



THE  
**WEBBY**  
AWARDS

23RD ANNUAL  
WEBBY AWARDS

EVERYTHING  
YOU

**THINK IS  
TRUE**

2019  
**TREND  
REPORT**

PRESENTED BY:



# EVERYTHING YOU THINK IS TRUE

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# INTRODUCTION

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At The Webby Awards, we've been looking at the evolution of Internet-driven work since 1996 and have had a front row seat to several technological revolutions over the past two decades. As we evaluate work from across the Internet, both in our day-to-day usage and from our purview into 13K pieces of work from 70+ countries submitted to The Webbys each year, we are careful to consider the full impact new technologies have on our personal and collective experiences.

Political echo chambers. Gold dress or blue dress. Bots and fake news. Doctored images that go viral. You can find a lot of things on the Internet today, but one thing has become much scarcer: agreement. People have quite a bit to argue about online, and everyone is convinced that they're right.

That's why for this year's Webby Awards annual trend report, we're exploring **Everything You Think Is True**: a look at how the Internet has fragmented our collective reality and why that's not (entirely) a bad thing.

In this report, we examined how our relationship to and usage of the Internet has changed in the past 25 years: from the time we spend online, to the opposing personal perspectives that we are able to amplify because of the Internet, to the speed in which false information travels because of our inclination to share, and the personalization of the web we each experience.

We also take a look at several projects that are leveraging the power of technologies like AR, VR, and voice to create positive reality-bending experiences. And finally, we discuss how fractured realities created through emerging technology is changing hiring in the workplace.

Whether you are a Fortune 500 brand, a digital media publisher, an ad agency, a tech startup, or someone tinkering on the next great thing in your garage, acknowledging this is critical: There is an incredible amount of consumer skepticism around the experiences they are having online and what that means in reality. But at the same time, there is a great opportunity for creators of digital work to embrace the very technologies that have caused us to question our realities, and create positive experiences that alter reality in healing and gratifying ways.

**ANGELA CAROLA,**  
Managing Director  
Industry Relations + IADAS  
The Webby Awards



Chapter One

# LIFE AFTER TRUTH

PRESENTED BY:



# LIFE AFTER TRUTH

Arguing about what's right is not a new phenomenon. The difference is that now our sources of information have changed. Before the rise of the Internet, most people got their news from broadcast media like TV and radio, or from established publications. Events like the 1969 moon landing, for example, looked pretty much the same for everyone— you tuned in your TV and there, in grainy black and white video beamed down from space, was Neil Armstrong walking across the lunar surface. Conspiracy theorists who argued that the landing was an elaborate setup were mostly confined to the fringes. They couldn't get the attention of a large audience on their own

## A MORE AUTHENTIC INTERNET

In true Internet fashion, nothing is black and white. And many new tools are already being developed to combat the downsides of our new fragmented reality, and to help people tell what's "real" from what isn't.



• **BOT SENTINEL:** Now infamous for their role in spreading fake news on social media, bots are also being used for good. **Bot Sentinel** is a service that exists as a direct response to the fake news epidemic. Enter a Twitter account, and Bot Sentinel will analyze that account's posts and determine if there's a real person behind them or not. It can also be used as a browser extension to alert you to fake accounts as you encounter them online.

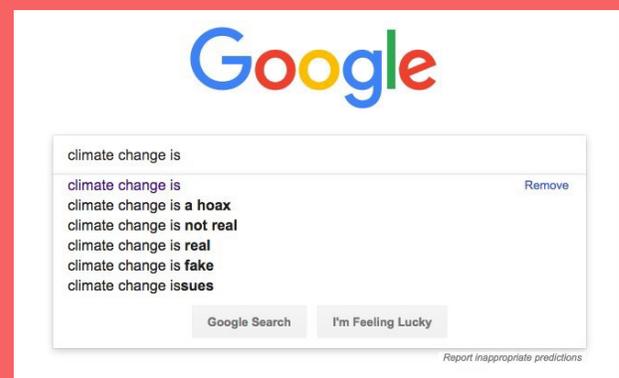


• **FAKESPOT:** It's not just fake news we need to worry about. Online reviews have long been ripe for falsified information and bot-driven commentary. Enter **Fakespot**. This service scans reviews on sites like Amazon, Yelp, TripAdvisor, and the App Store to determine a letter grade helping consumers assess if they are receiving accurate information before buying a product or booking a stay somewhere.

Flash forward to the present day, and the information landscape has changed dramatically. With the rise of social media, anyone can broadcast information, and deeply embedded personalization algorithms create newsfeeds that vary widely from person to person. As the events around the 2016 American presidential election vividly demonstrated, the information they contain can be manipulated, or entirely false.

In stark contrast to the past, where commonly held facts and truths made up the foundation of mainstream news, the Internet has begun to fragment our collective reality. Based on any number of factors (our age, location, political beliefs, search history), our digital window to the world can give a very different view than someone else's.

Over the past few years, a new word has emerged online: **post-truth**. The term refers to the perception that in today's fractured information landscape, the line between fact and fiction has blurred, and even established facts are up for debate. This stems from a number of factors. First, the Internet has (not surprisingly) become exceedingly popular. For example, a recent Pew study found that 89% of Americans are online, and while Americans 50 and older still like to get news from TV, people aged 18-49 prefer to use the Internet.



Automated search results, based on algorithms, are further enforcing this spread of false information across the Internet.

# LIFE AFTER TRUTH

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That means more people get their news from a source that, in general, lacks a robust gatekeeper system. Online, traditional news outlets compete against viral posts, videos, and all sorts of Internet ephemera. Anyone can share information regardless of its authenticity, and tweets and posts can go viral whether or not they meet accepted standards of truth. In addition, once this information appears in news-feeds, each person can interpret it differently.

## AS FAST AS FALSE

With no clear arbiter of truth online, falsehoods start to spread. A recent study by the MIT Laboratory for Social Machines found that we're seeing a lot more false information in our newsfeeds than we probably realize. After analyzing and sorting every tweet sent between 2006 and 2017, researchers found that false information was retweeted significantly more than true information: **Falsehoods reached 1,500 people an average of six times faster than truth.** The reason? The Internet, and especially social media platforms through which most of us experience it, isn't built to spread truth. It's set up to spread things that are appealing, regardless of whether they're true or completely made up. Add in algorithms that serve us posts with the most engagement, and you've got a system that's very easy to hijack with false information.

To get a better look at how fake news pops up in newsfeeds, The Webby Awards partnered with YouGov to survey 3,000 American consumers on their Internet use and information-gathering. The survey asked them generally what they use the Internet for, and across a wide range of possible responses, **finding news** was the clear front runner, with **finding travel, product, and restaurant recommendations** rounding out the top four.

Within that news gathering, however, there is quite a bit of variation among respondents. The results demonstrate that many online sources are competing for attention, and social media was cited as a source of news just as frequently as traditional online news outlets. On top of that, trust levels varied across the board on many of these information sources, and many respondents reported being worried about the rise of fake news online.

## WAYFINDING IN A FRAGMENTED INTERNET

So what does this all mean? To put it simply, the Internet has become a difficult place to navigate, for people and for brands. But at the same time, online fragmentation has also created new opportunities to connect with consumers.

In this report, we'll examine how companies are fighting through the noise and leveraging cutting-edge tech to reach their audiences in exciting new ways. More specifically, we'll explore some of the new frontiers of this fragmented age, like virtual reality, augmented reality, and voice recognition, and look at how companies are adapting and recruiting new talent to push these platforms to their fullest potential.

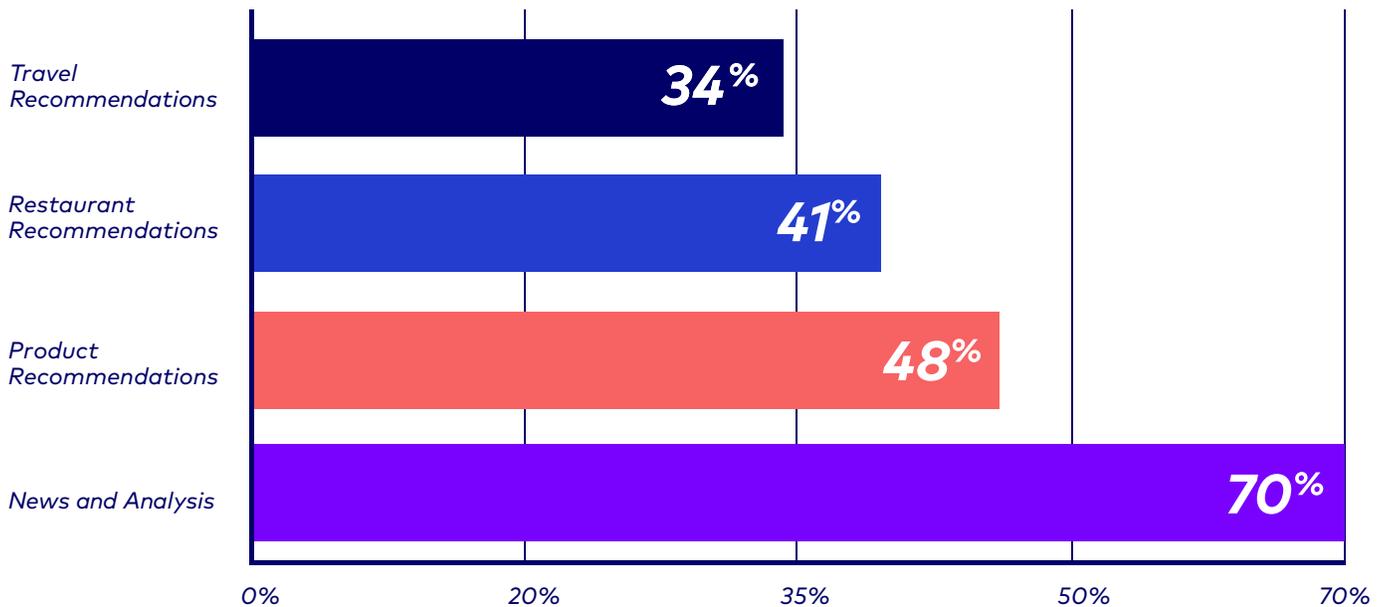
Hiring talent over the next few years with the right skills to embrace these technologies and platforms will become all the more important as we move forward into a fragmented digital world with a mix of dangerous pitfalls, and incredible opportunities to use tech to change people's lives for the better: through medicine, education, therapies, and beyond.

# LIFE AFTER TRUTH

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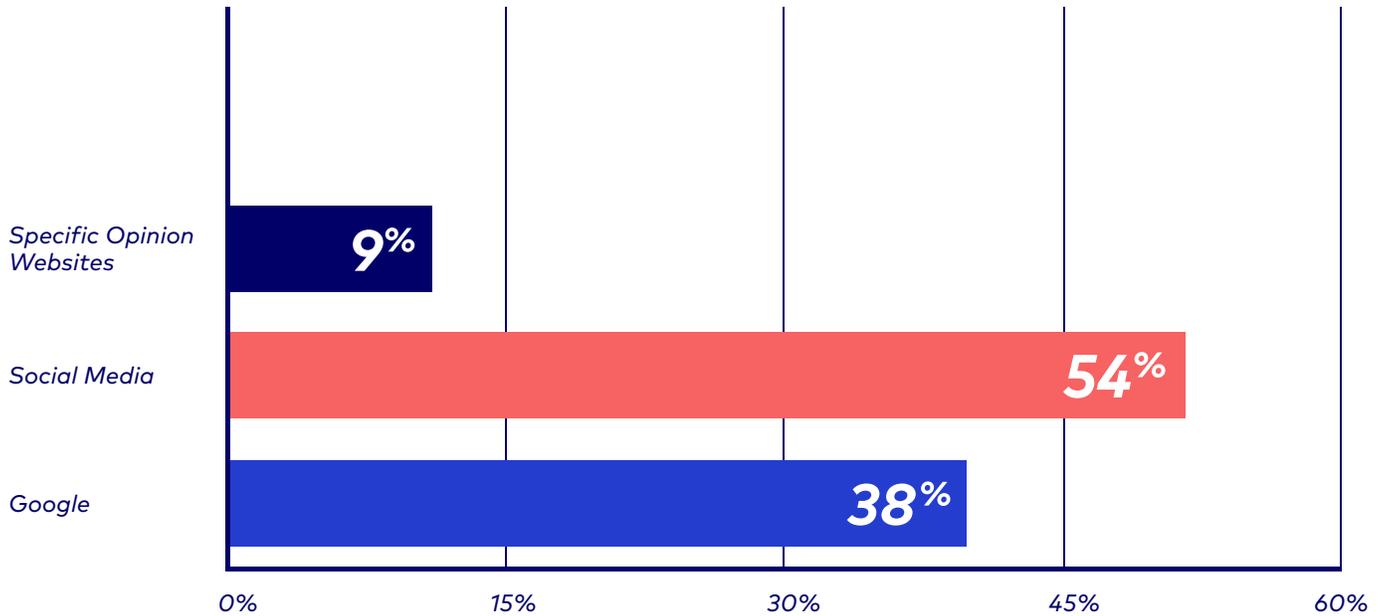
The Webby Awards partnered with YouGov to survey over 3,000 American adults about their Internet usage, news-consumption habits, and their general trust levels surrounding the information they are receiving from various sources. Below is a selection of that data, demonstrating an active engagement with the Internet, simultaneous with an active distrust of it – and a desire for more tools and emerging Internet technologies to make the Internet more trustworthy, reliable, and suited toward people's needs.

Which type of information do you get from the internet?

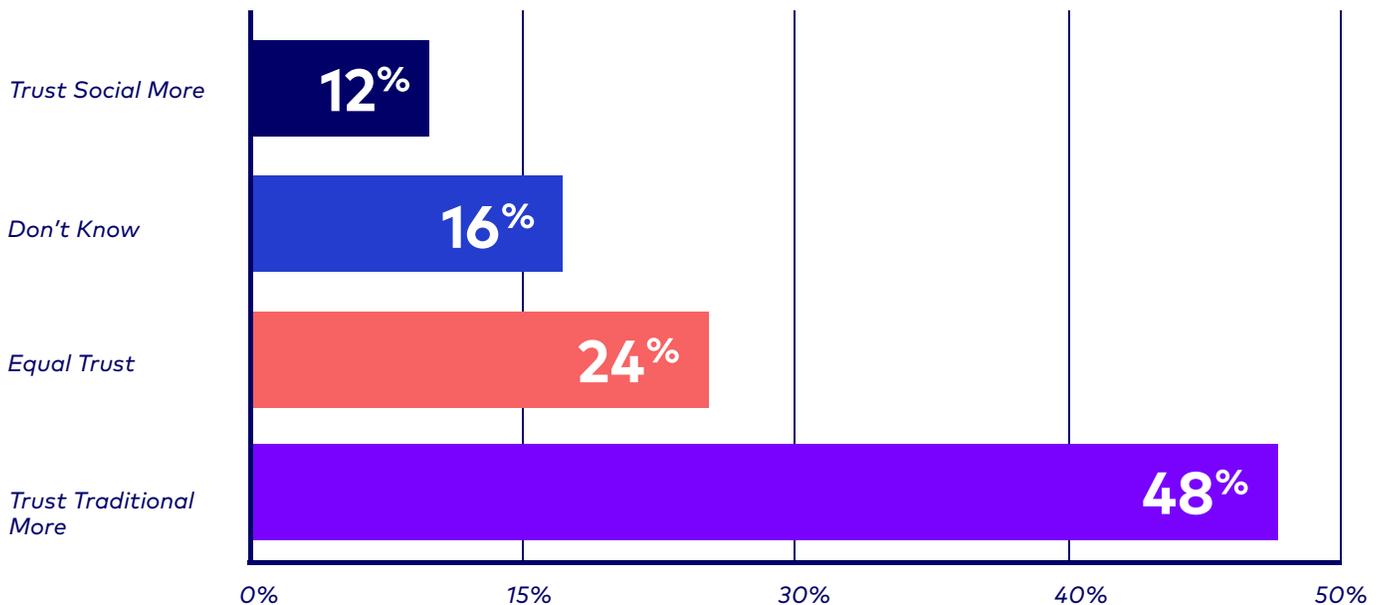


# LIFE AFTER TRUTH

Which do you use to get news online? (Please select all that apply)



Do you trust information more from traditional media or social media?



# LIFE AFTER TRUTH

Which do you use to get news online? (Most frequent responses)

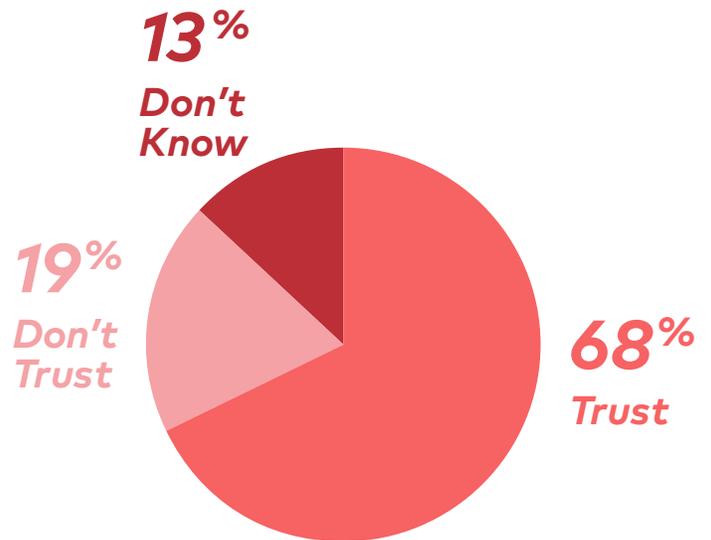
**43%**

*Specific News sites, i.e: The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Globe and Mail*

**43%**

*Facebook*

Do you trust information you get from News sites?



## METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted online within the United States by YouGov on behalf of The Webby Awards from September 4-7, 2018, among 3,915 adults ages 18 and older. This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc panel of 1.2 million individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. Emails are sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample. The e-mail invites them to take part in a survey and provides a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. (The sample definition could be "US adult population" or a

subset such as "US adult females"). Invitations to surveys don't expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.



Chapter Two

# BUILDING A CONNECTION

PRESENTED BY:



# BUILDING A CONNECTION

Virtual reality, augmented reality, voice recognition, and other new technologies have been grabbing a lot of headlines lately, and showing up in more and more products. These innovations have grown and matured a lot in recent years. The platforms have become much more robust, and research shows that these technologies will continue to spread and develop in new ways. A recent market study from the research firm Orbis found that the VR market could grow past \$40 billion by 2020, and an IDC study predicts strong growth for VR and AR through 2022.

Voice, too, has seen impressive growth. From Siri to Alexa and more, the proliferation of voice assistants and the smart devices that integrate them is a testament to how quickly consumers have embraced the technology. **Abbey Klaassen, President of 360i New York**, expects this trend to continue, and cites three reasons why. Voice technology is very accurate (close to 95% accuracy), smart speakers have become more affordable, and “people genuinely like the experience,” she says. She also points to an Edison Research study that found 65% of consumers who have a voice-enabled speaker “would not want to go back to life without one.”

There’s also significant consumer demand for these kinds of experiences—especially for newer and easier-to-use iterations. A study by Foundry, a UK-based visual effects software company, found that over one third of polled UK adults wanted to try a VR experience, and overall people “are far more interested in VR and its potential applications” than expected. Last year, VR headset sales hit 1 million, and newer, cheaper options have further increased demand. Voice recognition has matured as well, and it has become a lucrative way for companies to connect

with consumers. RBC Capital Markets predicts that Amazon’s Alexa voice assistant, to name just one prominent example, could drive up to \$10 billion in total revenue by 2020.

Across the board, technologies like VR and voice recognition present opportunities to more fully engage with consumers. And in a crowded, fragmented Internet, that kind of connection is vital for staying relevant both online and IRL. Among the 2018 Webby-recognized projects, we saw quite a few that made use of new tech to achieve this kind of connection.

*Abbey Klaassen*  
*President of*  
*360i New York*



**“People genuinely like the experience”** says Klaassen.

# BUILDING A CONNECTION



Only  
**5%**  
of us see social media posts  
that differ greatly from our  
world view.  
Why are we limiting ourselves?  
KIND FOUNDATION | PopYourBubble.com

## POP YOUR BUBBLE

You likely know KIND for their lineup of delicious and healthy snacks, but the company's charitable arm, the **KIND Foundation**, is taking on a challenge that goes beyond satisfying the munchies: It helps promote more empathetic communities, and it partnered with **Edelman** to launch **Pop Your Bubble**, a Webby-winning website that used Facebook profile information to connect people with different backgrounds and political beliefs. The idea was to break through online echo chambers and foster meaningful online discussion. To do it, the Edelman team created "The Anti-Algorithm Algorithm," which assessed each user's Facebook profile and surfaced people who were very different as suggested contacts to follow. In this way, Pop Your Bubble used the same tool that creates online echo chambers—algorithms designed to show us more of what we like—to break through them.

**Jesse Suchmann, Executive Creative Director at Edelman**, notes that the project revolved around the idea of pressing a button to alter your feed and expose yourself to viewpoints you might not like:

"Would you press it? Would you break your bubble to have a more realistic view of how people really feel?" he says.

The answer, apparently, was yes. As users signed up on the website and started to connect with new people, Suchmann and his team were amazed at the meaningful conversations that followed. "Every conversation was incredible," he says. He points out that for other brands and organizations, using technology to foster this kind of meaningful experience for users can be very powerful. In an ephemeral online world, that experience is something that lasts, and it sticks with people long after they look away from the screen. It also allows a company to push for real change rather than just talking about it.



**Jesse Suchmann**  
*E.C.D., Edelman*

***"It's really easy to make a thing that people can share to virtue signal," Suchmann says. "It's much harder to create something that creates actual behavior change, or challenges somebody to really take part in something."***

With a forward-thinking approach to tech, however, Pop Your Bubble shows that these kinds of projects, with real-world-impact, are possible.

# BUILDING A CONNECTION



## THE LAST GOODBYE

Many documentaries are made with the goal of telling a story and inspiring empathy in the viewer by bringing a person, place, or event to life for them on screen. With virtual reality, filmmakers can take that even further: By putting on a VR headset, a viewer can step into a different world, and experience a story firsthand. That's exactly what filmmakers Gabo Arora and Ari Palitz set out to do with **"The Last Goodbye,"** a VR experience documenting the story of Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter as he tours the concentration camp where he was imprisoned during World War II. **Tim Dillon, Head of VR at MPC,** collaborated with them on the Webby-winning project. He notes that "The Last Goodbye" team hoped to make a storytelling 'experience that would bring the audience into the world Gutter was describing, and VR was the obvious choice to do that.

***"It's a very intimate experience," he says. "There's a strong sense of presence in the medium itself."***

By using stereo video to film Gutter and capturing photorealistic images of the camp itself, Dillon and his team were able to give "The Last Goodbye" viewers not only a 3D view of Gutter, but the chance to immerse themselves in the camp he describes. The result is a visceral narrative experience that makes decades-old history come to life for the viewer. In Dillon's view, "The Last Goodbye" is a clear example of VR's ability to generate empathy among viewers. It takes people away from the distractions of their world, breaks the "fourth wall" of passive viewing through a screen, and puts the viewer "eye to eye" with the person telling the story, he says. It's perhaps the closest thing we have to walking a mile in another person's shoes.

That kind of experience is powerful, and Dillon sees it as one of the biggest benefits of VR for brands. In a fragmented, noisy Internet, creating authentic engagement with an audience is no easy task.

***"That's what the advertising industry and the brands need to do," he says. "They need to connect with people in a real way."***

By placing viewers in the midst of a narrative and letting them explore it on their own, VR represents a powerful way to make that connection happen.

# BUILDING A CONNECTION

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## BRAVO TANGO

American soldiers put their lives on the line every day, but for many, the most difficult part of their job is returning home and integrating back into civilian life. Getting access to mental health services and overcoming the stigma often associated with them are major barriers to a successful transition. Inspired by the **National Geographic** series **The Long Road Home**, which chronicles the lives of service members returning home after deployment, 360i developed Bravo Tango, a voice-activated app that helps veterans gain access to on-the-spot meditation courses. **Piper Hickman, Group Creative Director at 360i**, explains that voice recognition technology was an excellent fit for this Webby-nominated project, and a key factor in its success.

"Many veterans are hesitant to try meditation and mindfulness," she says. "Voice technology helps overcome that barrier by privately, and directly, guiding the user through various prompts in order to identify the meditation treatment best suited to their needs."

To develop the app, Hickman and her team worked with Air Force psychologist and combat veteran Dr. Mike Valdovinos, who has found that meditation is one of the most effective strategies to address the issues that veterans struggle with, such as stress and lack of focus. Voice technology gave soldiers a seamless way to access guided meditation courses when and where they needed them, and the 360i team received a wealth of positive feedback on the app. Hickman recalls one vet who used the app every day, calling it "so powerful." Others appreciated the way Bravo Tango cut down the stigma of seeking mental health treatment.

In Hickman's view, none of this would have been possible without voice recognition technology. Speaking feels natural, it creates a smooth interface between the user and the app, and it made soldiers feel comfortable seeking the help they needed.

***"There isn't another technology available, especially in a meditation context, that can provide the same intimacy, trust, and results as voice,"*** she says.

# BUILDING A CONNECTION



## HOTSTEPPER

Sometimes we just need a good laugh, and the next generation of digital technology offers unprecedented opportunities for entertainment and storytelling, too. **Hotstepper**, an AR-based navigation app that gives directions by having users follow a shirtless, strutting guide, is an excellent example of harnessing augmented reality to create novel entertainment experiences. The main goal of this Webby-winning project was “to put a smile on people’s faces,” says **Liam Walsh, Creative Technology Director at Nexus Studios**, which created the app. But that doesn’t mean the Nexus team wasn’t serious about the tech involved: Walsh explains that he and his colleagues approached the project as a way of exploring ARKit, Apple’s AR development platform for iOS devices.

“As a studio we were both excited by the possibilities and disappointed with what we were seeing. We wanted to push things further,” he says.

With Hotstepper, the Nexus team aimed to deeply integrate an element of augmented reality (in this

case, a virtual guide) into real life. This meant doing things like using GPS and compass data from a user’s phone to accurately render details on the Hotstepper guide, even down to the way shadows fall across his skin. The result is a more realistic and lifelike experience for users.

In this case, they’ll hopefully crack a smile, but Walsh notes that Hotstepper has big implications for the power of AR in general. With AR, brands can move beyond the limits of traditional experiential campaigns, which often achieve high levels of engagement but are difficult to scale because they’re limited to physical spaces. An AR project like Hotstepper, on the other hand, encourages that same level of engagement but allows for digital distribution to a much wider audience. For brands looking to tell a powerful story and connect with a wide audience, the possibilities are tantalizing.

**“There’s no other medium that has this flexibility, reach, and control,”** says Walsh.



Chapter Three

# ADAPTING TEAMS AND ACQUIRING TALENT

PRESENTED BY:



# ADAPTING TEAMS AND ACQUIRING TALENT

It's clear that new technologies like virtual reality are filled with promise and potential for a whole range of applications. But as the case studies illustrate, these platforms aren't moonshots—they exist now, and they're only becoming more widespread. Whether it's immersive storytelling or talking to a computer to get the weather, VR, AR, and voice recognition are here to stay. Companies and agencies need to have the resources and the people to not only utilize these mediums, but explore their fullest potential.

For years, **Vitamin T** has been a leader in connecting top tier agencies with the best creative and marketing talent in the business, and that has given the company unique insight into how the next generation of tech is changing hiring. **Susie Hall, President at Vitamin T**, has been watching this trend closely. In her view, every company needs to start thinking about how to integrate tech like VR and AR—and start hiring for it.

*Susie Hall,  
President,  
Vitamin T*



**"Getting the right people with the right skills on your team can make all the difference when it comes to acquiring new customers and keeping the ones you have engaged,"** she says.

## THE RIGHT STUFF

To succeed in today's evolving media landscape, brands and agencies need people with a wide range of backgrounds. Hiring candidates with the coding and development skills for new platforms is an obvious place to start. But that's not just any coder; you'll need people with experience in the AI programs that make those systems work.

"People skilled in AI and machine learning will have a really exciting future in this area," says **Abbey Klaassen, President of 360i New York**.

For **Oliver Dore, Technology Partner at Work & Co**, the new challenge with hiring developers is balancing candidates with deep knowledge in one area versus people with a more general coding skill set. Both groups are necessary to handle wide-ranging client needs and the demands of cross-platform projects.

*Oliver Dore,  
Tech Partner,  
Work & Co.*



**"We are finding that in digital products in particular, client briefs aren't often fully fleshed from the outset,"** he says.

It's great to have developers who have the chops to render rich experiences in VR, for example, but it's just as important to hire team members who can extend those experiences to other platforms and use cases as a project evolves.

# ADAPTING TEAMS AND ACQUIRING TALENT

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Coding is one part of the puzzle. Creative, marketing, and other fields are also key. Klaassen points out that it's vital to have people with many kinds of experience, and she looks for talent across a few key groups: people with a background in web and data operations (such as SEO experts and content creation), people who can develop new concepts and skills for voice and other platforms, and people who can write the algorithms that make these projects work and analyze their performance. Another important consideration is creating the internal resources for building complex new projects like voice recognition apps.

"We're also investing in developing products and tools that help us get smarter," she says. "It's so nascent that there aren't a lot of existing tools in the marketplace."

Perhaps most of all, new hires need to have an open mind and a deep desire to try new things. **Jeremy Osborn, Academic Director at Aquent's** Gymnasium online courseware platform, sees a bright future for people who can adapt to new applications.

**"VR, AR, and voice recognition technologies will all require creative people from traditional roles who are risk takers,"** he says.

Klaassen has found this to be especially true in her work at 360i.

"We're looking for people who want to chart new territory," she says. "We need people who are excited to be given a challenge that hasn't been done before, who have a high level of perseverance because it won't always be easy."

Both Klaassen and Dore agree that once they're on board, these specialized hires will contribute the most when integrated into the existing structure of a company. Klaassen says that while working on voice recognition projects, collaboration across teams has helped create more robust products.

"Voice isn't happening in a silo and voice strategy does not simply live in one department."

## CONNECTING WITH CANDIDATES

Finding people who fit all these criteria is a tall order for even the largest brands and agencies. But Vitamin T is working to make that process smoother, both for talented candidates and the companies looking for them.

On the hiring side, Hall emphasizes searching for people who are willing to adapt, even if they have traditional backgrounds. A new hire can always acquire platform-specific skills on the job; it's much harder to teach them ambition and open-mindedness. She tells hiring managers to seek candidates that have "the motivation and personal interest to make the leap to innovative technologies and conceptual design."

Vitamin T's matching process also helps candidates put their best foot forward—and makes it much easier for hiring managers to assess someone's proficiency with new technology. By giving candidates a digital space to showcase portfolios, they can demonstrate their skills directly to prospective employers. Whether it's building an AI model or a outlining a product deployment, Vitamin T also gives candidates guidance on exactly what kinds of projects agencies want to see, which streamlines the hiring process for both sides.

# ADAPTING TEAMS AND ACQUIRING TALENT

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"We set our hiring managers up with the expectation that our talent will have a demonstrated interest in their technology goals," Hall says.

Brands and agencies have also discovered winning strategies. For Klaassen, building a reputation for good work is a great way to attract talented people. In that sense, being willing to experiment and try new things as a company is essential. She points out that while the demand for people with specialized tech skills is high, ambitious candidates will jump at the chance to work on groundbreaking projects.

"We're looking for people who want to do the latter," she says.

A company with a deep roster of engineers, creatives, and other professionals who can apply their experience to new problems will be able to move faster and keep up with developments in VR, AR, and voice. At Work & Co, Dore has found that continually stocking up on good talent helps his company stay ahead of trends and create groundbreaking work. That means identifying people with useful skills and experience and hiring for the long term, not just for specific projects.

"We hire ahead of the curve when we see the potential," he says, "in order to hit the ground running and take on the very best project opportunities."

Whatever the strategy, hiring now will set companies up for success down the road. At Vitamin T, Hall and her colleagues expect robust work in VR and AR to become the norm very soon.

"In 2019 we fully expect to see even more brands experimenting with augmented reality interactions designed to improve their customer engagement," she says.

# CONCLUSION

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Digital platforms keep us connected. They're deeply embedded in our daily lives. Yet they also have spawned division both online and off. The issues with our digital world are complicated and at times overwhelming, but in order to address them, we have to also be aware of the digital solutions on the horizon. Rising platforms like VR and the AI and machine learning algorithms that make them work represent new ways to cross over divisions and engage with people. For **Jesse Suchmann**, these platforms are a compelling opportunity to drive positive social change. We just have to be willing to experiment and pursue their potential.

"I think it's important to use technology to try to correct some of these problems," he says.

With their large pools of resources and creative talent, brands and digital agencies have a big role to play in expanding the universe of virtual and augmented reality and sketching out how these and other innovations will fit into our daily lives. VR, AR, and voice recognition won't solve all of our online disagreements or burst every echo chamber. But in the hands of talented people, these platforms can change our reality for the better in ways we never thought possible before.

"When new digital platforms evolve, it means we all have to evolve our thinking and our capabilities," says Klaassen, "or risk becoming obsolete."

# ABOUT THE WEBBYS

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**THE WEBBY AWARDS IS THE LEADING INTERNATIONAL AWARD HONORING EXCELLENCE ON THE INTERNET.** Established in 1996 during the Web's infancy, The Webbys is presented by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences (IADAS)—a 2000+ member judging body. The Academy is comprised of Executive Members—leading Web experts, business figures, luminaries, visionaries, and creative celebrities—and Associate Members who are former Webby Winners, Nominees, and other Internet professionals.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

At The Webby Awards, we keep a close eye on news and opinions emerging regarding VR, AR, and Voice.

Follow #WebbyReads on Twitter for a complete and regularly updated reading list.

Questions about the research? Email **Angela Carola, Managing Director, International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences and Industry Relations** at [acarola@webbyawards.com](mailto:acarola@webbyawards.com)

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