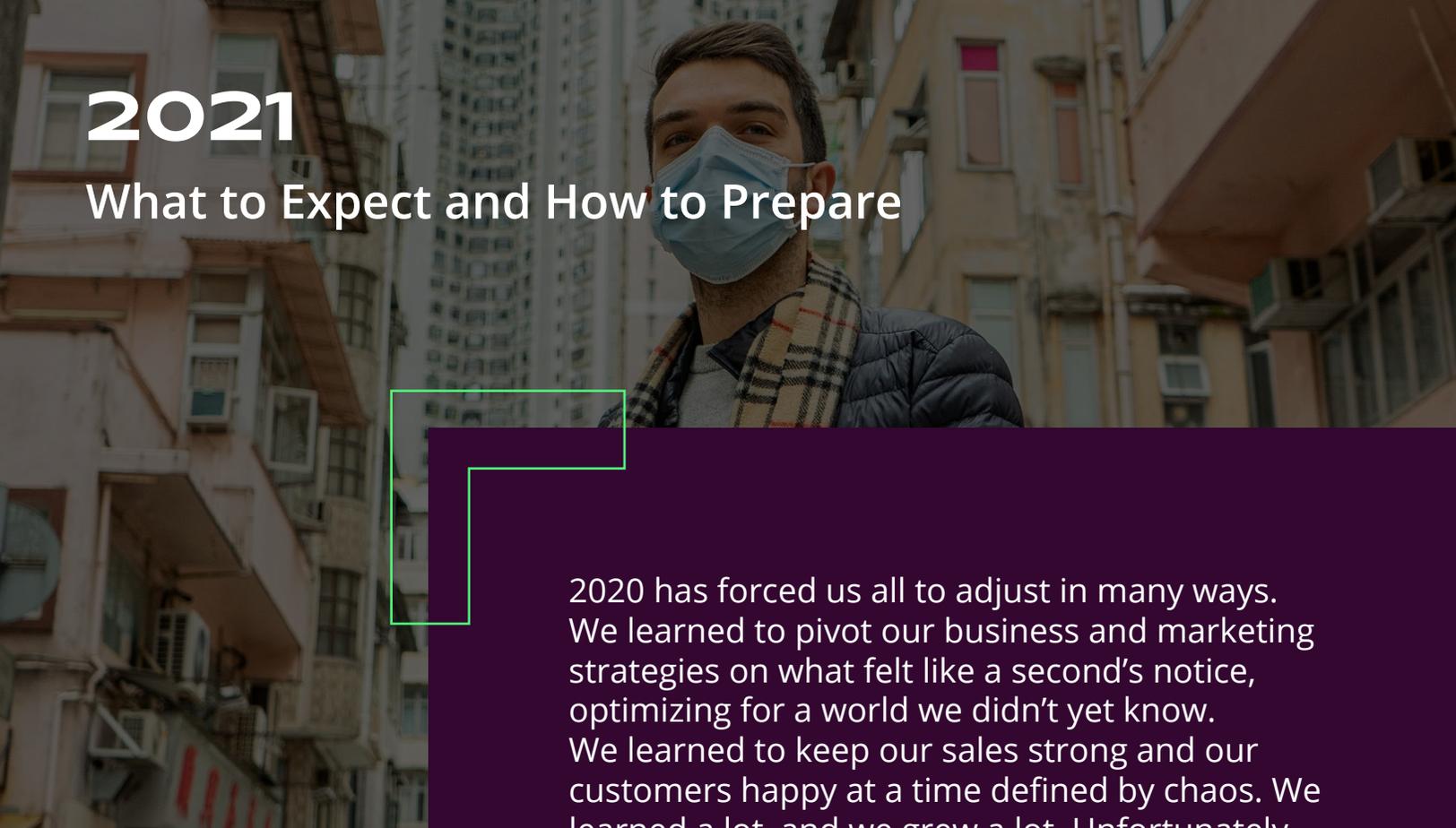


12 GROWTH HACKS FOR 2021

To Fuel Your Marketing, Insights & Innovation
Planning

MATERIAL+





2021

What to Expect and How to Prepare



2020 has forced us all to adjust in many ways. We learned to pivot our business and marketing strategies on what felt like a second's notice, optimizing for a world we didn't yet know. We learned to keep our sales strong and our customers happy at a time defined by chaos. We learned a lot, and we grew a lot. Unfortunately, all that knowledge and growth doesn't necessarily translate into a blueprint for success next year.

This year, we survived. Next year, we'll need to thrive in a changed landscape. It's not about going back to the old strategies — it's about moving forward, innovating. But how are you supposed to prepare for another, new kind of uncertainty?

To help you understand what could be coming in 2021, we asked experts from across **Material** to weigh in on what they think will play out next year, what the implications will be, and what brands across industries can do to get ready. **From CX to content marketing, from analytics to brand strategy, [our advice and recommendations](#)** are designed to help teams of all kinds — marketers, researchers, CX/UX professionals, and more — head into next year strong.

1. Refresh the Foundational Insights Driving Your Brand Strategy

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

A return to brand. The ROI on brand strategy is hard to nail down and the time horizon is long. So not surprisingly, during a time of great uncertainty and a sharp decline in the economy, companies have focused much more on the quicker levers they could pull and the tactical things they could do immediately. As things level off, we're already starting to see just in the past month or two companies returning to longer-term brand-building through brand strategy initiatives.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

Those who aren't thinking about this, who feel the time isn't right, will be left behind as their competitors grow stronger.

HOW TO PREPARE:

Lay the groundwork for brand initiatives by refreshing your foundational insights. A lot has changed in a lot of categories in a very short timeframe, and now is the time to **refresh what you think you know about consumers to use as input to brand strategy.**



Amy Rogoff Dunn

*Partner, Insights and Strategy
Kelton Global, a Material Company*

2. Evolve The Way Your Brand Looks, Talks, and Acts

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

Based on the ongoing fallout from COVID-19, I think we will see two things:

1. A lot of consolidation, mergers, and acquisitions across diverse business sectors.
2. Businesses positively building on the disruption that has occurred.

Very few companies in 2021 will go back to business as usual, so we're going to see new operational models, brand repositioning, and perception changes, with ongoing tactical marketing and communications in support of all that.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

2021 is going to continue to be turbulent, but brands are moving out of panic mode. This will cause them to have to change how they do many things, resulting in lots of opportunity for brand building. And that doesn't mean going back to the way things were. Brands that revert to their 2019 behaviors will be seen as old and outdated. Most brands will have to evolve to move forward. This includes internal (cultural) as well as external (customer) behaviors. In other words, you brand will have to look, talk, and act differently.

HOW TO PREPARE:

Create a brand plan. Look at where you were, where you are, and where you're going. Put this in the context of competitive and best practice examples, plus changing social and consumer needs and perceptions. This opens the door to extensive research and new branding solutions to directly show the vision you have and what you're doing to deliver on it.

Paul Parkin

Founder, Creative Director
Salt Branding, a Material Company



3. Center Your Analytics Around Your Consumers

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

I expect to see a number of developments, including a greater emphasis on first-party data, audience-based consumer insights and targeting, a new focus on personalization and cross-channel experience strategy, as well as the convergence of AdTech/MarTech and insights.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

Data is great at explaining “what, when, and where.” It doesn’t explain “why” — which is critical to identifying and prioritizing which levers to pull to influence and win with consumers. Insights teams will be challenged to answer new questions for new stakeholder groups, utilizing a data ecosystem to answer business questions.

In many ways, insights teams are positioned to bridge “people into platforms” by bringing a human lens to the ocean of data that even the most sophisticated companies struggle to swim in. This is a sink-or-swim, eat-or-be-eaten time for insights teams, where single-discipline traditionalists are quickly pushed aside for multi-disciplinary experts who understand that integrated insights must be as connected as the marketplace within which consumers operate.

HOW TO PREPARE:

Develop fully-integrated strategies that capitalize on the strengths of teams, technology, and data to address the weaknesses of others. Learn, then learn some more. And, finally, put the consumer at the center of everything you do, rather than your brand or product. For far too long, brands have built products then determined who they should be marketed to. Instead, they should start with consumers, then determine what should be made for them.



Josh Verseput

*SVP and General Manager, Digital Analytics
LRW, a Material Company*

4. Listen to (and Analyze) Real Consumer Conversations

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

2021 will be a year filled with uncertainty, and understanding consumer attitudes and behaviors will become more difficult to read and anticipate.



THE IMPLICATIONS:

Brands will need to drive consistency and depth in customer listening, analyzing unprompted online conversations about topics ranging from the pandemic to social justice issues to understand how different kinds of uncertainty are impacting people's behaviors.

HOW TO PREPARE:

1. Listen to real conversations, not social media activity. Keep it real.
2. Avoid focusing exclusively on your brand. This should be an exercise in understanding people, not tracking brand health.
3. Go light on technology. This is the time for humanity, not technology.



Kirsten Recknagel

CEO

MotiveQuest, a Material Company

5. Seamlessly Integrate Digital and Traditional Qualitative Research Methods

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

We can expect to see the continued prominence of digital solutions — but in combination with more traditional face-to-face techniques. The hope is that this will lead to cohesive, carefully considered research plans that maximize the advantages of each strategy (and not an unplanned jumble).

THE IMPLICATIONS:

This approach will make the insight generation process more agile and more iterative, which should allow for deeper and more seamless integration with other essential marketing processes (naming, branding, UX development, etc.).

HOW TO PREPARE:

Be open-minded, be adventurous, and work with partners that look at issues holistically and focus on business issues (and not just capabilities).



Matt Ayers

*VP, General Manager
Tonic, a Material Company*

6. Throw Away Your Old Assumptions — and Innovate Your Insights Strategy

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

In all likelihood, we'll see a continued push for agile/speedy methods and sprints, greater integration of multiple data sources, and the growth of "smart qual." And given the many COVID-based category disruptions there have been, there will also likely be a need (and hunger) for broader "future of" studies.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

Brands need to evolve and adjust fast. Those who want to be category leaders need to take bold risks and innovate to an extreme degree.

HOW TO PREPARE:

Start by throwing away your old assumptions. See consumers' new COVID-influenced, digital lifestyles as an opportunity for your brand, rather than a challenge. Look for inspiration outside your category. Study changing consumer behaviors. Redefine what experiences are/can be. Don't think small.



Martin Eichholz, PhD

*Chief Insights Officer
Kelton Global, a Material Company*

7. Envision the Long-Term Again

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

Due to COVID-19, many companies took a “fix what’s on fire” approach to new offering development in 2020. In 2021, we expect to see more teams thinking about the longer term again — and taking bigger bets.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

Brands will need bold leadership with a skillset that balances imagination with risk mitigation.

HOW TO PREPARE:

If you still have a “bunker” mentality, it’s time to re-emerge and let a little sunlight hit your face. It’s ok to start envisioning your business and life beyond the short term. It’s time to dream about what you could and should be doing for your brand, your market, and the world.

Elizabeth Real

President

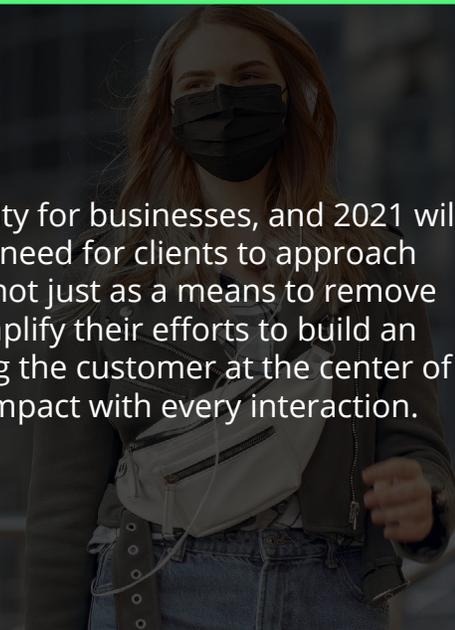
Strativity, a Material Company



8. Gain a Deeper Understanding of the Customer Journey to Differentiate Your CX

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

Customer experience has fast become a top priority for businesses, and 2021 will be no different. Different than in past years is the need for clients to approach customer experience as a true differentiator and not just as a means to remove dissatisfaction. In addition, brands will need to amplify their efforts to build an actively engaged workforce aligned around placing the customer at the center of everything they do, and empowered to make an impact with every interaction.



THE IMPLICATIONS:

Brands who want to differentiate beyond products and services will need to invest in programs and technologies that align their value prop with the needs of their customers across channels and buying preferences.



HOW TO PREPARE:

Brands should look to gain a deeper understanding of their customers' journey (from the customers' perspective) across every interaction point, validate through research the interaction points that are most important, innovate with cross functional teams to define the ideal experience and bust silos, align the organization around a common definition of CX — and finally educate employees to execute consistently.



Wayne Morris
Principal, Consulting
Strativity, a Material Company

9. Optimize Digital Touchpoints — They're Your Brand's Lifeblood

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

There's no other way to say it: 2020 has been a hard year. But the challenges we've collectively faced have made one thing clearer than ever — digital experiences are a brand's lifeblood. In our times of rapid change and deep uncertainty, they've provided an essential connection between company and customer. This will stay true in 2021.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

Brands need to make sure this connection — determined by the quality and effectiveness of the user experience — is as strong as possible.

HOW TO PREPARE:

Conduct an audit of your brand's current UX, going under the hood of your digital touchpoints to identify and implement tactical optimizations and conversion-boosting enhancements.



Mark Micheli

*Vice President, Experience Innovation
Kelton Global, a Material Company*

10. Boost Your Brand's Loyalty (and Tech Stack)

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

Some things I'd expect to see next year: personalization at scale, more marketing automation, and a greater focus on implicit/emotional loyalty.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

Brands must assess the state of their loyalty/CRM skillset, as well as the quality of their tech stack. They should also make the case for marketing to spearhead insights and data reporting, rather than finance or operations.

HOW TO PREPARE:

The best advice is the simplest: start learning and planning now. If you need help, consult an expert.



Sean Eidson

*General Manager, Loyalty and CRM
T3, a Material Company*

11. Invest in Visual Content that Resonates with Your MVPs

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

We will see marketers doubling down on traditional short-form media (infographics, eBooks, motion graphics, etc), but we will also see a higher demand for videos under 60-seconds, augmented reality (especially with audiences now trained to snap QR codes like never before), virtual conference booths (in VR/360 viewing rooms), visualization tools within video conference platforms, and more.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

Zoom fatigue is already leading to shortened attention spans. Today's audiences want content as short as possible. Additionally, our demand for quality continues to increase. We have escaped quarantine by diving into streaming media, much of which is produced at extremely high production values. At the same time, many consumers have spent their quarantines learning new skills and getting creative. They are challenging themselves to create out-of-the-box video on TikTok to stand out and expect brands to do better than they can. Brands need to communicate in more succinct mediums, at seemingly high production values, while sticking to likely tightened budgets.

HOW TO PREPARE:

If your budgets are going to decrease in 2021, then pair down your target audience by identifying the most important customer segments to you and learn what moves them to action. From there, invest in 2-5 pieces of long form content that would resonate with your target audience and can then be broken up into dozens of short-form pieces. Deliver that content to the audiences that matter most, releasing the bite-sized content first and then driving your audience to the long form versions, taking them through your conversion funnel. This will allow you to reach the most important 25% of your audience while remaining budget conscious and ensuring high-quality and high-value content to drive sales.



Amy Balliett

Founder & CEO

Killer Visual Strategies, a Material Company

12. Lean In to Earned Media Coverage

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021:

Earned media coverage will become even more important as brands look for validation and credibility from third-party sources.

THE IMPLICATIONS:

Brands must break through the clutter with authentic and thought-provoking content that gets to the root of “why what the company does matters to its audiences.”

HOW TO PREPARE:

I'd recommend three things:

- 1). Prepare subject matter expertise and thought leadership platforms
- 2). Invest in media training
- 3). Re-evaluate key brand messages

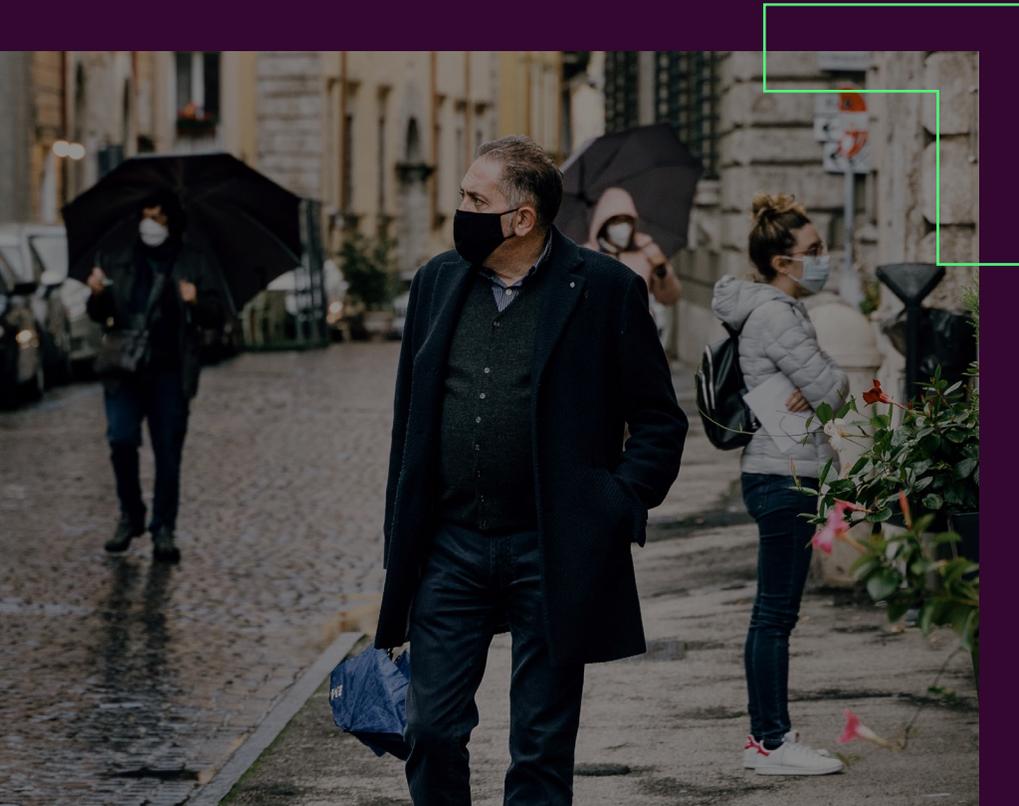
Natalie Kay

Senior Vice President
Karma, a Material Company



Material is a modern marketing services company, powered by analytics, deep human understanding, and design thinking. Our experts provide clients a seamless cross-company, cross-capability journey from insights to impact.

How can we help your brand prepare for a better 2021?
[Let us know.](#)



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