

Bye, Uncle Ben; TV Upfronts Must Evolve: Thursday's First Things First

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After 74 Years, Uncle Ben's Will Become Ben's Original

Uncle Ben has gone the way of Aunt Jemima, both dropping its Jim Crow-era mascot and announcing a name change to Ben's Original. Starting in early 2021, the image of the character will no longer appear on the Mars-owned brand packaging in a move it says is aimed at creating "more equitable iconography." The narrative is a reversal from the company's position five months ago, when a Mars spokesperson called Uncle Ben's "a beloved brand with a rich history."

Another evolution: The company has made several attempts to update or obfuscate the racist implications of the brand in recent years.

Marc Pritchard Says TV Upfronts Must Evolve and Level the Playing Field

The TV Upfronts system is "antiquated" and must change, Procter & Gamble's Marc Pritchard said at the virtual ANA Media & Measurement Conference yesterday, adding that the

company will instead negotiate directly with networks wherever possible. He said that the system puts marketers at disadvantage compared to networks, which are equipped with spending estimates and can therefore price inventory regardless of their ratings and viewership.

Shifting the status quo: “It’s not about winners and losers,” Pritchard said. “It’s about a level playing field to constructively create value together.”

Have you made a notable pivot during the pandemic? This year we’re expanding our Hot List to capture notable wins from the brand community and B2B space. Check out the new categories and submit today.

Publicis Sapient Chief Experience Officer Joins Tech Company Focused on Disaster Management

John Maeda, chief experience officer at Publicis Sapient, is setting forth to save the world. He’ll remain as chair of the experience advisory council, but he’s leaving his role at the agency to join a Massachusetts-based SaaS company focused on disaster management and Covid-19 via contact tracing. CEO Nigel Vaz spoke highly of Maeda’s work and expressed “great pride” in his decision to lend his expertise to the public health crisis.

Who’s up next? Maeda didn’t specify a successor for his role, but said diversity is a priority in filling it and said he aims to “#makeroom for the next generation of leadership in experience to become more diverse.”

Also in job moves: Match Group has hired Ayni Raimondi, formerly of Airbnb, as its new vp of brand.

CNN Shuts Down Its BuzzFeed-Esque Great Big Story After 5 Years

Great Big Story was CNN's valiant attempt at targeting millennial fans of publications like BuzzFeed and Vox, but now it's shutting down, and it has laid off its staff. The digital video platform launched in 2015 as an "antidote to the news," and it started strong, but interest fizzled over time.

A recurring story: The pandemic has caused many media companies to reevaluate their strategies.

DOJ's Probe of Google Shifts to Search Dominance

The DOJ has had Google's industry-dominant ad-tech stack, DoubleClick, in its sights amid its antitrust investigations, but a shift in the scope of the lawsuit will spare the offering for the moment. The case will now be focused on how Google's search engine and agreements with other companies "harm rivals and consumers," which would mean that its ad tools will no longer be the center of scrutiny and could remain intact longer than previously thought.

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