



4's

# STRATFEST REPORT

More than 300 of the sharpest strategists gathered at the Andaz Wall Street in New York Sept. 12-14 for the 20th annual 4A's Strategy Festival, whose theme was "Data + Humanity: Planning Redefined." Speakers stressed the vitality and necessity of the discipline at a time when the human element threatens to get lost in all the number crunching. Keynote speaker Rishad Tobaccowala, strategy & growth officer at Publicis Groupe, told the gathering that he could define strategy and planning with three words: "future competitive advantage." Among others on the 4A's StratFest stage this year were Kodi Foster, senior VP, data strategy at Viacom, and execs from brands including Google, Pandora and Netflix. 4A's president and CEO Marla Kaplowitz opened the conference by telling attendees that the industry is "about creativity and ideas at its foundation, but those don't just come to life; it really takes creative problem solving and digging deep in terms of insight and human understanding, and that's what you all do as the planning community." Mollie Rosen, EVP, agency relations & membership for the 4A's, noted "the ongoing tension—or cage match even—between data and humanity. Instead of seeing these as diametrically opposed forces, how do we look at these as two ways to get better output and better consumer experiences?" StratFest kicked off with the Jay Chiat Awards, now in its 21st year, recognizing the best strategic thinking in marketing, media and advertising from around the world. Several of this year's honorees shared case studies during StratFest, highlighting the processes and results of their award-winning work—among them, TBWA\Chiat\Day Los Angeles (Airbnb's "Don't Go There, Live There"), McCann New York (Lysol's "Protect Like a Mother") and Anomaly (whose campaign helped turn around Hershey's Jolly Rancher brand).

**CHECK OUT >>  
WHAT ELSE HAD  
PEOPLE TALKING AT**

**4's STRATFEST  
2017**

# THE 5 HOTTEST TOPICS

1

DATA  
DOESN'T  
RULE—  
HUMANS DO

2

COMMUNITY  
AND  
IDENTITY

3

EVOLUTION  
AND  
ADAPTING TO  
A CHANGING  
WORLD

4

CREATIVITY  
AND INSIGHT  
FROM  
CHAOS

5

JAY CHIAT  
AWARDS  
TAKEAWAYS



# 1 DATA DOESN'T RULE — HUMANS DO

## OVERVIEW

With such intense focus on the proliferation and influence of data, what about the human factor? Numbers, as we all know, cannot fully explain what inspires, delights and motivates the consumer, and StratFest speakers had much to say about the soulful flipside of the algorithm. Computer programs and data sets are indispensable. So is the insight that comes from understanding the thinking and feeling of the human being.

## WHAT IT MEANS

We are not a planet of robots—yet. Consumers are still about heart and soul, which is why advertisers ought not put all their eggs in one big data basket. Lizzie Widhelm, SVP, ad product sales & strategy at Pandora, stressed the importance of elements like “sound triggers” and “the theater of the mind” in the creation of radio ads. “Why are we still talking about ad performance when human performance should be the guiding light?” she asked. “Machines do not buy product.” What’s more, data doesn’t always tell the truth about what people are truly thinking and feeling. Take the many polls suggesting that Hillary Clinton had the White House in the bag, noted Kodi Foster, SVP, data strategy at Viacom, or the guys behind the recent startup Bodega who got blasted for cultural appropriation and insensitivity over their company name—even though their research pre-launch indicated that 97 percent of Latinos were OK with it. “Ultimately,” Foster offered, “we’re not looking to create a machine that supplants human decision making but that guides human decision making.”



### OVERVIEW

As Google Zoo strategic planner Venetia Taylor told StratFest, “data is humanity.” Most of the discussion about data has to do with understanding the thinking, desires and behavior of individuals. But what about the communities to which we all belong? What does big data tell us about groups—culturally and racially diverse groups, geographically defined groups? More to the point, how much can we really rely on that information to paint a reliable picture of these groups?

### WHAT IT MEANS

To Greg Andersen, CEO of Bailey Lauerman in Omaha, “the heartland” is less defined by geography than by a mindset, “and that mindset is largely built around pride of place. That sense of identity about where people are from is a big deal and shapes what people aspire to, what their hopes and dreams are, about what kind of life they want to lead.” Paul Jankowski, founder of the New Heartland Group in Nashville, which helps brands connect with consumers outside the coasts, argued that the middle of the country is an often overlooked driver of the culture and consumerism, commenting: “Entrepreneurship, technology, fashion—you would not believe what’s coming out of the ‘middle.’” God-is Rivera, director, inclusion and cultural resonance at VML, stressed the importance of diverse perspectives in the work the industry does for its clients, including on the strategy side: “As strategists we are really starting with a piece of a story. If we don’t have everybody in a room that makes up the entire world we’re selling to, then we don’t have the whole story. And any strategist knows if you don’t have all the data, then you can’t create a real path to success and really solve business problems.”



## OVERVIEW

The times they are a changin'. The pace of disruption has exponentially increased, and along with it the metabolism and mission of marketing. Decades ago, innovation took a long time, held back only by technological limitations. Now, in a world of mind-boggling tech breakthroughs, coupled with the possibilities presented by big data, innovation is experiencing a renaissance, and a bazillion marketing startups are working to make brand experiences better. How do we prepare ourselves for this evolution, and revolution?

## WHAT IT MEANS

There are some basics to understanding and working in this new world, suggests Avi Savar, CEO of the global accelerator and early-stage investment fund DreamIt who earlier was founder and CEO of the digital agency Big Fuel. “Everything is going to be connected, from inanimate objects to our own existence,” he told 4A’s StratFest. The pace of new, inanimate objects—i.e., connected devices—joining the network is going to grow from 15 billion to 50 billion over the next five years, he projected. A dinner plate that tells you how many calories you’ve eaten. Shoes that tie themselves. Smart tattoos. All that connectivity will give way to more real-time content and communication as well as more personalization—what Savar called “real-time engagement for self expression.” It will mean still more data, too. “The world is changing,” he said. “And the way that we look at the world is changing.”

# 3 EVOLUTION AND ADAPTING TO A CHANGING WORLD

BBDO's work for Snickers—including a Super Bowl spot that revived both the career of Betty White and the fortunes of the candy brand—is among the industry's most awarded ads in recent years. Lubars told 4A's StratFest how strategy was integral to the success of a campaign that would take the Mars-owned candy bar from No. 7 in its category to No. 1, producing a simple yet revolutionary brand positioning: Snickers isn't just a yummy chocolate bar—it sorts you out when you're hungry and not feeling like yourself. "A planner has to be part of the creative and the creative has to be part of planning," he argued. "Then all of a sudden there's a shaft of light and you grab onto it. If you're comfortable in that kind of mess then you can do something that's really successful."

## OVERVIEW

The output of any agency is impaired when its processes—among them, planning—are too neat and tidy and linear, BBDO chief creative officer David Lubars proposed during a "fireside chat" with Ed Cotton, director of strategy & innovations at Butler, Shine, Stern & Partners. "It is not fair for the planner to work in a Ford assembly line manner—that's not how insights happen," explained Lubars. "It's a messy, foggy, confusing world." Planning, he said, is at a revolutionary stage as technology and data rule. "Planning is the glue of this new world."



## OVERVIEW

An annual highlight of 4A's StratFest is the presentation of case studies by winners of the Jay Chiat Awards, recognizing the best in strategic thinking from agencies around the world on behalf of brands ranging from Lysol to Jolly Rancher to Airbnb. A common theme of the case studies was that often the most effective positioning comes from the cleanest, simplest idea, one that gets to the heart of the purpose of a brand—be it making yourself at home or keeping your children safe from harm.

## WHAT IT MEANS

McCann New York's campaign "Protect Like a Mother" for Lysol breathed new life into a brand that invented the disinfectant category a century ago—by emphasizing, rather than killing germs, the universal image of a mother protecting her young. Ads showed various wild animals protecting human babies to drive home the message, according to McCann, that "the strength of Lysol is as everyday as the strength of a mother's protection." TBWA\Chiat\Day, likewise, addressed Airbnb's challenge of breaking through in the mainstream travel market with an ingenious but simple message that spoke to the very DNA of the brand: "Don't Go There, Live There." Ads showed Airbnb guests not just visiting cities like Paris and San Francisco but actually "living" like locals—making breakfast in their own kitchens, shopping for groceries. As TBWA put it, "For the first time, the marketing and the product were inextricably linked."



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*“The job of a strategist is to help their clients show up as the best version of themselves.”*

*-Michael Fanuele, CEO and founder, Talk Like Music*

*“Stop yelling at people in their personal space.”*

*-Lizzie Widhelm, SVP, ad product sales & strategy, Pandora*

*“We create data as humans, but to what degree is data creating us?”* *-Venetia Taylor, strategic planner, Google Zoo*

*“There’s no one way to plan. It’s messy. Embrace the chaos.”* *-David Lubars, chief creative officer, BBDO*

# WHAT'S BEING SAID

**“Perspective is our most valuable asset.”**

**-God-is Rivera, director, inclusion & cultural resonance, VML**

*“We market to people like they are cows. Treat them like gods.”*

*-Rishad Tobaccowala, strategy & growth officer, Publicis Groupe*

*“How can we be better about delighting people?”*

*-Kodi Foster, senior VP, data strategy, Viacom*

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