid-19 should not deflect from deeper trends. With over a quarter of tech marketers (28%) experiencing an increase in audience engagement over the pandemic, social media is emerging as a key way in which end users explore and acquire products and services. 39% of surveyed marketers deemed social marketing to be the most important area to focus on. Mobile marketing (34%) was also front of mind, as was purpose-led brand marketing (34%).

Audiences responding to new content and messaging

Encouragingly, 59% of tech marketers have seen an increase in audiences responding to different types of content and there has also been significant uplift in the ability to get leads (55%). One warning sign, however, is an increase in potential clients dropping off the sales cycle at different times (51%) – probably because of new work patterns. Businesses best-placed to counter this volatility are those that have cemented their bond with customers. For example, the renewal of subscriptions and upselling of products/services remained robust during 2020 with 49% reporting increased frequency and 37% no change.

Brands humanising their offerings

Shaped By co-founder Nick Farrar believes the appetite for experimentation and creativity shows that tech marketers are switching from a sales approach to a value-driven ethos. “Many tech brands found themselves in the eye of the storm with Covid: their technology was in huge demand, but they also needed to step up in a crisis situation,” he says. “As a result, brands have strived to humanise their offerings, and connect on an emotional level.”

Emphasis on community and collaboration

This mindset rings true for Barbara Moreno, head of marketing, NDC[X] at Amadeus, whose airline clients were severely hit when Covid-19 struck, causing a global shutdown of the travel sector. Like 28% of marketers questioned in the survey, Barbara saw a growth in audience engagement last year amid a Rethink Travel campaign her company launched to spark conversations on the best path forward. “This pandemic has forced us not just to be creative, but also to be more empathetic,” she says. “We need to be really understanding about what our customers are going through, and engage them in a collaborative team

spirit."

Getting back to marketing basics

Dave Corlett, business director at Shaped By, comments. "Brands are realising you have to communicate with clients around their passion points, and the problems that you can solve for them. So it's about getting back to the basics of core brand identity – and how you communicate on a genuine and profound level."

Inexorable march of tech – and how creativity fits in

Increased emphasis on risks and creativity does not, according to the survey, signal a rejection of the trend towards AI/machine learning and data-driven marketing. 50% of survey respondents say their marketing is dominated by technology with 27% noting a dominance of creativity and 24% reporting an equal mix of the two. The underlying message is that tech marketers need to accommodate creative and tech under one roof.

The new study findings come from Shaped By (<https://shaped-by.com>), a creative studio for tech-fuelled brands that recently underwent a makeover of its own. Founded by Nick Farrar and Steve Goss in 2005, it has steadily grown its influence and expertise within the tech sector on both sides of the Atlantic over recent years, working with companies including Autodesk (<https://www.autodesk.com/>), Rubrik (<https://www.rubrik.com/en>) and Nutanix (<https://www.nutanix.com/>).

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For more information, findings and interview opportunities from the survey, please contact Poppy Brech (poppy@contentopr.co.uk Tel: 07703 599 512) or Will Hurrell (will@contentopr.co.uk Tel: 07551 927 321) at Contento PR (<https://www.contentopr.co.uk/>).

Notes for editors

The Shaped By Study was carried out by Opinium (<https://www.opinium.com/>) in 2021. Opinium interviewed over 200 senior marketers in medium to large tech companies in the US and the UK. Link to full survey here (<https://shaped-by.com/perspective2021/>).

Suggested box out:

US vs UK - cultural differences across the Atlantic

Tech marketers in the US and UK were mostly in agreement but sometimes attitudes diverged. Here are a few times the survey hinted at distinct corporate cultures.

US respondents were especially upbeat when asked if their organisation has a culture that embraces design

and creativity, with 81% saying yes compared to 76% in the UK. This gap was even wider when asked if they had been able to be more creative as a result of the pandemic – with 79% of US marketers saying yes compared to 66% in the UK.

46% of US marketers expect increased reliance on tech in the next 3-5 years, compared to 41% for the UK. The figures flip when asked if there will be increased reliance on creativity. 25% of US marketers said yes, compared to 37% from the UK. This may suggest the US is ahead of the curve – having already prioritised creativity and seeing tech as the next wave.

Both camps said their organisations support risk-taking, but the situation in the UK appeared more volatile. Under 'strongly support' risk-taking, the UK came out ahead of the US by 32% to 28%. However, the UK also scored higher when tech marketers were asked if their company tends to oppose risk-taking - 15% (UK) versus 8% (US).