

# 2023 Need to Know

## A TRENDS REPORT FOR UPMO PRACTITIONERS



# A Word From Us

**It's a new year, and as we welcome 2023**, we hope you found solace, solemnitude and joy over the holidays. Now it's "back to the grind" for most of us, and with the new year comes a time of research and planning for the months ahead. **Ardent strategists, we're always looking ahead** and keeping tabs on the trends, research and data that impact districts like yours. Within this document, we've rounded up themes, trends and topics we see bubbling to the top from the worlds of urban place management, destination marketing, placemaking, urban planning and economic development.

**Read on for tips and tools to make your job easier, validate your direction, spark your passion and pique your curiosity** — all in the name of supporting your constituents, members and ratepayers. We're keeping this pretty high-level, so if you want to learn more, dig deeper or would like a personal consultation to discuss what this might mean for your district, please **give us a shout!**

With sincere regards,  
Your Bright Brothers Team







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# Social Media



## Social Media OVERVIEW

**The “tok” is the talk of the town.** Well, the whole internet, really. And it’s not going anywhere anytime soon. Despite efforts at the federal and some local levels that ban the use of Chinese-owned TikTok app from municipal phones, for place-based marketers and your constituents, **it’s a place you need to be.**

The salad days of wild growth and engagement on **Facebook and Instagram** are gone, and they are now what they’ve always intended to be; **highly targeted advertising platforms** that deliver dollars to investors and shareholders. Period. Other than Instagram Reels, you’ll need to pay to play, but explosive growth, discovery, engagement and shopping (yes, shopping — we’ll get to that in a minute), are squarely on TikTok these days.

And when looking across all of our clients, plus industry trends, analyst insights and anecdotal feedback from merchant marketing sessions we’ve done with districts for their ratepayers — the upside cannot be ignored. Unlike more traditional social media channels, **TikTok is all about discovery**, and their algorithm works to bring you unprecedented growth and visibility for your district’s stories, events and placemaking, *if* you play your cards right. And that doesn’t mean you need slick, polished professional video. But **you do need a crafty strategy**, authenticity and a willingness to dedicate time, energy and resources to this white-hot platform.

### Some things to consider with TikTok:

- 53% of TikTok users are over 30<sup>1</sup>
- 13.6% of US TikTok users have an HHI of \$75K - \$100K, and a whopping 40.2% have an HHI of \$100K+!<sup>1</sup>
- Users skew 57% female to 43% male on their gender binary<sup>1</sup>
- On average, TikTok users spend 95 minutes per day on the platform and open it 8 times per day<sup>1</sup>
- TikTok users are 1.5x more likely to immediately purchase something they discovered on the platform compared to other social media platform users<sup>1</sup>
- TikTok users are 1.5x more likely to convince a friend or family member to buy a product they’ve seen on the app<sup>1</sup>
- TikTok users are 2.4x more likely to create a post and tag a brand after buying a product<sup>1</sup>
- 67% of users says that TikTok inspires them to shop — even when they weren’t planning to do so<sup>2</sup>
- 40% of Gen Z users prefer using TikTok and Instagram for search over Google<sup>3</sup>
- And anecdotally, we’ve gotten feedback from small businesses who attended our merchant marketing sessions who told us:
  - “I gained 12K+ followers in the past 24 hours!”
  - See next page for a case story!





Previously, I almost never had online bag sales. This past weekend one of my videos kind of took off, and I sold 30 bags in about 48hrs.

## Social Media STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT



Bright Brothers hosted a **merchant marketing session** for one of our downtown client's stakeholders that focused on **connecting with Gen Z**, as well as best practices for TikTok. Soon after, we received the following, lovely email full of thanks and praise from one of the district's small businesses:

*"I started my account a day or two after your workshop. I didn't link any accounts or use my contacts to find friends, so I started completely from scratch. About a month in, I started making bag sales online almost every day. Previously, I almost never had online bag sales. This past weekend one of my videos kind of took off, and **I sold 30 bags in about 48hrs.**"*

**The video got over 100k views** over the weekend and it seemed like everytime I refreshed my email, there was another order notification.

The craziest part is that **I've spent 11 years making photos and videos for Facebook, IG, and YouTube and never have come close** to getting any kind of traction like I've gotten with TikTok--literally in less than 3 months from opening my account.

*Anyways, I just wanted to take a minute to tell you that I am singing your praises to people a couple times a day, and I have no idea how I'm going to fulfill all the orders."*

That's a GOOD problem to have!

*\*Courtesy of Werther Leather Goods, Norfolk, VA*



## Social Media TWITTER KILLER?



**Despite all the brouhaha about the future of Twitter**, the staple social networking service is limping along after business magnate Elon Musk finally acquired it in late October 2022. Since that time, it's been a rocky road for the 280-character-long platform. Musk's volatile takeover has included a back-to-office order that didn't sit well with many employees, a mass exodus of staff and brain trust at nearly every level internally, a diaspora of advertisers resulting in millions in lost revenue, and thousands of users fleeing (or looking to leave) the formerly-favored platform.

**But what comes next?** There's no clear consensus. With myriad upstart start-ups looking to take a bite out of Twitter's market share, many are racing to bring betas to market and grow their user bases, including open source and collaborative communities like Mastodon, Post and others.

Additionally, formerly-abandoned industry-leading apps like **Tumblr** (which experienced massive fallout and fell out of favor after the enforcement of stricter content policies surrounding adult content in 2018), are now seeing an **upswing in users fleeing Twitter**. Case in point, as reported by [Tech.co](#) in November 2022, "Tumblr, a still widely-used but ultimately more historical social media platform, saw 301,000 post-acquisition downloads compared to 170,000 for the same period beforehand."<sup>4</sup>

Some, like [WIRED's Morgan Meaker](#) posit that **LinkedIn is the way to go**, and [Marketing Brew's Jack Appleby](#) put out some quantifiably discerning stats regarding cross-posting from Twitter to LinkedIn — and looked at the exponentially positive numbers he saw on the professional networking platform.<sup>5,6</sup>

**At the end of the day, there's still no clear "Twitter killer"** (aside from Musk himself), and the drama will continue to unfold, so any singular replacement probably remains to be seen in 2023.

A close-up photograph of a smartphone screen displaying the Twitter logo (a white bird) on a blue background. The phone is tilted, and the background is a solid red color.

“Tumblr...saw 301,000 post-acquisition downloads compared to 170,000 for the same period beforehand.” — TechCo





# Email



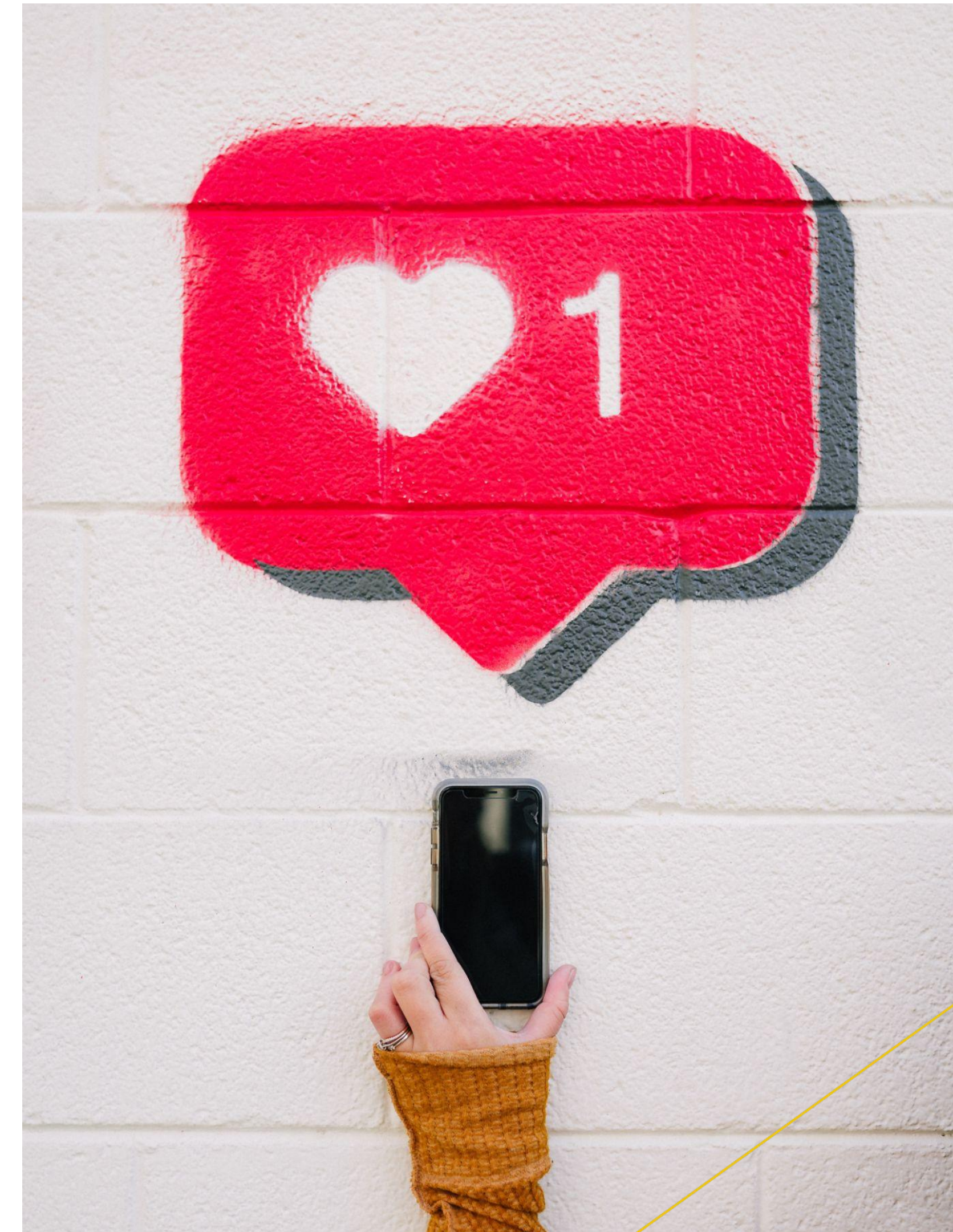
# Email OVERVIEW

**Email marketing is** the natural extension and progression of direct mail, a vetted marketing practice going way back into the 20th century. And as other, newer technologies emerged (e.g. social media, digital advertising, influencers, etc.), many marketers preferred to chase the bright, new and shiny, in favor of what can and should be **your number one performance marketing channel.**

We're not going to posit that email marketing is “making a comeback”, because frankly it never went away. And during the pandemic, the value of custom communications to your most loyal and supportive user bases offered a socially-distanced lifeline for your organization or business. And while successful email campaigns are both part art and part science, the numbers don't lie. **A well-crafted email campaign can and should be part of your media mix** for any events, activations, merchant news, and more.

We love email for several reasons:

- As mentioned above, email should be your **number one performance marketing channel**, and the proof is in the pudding
- Email Lists are technically **“owned media”**, meaning that your lists should contain your most hardcore supporters
- Email is literally a **digital call-to-action**, and should be brief, to-the-point, and oftentimes merely a “single subject” (yes, we're wagging our fingers at those of you who send “30-scroll websites” full of content to your lists) — especially for district event promotion





# Email OVERVIEW

According to market and consumer data resource [Statista](#), “In 2020, the global e-mail marketing market was valued at 7.5 billion U.S. dollars and the source projected that the figure would **increase to 17.9 billion by 2027**,” and that’s nothing to sneeze at.<sup>7</sup> To make your email campaigns successful and legally compliant (and that’s a big one in 2023!), **here are some things you should consider**:

- **Data privacy** should be a top concern for your organization. We’ve been talking about GDPR or the EU’s “[General Data Protection Regulation](#)” for years now. It went into effect in 2018 and has far-reaching implications — even in the US.<sup>8</sup>
- The State of California also enacted its own stringent regulations in 2018, with the [California Consumer Privacy Act \(CCPA\)](#) with several amendments and expansions in provisions as recently as 2020.<sup>9</sup> Enforcement began in earnest in 2022 with beauty brand [Sephora paying out a whopping \\$1.2 million USD settlement](#) to the state, with promises (or threats) of many more big brands coming under fire.<sup>10</sup>
- Develop an automated **drip campaign for new subscribers** that consider their customer journey:
  - When and where they first sign-up (most likely that’s your website)
  - Sending a verification/opt-in email
  - Thank the subscriber by sending an authentic “thank you” email, perhaps with a gift like a \$5 “Downtown Dollars” incentive
  - Set expectations for how frequently you’ll send emails to them
  - Provide contact information for your organization
  - Sending from a staff member’s name is a great way to break through to stakeholders

Some trends which have been around for a while now, but are **expected to sizzle in 2023** include:

- Engaging and intriguing **headlines** still matter
- Inclusion of **emojis** in subject lines increase open rates and engagement
- **Personalization** and authenticity matter. Most modern email services like MailChimp, Emma and Constant Contact offer personalization functionality
- Marketing leader HubSpot put together [a nice primer on email personalization](#) with **23 case story examples** you may want to consider.<sup>11</sup>
- User Generated Content (**UGC**) can help fill the gaps if you’re deficit on content (although we don’t advocate simply blasting for the sake of blasting if you have no news or a compelling CTA)
- **Artificial Intelligence** seems to be popping up everywhere these days, so from managing your customer service threads, to most commonly answered questions to even developing content, the use of AI is on the rise and only expected to become more pervasive
- Animated or **interactive content** within e-blasts continues to grow in popularity
- **Authenticity** is still key. Don’t feel compelled to write in an overly formal manner, even if you are promoting the district. E-blasts, website copy and social media should all have an approachable, authentic, humorous or even vulnerable tone of voice, depending on the content. **Write like you’re speaking to a friend, not the mayor**



## Email PLUS OR MINUS



**To opt in or opt out — that is the question.** While we marketers typically aim to grow our numbers, followers, subscribers and metrics, **a case can be made for giving subscribers the boot.**

In general we recommend **numerous points of entry for new email subscribers** on your website; from static footers, to dynamic pop-ups sprinkled throughout the web experience, as best practice.

**Partner promotions** and/or cascade promotions work extremely well. Perhaps you team up with your local CVB, chamber and a popular venue, park or business in town to collectively grow your lists with prizes or incentives. We developed one such sweepstakes promo in Tempe, AZ years ago and the **list attrition was near zero** years after the fact.

Don't overlook "owned sources" for list acquisition. For example, if you're selling tickets to an event, **grab the emails from EventBrite** (or whichever platform you used), of those who purchased/participated and segment them as an event-specific list (you know there's intent and affinity for future events, corollary content...etc.), and offer them an opt-in to your main list (segmented, of course).

**Consistent list hygiene is imperative** though. Most email providers tell you who's unsubscribed or bounced, so be sure to remove those from your distro. Dead email addresses may even be costing you money, depending on your service plan.

But one of the bigger trends we've seen in the past year is an **"opt out strategy"**. Yes, you're literally asking folks if they'd like to **unsubscribe, proactively**. As many as [68% of emails get deleted automatically](#), and for whatever the reason — maybe they're just not that into you anymore.<sup>12</sup> NBD. **Show them to the door.** If someone no longer opens or engages with your e-blasts, they're technically dead weight that's just pulling down your numbers. So be kind and offer them a way out that's not uncomfortable, and aids you in the long run. Not sure how to do that? [Check out this overview from Ann Gynn for the Content Marketing Institute](#) on developing your unsubscribe strategy.<sup>13</sup>



A dark blue-tinted background image featuring a smartphone mounted on a gimbal. The phone's screen displays a video recording interface with various icons and a central viewfinder. The word "Video" is written in a large, white, serif font across the center of the phone's screen. A thin, light blue diagonal line is visible in the bottom-left corner of the image.

# Video



# Video OVERVIEW

**If a picture says a thousand words, then a video tells the whole story, right?** And video is everywhere these days, thanks to the fact that nearly all of us have a handheld recording device in the palm of our hands at all times.

As video technology and publishing technology have rapidly increased, conversely, **our attention spans have shrunk exponentially.** Sadly, it is now estimated that the average human attention span is eclipsed by that of a goldfish! Purportedly, goldfish have a leg up (ahem, fin, perhaps?) on us humans, with an additional second of focus, so that's **Humans 8, Goldfish 9.** The stats and research have been disputed, but there's no discounting the fact that we have very short attention spans. Modern media is not helping the trend.

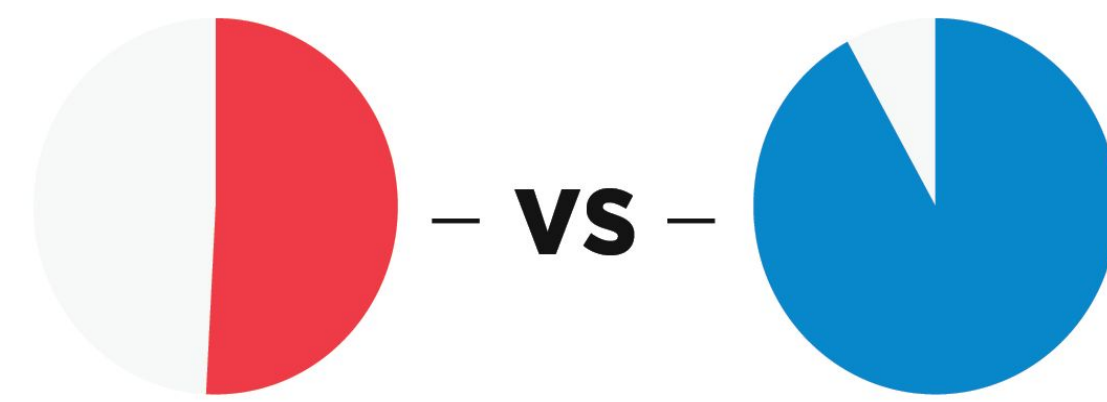
As evidenced by the popularity of ephemeral media like Snap, TikTok, Reels and more, we live in **an era of hyper-paced media consumption,** so video is a great way to get your message across in seconds. But there are a few things to note:

- 73% of consumers prefer short form video<sup>14</sup>
- Short form video has the highest ROI<sup>14</sup>
- 30% of all short form videos are watched 81% of the way through<sup>14</sup>
- Users spend an average of 45 minutes at a time watching TikTok videos<sup>14</sup>
- HubSpot considers short form video to be under 60 seconds, with the optimal length between 31-60 seconds<sup>15</sup>
- 85% of marketers say short form videos are the most effective format on social media<sup>15</sup>

So why do we still see so many long form videos being produced by organizations and marketers alike? Ego, mainly is our gut take. But perhaps they're trying to reach Baby Boomers. According to HubSpot, "56% of Gen Z, 54% of Millennials, 48% of Gen X, and 26% of Boomers say they discover new products most often on YouTube,"<sup>16</sup>







51%

of consumers believe that less than half of brands create content that resonates as authentic

92%

of marketers believe most or all of the content their brand creates resonates as authentic with consumers

Stackla 

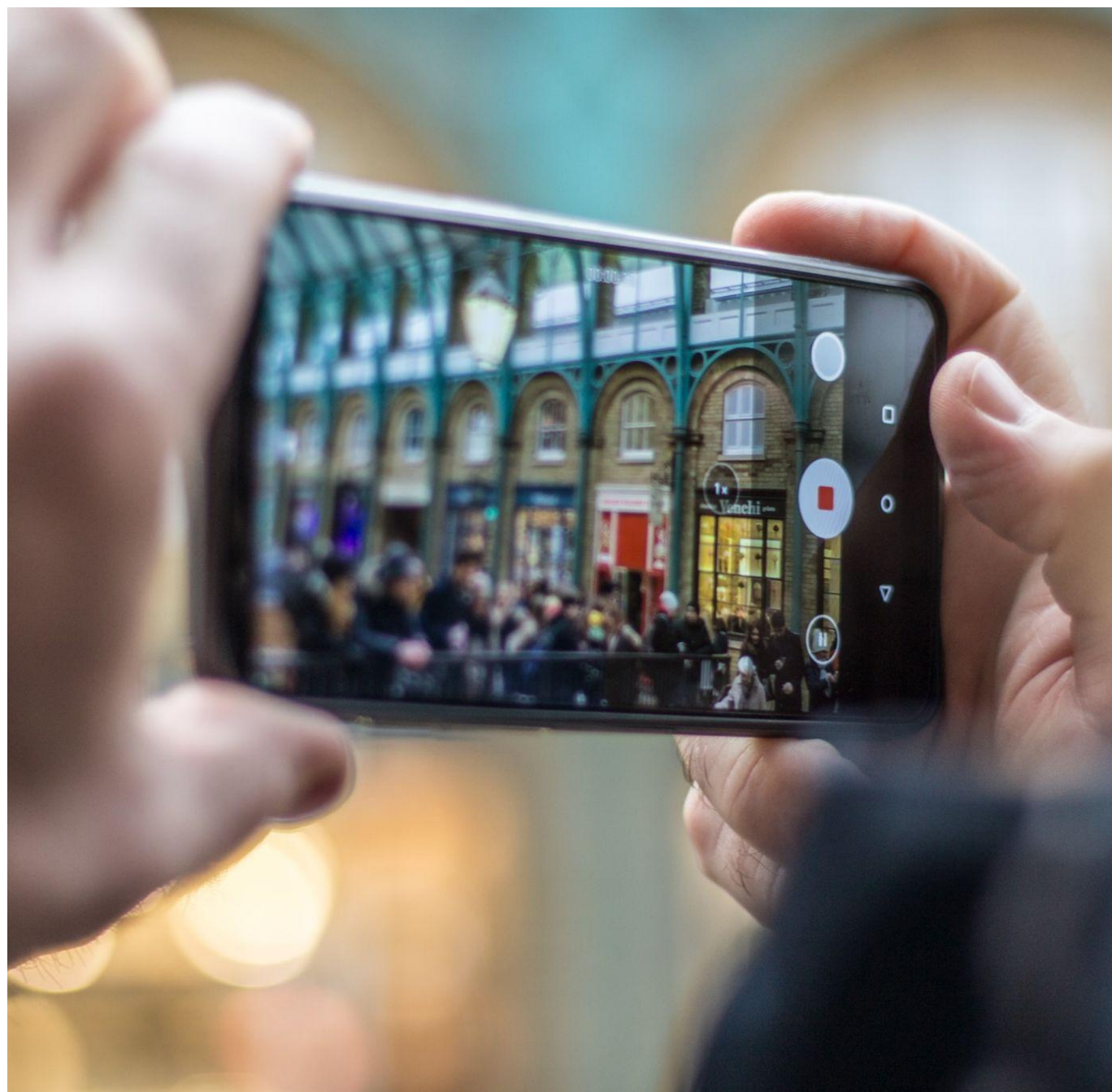
## Video OVERVIEW

**The kind of content and length of video you make really depends on your audience.** HubSpot notes, "While each generation might watch fairly similar content, it's important to remember that the goal is different. For Gen X, it might be to reminisce, while for Boomers, it's to save time, and for Millennials and Gen Z, it could be to learn something new," so the old adage, "**read the room**" definitely applies here as well.<sup>16</sup>

But for many marketers and smaller organizations, **professionally produced video is a luxury** or out of reach for some budgets. Again, that handy-dandy device in your pants pocket can come in handy. A few things to note:

- Not all video needs to be perfectly polished. In fact, **90% of consumers said that authenticity is important** when deciding which brands they like and support<sup>17</sup>
- **92% of marketers believe** that most or all of the content they create resonates as authentic with consumers<sup>17</sup>
- **51% of consumers say that less than half** of brands create content that resonates as authentic<sup>17</sup>

So when you're out and about in your district, **keep your smartphone within reach, and don't shy away from shooting some impromptu, casual and non-professional video on the fly.** And telling your district's story with short form video on social media can be as simple and as a quick intro video and hello with your favorite barista while grabbing your morning coffee, lunch out with coworkers, an afternoon break meeting people in the park, happy hour, or more. For many, video can provide a virtual snapshot of what it's like in your district. Having video on hand also comes in handy when you need to tell your story as part of a campaign.





# Video UPCYCLE

We like to say that **“A little B-roll goes a long way”**, and that's especially true for short form video. A few things to love about B-roll:

- Oftentimes, a media company (say the local paper, culture rag or TV station), will shoot and produce video for you as part of a larger package. It's often a “value add” as part of larger campaign. **Invest once, then repurpose**, reuse, recycle and upcycle
- If you're doing a professional shoot, **ask the videographer** to get (and give you), plenty of B-roll that you can re-purpose later
- **Cut down 15-second snippets** to use for TikTok, Reels, Twitter and more. Produce once, then repost or share across multiple channels
- **15-second spots are also the perfect length** for many streaming TV buys, YouTube and Google advertising and more (clearly your social channels)

**But where else does B-roll come in handy? PR. Most definitely PR.** If you've ever tried to get the local media out to cover one of your events, it can be challenging — especially if you're not buying an advertising package from them. Recently one of our colleagues shared with us an enlightening anecdote from a Top 20 U.S. metro. On the very same day that she was holding a big press conference/media junket for the unveiling of a placemaking project that took nearly a year to develop, there was a massive auto accident about an hour outside the city. All the local TV stations were covering the accident live, and pulled the TV crews she was anticipating for her event. Not one to be discouraged, she and her assistant moved forward with the event, shot B-roll with their **iPhones and sent it to local newsrooms** instead. And guess who got featured on that night's news? Yep!

With tapped newsrooms, reduced editorial staffs and slim-lined news crews, plus consumers' short attention spans and their preference for authenticity – **B-roll shot on your iPhone can be a lifesaver** in your annual content calendar.





## Special Mention AUTHENTICITY



While we're on the topic of **authenticity** and consumers' preferences for the real deal, we wanted to call out some of our favorite campaigns from downtowns, districts, and DMOs **showcasing the faces behind the community**. A few come to mind, and while not video (these were photography-based), the essence is the same — keepin' it real!

**Downtown Fort Collins** (CO) did a very popular "[People Behind the Plates](#)" campaign to support their annual "Great Plates of Downtown" promotion. Great Plates of Downtown is a nearly two-decade long promotion, similar to the restaurant weeks many downtowns produce. There's a prix-fixe menu at participating locations, with a portion of the proceeds donated locally. Downtown Fort Collins interviewed 25 employees from participating locations to genuinely showcase the veritable **faces behind the plates**. The result is approachable, credible, and personable and tells the story of a tight-knit downtown that supports its community. We absolutely loved this one!

Another example comes from **Downtown Tempe** (AZ) in late 2020. During the full brunt of the pandemic, the BID ran a social campaign entitled "[I Mask Up Because...](#)" and featured interviews and quotes from local business owners wearing their masks, and describing what it meant to them and the community. With varying viewpoints, perspectives, and positive impacts, the campaign put a human face (albeit a masked one) in front of the district's fans and followers and drove additional support to their struggling businesses during some of the darkest days of the pandemic. Kudos on **a personalized campaign** bringing awareness and driving support to their stakeholders!

So whether you're shooting photos or videos for your district, keep authenticity, varying viewpoints, and stakeholder support top of mind. **The more real you are helps tell your story**, and pays off in dividends regardless of media type.





A group of people are engaged in a mural-painting activity outdoors. In the center, a woman with long dark hair tied back is painting a large, colorful face on a wall. To her right, a man in a dark jacket and cap is also painting. In the foreground, another person is kneeling and painting. The background shows a park-like area with trees and buildings. The entire image is overlaid with a dark blue tint, and the word "Branding" is written in white, bold, serif font across the middle.

# Branding



# Branding OVERVIEW

When it comes to branding, oh boy, do we have a lot to say. Certain adages come to mind: "A rose by any other name...". Or one of our co-founder's personal faves, "**Your brand is not what you say it is — it's what others say about you when you're not in the room,**" and these are loaded statements. Let's unpack these a little.

It's important to remember that **your brand isn't just logos and fonts and color palettes.** It's the sum total of your reputation, how well your website functions, the types of programming, placemaking, clean and safe, and support you provide your community, and so much more. And all ego aside, your brand **is what the community thinks about you**, not just the narrative you try to sell. So if the community thinks parking sucks downtown, then guess what? Parking sucks downtown. And it's now your job to dispel the myth or drive the narrative in a different direction.

To start, let's **consider community engagement.** We've seen tons of organizations go through the process of gathering the entire team, huddling, and brainstorming. While that might work in some scenarios, **a top-down approach is rarely the best.** And we've seen examples of community backlash when they weren't invited to the table. So what's the best approach to starting your branding process? Community engagement, of course.

If the agency you select to guide you through the branding process does not include **community intercept surveys, polls, face-to-face intake, or other forms of community involvement and crowdsourcing,** you're doomed to fail. Make sure there's an entire section in their proposal before you sign the contract! And any agency worth its salt will have a clearly outlined process for this and can explain how the results inform the branding process.





# Branding ELEMENTS

**You only know what you know**, so starting with a ground-up, grass-roots intake session should affirm and validate that **your mission is aligned with the community's' needs** — or help you identify areas of opportunity for improvement that can be addressed in your new brand.

## Ask the community questions like:

- How are we doing?
- What do you like best?
- What should our priorities be?
- What would make you spend more time downtown?
- What keeps you from doing X downtown?
- What do want to see more of?
- I like downtown because it's XYZ...

**Ask lots of qualitative questions.** Offer a mix of formatting styles of questions. Lists of common adjectives describing downtown, also provide invaluable insights.

This type of community engagement will **inform your organization** and provide answers to just what people say your brand is. You may or may not like everything you learn, but the feedback should be honest, and help you understand **controllable aspects of your brand**. It also leads to a better understanding of your constituents' needs, wants and barriers to entry.

**Bright Brothers Strategy Group uses community engagement surveys** as part and parcel to our Persona Development Process. The Personas are a perfect amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative data, and can then be used for:

- Brand development
- Marketing and Communications strategies
- Program development
- Placemaking
- Website, social and advertising copy
- SEO
- Economic Development
- Events and Activations
- ... and a whole host of related district initiatives

When you **start your processes by asking, listening and engaging with the community**, you better understand their needs and can develop a responsive organization that is in tune with the community and meets their needs.

But this is just the first step in developing your brand. Since the pandemic, we've seen a whole host of organizations attempt to rebrand their districts — with varying degrees of success. Your brand should be flexible, dynamic, multi-faceted and able to connect with various communities locally and afar, and **above all, be authentic.**



## Branding ELEMENTS

So you've done your due diligence. You've listened to the community, synthesized their feedback, and developed your new branding. That's only part of the picture. What comes to mind when you think of your brand (logo, accents, font families and color palette) are really **your visual identity**. Your brand is still the sum total of your district and organization overall, your merchants and their associated brands, your streetscape and public realm, their level of cleanliness and attractiveness, your events, activations and more. And overall, your website, the ratings and reviews of your district and merchants, and most importantly the user generated media coming out of your district are of paramount importance as well.

Every photo, every video, every review and rating tagged with your district is part of your brand. And **remember that nearly 40% of Gen Z prefer TikTok and Instagram for search over Google!** So that percentage gains exponential weight when you consider Millennial behaviors, Gen X actions and more.

**This is how people plan trips and travel now.** This is how people determine where they want to live, work, shop or relocate to. This is a significant part of your brand. And while you cannot control every aspect of every Yelp review, Facebook rating, Google My Business comment...etc. surrounding your district — you should be driving the narrative around what is controllable. Much of this starts with **claiming/owning your Google My Business account** for the district and actively managing it.

But again, your brand is so much more than your visual identity and online text, images and video. It goes beyond that, and one trend we kept major tabs on in the past year is sonic branding.



# Branding

## ALL THINGS AUDIO

If pictures say a thousand words, and video tells the whole story, then consider **another one of our senses that increasingly impacts your brand: Audio**. The rise of audio has been a hot trend these past few years, and most definitely should be on your 2023 radar.

Are you a big brand like **Intel, Nike, PepsiCo or MasterCard**? Probably not. And **you probably don't have their budgets either**. But we can learn from the trailblazing big brands that dump billions into R&D and test, vet and explore new technologies with their fat coffers.

**Sonic branding** and audio logos have been a hot topic over the past few years. And actually in 2021, [we published a Trends Report on "All Things Audio"](#) and keep coming back to tell this story as it unfolds. With the massively increased popularity of podcasts (**62% of U.S. consumers listen to podcasts<sup>18</sup>**) and big brands exploring how they sound, the aural experience of your district is not far behind. With the rapid adoption and ubiquity of smartphones, smart speakers, mobile devices and in-dash entertainment systems — the trend is building. Consider these points around audio and branding:

- Smart speaker ownership grew by over 22% during the first year of the pandemic as the number of people who work from home increased<sup>18</sup>
- Each week, more Americans listen to podcasts than have Netflix accounts<sup>18</sup>
- In 2022, 62% of the population 12+ has listened to a podcast<sup>18</sup>
- 73% of the U.S. population 12+ have listened to online audio in the last month<sup>18</sup>

And while **podcasts are pervasive**, we've only heard of one district that produced one, and that was the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore. Let's be clear: We're not saying that audio branding only relates to podcasts, or that your district needs to emulate Baltimore and launch a podcast. The points being that **podcasts are a veritable form of media, often overlooked by urban place management organizations** as part of their media mix. And you're not hearing the whole story when it comes to audio — see the next page.





# Branding

## ALL THINGS AUDIO

Aside from podcasts (and yes, you can easily buy media on podcasts), other audio opportunities exist as well. If you manage ads on Google, **you can purchase 15-second spots** (there's that magic number again!) directly through your [Google Ad Account](#) that play as interstitials on YouTube and more.

Furthermore to big brands and audio, the past few year saw some amazing innovations that will impact 2023 and beyond:

- Gabe Alonso who heads up digital platforms and community for PepsiCo, proposes that [your brand needs to have a signature sound](#). From TikTok to podcasts and live audio to earworms, Gabe says that the audible element of your brand is just as important as how you look and feel.
- [MasterCard launched a 10-layer sonic branding plan](#) that includes numerous audio assets, and even an album of original songs.

- Chip brand [Tostitos](#) (owned by PepsiCo) worked with a sonic branding agency to drill down to discover the brand's signature sound, what they agency calls its "inevitable sound" and incorporated the sounds of a salsa jar lid popping open, plus the rustling of a chip bag as parts of their sonic logo.
- Fast-casual chain [Panera](#) developed not one, but four different versions of its new sonic logos in one-, three-, and six-second, as well as a long form version, that all assist with brand recall and sales lift.
- Social media management software [Hootsuite](#) launched a wild sonic logo along with a Mortal Kombat Easter Egg for fans.
- The Wikimedia Foundation (yes, those brainy folks behind Wikipedia and more), held a competition to [define The Sound of All Human Knowledge](#) last year, in building their sonic logo. This is also a great example of community engagement with the contest.
- [Headspace and Orangetheory](#) appointed new CMOs (Chief Music Officers) to their C-suites to invest in their sonic identities.



“A sonic logo (sometimes called a sound mark, audio logo, or mnemonic) is a brief audio asset that quickly conveys a brand's identity.” — AudioBrain <sup>19</sup>



# Placemaking





# Placemaking OVERVIEW

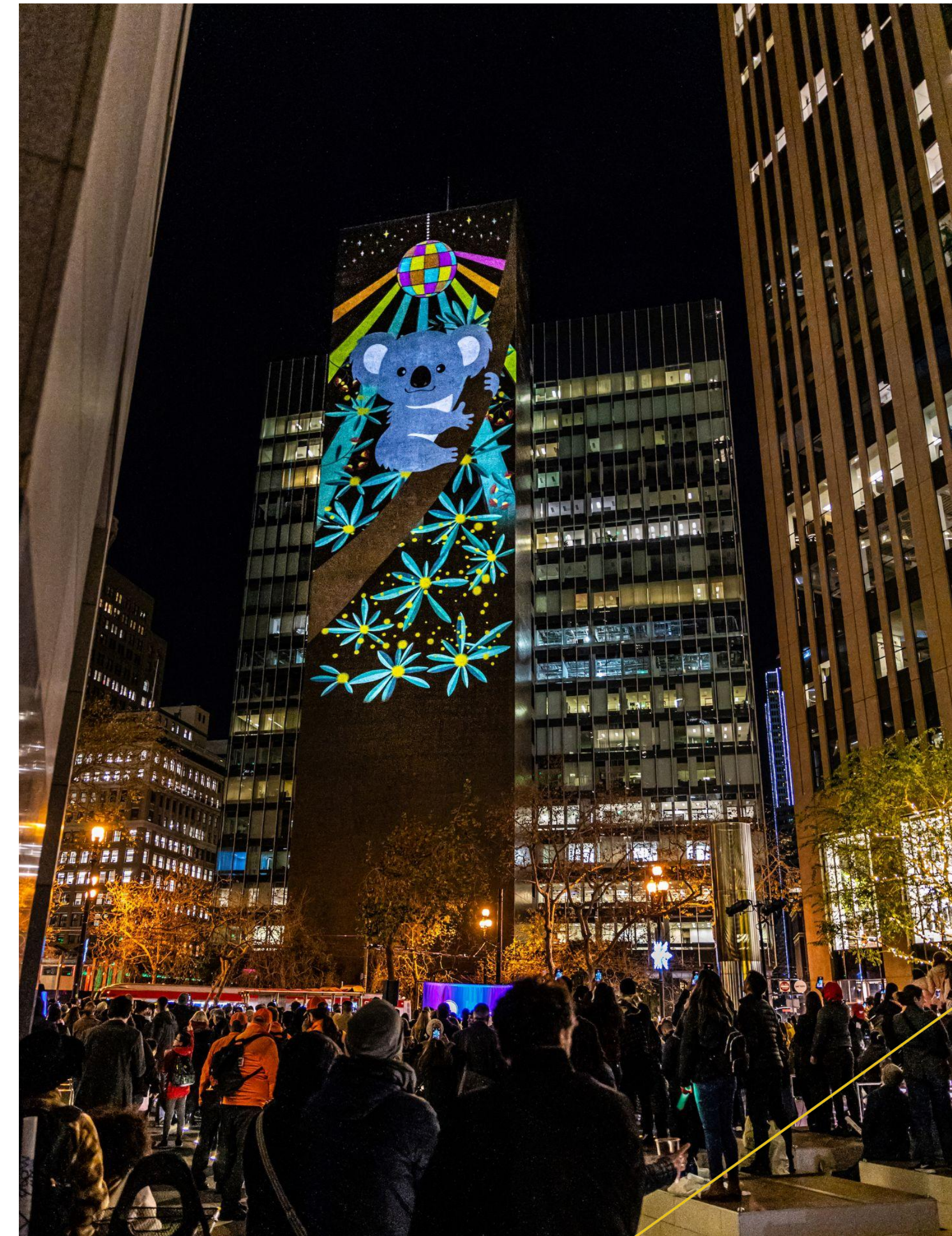
The terms **placemaking** and place branding have been bandied about so much, across so many industries, they are **now crossing over into the gen pop vernacular**. But we, as place management practitioners, hold placemaking near and dear to our hearts. It's a crucial element or overarching approach to nearly everything we do for our districts. And whether you're responsible for operations, clean and safe, marketing, events and activations, programming, special projects, community engagement — or even social and MarCom — **placemaking pervades nearly everything we do**.

Before the pandemic, our co-founder Josh Yeager participated in the **IDA Top Issues Council** on Placemaking. Together with a whip-smart coalition of IDA members, practitioners and some downright innovative folks, they collectively developed [this publication on Place Branding](#) (FREE for IDA Members), and produced and hosted IDA's first-ever Placemaking and Place Branding Summit in Huntsville, AL. The pandemic put the brakes on subsequent summits, but the information, insights and inspiration from the report are **all still applicable, albeit perhaps with a few post-pandemic tweaks**.

And that's mainly what we're exploring in this section. No need to say it again, but the pandemic up-ended so many aspects of our lives, that **culturally we're a different bunch now**. Downtowns and districts globally have different concerns, pressures, merchant support needs, dayparting and foot traffic patterns. So within this section, we'll delve into today's world of placemaking and **guide you through some examples of outstanding placemaking** globally.

Also, never forget to [check our website's RESOURCES section](#) for additional Trends Reports (like this on on [Illuminated Placemaking](#)) and an archive of our bi-monthly e-blasts for place management practitioners and destination marketing organizations, the Bright Brothers Bulletin.

Photo Credit: Downtown San Francisco Partnership





# Placemaking EXPERIENTIAL

We talk all the time about “**leaning into experiential**” locally, but what does that mean? A great answer comes from Senior Business Director of Experiential, Victoria Sobel from lauded creative agency Giant Spoon. Known for groundbreaking and impressive, immersive experiences, Giant Spoon caught the world’s attention last year by **turning upside down the Empire State Building** (and 14 other iconic landmarks globally) to tease the launch of Stranger Things, season 4. If you haven’t seen the activation, click here to [enter The Upside Down](#).

Sobel stated in a recent interview with Marketing Brew about that, “**Consumers now look to brands to do more than just demo and sample—they want to participate, learn, celebrate, and ultimately, be part of a community through these shared moments. Marketers should lean into this opportunity to build brand love and loyalty through the creation of great, memorable experiences,**” and that Empire State stunt definitely checks all the boxes!<sup>20</sup>

Now, most urban place managers don’t have the kinds of big budgets that Netflix has to promote their districts. So what is possible? Plenty! **Think about things you and your stakeholders can do like:**

- Philly’s famed Pizzeria Beddia has a private *omakase* [hoagie room](#). Based on the Japanese tradition of omakase, guests participate in the preparation of the food
- Host an in-shop experience à la [Lush cosmetics](#), the famed British beauty brand
- [Sleepovers](#) are an increasingly popular trend at museums, zoos and cultural attractions
- The [Tinder Pride Slide](#) was not only a trip, it was also a feel-good fundraiser
- This innovative lighting manufacturer [RBW](#), hosts lunch-and-learns with architects and designers (their target audiences) and [interactive public events](#) where participants assemble a lighting fixture and takes it home
- And then of course, you have your vetted experiential business models like Build-A-Bear, Wine & Design (aka “tipsy painting”) and chefs classes...
- Plus, experiential exhibits like The [Van Gogh](#) Immersive Experience, [Luminarias](#) in the Garden, the [Museum of Ice Cream](#) and many more.
- If you have an influx of new residents to your district, consider programming “locals only” fam tours, dine-arounds or bike and burrito rallies!



“Experiential isn’t going anywhere in 2023. Entering a potentially recessionary year, brands will be looking to get outsized attention for their efforts and investments. Experiential, more so than many other mediums, has the potential to deliver that attention.” — Maria D’Amato, Executive Creative Director, GSD&M, AdWeek Creative 100



Photo from LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mariadamato/>





## Placemaking EXPERIENTIAL



**Taking a deeper dive into experiential and illuminated placemaking, consider the Downtown San Francisco Partnership's 'Let's Glow SF' event.\*** With two seasons under their belts, the downtown district tirelessly works to counter the media narrative that the central business district is dead. The media in SF itself loves to jump on this narrative to garner alarmist clicks. Admittedly San Francisco's commercial real estate market has been particularly hard hit with pandemic pitfalls, like major tech companies moving to WFH as standard, Twitter getting hit for past due rent, and more.<sup>21</sup>

In an effort to **keep office workers downtown** after hours, (and spending money at local stakeholders), as well as **draw locals, regionals and visitors** to SF's extremely clean and safe downtown, the district launched Let's Glow SF during holiday 2021 to much fanfare, plus a special honor from Mayor London Breed. The 10-day event massively increased foot traffic and drove an estimated \$2.2M in economic impact for the districts' ratepayers. In 2022, Let's Glow returned as the nation's **"largest holiday projection mapping festival"** featuring spectacular light shows at five iconic locations within the district, and 2022 knocked it even farther outta the park with a **42% increase in attendance and a 61% increase in visitor spending, creating a \$3M economic impact** for Downtown SF businesses.

The district worked with a local visual arts company [A3 Visual](#), and tapped local and international talent to design the interactive displays and light shows. In 2022, they offered a digital brochure, and added a [companion print guide](#) to the festival that was distributed to local tourism and hospitality partners. It all adds up to **quantifiable returns for the community**, and even in San Francisco, \$3M in economic impact is nothing to sniff at!

**Get the full scoop on Let's Glow SF** here on the [Downtown San Francisco Partnership's new website!](#)

Now not every district has the budget, foot traffic or wherewithal to produce this type of event, but a key component here was also dayparting.

**\*Full disclosure, the Downtown San Francisco Partnership is a client of Bright Brothers Strategy Group**



# Placemaking DAYPARTING

Because of the pandemic, we now have **disrupted foot traffic patterns, WFH** and more flexible work schedules, different **child care situations, and hybrid work scenarios** creating **fractured dayparts**. In some cities we're seeing rebounds in daily commutes returning to some 80-90% of pre-pandemic levels, and in other places (like San Francisco), we may never return to a formerly-known norm. So what does this mean for districts? Nearly every one of our clients has expressed challenges pertaining to this **disruption**. It's **difficult for restaurants to staff for lunch** without the office workers. Some cities have seen a "brain drain" of talent that can work virtually anywhere and have moved off-grid. And in some places, businesses are mandating return to the office with varying degrees of success. **So what to do?**

**Lean into dayparting.** And what that means is understanding when and where people are coming downtown, and **programming and activating for those segments**. It may not be the traditional "after work happy hours" and coffee meetings anymore. We highly recommend you track and **analyze foot traffic patterns** (with any of the myriad services like Springboard, Placer.ai and others), to better understand when and how people are using your downtown amenities. Once you have a grasp on when, you can get the most bang for your buck, program for these visitors and make sure it ties into your merchant support efforts. Some examples come to mind, like:

- Downtown Tempe's "[Park After Dark](#)" series that takes place **after sunset** during their blistering summer months
- Recurring concert series during **alternate dayparts** like lunch, happy hour and weekend evenings, like Downtown Pittsburgh Partnership's "[Downtown Sound](#)" series
- Consider round-ups of content/programming around **mid-afternoon** [sweet treats and pick-me-ups](#) like Visit Chandler catalogued
- ...or even consider **go-at-your-own-pace programming** like Downtown Austin's "[Mural Map](#)", Downtown Huntsville's "[Craft Beer Trail](#)", Downtown Excelsior Springs [Chocolate Tour](#), wine tours, cocktail trails and more.





## Placemaking CHANGE

**Once the genie is out of the bottle, it's never going back.** We're now three years in since COVID-19 first hit, and the word "pivot" has been beaten like a dead horse (pardon the analogy). But let's explore how some places **lean into change**.

**"Car-free" frees up space for people.** Even before the pandemic, we saw the beginnings of car-free movements in cities around the globe. With Europe taking a decided lead over the U.S.'s love affair with the automobile, cities like Barcelona, Milan, Paris and Stockholm are ahead of the curve in implementing **Open Streets programs — bringing a more human scale** to safe and exclusive streets for pedestrians.<sup>22</sup> And stateside, we've seen massive inroads made in cities like Atlanta, Boulder, Columbus, Fort Collins, Fort Lauderdale, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, Philly, Portland and more.<sup>23</sup>

Additionally, **streeteries** lending a slim lifeline to struggling restaurants during the pandemic, are **now becoming permanent** in cities like New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle and many more, albeit not without contention. **Some cities (and citizens) favor parking over pizza**, and making streeteries permanent come with a hefty price tag for safety, stability, insurance and inspections purposes.

But in one of the most telling stories of all, the city of Toronto, CA recently announced some quantifiable evidence in favor of permanent street eats. In late 2022 **Toronto published the results of analysis on revenue generation** from the same footprint of space, year-over-year. What they found was that had the traditional parking been in place, it would have generated a mere \$3.7M, **compared to the \$181M produced by curbside patios** during the same 13-week study period. **That's 49X more revenue generated for the city**, and its citizens are seemingly stuffed and satisfied with the results as well!<sup>24</sup>





## Placemaking CHANGE



**Use of the public realm became even more imperative during the pandemic**, and often with surprising outcomes. One street in Jackson Heights, a dense, bustling neighborhood in Queens, NY closed 34th Avenue to traffic during the pandemic, and residents and businesses liked the expanded, outdoor space so much, the Department of Transportation agreed to make the change to an Open Street permanent. Managed by the [34th Ave Open Streets Coalition](#), this success story is but one example of thousands implemented worldwide due to COVID-19's social distancing protocols and efforts to make places more liveable.

Jackson Heights, NY resident and Department Chair at William Paterson University, Lauren Razzore-Cedeño endured the majority of the pandemic in this neighborhood. She shared personal insights with Bright Brothers Strategy Group, noting that, **“What transpired and transformed 34th Avenue was honestly a lifesaver for us,”** stated Razzore-Cedeño, a mother of two young children.

She furthered that, “New York was the epicenter of the pandemic at the time. We had nowhere to walk because it wasn't safe on the sidewalks packed with so many people... we couldn't socially distance. So I would take the girls down there for fresh air. It started just as a place to get some space during COVID, but they developed programming on 34<sup>th</sup>, and **the whole scene became a really amazing community space.** Some neighbors weren't happy with the changes, but it really provided a lifeline for me and my family.”

So whether for walking, playing games, yoga, dining, dancing, bike rallies or myriad other purposes, the trend toward creating **safe, human-scale, car-free spaces within our districts** and cities is a trend we're likely continue to see develop in 2023 and beyond.



A young man with dark hair is sitting at a table in a restaurant or cafe. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and is holding a glass with a drink. The background shows a menu board and other people. The image is overlaid with a dark blue filter. The text "In Sum" is written in a white, serif font in the center of the image.

# In Sum





## In Sum CLOSING THOUGHTS

While trends come and go, serious **marketers and place managers are always on the lookout for vetted techniques, tactics and strategies to help support their communities.**

We have soooo much more to say and so many other insights to share, so keep your eyes peeled for subsequent Trends Reports throughout 2023 to help guide and inspire your district or destination marketing efforts.

But for now, we've rounded-up and given you the download on some impactful, incredible and unforgettable trends for 2023, including:

- **Social Media**
- **Email Marketing**
- **Short Form Video**
- **Branding**
- **Placemaking**

...that we hope you can take to heart.



As leaders in the development of strategic initiatives within the UPMO, place management, urban planning and destination marketing verticals, **Bright Brothers Strategy Group excels thanks to our “people-first, data-driven” approaches**, deep industry experience (we've worked with dozens of your peer districts and marketing orgs), and our vetted POSTR process, that starts with people and custom-developed Personas.

We're happy to develop specialized strategies and solutions for your district, provide educational economic development sessions for your stakeholders or just be that consultative 3rd party looking out for your best interests.

**Have a need or a burning question? Give us a shout!** We're always happy to meet new people and chat industry trends. Thanks for reading!

With sincere regards,  
**Your Bright Brothers Team**





**“We hired Bright Brothers to help us in advance of our new site build. The experience and deliverables were invaluable in defining the tone, copy, voice and needs and wants of our target audiences. We have found the personas to be invaluable – especially during COVID when we had to switch a virtual Annual Conference and set up a new weekly webinar program. And not only myself and the marcom manager use them, but the whole staff!”**

**Allison Shashok**

DIR. MEMBERSHIP & MARKETING  
INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION

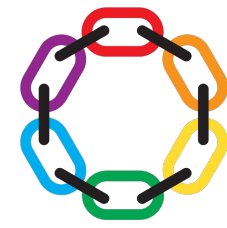




# Clients



Visual Identity,  
design, MarCom strategy  
CALIFORNIA



LEATHER & LGBTQ  
CULTURAL DISTRICT

Persona development  
and brand strategy  
CALIFORNIA



Recurring consultants  
analytics, SEO, social  
ARIZONA



Retainer consultants  
analytics, SEO, social  
VIRGINIA



Persona Development,  
MarCom strategy, Consulting  
MICHIGAN



Persona development  
and MarCom strategy  
TEXAS



Award-winning  
marketing strategy  
& design  
ARIZONA



Persona development  
and MarCom strategy  
ARIZONA



Marketing strategy  
& design  
ARIZONA



Persona development  
and strategic consulting  
CALIFORNIA



Persona development  
and strategic consulting  
MARYLAND



Creative design  
and MarCom  
CALIFORNIA



Persona development,  
asset strategy, social strategy  
WASHINGTON, D.C.



Destination marketing  
social media management  
ARIZONA



Persona development  
and strategic consulting  
PENNSYLVANIA



DOWNTOWN  
DALLAS INC

Persona development  
and strategic consulting  
TEXAS



Persona development  
and strategic consulting  
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Digital consultation  
and best practices  
CONNECTICUT



# Image Attribution

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# Thank You

## FOR READING OUR TRENDS REPORT!

GOT QUESTIONS? WANT TO LEARN MORE?

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