When Past Purchases Aren’t Enough Anymore

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Identity tracking has dominated digital marketing for two decades, but knowing a profile doesn’t mean understanding a real-time mindset.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions panel co-hosted with Seedtag, industry leaders discussed how to look beyond static data points to capture the fleeting emotions, immediate motivations, and environmental context driving consumer decisions.

When play and cravings become real-time signals

Interactive platforms offer behavioral signals that traditional media cannot match. Andrea Hopelain, general manager and SVP of global marketing at Electronic Arts (EA), explained that gaming environments provide deep clarity into consumer moods because “play is a language.” Having launched EA Advertising last week, Hopelain explained how these live actions inform brands.

“If you’ve got a player that’s rage quitting because they’ve just lost four matches in a row, you can infer that they may

need something right in that moment," Hopelain said. These specific reactions help companies deliver relevant messages at the right time.

Peter Giordano, general manager of platform and growth services at DoorDash, noted that consumer profiles are incomplete without situational triggers. DoorDash uses an occasion-based approach to connect merchants with active buyers.

"More iced coffee is bought in the afternoon than in the morning," Giordano shared. He explained that buying patterns shift based on the moment, with afternoon coffee orders often leading to pet treats and late-night weekend purchases driving demand for items like toothbrushes. Rather than relying solely on historical purchase data, smart campaigns combine past behavior with real-time signals to respond to immediate needs.

Bringing the magic back to advertising

Prioritizing a consumer's environment over raw metrics represents a necessary change for modern agencies. Brian Gleason, CEO of Seedtag, stated that the industry became highly effective at tracking people but lost sight of conversational tone and modality.

"When you think back, and you look at Mad Men, there's a moment of inspiration that you feel something and you connect with someone," Gleason said. While LLMs give platforms the processing power to interpret content across channels, Gleason noted that custom fine-tuning creates the differentiation brands need.

Technology alone cannot generate meaning. Hopelain noted that while AI helps with execution, human oversight is required to build valuable experiences. She pointed to a recent partnership in which millions of players used Coach handbags in The Sims world, giving the fashion brand direct insights into real-world retail preferences.

The panel concluded that modern advertising is shifting away from massive calendar events toward individual milestones. “We’re definitely moving to a more personalized moment experience based on all of the other signals we have,” Giordano noted.

Ultimately, the goal is to establish an ecosystem where digital ads provide a distinct benefit to the user.

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