

Fast Company Innovation Festival

September 18-21, 2023

Convene | NYC

Presented by

bde
&co.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Key Takeaways & Next Steps | 4 |
| Customer Experience & the New Premium | 5 |
| What is the New Premium? | |
| Elevating Customer Experience | |
| QR Codes and Experiences | |
| Community Building & Authenticity | 7 |
| Building a Brand Community | |
| How to be Authentic | |
| Visual & Verbal Branding | |
| AI Applications | 9 |
| AI for Business | |
| Encouraging Creativity with AI | |
| What's Next in AI? | |
| Ethical Considerations | |
| Leading AI Platforms | |
| Trend Spotting | 12 |
| What's Next in Hospitality | |
| The Future of Data Democratization | |
| Trends in the Workplace | |
| Scaling Sustainability | |
| The Future of Commerce | |
| Hiring Advice from Google | |
| Conclusion | 15 |
| Key Speakers & Sessions | 16 |
| Keynote Speakers | |
| Fast Track Sessions | |

INTRODUCTION

The Fast Company Innovation Festival brought together the leading companies innovating in tech, AI, commerce, and marketing to explore the future of business in an increasingly digital world. With new tools, data and research available to leverage every day, staying at the leading edge of innovation is essential to remain successful in today's business landscape.

Throughout the week, each topic of the Innovation Festival shared common themes: **remaining human, authentic, and community-driven** while using the ever-growing suite of new digital tools available to their full potential. A good product is no longer enough, consumers and clients are making choices based on **shared values, sustainability, and personal relationships to brands and their communities**.

Brands that find success in the new business landscape will take into consideration:

1. Customers and clients care about humanity, authenticity, and shared values.
2. There is a new expectation of premium for consumers and end users.
3. Personalization and elevated experience are driving consumer behavior.
4. Digital is leading the future, but physical is just as important for a wholistic experience.
5. Data is king and proper data democratization across your organization is necessary.
6. AI is a powerful tool and must be incorporated into business in a careful, responsible way.
7. AI alone isn't going to take your job. Someone who can deploy it well will

In attending this conference, **bde&co.** seeks to be at the leading edge of the innovations being driven by digital trends and technology and how these tools and lessons can be applied to the business of design, lifestyle and hospitality. And to share those findings with you.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Meyers
Director, Digital Strategy & Development
bde&co.

KEY TAKEAWAYS & NEXT STEPS

1. Refine or revisit your core messaging and values to act and speak authentically as a brand.

- a. Start by aligning yourself internally and with your partners on:
 - i. Who you are
 - ii. What your values are
 - iii. How your team reflects these values
 - iv. What you offer your community, clients and customers
 - v. What they offer to you
- b. From there, refine your messaging and digital strategy to convey these values in a human, authentic way across all of your channels. Make your approach conversational and community-focused by speaking to your audiences' emotions.
- c. Always have something to show for the things you talk about.

2. Assess your data infrastructure and how it is leveraged across your teams.

- a. Identify what data you have, how it is stored and organized and who has access to it.
- b. As privacy concerns increase, targeted and retargeting your ideal customers and clients will become increasingly difficult without 1st-Party data.
- c. Democratize your data so that any teams that can benefit from your data can access and apply it accordingly.

3. Identify your premium potential and elevate your customer experience.

- a. Identify what needs to be digital and what needs to be physical in your shopping, specifying, ordering, sampling, etc. process to make the overall experience of your brand seamless, easy and enjoyable.
- b. See where in this process personalization can be added both physically and digitally.
- c. Assess what tools you have available and how they can work together to create cohesive, elevated customer experiences – AI, QR codes, virtual experiences, physical interactions, etc.
- d. Remove any remaining friction across these tools to simplify the omnichannel experience.

4. Understand and apply the best tools available.

- a. AI is a powerful tool and must be incorporated into business in a careful, responsible way. It may not be time for you to apply it to your business, but that time is fast approaching for all businesses.
- b. Knowing how and where AI can apply to your business model – automation, ideation, creativity, etc. will help keep your business ahead of the curve.
- c. AI alone isn't going to make your company successful. Employees using data to enhance and leverage AI effectively will.
- d. See the list of AI platforms on page 10 for additional information.

PART I: CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE & THE NEW PREMIUM

What is the New Premium?

In short, premium means something different to each person. What individuals value varies from person to person, but in general, some trends emerge. For most, a premium experience is, at base, one that is seamless, easy and enjoyable.

Note that what each person finds easy and enjoyable can differ. For some, an impersonal, digital-only service might be best, for others, a brick-and-mortar human interaction is best so it is crucial to adopt an omnichannel approach to be truly premium.

The new premium builds on all this with an elevated, personal touch. Personalization creates a true sense of connection and importance. This can be digital or physical and can be something as small as the details in craftsmanship of an object or as big as the CEO of Hill House Home addressing customers directly via Live Stream.

To achieve these premium metrics, start with a product, service, experience, etc. that makes people's lives easier or adds value to it in some way.

Identify what your business does to add value, how it impacts your customers/clients and how you communicate that to them.

Elevating Customer Experience

Elevating customer experience will build a community around, and connection to your brand. Create moments of customer experience that are not focused around product or selling, but around creating this connection.

Consumers are buying on values, not just products anymore. They expect companies to have a conscious and to share their values. 80% of consumers reported purchasing from a company last year because of their values.

To make these values clear, there needs to be humanity in your business, both on the employee and the consumer/client side. Build connection to people and by taking their emotions and their needs into account. Customers/clients on the west coast have different needs and personalities than consumers/clients on the east coast.

Consider how digital and physical interact. How does the physical brand experience translate into digital and vice-versa?

Digital integration is essential to removing friction from customer/client experience, but many moments need to be physical – in-store shopping, trying on a product, feeling a material, etc.

Example: Hill House Home created a livestream 'waiting room' with a Q&A with the company's founder doing previews of products before release. This created a dialogue with the customer and put a human face and personality to the brand, but returns and shopping can still be done through brick-and-mortar stores.

Physical and digital are different worlds and require speaking to the setting where your message will be seen. To be effectively omnichannel, messaging should be consistent to both the brand and setting and all channels should work together to create one unified experience.

QR Codes & Experiences

QR codes gained in popularity again during COVID as the world went touchless. Almost all smartphones possess QR code readers baked into their functionality meaning they are accessible to most consumers.

QR codes can have multiple simultaneous functionalities:

On the product side, they can provide on-site personalization as well as live inventory tracking in retail stores. QR codes can be used to keep track of product lifecycle – like an NFT but lower cost. Scan a QR code to learn date of manufacture, origin point, materiality, recyclability, etc.

For consumers, a QR code can be scanned to create a digital experience. A link can be geo-fenced to offer one experience when scanned in-store and another when home. This can be leveraged to create unique experiences on products that link physical and digital.

Example: In-store, a QR code on a product can go to a custom-built landing page about their product, telling its story, giving info on the designer, etc. At home, outside the geofenced store, the QR code can launch an in-browser AR Experience that enhances the product or creates an opportunity for community generated content.

QR codes are an easy pathway to allow for truly omni-channel integration.

PART 2: COMMUNITY BUILDING & AUTHENTICITY

Building a Brand Community

There are 3 levels of culture that brands can infiltrate: sub, pop, and mass culture. A brand like Heller has a sub culture of longtime Hellerware fans. They have infiltrated the pop culture through partnerships with brands like Supreme and MoMA that lead to explosive growth on social media.

A mass-culture brand is a company like Nike that has its own organic social media movements created across cultures and platforms. Nike is recognizable around the world and even has its own subcultures for specific products and partnerships.

Develop fan centric content through UGC and digital experiences. Promote “sharing the mic” by allowing your audience to promote for you.

Make it a conversation between people. The key to success is to have a conversation with one person that is overheard by many. Do this by talking about and sharing what’s in the moment on social.

Find the thing in your brand, market, community that can be scalable and build upon it authentically.

Approach new platforms in a meaningful authentic way. Don’t do it just to do it. You have to have a vested interest in the thing itself whether that is your brand or your product or your message.

If you can, take a journey through the organization and make it a collaborative experience. Involve human personalities at every level.

Brands are created by their fans, so there needs to be a call and response. What are you giving them? What are they giving you back?

Make opportunities to co-create with brands through brand ambassadors and partners. People to People.

Ask yourself: What is on your company’s ingredient label?

1. Who are you?
2. Who is in your organization?
3. Do you reflect the community you serve?
4. Does your team reflect the community?

How to be authentic:

Don’t jump on band wagons, stay true to your core message. Aim to create loyalty and retention.

Connect to an emotion story with action. If you are going to talk about an action or timely social topic, make sure you have the receipts to show that you are doing it. e.g. sustainability, diversity, etc.

If you are using AI, always have a human hand guiding it as it is inherently inauthentic.

Think about where your message is going to be and how it is going to appear across decks, video, web, copy, visuals etc.

Press performs better – ads on social should use quotes from press and cite them. Reviews and trusted voices drive conversions.

Visual & Verbal Branding

Branding, both visual and written is essential to success. Even the best ideas can't be sold if they aren't well designed.

Start by asking:

1. What do you do? Or What is it?
2. Why is it important?
3. Why should I care?

If you can't answer one of those questions, go back to better understand or refine your idea or product. Always answer those three questions to create a clear direction.

For brands, start with visual storytelling first. Your visual branding does more than just represent your company, it conveys a message about who you are.

Identify your differentiators and communicate them effectively and authentically.

The single biggest factor in brand success is authenticity /realness. Your brand needs to be an organization of people who share the brand values.

Aim to provide actual value to your customer or client's life.

PART 4: AI APPLICATIONS

AI for Business

Marketers need to be at the table for AI discussions – about how it can be both trained and deployed. Programming and automation applications are different than marketing and language applications.

AI is an extension of digital transformation and is driving the current wave of enterprise transformation we are seeing. Companies large enough to invest in and research their own Large Language Models are a.) ahead of the curve and b.) leading the development of AI for business.

AI needs to be fueled by data and analytics. “Personalized” language models or AI platforms that are trainable at the client level mean that you can train your own AI on your company’s owned data for hyper-targeted, on-brand results.

With enough data, generative AI will be able to develop predictive analytics based specifically off of your data to anticipate customer behavior/needs.

To get started in thinking how AI can benefit your business, apply AI to solve a problem. Identify an area where a solution is needed or there is a challenge, and think about how AI can help – writing, creativity, automation, etc.

Keep in mind, Generative AI should be powered by *and* empower info accessibility. Without data and information, you won’t be successful training AI. And without data democratization across your organization, you won’t be successful in deploying it.

In the end, AI isn’t going to take your job, people who know how to deploy AI effectively are.

Encouraging Creativity with AI

AI’s simulate human intelligence processes, including learning and language. AI can help generate novel ideas based on a vast range of sources. It can be trained on data, including your own brand materials.

AI can augment human creativity by providing tools and techniques that enhance and accelerate the creative process, generate novel ideas, and providing inspiration. In order to do this, the most important factor is how you are inputting a prompt.

When developing a prompt to input into a large language model, think of it as giving out a creative writing assignment. Approach the prompt from a story perspective and ask yourself what you are hoping to achieve or convey.

Providing enough detail in your prompt is imperative, especially for longer responses like generating a blog or long-form content.

Ask: what details are you hoping to get back? What questions do you need answered? What context do I need to provide to get an accurate, relevant answer?

AI can also help streamline brainstorming sessions by suggesting ideas based on given parameters, accelerating early-stage creativity. Ask for a few idea starters on your specific topic and don't forget to provide enough context.

AI can also act as a second set of eyes. AI algorithms can analyze creative concepts, providing data-driven insights into their potential success and market reception. This is improved in enterprise trainable AI systems. With enough data, AI can analyze user preferences and behavior to recommend creative content for maximum engagement including advertising, audience targeting, copy/creative, etc.

Note: this is possible but may not be as accurate for open-source platforms like ChatGPT depending on the depth and date of data the platform was trained on.

As with all things AI, creative outcomes need a human hand guiding them. AI algorithms can be fine-tuned and guided by human creators (or brands) to align with their artistic vision.

Iteration is one of the most valuable resources AI can provide. Iterative generations of text, visuals, etc can be created instantly without additional work by a human creator. This can help provide inspiration, additional variations for use, or help refining the message and look of a specific creative.

Use AI to learn not just to do things for you. AI can provide personalized educational topics and information based on specific topics you are looking to learn more about. Use AI to learn and find resources but always fact-check and make sure information is valid.

What is next in AI?

Most applications need more than a Large Language Model (LLM), a text-based generative AI, but right now open-source platforms are primarily LLMs like ChatGPT.

The future of AI will be personalized, trainable layers of AIs built on top of foundational tech. Custom AI are being built by enterprise companies and trained on 1st party data.

In the near future, this accessibility will extend to smaller businesses with the ability to train a LLM on your company's marketing materials, internal brand guidelines, etc. to write website copy, press releases, etc. in your brand language.

AI requires reinforced learning with human feedback. Especially when training, AI needs a human touch to guide how it learns.

Right now, mostly at the enterprise level, so open-source platforms are great but come with data concerns and are not trainable on your data.

Ethical Considerations:

With any AI platform, ethical considerations have to be taken into account when using them as a tool for creativity. As legislation always falls behind advances in technology, Intellectual Property laws, copyright and other creator protections can be a gray area for AI generated content.

It is essential to ensure that AI-generated content respects copyright laws and intellectual property rights in your respective area preventing unintentional plagiarism. If you plan to use AI to build upon or

iterate on a piece of original content, it is important to get consent from the creator and any related party before inputting their intellectual property.

It is also essential to consider concerns regarding biases in AI-generated content. AI will output creative based on what it has been trained on which can come with an inherit bias toward that data. For example, in many AI image generators, returned images for certain searches like 'doctor' or 'CEO' will most often return results featuring white males.

For businesses using open-source platforms, privacy is also a major concern. Open-source platforms give little insight on how data that is input into the platform is used, catalogued and output to other users. It is best practice to never input any data which you would not want publicly available into an open platform.

Owned enterprise platforms which are not publicly accessible can help mitigate these privacy concerns and still allow for an AI to be trained on your company's 1st party data. This level of privacy is not currently widely available for small to medium size business who cannot develop their own AI, but new platforms which aim to increase access to this functionality are currently being developed and are coming soon.

For all businesses, developing an AI policy that addresses these ethical and privacy concerns will help guide employees on how and when AI can be used for business. When in doubt, err on the side of protecting the privacy of your data.

AI Platforms for Further Research:

- Tome
- LookX
- Meta AI
- Bard
- ChatGPT
- Midjourney
- Stable Diffusion
- Other: Rezz

PART 5: TREND SPOTTING

What is Next in Hospitality?

Travel is currently at or exceeding pre-COVID levels for both work and leisure. Following an initial post-COVID travel boom, the travel industry has a new, elevated baseline thanks to the progression of flexibility for remote work.

Surveys by Hilton have shown that work travel is driving additional personal travel with those that travel for business adding vacation days onto and extending stays.

Travelers are now looking for experiences as well as destinations. The experience and amenities of a stay are just as important as where a traveler is visiting.

Because of this, function is king. In regard to the new premium, travelers are looking for a seamless, personalized experience. Towels and sound are the two biggest factors in customer experience based on surveys conducted across every level of the Hilton portfolio from economy to luxury.

In the US, 'Premium Economy' is leading travel with the most sought-after hotels falling at the highest end of economy bookings, \$70-\$150 per night. Luxury is a relative term based on what a consumer can afford, so at every level, there must be depth of experience and personalization.

The Future of Data Democratization

1st-party data is the future. There is a fundamental difference between what people say and what they do and this data bridges this gap to understand the actual habits of consumers.

Brands need to have data on their customers and they need to use it effectively. This means democratizing data, or making it available and usable to all sectors of the business, from programming and design to marketing.

Cookies will disappear in 2024 meaning targeting for SEM and Social will become more challenging. To combat this, start (or continue) gathering as much information as possible from customers. BUT make that data accessible to anyone who can benefit from it within your organization.

ALL areas that can benefit from data, especially marketing, and need access to be able to properly leverage it effectively.

Before sharing data, taking into consideration privacy policies and protections for customer data first. Make sure that the access to data is protected and that only relevant teams are able to access it. Additionally, ensure any data collection and use meets the privacy laws in your area. For example, data sharing is much more heavily protected under GDPR in the EU, which restricts how and where data can be used in marketing.

Trends in the Workplace:

It is now commonly accepted that flexibility is here to stay. Hybrid work won't go away, but it will change how people travel and how they work when they are in the office.

Conferences and events are back in person and are exciting to attend, but the flexibility to work remote is still wanted by all.

People became used to working in different ways when forced to work remotely and these trends are carrying through in the return to office. At home you have multiple work zones – couch, desk, kitchen table, etc. In the office, designers and companies must reflect this change and offer activity-based work zones.

Employees will look for separate areas for Zoom, meetings, focused work, collaboration, etc. depending on the task, the time, and other personal factors. Integration between in person and virtual is key to making this work.

Because of these trends, ancillary is the future of workspaces. In short, employees want the option to work in a variety of ways as they might if they were at home.

Scaling sustainability

Sustainability should come from a grounded company ethos that show care and understanding of your clients and customers and the environment. You must know your brand, be your brand, and do business according to your ethos.

When looking to scale sustainability efforts, set a strategic foundation for sustainable practice. Create an internal operating structure that creates a clear path for fast action that can be carried out at any level of your organization. Train your employees on these practices so that clear pathways exist for making sustainable decisions.

Customers care about sustainability and shop on values. Make sure you convey your sustainability messages to your audience in a human, non-marketing way. You can do this by building sustainability into other brand topics to create an underlying current of sustainable messaging.

When scaling, focus on achievable and actionable items first. For example, if a sustainability program exists but has little traction, push this program and educate your consumer base on proper end-of-lifecycle practices. This will help grow programs, show action by the company, and, ideally, save money.

Example: Parachute struggles to grow their recycling program due to the long lifecycle of products. They educate the consumer both on their recycling program, but also on other sustainable ways to use the product at the end of its lifecycle. This shows an understanding of the consumer's behavior while also promoting their own recycling program and sustainable messaging.

The Future of Commerce

The future of commerce will be driven by convenience and the new premium. Brands offering new experiences that solve a problem easily or make for a personalized interaction will be the most successful.

B2B and D2C consumers are seeking frictionless experiences across both physical and digital interactions. Digital is a powerful tool but some things need to be physical. Determine what brand experiences, tools, shopping, specifying, ordering samples etc. can be digitized and what needs to remain 'brick and mortar.'

Leverage your AI solutions to create real-time emotional experiences. How can AI be used in your business to automate personalization?

To reduce friction ask yourself:

1. Where does friction exist in the customer's journey?
2. Where can it be reduced?
 - What needs to be digital?
 - What needs to be physical?
 - How do these two complement each other?

Hiring Advice from Google:

Look for an unbounded thinking mindset. Ideal candidates should always be curious and asking: what is next? A learning mindset is part of curiosity, the best will want to learn and develop.

In interviews, ask: how do you develop a learning agenda?

Find out what they do in their free time and what their hobbies are to understand if they have an unbounded thinking mindset. Hobbies that incorporate a learning element like reading will often indicate a desire for growth and curiosity.

PART 6: CONCLUSION

In summary, the future of business, B2C, B2B, and DTC, will rely on a balance between digital transformation and human touch. AI will continue to grow as a force for business in the evolving landscape, and will enhance the productivity, creativity, and efficiency of teams that can learn and deploy it effectively. Ultimately, AI will not replace the guiding human element that is needed to build genuine connections with consumers but will be a tool used by the most successful businesses.

The path forward is led by the growth of these digital tools, but personalization should remain at the forefront of every digital interaction, resonating with consumers seeking a genuine connection. Physical interactions will, for now, remain an invaluable step for many businesses to connect with their communities and sell products as well. It's crucial to examine and decide where your organization should focus on digital transformation and where a human element is needed

Even in this tech-savvy era, consumers and clients still seek authenticity, looking for a human face, personality, and shared values in their purchasing experiences. Authentic storytelling is the cornerstone on which enduring brands and communities are built. Engaging and emotionally genuine narratives foster a strong connection with clients, customers, and the community at large.

The ultimate premium offered to communities is a blend of personalization, elevation, and immersive experiences across digital and physical realms. These experiences, memorable and seamlessly integrated, are the basis for creating long-term customers and sparking narratives that communities enthusiastically share.

All of this hinges on data. Data, particularly 1st party data, will be more important than ever as AI platforms become widely available and trainable and as web tracking disappears. Building a data infrastructure that is accessible across all organizational touchpoints is essential. This democratization of data, combined with the proper use of digital tools, premium experiences, and human touch sets the stage for success in this new era of business.

KEY SPEAKERS & SESSIONS

Keynote Speakers:

What's Up Next in Hospitality & Travel

Presented by **Chris Nasetta**, President and CEO, Hilton

Finding Real Emotion in Artificial Intelligence

Presented by **Janet Balis**, Partner and Marketing Practice Leader, EY Consulting; **Don McGuire**, SVP and Chief Marketing Officer, Qualcomm; and **Emily Oberman**, Partner, Pentagram

Humanizing the Next Wave of Technology

Presented by **Wesley Eugene**, Partner and Chief Information Officer, IDEO; **Christian Madsbjerg**, Entrepreneur, Philosopher, and Cofounder, ReD Associates; and **Prem Natarajan**, EVP, Chief Scientist and Head of Enterprise AI, Capital One

How to Elevate the Customer Experience

Presented by **Ather Williams III**, Head of Strategy, Digital, Innovation and Enterprise Payments, Wells Fargo; **Nell Diamond**, Founder and CEO, Hill House Home; **Melora Zaner**, Chief Design Officer, TIAA

Empathy & Innovation: Keeping the Customer at the Center

Presented by **Emily Roberts**, SVP, Head of Enterprise Consumer Product, Capital One

Rethinking Commerce with Next-Level Consumer Engagement

Presented by **Lauren Antenucci**, Manager, Loss Prevention, Puma North America; **Toby Gabriner**, CEO, Bitly; **Chuck Lasley**, IT Director, Application Development, Dillard's; and **Carrie Wilkie**, SVP, Standards and Technology, GS1 US

How Elevated Experiences Create Forever Customers

Presented by **Daniela Jorge**, Chief Design Officer, Capital One; **Shannon Knapp**, President and CEO, The Leading Hotels of the World; and **Lauren Liss**, SVP, Premium Products and Experiences, Capital One

Unlocking the Power of Digital Commerce

Presented by **Anushka Salinas**, President and Chief Operating Officer, Rent the Runway; **Jeff Saunders**, SVP, Chief Technology Officer, Warby Parker; and **Sanjiv Yajnik**, President, Financial Services, Capital One

Design in the Age of AI

Presented by **Catherine Courage**, VP, Knowledge UX, Google; **Nona Farahnik Yadegar**, Design Director, Snap, and Cofounder and Chairwoman, Origin; and **Jason Yuan**, Cofounder and Chief Design Officer, New Computer

How to Accelerate AI for Business

Presented by **Rohit Badlaney**, General Manager, IBM Cloud Product and Industry Platforms, **Sarah Hoffman**, VP of AI and Machine Learning Research, Fidelity Investments; and **David Rogers**, Professor, Columbia Business School, and Author, *The Digital Transformation Roadmap*

Reinventing the Workplace to Make Work Better

Featuring **Djenaba Parker**, General Counsel and Chief People Officer, Goop; **Ryan Simonetti**, Cofounder and CEO, Convene; and **Rachel Wachtel**, EVP of SPACE+, Brookfield Properties

Using AI to Foster Creativity

Presented by Featuring **Brian Chesky**, Cofounder and CEO, Airbnb

How to Redesign the Future of Work

Presented by Featuring **Michael Shvo**, Founder and CEO, Shvo

Fast Track Sessions:

How Generative AI is Changing the Work of Creativity

Presented by **Michael Mignano**, Partner, Lightspeed and **Keith Peiris**, Cofounder, Tome

How to Launch a Successful Brand

Presented by **Melissa Duren Conner**, Partner, JBC and **Emily Heyward**, Cofounder, Red Antler

Scaling Sustainability: Environmentally Conscious Business Growth

Presented by **Amy Hoban**, Chief Creative Officer, Parachute, and **Ariel Kaye**, Founder and CEO, Parachute

How Your Workplace Can Encourage Creativity with A+I

Presented by **A+I**