# How Brands Find a Human Touch in a World of Algorithms

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AI is rapidly changing how content is produced and how brands connect with customers. It's also helping behind the scenes, providing better asset tracking and automating manual tasks.

During an ADWEEK House Austin panel co-hosted with Manifest, industry leaders discussed how brands can use technology to deepen emotional resonance rather than just simulating it.

## The duel vs. the duet

Laura Kowalski, SVP of strategy at Manifest, kicked off the conversation, suggesting that brands should view AI as an orchestrator for human creativity.

"We aren't thinking of human intelligence vs. artificial intelligence as this great duel. It's much more of a duet," Kowalski said. "We see that, together, these two forces need to cooperate. And we are the wonderful orchestrators that can create beautiful music if we harness the power and accelerant of AI with our human thinking."

As automation scales content, a brand's story has to be strong enough to stand out. Steve Slivka, chief experience officer at Manifest, emphasized that "having a strong point of view, a strong story, a strong signal that you're trying to get out into the world becomes more and more important because we are able to iterate that almost infinitely."

"So for me, my focus is strong, potent stories that we can tell, that can hold together as we scale these stories in a

myriad of different ways," Slivka explained.

## Beating the BS detector

This need for authenticity is extremely important in high-stakes industries like healthcare. D.J. Willard, senior director of strategic marketing at Priority Health, noted that consumers have a sharp intuition for inauthentic automation.

"I think, in general, consumers—our members—are incredible BS detectors. They'll automatically be able to recognize when you're not being authentic or you're not being true to the brand that you pretend to be, and they will help define it for you," Willard said.

Kowalski predicted that as the industry leans into synthetic data, the pendulum will swing back toward traditional human research.

"I think what's going to happen is we are going to go back to some of those foundational elements that we've relied on in the past, like ethnographic research," she explained. "We can have these personas evaluating creative, but it's all synthetic, and there has to be a way to get at new, rich insights."

## Beyond remarkably average

To survive in an automated world, brands are moving beyond good enough content. Slivka noted that "earnest storytelling" is backed by real behavior.

"As you create those stories, you have to also take shots at it. You have to be a detractor and figure out ways that it's not going to work and make it stronger," Slivka explained. "It has to have that strength and be born of actual truth and actual belief that's backed up by action for it to work."

Willard concluded by reminding the audience that technology

has to follow strategy.

“When you have the AI hammer, everything looks like a nail,” he shared. “So, you want to find a way to utilize AI across every single different business process or creative asset that you potentially have.”

Using the tool allows for a better understanding of a business’s objective. “Or, as I like to ask my team: What is the business problem we’re trying to solve, and can AI really be a tool that helps us do that?” Williard said.

“In some cases, the answer may actually be no. But then it’s also helping the organization understand that the answer can be no here because what’s worse is spending toward a goal, thinking that AI is the answer, and it ends up not being the answer,” he explained.

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