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Marketing That Moved Us: Guinness “Pint of View”

Direct Mail Is a Hit with Gen Z and Millennials

Brands We Love: P.F. Candle Co.

The Changing Paid Media Puzzle

Voices of Marketing



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LETTER

Welcome to the latest issue of *ONE:ONE*.

In a world where consumers are bombarded with content, ads, and notifications from every direction, the brands making the biggest impact are often the ones creating something people feel, experience, and connect with. That theme runs throughout this issue.

We begin with a look at why younger audiences are rediscovering direct mail. While many marketers assume Gen Z and millennials only respond to digital channels, the reality is more nuanced. Physical marketing pieces are increasingly standing out because they feel more personal, more memorable, and more trustworthy in a crowded digital landscape. As the story explores, successful brands are finding ways to combine the power of print with digital convenience to create stronger customer experiences.

From there, we dive into the evolving world of paid media. As privacy changes, rising ad costs, and algorithm shifts continue to reshape the landscape, marketers are being forced to rethink old playbooks. One takeaway becomes clear: Strong creative and authentic storytelling matter now more than ever.

This issue's "Brands We Love" feature spotlights P.F. Candle Co., a company that has built a loyal following by staying remarkably authentic while growing from a small Etsy shop into a nationally recognized lifestyle brand. Through thoughtful content, community-focused events, and beautifully consistent branding, they've created a brand experience that feels personal at every touchpoint. (And yes, one lucky reader will take home a P.F. Candle Co. giveaway pack inspired by this story. See the QR code below.)

Up front, in "Marketing That Moved Us," we highlight Guinness's clever "Pint of View" campaign, which transformed an everyday coaster into a highly shareable social media moment. It's a great reminder that some of the most effective marketing ideas are often the simplest—especially when they invite customers to become part of the story themselves.

As always, we hope this issue sparks ideas, conversations, and new ways of thinking about how brands connect with people today. Thanks for letting us be part of your marketing journey.

Sincerely,



Drew Townsend
Partner, Square One

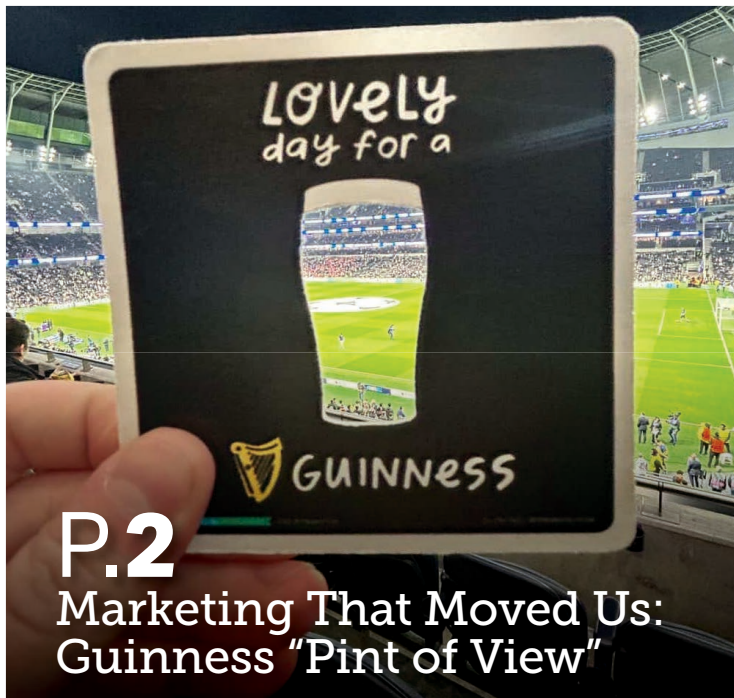


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Visit our giveaway page for a chance to WIN a 3-piece gift pack from P.F. Candle Co.

Scan the QR code or visit sqone.net/giveaway to register today.





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Guinness "Pint of View"



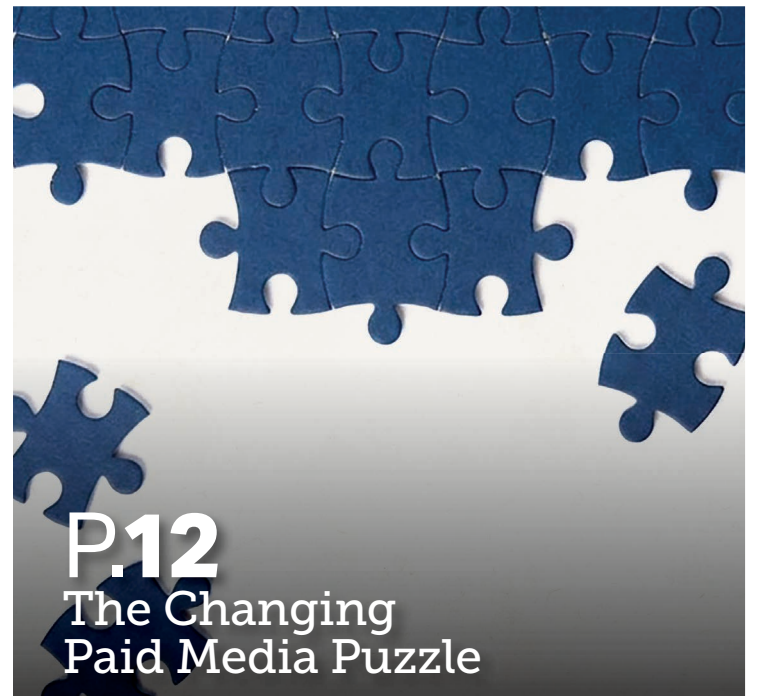
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MARKETING THAT MOVED US:

GUINNESS LETS PEOPLE SHARE THEIR “PINT OF VIEW”



WHO DID IT:

Guinness, the dry-stout brand known as a symbol of Ireland, partnered with social media agency Born Social to create coasters (known as “beer mats” in Ireland and the UK), encouraging people to share their own “Pint of View” on social media.

WHAT IT IS:

Each coaster includes a print activation that transforms a standard item into a user-generated content (UGC) engine. A pint-shaped window is die-cut into the center of the coasters, which are made from thick, absorbent pulpboard. The

window serves as a creative prompt, encouraging people to capture and share their own Pint of View. The result is that the audience becomes brand storytellers, embedding Guinness naturally into everyday moments in a way that feels authentic and personal.

RESULTS:

What started as a simple pub activation evolved into a broader social storytelling platform. After an initial drop of several million coasters across Ireland and Great Britain in the summer of 2025, the coasters became an organic hit. In early 2026, Guinness Ireland distributed an additional 1.5

million coasters to pubs across the Emerald Isle for the Guinness Six Nations rugby championship. "People went beyond using them in pubs," says Callum McCahon, Chief Strategy Officer at Born Social. "They took them to gigs, festivals, [and] weddings, and on hikes and holidays, turning them into genuine social artifacts rather than one-off activation materials." The coasters became so valued that people kept them and even resold them online, causing more demand from trade partners and pub owners. Guinness plans to activate Pints of View at music festivals and other events moving forward.

HOW THEY DID IT AND WHY IT WORKED:

Guinness put social storytelling in consumers' hands and tapped into one of their longtime brand slogans: "Lovely Day for a Guinness." McCahon says the coasters acted as a simple but recognizable frame through which people could capture and share their own interpretation of a lovely day, whether that was a huge cultural moment like a gig or festival, or something much smaller and more personal, like showing off their dog at the pub. The campaign is adaptable, too. During the Guinness Six Nations, Guinness activated Pints of View with billboards near stadiums as well as human-sized coasters outside select pubs where people could pose for pictures in the giant pint cutouts.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

A simple, creative idea with organic uptake can inspire a multi-touchpoint campaign, and print activations are not necessarily flat or one-dimensional. In fact, die-cutting can become part of the creative idea, not just the execution. McCahon says the campaign also solved a tension at the heart of modern brand building. "Distinctiveness gives you recognition; people know who you are," he says. "But meaning is what makes people feel the brand belongs to them. Instead of simply repeating the brand line to consumers, the campaign expanded the platform through real-life participation."





DIRECT MAIL: THE “KIDS” DIG IT

MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z ARE BECOMING BIG FANS OF DIRECT MAIL MARKETING. HERE’S WHY—AND HOW YOU CAN MAKE IT WORK FOR YOUR BRAND.

Admit it, sometimes you have giggled at the notion of using direct mail to reach a younger target audience—maybe even as you read the title of this article. “We’re trying to talk to YOUNG people,” you’ve thought, “not grandparents.” Well, the data might just be laughing back. Recent studies say that millennial and Gen Z consumers have a soft spot for direct mail.

Lob’s 2025 *State of Direct Mail: Consumer Insights Edition* surveyed 2,000 American adults and found that 85% of Gen Zers and millennials engage with direct mail, often

reading it the same day they receive it. The study also revealed that 67% of recipients take action—such as visiting a website or making a purchase—after receiving a direct mail piece. Not enough to convince

you? Fine. A whopping 72% of millennials say they would be disappointed if they stopped receiving direct mail, according to research from the U.S. Postal Service (an admittedly biased party).

“These generations grew up drowning in digital noise,” says consumer psychology expert Roger Dooley. “Their brains are highly efficient at filtering out anything that looks like a generic ad. A physical piece of mail breaks through that filter because it’s unexpected. In behavioral science terms, it’s a pattern interrupt.”

Put another way: If you grow up getting bombarded with junk email, “click here” CTAs, and cheap YouTube ads, you become numb to it. Direct mail offers something new and different. It engages the senses (touch, for one) and delivers an emotional connection and stronger memory than email might. Psychologically, it also feels less manipulative and more authentic and trustworthy than a digital ad served up because an algorithm said you’d be interested.



"Trust isn't a conscious decision," says Dooley, author of three books—*Brainfluence*, *Friction*, and *The Persuasion Engine*. "When someone encounters your marketing, their brain runs an unconscious assessment in milliseconds: Is this familiar? Is this risky? Is this worth my time? Physical mail has a built-in trust advantage. It signals investment. This company printed something, paid for postage, physically put it in my hands. That's the opposite of a spammy email that costs nothing to send to a million people. Economists call this a 'costly signal,' and it's one foundation of trust."

Jeff Dutremble is Head of Sales for Paper Run, a software development company that leverages automation and AI to help brands deliver personalized direct mail to reach and retain customers who don't open emails. He agrees that digital saturation has led younger consumers to develop an affinity for direct mail.

"There's too much noise," Dutremble says. "It's almost impossible to break through that noise—or pattern interrupt, if you will—on digital channels because everything blends together. So how do we pattern interrupt? We SLOW. IT. DOWN. We turn to a tactile, super personal, old-fashioned means that is the antithesis of everything digital, artificial, saturated, and fast."

Dutremble believes many marketers have been surprised to learn that for Gen Z and millennials, it's appealing to see a physical letter or postcard in the mailbox with their name on it, then sit and open it at the kitchen table and examine it in their hands. While he admits that, compared to a single text or email, direct mail is an expensive channel and unprofitable if done incorrectly, he also argues that the high number of digital touchpoints digested daily by millennial and Gen Z consumers drastically reduces the impact of each one.

"Compare that to a Gen Zer's physical mailbox," he says. "How many pieces of mail per day do they receive? Two? Five? Regardless, that number is astronomically lower, the time per impression

significantly longer, thus making a proportionately higher impact."

Increasingly, more companies seem to agree, using direct mail to establish that trust Dooley alluded to with younger audiences.

Glossier may have started in 2014 as a beauty website and online community, but the company has grown its audience by incorporating distinctive pink, editorial-style mailers and catalogs into its marketing mix. Much of Glossier's direct mail reads like an offline Instagram post—minimal copy, ultra-clean imagery, and a highly curated aesthetic. In many ways, these pieces function less like traditional direct mail and more like brand media, as if Glossier is publishing its own physical content. Designed to be "Instagrammable," the mail often gets passed beyond the original recipient, aligning perfectly with Gen Z and millennial sharing behaviors. After all, if you're selling beauty, your marketing should look the part.

Glossier also doesn't "spray and pray" with its direct mail. Instead, it zeroes in on existing customers, subscribers, and audiences who look a



lot like the people already buying in. Combine that targeting with a quality piece of mail, and you are much closer to earning their attention. From there, Dooley says you'd better reward it.

"These [younger] consumers have been trained by Netflix and Spotify, not to mention chatbots, to expect personalization," Dooley says. "When a piece of mail feels mass-produced, it feels lazy. The 67% action rate (of Gen Zers and millennials) makes sense when you consider that physical objects engage the brain differently than pixels. Research shows physical media produces stronger emotional responses and better memory encoding. When you hold something, your brain assigns it more value. That's the endowment effect. When you combine sensory engagement with personalization that shows you actually know the recipient, you've hit two powerful triggers at once."

One knock against direct mail was always what Dooley refers to as the "friction gap." The principle is simple: Every bit of effort you add to a customer's journey costs you customers. A decade ago, a great offer on a postcard might have required you to type in a URL, call a phone number, or search for a product online. "Each of those steps is a leak in the conversion funnel," Dooley says. "And companies that treat

direct mail as a stand-alone channel, disconnected from digital, are leaving money on the table."

His recommendation is to combine the power of physical (direct mail) and digital tools into a single integrated system where direct mail becomes the trusted trigger and digital removes the friction.

"Smart mailers have largely solved [the friction problem]," Dooley says. "QR codes drop you into a personalized landing page and offers are already tied to your account. Timing is calibrated by data, so the piece arrives when you're in a buying window."

Casper, the direct-to-consumer mattress and sleep company, takes a performance-driven approach to this model. Its mailers use promo codes, landing pages, and store prompts to drive online visits. The idea isn't to close the sale in the physical mailbox, but to start the journey. From there, Casper retargets site visitors with ads, follows up with email, and uses remarketing to convert interest into sales. The playbook works particularly well for a high-consideration purchase such as a mattress, where trust builds over time rather than in a single moment.

For younger consumers, that journey often starts offline but finishes online, a reflection of how seamlessly Gen Zers and millennials move between physical and digital worlds. In the Lob study, 49% of consumers said brands that send direct mail feel more credible than those that don't. For younger audiences—raised on a steady diet of digital ads and influencer content—that physical



signal often feels more authentic and, therefore, more trustworthy.

Still, even proponents of direct mail are quick to point out that it doesn't replace digital. Dutremble believes that if a person is actively engaging with email or SMS, a brand should stick to those more cost-effective channels. If, after a testing phase, the conversion doesn't occur and the audience retracts from digital engagement, that's when direct mail can be a next move, re-engaging lapsed audiences to reach consumers who aren't responding elsewhere.

Direct-to-consumer grooming brand Dr. Squatch, which became well-known for its use of TikTok to reach its younger male audience, is a prime example. In 2023, the company tested the use of postcards to target lapsed customers who were not receiving SMS messages and saw immediate revenue returns. A personalized message offered 20% off the next purchase of at least \$30. According to various reports, the campaign led to a 12.66% conversion rate and a 10x return on ad spend. The company had assumed that customers not replying to SMS or email were less likely to purchase, but they simply needed a more meaningful connection with the brand.

"Brands are using (direct mail) as a complement to email and SMS, not as an entirely separate channel," Dutremble explains. "Email and SMS are still effective, albeit with declining impact. Direct mail has been especially effective when sent to lapsed customers that just aren't engaging otherwise."



5 TIPS FOR REINTRODUCING DIRECT MAIL TO YOUR MARKETING MIX

RUSTY WITH YOUR DIRECT MAIL DOS AND DON'TS? ROGER DOOLEY AND JEFF DUTREMBLE HAVE ADVICE.

1

Identify your target audience.

"Chances are, if you've tried direct mail before but it failed, there was an issue with who you were targeting, and it wasn't the audience that would drive the most incremental impact. Find a provider that offers hands-on, strategic guidance in this area." – Dutremble

2

The medium earns attention.

"The worst thing a brand can do is use the physical medium but fill it with sterile, corporate language from a banner ad. The design and content earn trust. Trust drives conversion." – Dooley

3

Send less mail, not more.

"Like your email and SMS marketing strategy, batching and blasting boatloads of mail isn't the name of the game. You will likely lose money. This is also true in the testing phase: Send as little mail as possible while gathering statistically significant data to understand whether direct mail could be a profitable channel." – Dutremble

4

Design and emotional tone matter enormously.

"Color, typography, imagery, and paper quality all hit the emotional brain before the rational brain kicks in. Well-designed mail creates cognitive ease, and things that are easy to process feel more trustworthy. That's a well-established finding in psychology. Fluency equals trust." – Dooley

5

Don't use direct mail for cold prospecting and acquisition.

"If someone is requiring you to spend a minimum amount of money for prospecting and you haven't tested direct mail on the retention side of the funnel yet, run." – Dutremble





BRANDS WE LOVE

P.F. CANDLE CO.

In a way, Kristen Pumphrey's vocation started with a theft. As a kid, she swiped a candle-making kit from her sister, who was making them for a school fair, and used it to make some candles of her own. That led to after-school classes at a craft store. Several years later, after graduating from college, Pumphrey noticed that Etsy—the online marketplace that connects buyers with independent sellers of handmade, curated goods—was on the upswing. Eager to start a storefront of her own, she began making candles again. In 2008, at just 22, Pumphrey founded P.F. Candle Co. as a one-woman Etsy shop under the name Pommes Frites Candles, a moniker from Pumphrey's last name.

Pumphrey and her husband Thomas Neuberger now run the multimillion-dollar home fragrance company from Los Angeles, with help from more than 60 employees. P.F. Candle Co. is still independent, residing in a 22,000-square-foot headquarters and production facility that has been home since 2018. The company's signature



amber jars are now instantly recognizable, and the product range extends well beyond candles to air fresheners, incense, reed diffusers, air and linen sprays, and related accessories.

The original, 2008 recession-era version of P.F. Candle Co. operated out of Pumphrey's second bedroom in Austin, Texas. Five years after opening, she received a large order from home décor retailer West Elm. The order catapulted the company beyond Etsy, which it left in 2016.

While growth was rapid in the early years—sales reportedly jumped by a mammoth 75% in 2018—Pumphrey and Neuberger (who joined in 2013) were deliberate about the company's expansion. To this day, P.F. Candle Co. has not taken any outside funding to accelerate growth, instead building intentionally without sacrificing the brand's soul.

A multichannel distribution strategy that includes direct-to-consumer, independent shops, and international accounts and larger retailers such as Whole Foods and Urban Outfitters has kept sales consistent and well-balanced.

The P.F. Candle Co. marketing playbook reads like a company that understood its clientele before any social media algorithms did. A bit of great timing didn't hurt either. The brand rode the late-2010s wave of slow, decorative living and home design that saw millennials use candles, oil diffusers,

and incense to turn their apartments into cozy, "Instagram-worthy" living spaces.

P.F. Candle Co.'s own Instagram account is a worthy place for such inspiration. Products are cleanly displayed in desirable living spaces with premium lifestyle photography. Reels show employees making products by hand in the company's LA factory. One reel shows the office coordinator making papier-mâché candle stands that would be used as in-store displays.

On TikTok, P.F. Candle Co. has 12,000 followers, and the content is incredibly authentic. Many videos feature Pumphrey herself narrating on or off camera. In one clip, she announces the soft opening of the company's Brooklyn store while helping with its setup. In another, she teaches viewers about a home's "base formula"—the everyday scent that defines a space—and explains how

candles, room sprays, incense, and diffusers can influence it.

One central theme across P.F. Candle Co.'s various content pieces is the way the brand highlights its employees. In one TikTok video, Pumphrey starts by telling viewers they will see how the candles are placed onto the labelling machine, then she hands off the video to the team member responsible for that task. Other collaborative videos with outside creative influencers explain how to "level up" your living space.

KRISTEN PUMPHREY
CEO
CREATIVE DIRECTOR
CO-OWNER



**IN-PERSON
EVENTS DRIVE
PERSONAL
CONNECTIONS,
AND PRODUCT
COLLABORATIONS
PUSH THE BRAND
IN FRONT OF NEW
AUDIENCES.**

While professional and detail-oriented, the brand's website still gives off the vibe of an independent, founder-led company. At pfcandleco.com, the company proudly touts its "non-irritating fragrances formulated for everyday use" being made in the USA. The website allows visitors to shop by product, by scent, and by best sellers. It also makes it easy to search for gift ideas and immerse yourself in fragrance families if you have a nose for what you're after. "Fragrance is an extension of home design," says the About page, "so P.F. goods are crafted with high-quality materials at accessible price points." Products range in price from \$22 for individual candles to \$192 for candle bundles.

The website also boasts an up-to-date Events page that invites people to come into their various shops for gatherings, such as a Vinyl Swap and Listening Party, a free Plant Potting DIY, a Closet Sale, or a Matcha Pop-Up. While those activations don't reach thousands of customers at once, such face-to-face encounters clearly drive loyalty and create personal connections.



Meanwhile, product collaborations do an effective job pushing the brand in front of new audiences. A collaboration page on the website details one limited-time partnership with Haricot Vert, a Brooklyn-based group of artisans who specialize in handmade, wearable poetry. The idea is to celebrate their shared retail store presence in the Williamsburg neighborhood just two blocks from each other. P.F. Candle Co. has also partnered with Grillo's Pickles for National Pickle Day, turning Grillo's 100-year-old recipe into a soy candle. Other partners have included Peanuts, skate brand Toy Machine, and LA-based alt-rock band Wallows.

Even as new product categories come on board, the company says it continues to make all its home fragrance goods in-house at its LA facility. It's also committed to using minimal packaging, domestically grown soy wax, and vegan, cruelty-free blends of natural and synthetic fragrance materials free from parabens or phthalates (synthetic chemicals often called "plasticizers"). If visitors want to dig deeper, the company offers a web page with detailed product ingredient lists.

P.F. Candle Co. says it monitors its carbon footprint and sets yearly reduction goals. Serving its local community is also part of the brand ethos. In 2025, for example, the company donated time and



contributed over \$50,000 to support wildfire relief in Los Angeles.

For staying close to the community that helped foster its growth and bonding with its consumers through content, collabs, and clever communal events, P.F. Candle Co. is a Brand We Love.

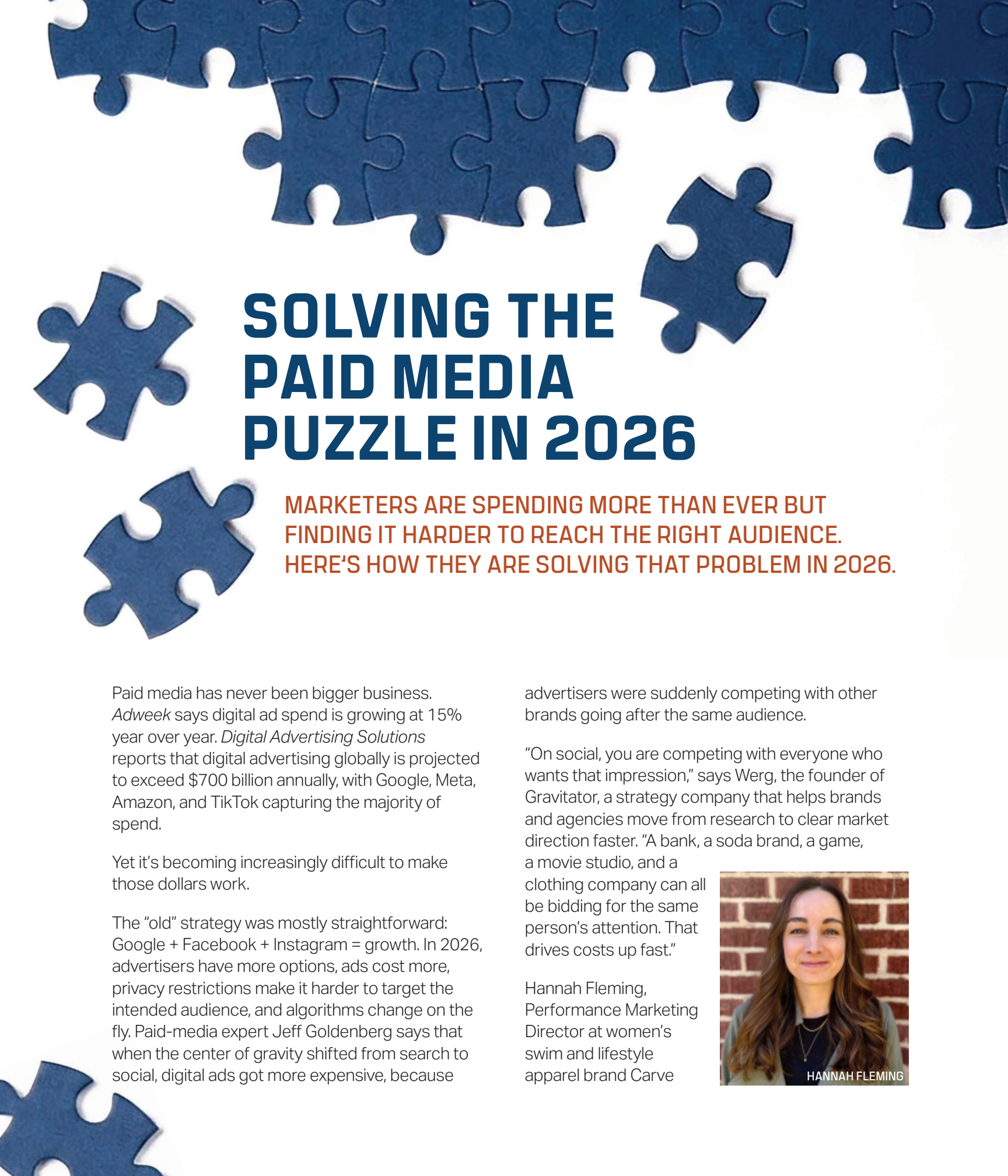
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SOLVING THE PAID MEDIA PUZZLE IN 2026

MARKETERS ARE SPENDING MORE THAN EVER BUT FINDING IT HARDER TO REACH THE RIGHT AUDIENCE. HERE'S HOW THEY ARE SOLVING THAT PROBLEM IN 2026.

Paid media has never been bigger business. *Adweek* says digital ad spend is growing at 15% year over year. *Digital Advertising Solutions* reports that digital advertising globally is projected to exceed \$700 billion annually, with Google, Meta, Amazon, and TikTok capturing the majority of spend.

Yet it's becoming increasingly difficult to make those dollars work.

The "old" strategy was mostly straightforward: Google + Facebook + Instagram = growth. In 2026, advertisers have more options, ads cost more, privacy restrictions make it harder to target the intended audience, and algorithms change on the fly. Paid-media expert Jeff Goldenberg says that when the center of gravity shifted from search to social, digital ads got more expensive, because

advertisers were suddenly competing with other brands going after the same audience.

"On social, you are competing with everyone who wants that impression," says Werg, the founder of Gravitator, a strategy company that helps brands and agencies move from research to clear market direction faster. "A bank, a soda brand, a game, a movie studio, and a clothing company can all be bidding for the same person's attention. That drives costs up fast."

Hannah Fleming, Performance Marketing Director at women's swim and lifestyle apparel brand Carve



Designs, has spent her career across both D2C and B2B paid media, navigating increasingly complex buying journeys while keeping performance and efficiency at the center. She says rising costs are real, but they don't necessarily signal a channel's failure.

"Historically, growth for many brands relied heavily on a small number of platforms—primarily Google and Meta," Fleming says. "While those channels are still incredibly important, we are seeing more brands intentionally diversify their media mix to reduce dependence on any single platform."

As brands rethink where—and how—they invest, the big question is no longer where to spend, but how paid media actually works in 2026.

CREATIVE IS THE NEW TARGETING

As competition for dollars heats up across the digital advertising landscape, the pressure to move quickly mounts on brands. Fleming says Carve Designs has evolved its creative process to keep



pace with modern platforms and maintain advertising performance. In practice, that means using multiple content sources to stay competitive in a crowded field.

"Creative is really the engine of paid media now, whether you're advertising on Meta, connected TV, or emerging channels like AppLovin," Fleming says. "We've built a content ecosystem that allows us to iterate quickly. We're capturing more unpolished, authentic UGC-style content during photoshoots, working with our founders and employees to create employee-generated content [EGC], and partnering with performance-focused influencers through our Carve Creators program. Their content performs well because it feels natural and relatable."

The shifting paid-media landscape has even changed how some brand teams are constructed. Goldenberg believes that many companies are currently recovering from a previous organizational decision to separate brand marketing from performance marketing. He says they are "two sides of the same coin"—brand creates attention while performance puts it into action.





"[Performance teams] cannot just be media buyers chasing efficiency inside platforms," Goldenberg says. "They need to be closer to brand, creative, and customer insight so they can help build systems that convert now and make future conversion easier. The stronger brands are building creative and design that can do both at once. The ad is not just there to convert. It is also shaping memory, trust, and preference. That means the mix gets less siloed and more connected."

At Carve, that approach is already playing out. Fleming says that as targeting capabilities have become broader and more automated, the creative itself plays a larger role in signaling who the message is for and capturing attention. That's why the brand focuses heavily on speed of iteration and creative diversity, testing both the formats (video, photography, GIFs) and messaging angles (product education, lifestyle inspiration, UGC, and employee-generated content).

"There's an interesting balance between brand storytelling and product-driven messaging," Fleming explains. "Consumers increasingly want authentic brand narratives, but product-focused creative often drives faster revenue results. That's where measurement tools become important. We want to understand not just direct conversions, but also the broader brand lift and halo effects that upper-funnel storytelling can create."

The emphasis on creative is driven as much by economics as anything else. Goldenberg says we are all witnesses to a great race between two approaches: one with highly targeted audiences

with very high cost per thousand impressions (CPMs) and the other with broader audiences with lower CPMs. For the targeted route to win, the conversion rates must improve enough to justify the additional cost.

"If that audience costs three times more to reach, the ad needs to convert at least three times better," he says. "That is a tough bar. That's why a lot of brands are moving the other way. They are keeping media costs lower, opening up the audience, and relying more on the creative to attract the right people and filter out the wrong ones. In that environment, creative quality matters a lot more."

MARKETING WITHOUT PERFECT DATA

The ability to precisely measure ad-spend ROI is not what it once was. Privacy changes, including the decline of third-party cookies, shorter platform attribution windows, and Apple's App Tracking Transparency (ATT), have limited previously reliable marketing signals. And because customers interact with brands across so many more touchpoints, it can take two to three times as many interactions before a conversion occurs, making it more difficult to assign credit to a single channel.

"Historically, advertising platforms could track users much more precisely across apps and websites," Fleming says. "With those signals becoming weaker, attribution has become less deterministic. It has become one of the most complex challenges in modern marketing."

Goldenberg says marketers used to rely too heavily on cheap tracking, easy retargeting, and platform-level attribution that looked more precise than it really was. That world is mostly gone, reshaping how marketers target and measure campaigns. Today, platforms rely heavily on machine learning models, and marketers have adapted, leaning into stronger creative signals, first-party data, and broader targeting.

WITH TRACKING SIGNALS BECOMING WEAKER, ATTRIBUTION HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX CHALLENGES IN MODERN MARKETING.

"We use a multi-touch attribution tool for day-to-day channel analysis and to compare different attribution models," Fleming says. "We also rely on media mix modeling to better understand the impact of non-click channels like connected TV, direct mail, and influencer marketing."

Fleming also runs incrementality tests whenever possible to validate whether a channel is truly driving incremental revenue, and she tracks the brand's media efficiency ratio, examining the relationship between total marketing spend and total revenue. No single tool tells the whole story, but together they offer a more holistic picture.

Still, even with those tools, certainty remains elusive.

"The smart adaptation is not chasing perfect measurement," Goldenberg explains. "It is building strong first-party data, using measurement to compare audiences and channels directionally, and then tracking performance all the way down to actual business results. There is still leakage, but if you know the economics work at the bottom line, you can make good decisions anyway."

THE JOB IS CHANGING

Even as measurement becomes messier, the job of performance marketing is becoming more automated. Artificial intelligence is now embedded across most advertising platforms through bidding, targeting, and optimization. Budget allocation, audience expansion, and testing are already moving in that direction.

"In many cases, the hands-on platform operator becomes less important over time," Goldenberg says. "The bigger job becomes setting the strategy, feeding the system the right signals, judging creative, and knowing when the machine is optimizing toward the wrong goal."



Already, marketers like Fleming are spending less time making manual adjustments—changing bids, managing campaign levers, and micromanaging audiences—and more time guiding the system—focusing on creative direction, channel diversification, and performance trend interpretation. "That means providing the right inputs—strong creative, clear campaign objectives, and clean conversion signals—so the algorithms can optimize effectively," she says.

With spend execution more automated and measurement less precise, marketers are employing a more fluid channel strategy. They test earlier, shift spend more frequently, and look for efficiency before channels become saturated.

Goldenberg says that when paid media becomes inefficient, brands need to stop treating their channel mix as fixed.

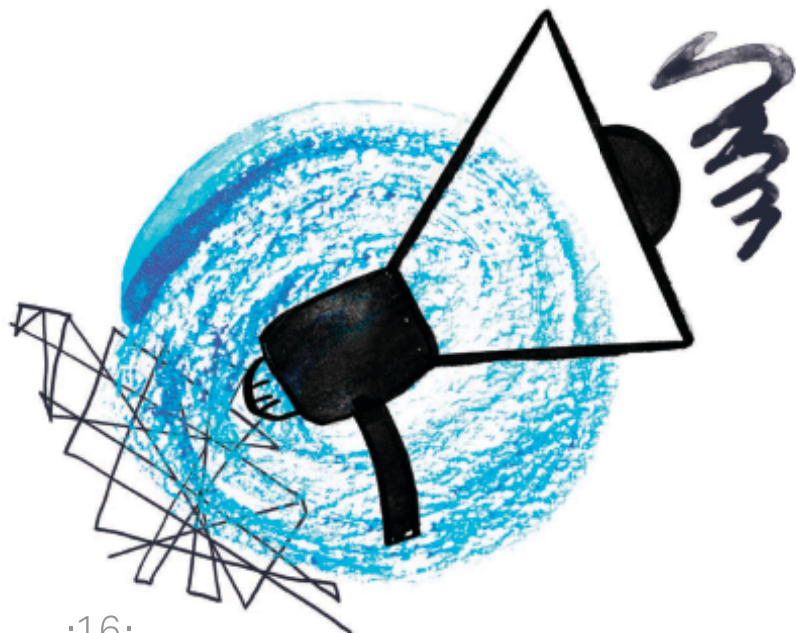
"Pay close attention to where your audience is actually spending time, then test earlier and more often so you are not the last one piling into an overcrowded channel," he says. "The brands that stay ahead usually find the next efficient pocket before everyone else does."

For marketers like Fleming, that doesn't mean abandoning channels altogether as costs rise. It means rethinking how you invest—adjusting creative, strategy, or channel mix to find a better ROI.

"A channel only becomes unsustainable when the economics fundamentally stop working, when the cost to acquire a customer exceeds the long-term value of that customer," Fleming says.

The good news: Testing is easier than ever, and new channels are more accessible. Fleming points to connected TV as an example.

"That democratization has made it easier for brands of all sizes to test channels that previously felt out of reach," she says. "From a risk perspective, spreading spend across multiple platforms helps ensure you're not overly exposed to changes in any one algorithm or policy."



5 WAYS TO IMPROVE PAID MEDIA IN 2026

JEFF GOLDBERG OFFERS A HANDFUL OF PRACTICAL WAYS MARKETERS CAN IMPROVE PERFORMANCE IN TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT.

- 1 TEST MORE.** As channel performance becomes less predictable and competition increases, perform earlier and more frequent experimentation to find efficient pockets before they become crowded.
- 2 USE THIRD-PARTY ATTRIBUTION TO CHECK THE PLATFORMS.** With platform-level reporting becoming less reliable, validate performance using independent measurements and focus on directional insights tied to business outcomes.
- 3 TEST LANDING PAGES, NOT JUST ADS.** While creative drives attention, conversion often depends on what happens after the click, making landing page optimization as critical as ad testing.
- 4 BRAND YOUR PERFORMANCE ADS.** As the lines between brand and performance blur, the most effective ads don't just convert; they also build memory, trust, and long-term preference.
- 5 SELL OUT FOR ATTENTION—SAFE ADS DISAPPEAR.** In increasingly crowded feeds, standing out is essential. Creative that blends in is unlikely to perform, regardless of targeting or budget.



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FEATURED IN BRANDS WE LOVE ON PAGE 8



And the survey said...

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73% of surveyed B2B and B2C marketing executives say their companies are **using AI to help create text, images, videos, or other content.**



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What types of content are marketers using GenAI to produce?

-  **Email Copy [44%]**
-  **Social Media Copy [42%]**
-  **Social Media Images [39%]**
-  **Website Images [36%]**
-  **SEO Content [36%]**
-  **Blog Posts [33%]**
-  **Marketing/Sales Collateral [33%]**

Why AI isn't being used: Exactly half of those not using generative AI yet say it's because of the **team training** required to use it effectively. Meanwhile, **45% cited the cost** and **45% cited privacy and security concerns** as obstacles.



Source: Botco.ai, *The State of GenAI Chatbots in Marketing*, March 2023
Methodology: Botco.AI surveyed 1,000 B2B and B2C marketing professionals in March. Three-quarters of them were from companies with 100 or more employees.

Two-thirds of those surveyed say they **use AI for brainstorming sessions, first drafts, and outlines.**

49% rely on AI to produce **final content.**