

A CELEBRATION OF

HOME GROWN

STORIES

THE SERIOUSLY
CREATIVE ISSUE



ISSUE 4
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WELCOME
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WELCOME

WE HOPE THIS ISSUE REACHES YOU SAFE AND WELL, AND YOU ARE NOW IMAGINING A BRIGHTER FUTURE AS WE EMERGE FROM LOCKDOWN.

Working with businesses all over the UK during the pandemic, we have been inspired by their innovation, tenacity and optimism. We believe that we will soon turn a corner and go forward connected as humans, more digital as beings and more caring about our planet and people.

This issue is dedicated to being 'seriously creative' which is our core brand value at O.

We happen to think creativity is a pretty serious topic - when faced with a global crisis, economic uncertainty and personal struggles - we have seen our communities emerge stronger and even more creative than ever.

Restrictions on the little things we took for granted has made us crave a more creative outlet, or for some it has led to a rethink of what we need to take more seriously.

Here we share our thoughts and who has inspired us, from the little guy to the global brand that kept us going, the daily routine that got us through, to the life changing decisions we've made in recent months.

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DID SOCIAL GET SERIOUS, OR CREATIVE IN 2020?

This last year we took to the internet more than ever before. Locked down and separated from our friends, family and colleagues many used their social communities to plug the gap.

Meanwhile things were changing on social media, as brands took more risks, humour became the antidote to real life and people stood up loudly for their beliefs. However trolling has continued to grow and a new 'cancel culture' has emerged, as people become less tolerant or open to debate with those whose views or lifestyles are not the same as theirs.

Creativity was everywhere, but serious topics were trending too - we just addressed them in a more creative way.

Here's just some of the last year's big social trends we think changed things for good.

CREATIVE SMILES

Weetabix stole the show in early 2021 with its 'Weetabix and beans' viral social stunt. There was barely a marketing person in the land who didn't share their love for this simple activation, but it was the other brands that joined the conversation that saw one of the biggest social trends take flight into the mainstream.

Brand band-waggoning has grown in popularity over the last year, where one brand posts a viral and other - even competing - brand jumps into the conversation with their own take. From @Nandos commenting to @Weetabix "You okay hun? to Sainsbury's saying "beans have no authority here" and Heinz *removes Sainsbury's from chat*, the fun social banter saw this single Twitter post gain 134k likes and national media attention.

Brewdog and Aldi is another example of brands colliding in good humour over social - the

funny social media exchange between the two companies took place after shoppers drew comparisons between Aldi's Anti-Establishment Beer and Brewdog's Punk IPA. Brewdog initially joked they'd create a Yaldi IPA in mockery of the clear brand similarities - rather than take offence, Aldi responded wittily "we would have gone with ALD IPA, send us a crate and we'll talk.."

The banter led to the ALD IPA becoming a reality and now available as a Special Buy in-store, for every case bought both companies are donating a tree to Brewdog's forest to fight climate change.

So, if the state of the world has taught us one thing it is that keeping a sense of humour

and putting aside rivalry to lift spirits is the new normal. Brands are not just about sales, they are playing their part in keeping us smiling in difficult times.

Fundraising challenges also became a social movement in 2020, with everyone trying to do their bit to recognise the hard work and sacrifice of our NHS heroes. Nowhere better was this seen than the late

KEEPING A SENSE OF HUMOUR AND EVERYTHING IN PERSPECTIVE, PUTTING ASIDE RIVALRY TO LIFT SPIRITS, IS THE NEW NORMAL.

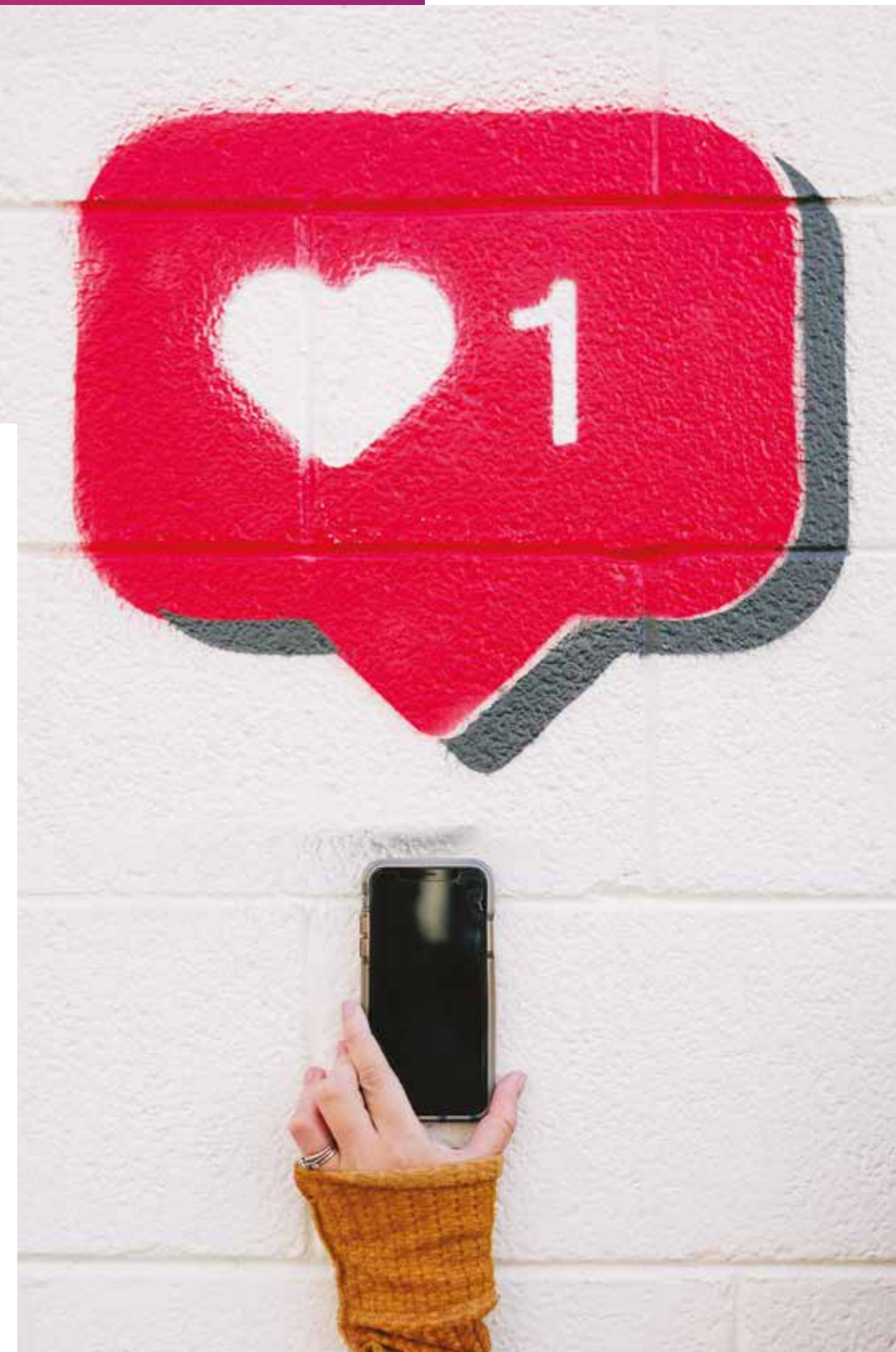
Captain Sir Tom Moore, who raised over £32 million by walking around his garden in the run up to his 100th birthday and becoming a global social media sensation.

SERIOUS MOVEMENTS

Through the last year we have seen social take fire with serious news from the Black Lives Matter protests to the storming of the Capitol in the US. Social has become a global stage for politics and political views, for rebellions and conflict and for much unregulated opinion.

Cancel culture has become huge, as people have gotten tired of social being used as a platform for hate, discrimination or abuse. The tide of disagreement leads not to healthy debate but to eradication of the person, in social media terms. People are voting with their likes and follows, with one tweet able to cancel an entire career in seconds.

So what are social media platforms doing to stem the flow of fake news and hate? Thankfully some movements were made in late 2020, when Twitter banned Donald Trump for spreading false election propaganda and flagged/disputed content functionality is helping platforms clamp down on issues like anti-vaxxer disinformation.



As lockdown started to bite on families, social media saw one man lead an entire movement for change when it comes to poverty. Footballer Marcus Rashford campaigned tirelessly from his Twitter feed to ensure children did not go hungry when removed

from the security of free school meals. Taking his campaign right to the top, he influenced parliament and had direct impact on policy change.

One man on a mission created a movement about meals. That's seriously cool.



JACKIE WEAVER — USING HER 'NEW-FOUND' AUTHORITY FOR GOOD

Now infamous, the Handforth Parish Council meeting has had millions of views around the world. Since going viral, despite the video highlighting some serious behaviour issues, the content has brought a lot of laughs and plenty of admiration for Jackie Weaver.

The video, which was filmed by a young council follower went viral in hours, and so did Jackie. With appearances on Sky News, BBC, ITV, The Brit Awards, among many others, she is certainly in demand. We caught up with Jackie about her new-found authority and how social media has given her an amplified platform to use her voice to raise awareness for positive change in local politics.

How are you handling becoming an internet sensation?

"I try to see everything in isolation so that I don't get overwhelmed, every request I see as a separate thing, so I'm able to take part without always seeing the big picture or reminding myself millions are watching. I've been asked to do some weird and wonderful things and it's been an incredible experience so far. I keep telling my husband that when this is all over he needs to remind me that I had a lot of fun."

Did you use social media a lot before all of this?

"I was on Twitter, a very long time ago a colleague of mine set me up an account where I was supposed to tweet about things happening around the work world, and I must have put two or three things on but it wasn't much. Once it all happened, I quickly realised the power of social media, but you can see how people get obsessed with getting more and more followers and that constant need for affirmation online.

I started to notice the follower numbers going up and up and up. And not only that, but that feeling of 'what am I going to do when all these people leave me' and how bereft am I going to feel? I have a voice and a following and so I'd like to put it to good use, but I also have a full time job."

What has been the most interesting or weird moment for you so far?

"I mean, I have to admit there haven't been that many strange requests or brand partnership options so far, apart from one man asking me to marry him of course. I have taken part in some of my favourite shows and got to meet some amazing people which has been a real highlight.

I'm constantly hearing of songs being written about me, even Jackie Weaver merchandise, which still feels a bit surreal."

Have you been approached to do any brand partnerships or collaborations online?

“ACTUALLY, I HAVE HAD TWO NURSING HOMES ASK ME TO BE A SPOKESPERSON FOR THEM AND PROMOTE THEM AND I MUST ADMIT I DECIDED NOT TO TAKE THAT PERSONALLY BUT I DON'T THINK I'M QUITE THERE YET — THE KIM KARDASHIAN OF NURSING HOMES COULD BE ONE FOR THE FUTURE.”

"I have been called an influencer and I must admit I am not 100 percent sure what that actually means. But I would like to use that influence in the best way I can, quite frankly the fact we have to talk about diversity and representation is something I'm disappointed in. You would think this had been resolved, because you don't hear about it as much anymore, but actually what we have done is pushed it further behind the curtain. I am not here for change for changes sake, it's not about that; it's about local councils being representative of their communities, and if that means older men and women then fine. But quite often that isn't the case and it's not representative of the community that they're part of."

We saw in the Guardian that you've teamed up with Helen Meissner on a dance track to highlight diversity in local council, how did that come about?

"Since the video was posted online it's been weird to see people writing songs about me, seeing more video edits and being used in every way possible across social media, and I guess in the most part it does not bother me. But when this really enthusiastic woman got in touch with me, spent a little time to get to know me and then asked if I'd be involved with a dance track, I thought - why not? She was very sensitive to the fact that I didn't have a lot of time so she helped me as much as she could and told me what she needed me to do. It's been really nice to help someone who is clearly very enthused about her work and it was an enjoyable and much more real experience to be part of something, rather than something being done about or for me."

What's next for Jackie Weaver?

"This is just a tiny part of me, I'm a wife and a mother, I don't even think my son's will watch the video. I will continue to be very much the same to my family, and I have no doubt this will all become old news soon. And I feel sort of sad about that, I can see what it must be like for 'influencers' and how it must feel when things end. I have a bigger voice and platforms that help with my work, where I can talk about real issues and be part of special things. I'm told I have a lot of 'social authority' now, so I'll help where I can and use it wisely!"

CREATIVE LOCAL HEROES

The people whose creativity and innovation got us through the pandemic, from content creators on social platforms like Instagram or TikTok, to artisan businesses that refused to be defeated when lockdown hit, entertainers who swapped festivals for Facebook Live and just normal people whose creative output simply made us smile.

Thank you to all of you for inspiring us.

FENWICK: A WINDOW ON A WORLD OF 'INSPIERIENCE'

2.



The last year has seen us all sacrifice experiences like parties, festivals, travel or events but that hasn't stopped people being creative in curating moments of joy.

1.



CHRIS & ROSIE RAMSEY (SHAGGED MARRIED ANNOYED)

For the podcast LOLs.

One brand that was determined to ensure families had a special Christmas is Fenwick, the department store that brings joy to people with its Christmas window reveal each year.

As the November 2020 lockdown was announced, O Comms began working with the Fenwick team to plan for a digital Christmas like no other – an 'insperience' that families could enjoy the world over.

Fenwick is underpinned by community and family and was determined to bring the magic of its iconic Christmas window display to the people of the North East this year in a safe way.

Fenwick Newcastle's famous Christmas window display, now in its forty-ninth year, regularly attracts a crowd of 2,000 people to Northumberland Street. In 2020 Fenwick unveiled the

windows virtually for the first time via Facebook Live, with over 250,000 tuning in on the night, from all around the world.

To date, the lockdown Christmas window 'A Wind in the Willows story' digital unveil event has accumulated over 860,000 views and received over 38,000 comments, with thousands congratulating Fenwick for creating a much-needed sense of communal festive cheer. The virtual event featured a host of festive surprises, including dancing elves, Santa himself on the Fenwick store roof top, and a nostalgic look back through the extensive Fenwick Christmas window archive.

Safety of the local community was top priority for Fenwick who worked closely alongside the local authorities, Newcastle City Council, to install safety barriers and a 20 foot wall to ensure a

crowd did not gather outside the department store for the unveiling event which took place on a Sunday. London based, creative film company Duck Productions filmed the live event and its set included 8 cameras, a production van on-site and a creative director.

O's PR team were on site to manage the swift turnaround of photos and film wishes to the waiting media, who were not on site.

Created here in the UK, this year's window scenes were transported to Newcastle where they were brought to life by a team of five animators, technicians, window dressers and carpenters with an expanded external production team of around 30 people in total.

The detailed and complex process to create the window scenes involved intricate storyboard designs for each scene and required five solid days working with the production design team to animate the entire eight-scene window scape.

At 38 metres and with eight amazing scenes, the display is one of the largest Christmas showcases in Europe and provides 840 hours of exciting entertainment over the festive period.

Developed over nine-months, the window scenes depict a Christmas reimagination of the popular and beloved classic children's story,

AT 38 METRES AND WITH EIGHT AMAZING SCENES, THE DISPLAY IS ONE OF THE LARGEST CHRISTMAS SHOWCASES IN EUROPE

The Wind in the Willows written by Kenneth Grahame. Fenwick's 'A Wind in the Willows Story' features everyone's favourite animal characters from the original story with the addition of Santa Clause.

All the characters in the window scenes have been individually

designed to have their own unique physical features and facial characteristics. The character's posing, positioning, styling, and props are the result of meticulous character development. Due to COVID restrictions, the set, lighting, and backdrop scenery were all reviewed and developed by the production team remotely via video call.

Although designed specifically for Fenwick's Newcastle customer base, the 2020 window gained global exposure from viewers worldwide including Fiji, South Africa, Canada, USA, Thailand, Canada, New Zealand and across Europe.

Many shared emotional and heart-warming responses, congratulating Fenwick for creating a much-needed sense of community, as thousands of people all over the world were able to watch the reveal together online at a time when many are separated from family and loved ones. One viewer from California, USA, commented: "This is a happy day for us and a wonderful way to celebrate with our friends across the pond!"

One viewer commented that they were watching the reveal in Canada whilst their mum was watching in the UK. Lots of parents expressed gratitude to Fenwick for being able to share a fond childhood memory, the reveal of the Christmas window display, with their children.

The Live Stream was a thirty-minute event featuring dancing elves and an appearance from Santa on the store's rooftop. Fenwick captured Christmas

and created a real nostalgic moment for viewers in the region, across the UK and around the globe. Another viewer commented: "Watching from Abu Dhabi - I was supposed to be on a visit home in Newcastle so glad I can still see it!" and another expressed: "Watching from Boston USA."

3.

SMOOVE & TURRELL

The weekly Facebook Live sets that made Friday nights the place to be.



4.

GRAYSON PERRY'S ART CLUB

Back for 2021, who doesn't love Grayson's wonderful eclectic style and eye for a great piece of art.



5.

NEWCASTLE EAGLES

Whilst a ban on sport could have set them back, they turned their brand new stadium into a vaccination centre and set a record in December for the number of people vaccinated in one day.



6. **CRUFFIN TO WORRY ABOUT:**

CREATING A COMMUNITY THROUGH FOOD

If you've walked through the Ouseburn recently you might have wondered why there is always an enormous queue snaking its way along the tow path. The culprits are Northern Rye, artisan bakers and North East foodie royalty.

Since opening the doors of their Ouseburn shop in June 2020 they have amassed an army of loyal fans willing to brave all weathers in their pursuit of breads, signature cruffins and freshly roasted coffee.

Glaswegian born Robbie Livingstone, owner of Northern Rye, left a career in printing at the age of 36 to pursue his dreams of opening his own bakehouse. After graduating from the The School of Artisan Food in 2017, Robbie began baking out of his kitchen in Newcastle.

Thinking back to how it all started he remembers, "My partner went to university in Newcastle and when I was made redundant for the second time we decided to relocate. I started creating in the kitchen of our flat and got in touch with Anna Hedworth at the Cook House to see if I could get involved with Jesmond Food Market, it was already full of bakers but she offered me the opportunity to run a pop-up



at the Cook House down in the Ouseburn - we sold out that first weekend and from there I went on to do pop-ups all over the North East and built up a bit of a following. I ended up getting a unit in Byker to grow the business after I got a letter from the council asking me to stop making so much noise early in the morning in the flat...!

"I eventually turned the unit into Northern Rye Bakery and spent a few years building up the business from there before getting the shop in The Malings, Ouseburn. I always wanted the shop to be a place where people could come and buy their breads and pastries but that was also an experience and became part of the community."

Speaking about opening a new premises in the middle of a pandemic, Robbie is humble about his success, "I really didn't know if it would work or not but the community really got behind us and supported us, it's been overwhelming really. We have customers who have been

visiting since the first pop-up days, one man was even there at the first event at the Cook House and has been a regular ever since. The hard work of Alice, and the rest of the team in the shop is a huge part of that, they make our customers part of the family, they take time to have a chat and get to know them. It's a world away from the image of some surly hipster serving in a Camden bakery.

Social media has certainly had a part to play in the Northern Rye story. Robbie has amassed over 16.5k followers on Instagram alone and despite having no formal training in digital marketing, has an eye for what works; "I run our Instagram page myself, and if you scroll back in the feed you will see it really is a documentation of the business from the very start. I photograph our products, usually while they're cooling at the unit, and it's great to see people get excited over the new flavours and planning their visits. We love seeing people

sharing our products and the reactions that they get. I love experimenting with new flavours and ultimately, I just want to make great products that people enjoy. Social media has definitely helped us connect more with our community and be able to engage with them in a more meaningful way."

IT'S A WORLD AWAY FROM THE IMAGE OF SOME SURLY HIPSTER SERVING IN CAMDEN BAKERY

So what's next for Northern Rye? While Robbie is keen to expand the business in the future and potentially open a second UK site, for now he is happy to continue to nurture the success of Northern Rye, developing his skills and creating more and more adventurous products. We're hungry just thinking about it.

Join the Northern Rye community at @northern.rye

6. SHRINKING THE WORLD:

HOW PANDEMIC HELPED TO BRING THE NORTH EAST TO NASHVILLE

Not a lot of artists can say that 2020 was as breakout year for them, but British country music star Tommy Atkins has never done things by the book. Following his number 1 smash, *Cinderella's Had a Drink*, and five consecutive top 5 singles in the U.K., New Zealand and Canada, the singer-songwriter released his first EP: *Kiss Me, Cowboy* at the start of lockdown in the UK.

Last year, Tommy made history on country radio in the UK and Europe with hit singles that featured openly gay lyrics, and won the award for New Artist of the Year at the Country Queer All-Star Poll, cementing his place at the front of the queer country movement alongside industry heavyweights Brandy Clark, Waylon Payne and Brandi Carlile. We caught up with Tommy to discuss how a lad from North Shields has continued to dominate the country music charts worldwide despite a ban on touring, the positives that he has taken from the last twelve months and how Nashville and the North East are closer than you might think.

Tommy started writing songs when he was 16, intending on becoming a songwriter for other artists due to the lack of diversity in country music. Talking about his early career, he remembers, "I didn't really see any openly gay artists out there making country music, being accepted and having success in the

mainstream, so I did this for a few years. I started to appear at multi-songwriter performances and while I was doing that and getting various bits of feedback, it dawned on me that now was the time for openly gay lyrics to come into country music and for somebody to make that happen.

"For the past few years that has been my mission, to make my own music champion LGBTQ+ people, but also the UK in country music. Our country scene is fairly new and quite small in comparison to other countries so my main goal is to try and address that."

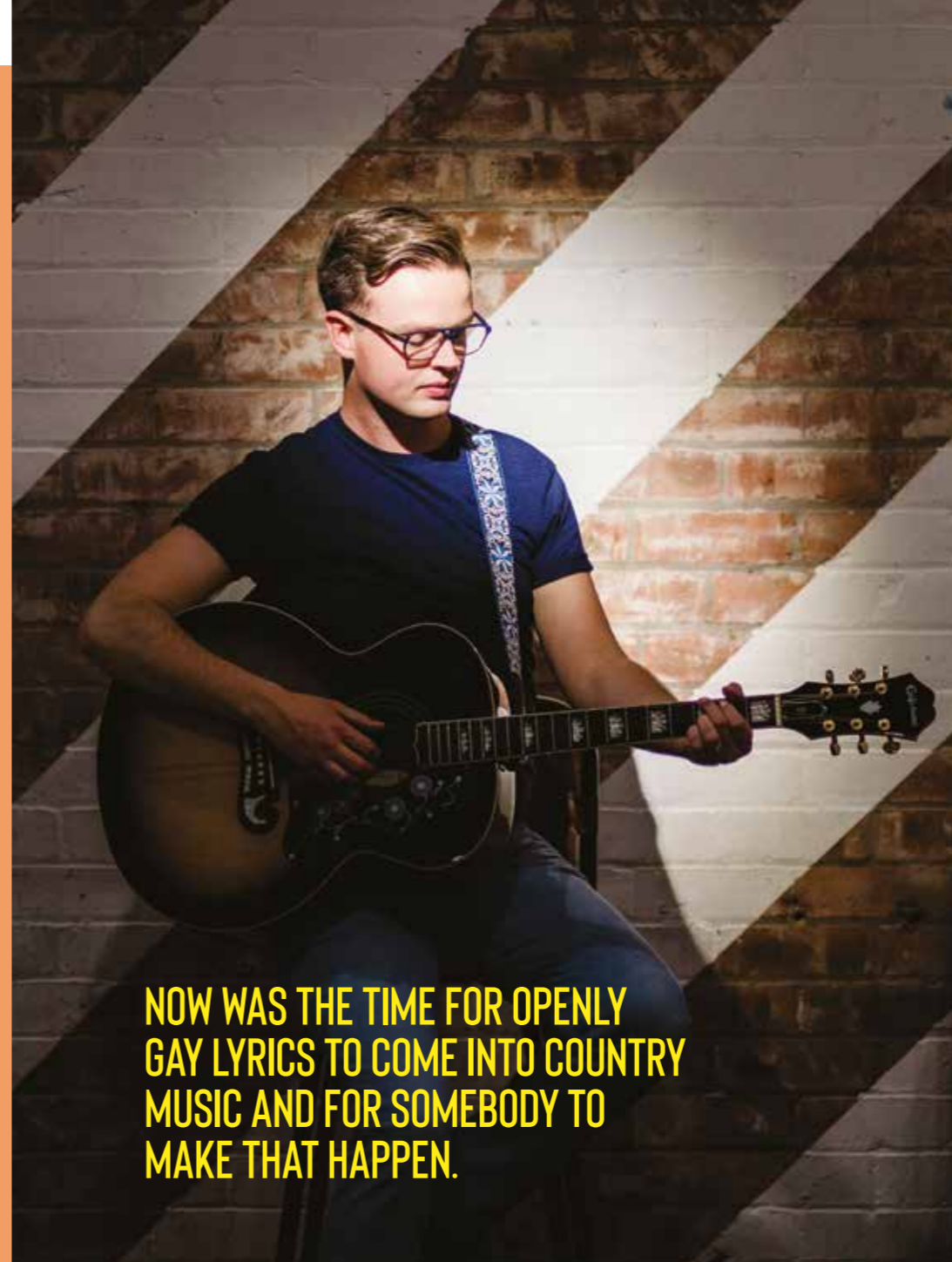
During his career, Tommy has spent significant time in Nashville recording, playing and making contacts in the music scene while still living predominantly in the North East. When the pandemic hit, that all stopped and suddenly artists had to adapt to a digital stage in order to stay relevant.

"I had been writing and recording music with people

in Nashville for a couple of years before I ever visited. I'm actually very used to remote working, so the whole Zoom writing sessions aren't really a new thing for me. It's certainly helped having a rolodex of people that I can turn to from my Nashville community and, yes, ask if they want to write or work together, but also ask for advice and over the last year that's been invaluable.

"The bigger adjustment for me was reaching my audience. Touring has always been the tried-and-true method of breaking into a new audience and without being able to tour it was difficult to get people excited about me as a fairly new artist on the scene but also about UK country generally.

"In lieu of being able to play the gigs and festivals that I had planned, I had doubled down on radio promotion and press while brushing up on my digital skills so I could still speak to my audience. Touring is amazing but it does take up



NOW WAS THE TIME FOR OPENLY GAY LYRICS TO COME INTO COUNTRY MUSIC AND FOR SOMEBODY TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN.

a lot of time. I think having this year to invest in other means of promotion has definitely been a plus and something that will stand me in good stead going forward.

"I've had to find creative ways to launch new singles during lockdown. Facebook Lives have been great and they will definitely be something that I will keep going when we come out the other side of this. Hosting digital events has been a new piece of learning for me, and I wanted to make sure that it still had the high production value that people expect from artists. A lot of people rushed to create free events that didn't look great, and that combination undervalues what we do as performers. Digital events also meant that I could perform with people from all over the world, something which simply wouldn't be possible on a live stage. I hope that post-pandemic some of the digital elements can be weaved into live shows so they become more accessible and open up live events to a much wider audience geographically too. I've seen a lot of success in the Asia-Pacific region this year, somewhere I certainly wouldn't have thought to tour, and that has been down to having the opportunity to play to a global audience online."

Sitting 4040 miles away across the North Atlantic Ocean, it's not immediately clear that there are any similarities between the North East and Nashville, but Tommy thinks differently; "Growing up in a working-class environment is what county music is all about, for Tennessee its farms, for us it is mining, the shipyards – industry. We share a sense of community, and when you write about these things they completely translate into a shared experience. Look at anywhere where you have people carrying out repetitive work and you'll find great music – look at the car industry in Detroit, the work on an assembly line, that fed the R&B, Hip Hop and Soul sounds that we associate with the area today."

Tommy hopes that the pandemic will leave us with a legacy of more meaningful stories in country music as artists have time to reflect and create, "maybe we'll hear less songs about whiskey and women", he jokes, "I think we'll see more introspective music as artists think about what they have missed in 2020. My next single is about finding balance, the world slowing down and taking time to appreciate what's important."

Tommy Atkins next single is released in May 2021. Find out more at www.tommyatkinsmusic.com

6. FINDING YOUR POSSIBLES

THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS WITH LAURA LINDOW



Laura Lindow has a super power. She has been helping people to “hang on to their possibles” during the pandemic.

In the height of the pandemic and searching for a way to continue to reach communities through theatre, Laura wrote the Northern Stage online Christmas show, *The Emperor's New Clothes*. O's creative director sat down with Laura, an award-winning theatre writer and director for a coffee and a natter about how theatre has changed over the pandemic, her very serious work as a Clown Doctor and why creativity is more important now than ever.

Born in Edinburgh, Laura is a graduate of Northumbria University and has lived in the North East for many years, developing a “gradual but thumping love affair with the region”. In her 20 years of making theatre she has gained a reputation for creating “punchy work with a serious sense of play”.

Talking about her work with Northern Stage, Laura said; “I wrote my first Christmas show with Northern Stage five years ago; creating work in this venue is such an honour and a privilege and this year was the most special yet.”

“When we had the first conversations (Director Mark Calvert, collaborators Kitchen Zoo and myself), we didn't know what that show was going to look like, we didn't know how we were going to be able to realise it together, whether the show could be live or not. We all felt very keenly the sense of wanting to bring some hope and joy - an opportunity to escape to the performance, and to really reach people. As a team it was also important to honour the tradition for people who make a Christmas show part of their festivities, but it also gave us the opportunity to create a new tradition for audiences who maybe haven't been part of that magic before.

Looking at the numbers of children and families that the show reached is just staggering.”

With the show being recorded and no audience present, the production of the show was a totally different experience for Laura and the team, who are used to feeding off a crowd.

“It could have felt very, very odd”, she admits. “We couldn't play composer (and King) Jeremy Bradfield's music live because the show was being recorded, and there was of course no audience. We had to keep the energy levels high, high enough to reach out through the screen to the people watching at home. Meerkat Films were so skilled - it was their job to capture not just the images but the essence of what was happening onstage, which they did brilliantly. Even though it was being filmed we wanted it to keep its authenticity as a piece of theatre. You'll notice there are no shortcuts, no cheating with clearing the stage between shots - we had people tripping over piles of socks in the final recording, but that meant that you could really travel with the actors and the characters through their story.”

Writing isn't the only thing that has kept Laura busy during lockdown, she's joined forces with other creatives in the North East to make sure that her community stays connected and positive during what has been an exceptionally turbulent year for the industry and freelance professionals.

EVEN THOUGH IT WAS BEING FILMED WE WANTED IT TO KEEP ITS AUTHENTICITY AS A PIECE OF THEATRE

“Alongside Zoe Cooper and Gez Casey, I started the North East Playwrights Network. It was so important to try and maintain those links between creatives in the region, even if it was just appearing as faces on one another's screens, it gave us a chance to reach out and check in on each other. All sorts of companies and individuals really stepped up over the lockdown to produce incredible things,

working so hard to keep creating opportunities for the future of our industry, whatever that might look like.” When she's not writing and producing for the stage, Laura swaps her normal attire for a doctor's coat and red nose, transforming into her alter-ego Dr Lulu McDoo, one of the North East's Clown Doctors for Tin Arts, bringing joy to sick children on the wards of The Freeman and Great North Children's Hospital, using play and a little bit of silliness to support them through what can be a traumatic and frightening time.

“I live and breathe my work. It was important to me to keep going and keep creating during 2020. The first thing was the Clown Doctoring because it was so urgent to keep reaching those children and their families. It wasn't just that we were able to create through lockdown, rather it felt essential to keep going in order to support people during this time.

“As Clown Doctors we work with children to whom the world feels strange and peculiar, even impossible... but sometimes impossible is the only thing that can possibly happen! Sometimes the impossible is where the possible just gets going. And this idea of hanging onto what's possible fed into all of the other work that we were producing.”

Thinking about the place of creativity during the pandemic, Laura ponders, “It's interesting because when theatre and

culture was getting an economic pummeling, people were automatically reaching for art. Through theatre you can reach out and help one another, keep someone company through loneliness that they may be facing.”

“Creativity exists in our lives every day and stories are how we make sense of the world; it addresses our human need to make sense of the space between the stars.”

7.

GETTING CREATIVE IN THE KITCHEN AND OBSESSED WITH NEW IDEAS



I tried the London chef life, and it wasn't for me, I have always been and will always be excited about the North East and everything it has to offer. I remember working at my first job in a cafe, cooking proper food, it was nothing fancy but it was one of the happiest times in my life. For me it's all about people and making them happy with great food.

Aidan, the owner of the well-loved Aidan's Kitchen in Sandyford, described this past year as one filled with experiences like no other, and not all bad. He's kept us entertained on social media and showed us all how to take lockdown in our stride. Despite being a relatively young business owner and the business not trading for that long, the pandemic gave Aidan and his team the chance to get even more creative in the kitchen.

us a chance to take a step back and think about what we could do differently. I imagine many businesses have done the same and will come back from this with loads of new ideas.

Why do you do what you do? "Because I love food and people, capture your audience, and you can cook for anyone." It has been great to see the industry get so creative and collaborative over the last year, and I really hope that continues. The North East is an amazing place and I've loved sharing the experiences of the last year with so many other business owners who have been so incredibly supportive and open.

I'm so passionate about baking and have really enjoyed making this a big part of our offering over the last year, who knew everyone would get so crazy about cake in 2020? We also tested out different menus with our customers, some more successful than others.

I GOT TO EXPERIMENT A LOT MORE AND I COMPLETELY FELL IN LOVE WITH FOOD ALL OVER AGAIN

As well as proving to be a master baker throughout lockdown, the team tried lots of new menu ideas, from burger nights to gift hampers, afternoon teas and even dabbled in cocktails.

"The last year has shown me that whilst experimenting is great and a lot of fun, that it's never been so important to listen to feedback. Our customers love our brunch menu and miss dishes if we swap them out for something new, we need to make sure after all of this, we stay true to who we are, what we do well and what people love."

"I always get comments about my social media posts, with lots of people finding them entertaining, I'm passionate and vocal and so there is no holding back. I'm a Washington lad that loves to see local businesses doing well. I know some of my tweets and posts provide some entertainment, but I also hope it shows that business owners are people too and it's been a hellish year, we're all learning as we go and couldn't have planned for any of this. I can't wait for the doors to reopen, for the outside tables to be filled with empty plates and happy customers, and to spend time with the team, the people that make Aidan's what it is and make me feel so proud."

His love for the business and the region is filled with passion, from Sandyford's location to the extraordinary array of characters that cross the doors at Aidan's Kitchen.

"I found that during lockdown, and being back in the kitchen more, I got to experiment a lot more and I completely fell in love with food all over again. I became obsessed with exploring new ideas."

"I love watching people go by and seeing the variety of culture in the North East, we have so many different kinds of people visiting us, and I love that. We want to keep building the Aidan's Kitchen community and who knows, we may even try to do that in other cities too in the future?"



8. NE1 AND EVERYONE



During lockdown, the NE1 social channels have been on fire, helping us all to stay connected to the city we love. We caught up with them to find out what their followers have loved this year.

What's been your most popular social theme?

It has varied but it is obvious to us that everyone has missed days out in the city centre! We've spent a lot of time highlighting the ways in which businesses have creatively adjusted how they operate and our followers have always engaged well with new ways to enjoy the city from home. When lockdown was first introduced, we even introduced our own 'Hack your Isolation' series, a handy diary of online events from across the city to entertain in the weeks ahead.

News of new openings always go down well with our followers too. Quayside restaurant Khai Khai, Bigg Market newbie Meat:Stack, and iconic and long-awaited Hard Rock Cafe to name a few, announced their new ventures in 2020 which made a real splash on our socials. It's great for us to see people tagging their friends and

making plans to visit in the future, it makes what we do worthwhile.

Have you found more people are celebrating the city and region through social and looking forward to get back?

100%. There has definitely been an element of not knowing what you've got until it's gone and it is clear that people have been desperate to get back to making the most out of the city. After an extremely challenging year for businesses of all kinds, the love and support shared across social media has been wonderful to witness and be part of. We've often encouraged our followers to like, share and leave positive reviews for city-centre businesses that they miss - it's little things like this that offer a boost and make all the difference to business owners and the staff who have been itching to get back to doing what they do best.

What was your most liked post of 2020?

We reposted a snowy image of the Tyne Bridge taken by a local photographer and it absolutely exploded. There's some amazing photographic talent in the region, and we try our best to use our platform to showcase their work as well as our own organic content. It's nice to support people.

You've kept us all updated and excited to get back to normal life. What's your favourite thing to do in Newcastle?

We're all big foodies so our absolute favourite thing to do is eat out and try new places. The thing we love most about Newcastle's food and drink scene is the vibrant choice of independent venues and the sheer variety of cuisines to choose from. Our post-lockdown night out looks like; WC for a glass of wine, Route for dinner, followed by

a trip to Horticulture's outside terrace for one (or two) of their iconic Espresso Martinis. Maybe a Greggs chicken bake for the journey home - who knows!

How have you managed to keep your socials alive when the city has been in lockdown?

The whole world has been spending a lot of time online at the moment, and businesses have done a remarkable job adapting their offer. Cultural venues across the city have delivered virtual tours, socially-distanced performances, online resources and roundups of exhibitions past and present! We've seen live streams from nightclubs, cocktail masterclasses from

bars and cook-a-longs from restaurants too. Because of this, there is always something for us to shout about and we're proud to have been able to offer a voice for businesses and use our platforms to shine a light on the innovative ways they have operated throughout lockdown!

How has the hospitality community reacted?

It's no secret that the hospitality sector has been hit hard as a result of the pandemic but the way businesses have displayed their creativity, resilience and adaptability has allowed many to still trade in some form. Restaurants and bars have reshaped and the average takeaway has been turned on its head. We've seen DIY kits, premade cocktails, treat boxes, 'at home' menus, pancake batter in a bag and all the secrets to iconic recipes from a whole host of restaurants across the city!

For nightlife, things have been challenging the say the least but we're confident that once we are able to, Newcastle's nightlife will return to give the city its unique vibrancy and remain renowned across the world. The tough time away from our beloved night-time venues has definitely highlighted the myriad of choice that the city has for cocktails, dancing, late-night spots and is something that will never be taken for granted again!

The night-time economy in the city is a vital driver for

social cohesion and to ensure these businesses remain supported, we've often lobbied Government for support and used our platforms to highlight the plight of the industry.

What do you think the people of Newcastle have missed the most?

Geordies are extremely friendly folk and we know that the lack of social interaction has been hard

BUSINESSES HAVE DISPLAYED THEIR CREATIVITY, RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY

for so many. People have been looking forward to getting back to experiencing Newcastle as the diverse hive of activity that we're all used to. A chat on the Metro, a hello in the street and the opening of doors to businesses we've missed so much over the past year.



Newcastle is raring to go and there are hugely exciting plans in the pipeline to make sure that we can all enjoy a safe, welcoming and spirited summer in the city!

THE YEAR WE GOT CREATIVE

Meditation apps, fitness crazes, daily walks, long baths – are the new habits we've formed in lockdown making us more connected to our creative brain?

Creativity is a muscle, just as it needs exercised to get better it also needs to relax to recover and stay resilient.

The rise in the wellbeing industry saw millions of people do PE with Joe in their living rooms, download a meditation app or pound the pavements from Couch to 5k during lockdown.

However you look at it, the slowdown of the daily grind and spending more time at home has seen a boom in creative hobbies and past-times.

We asked our team and clients what creativity means to them, and what creative habits they've formed in the last year, and here's their tips:

ANDREA DROMARD — ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE, O

During lockdown I've become obsessed with Pinterest. I'm a very visual person and I enjoy channelling my creativity into Pinterest boards. My favourite Pinterest section at the moment is tablescapes, I love the creative process of designing an aesthetically pleasing tablecape. It's all about combining different colours, textures, patterns, and materials to create something harmonious and beautiful. It really helps calm my mind as I'm visualising the bigger picture, but the most fun part is selecting all the smaller elements that make up the bigger picture. Some people have taken up jigsaws during lockdown but I prefer tablescaping.



MICHELE GETTINS — CMO IAMPROPERTY

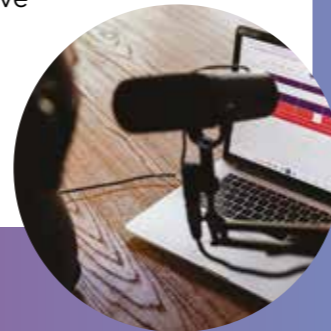
I've definitely been doing more walking, both on my own, with friends (when allowed) and with my family. It's helped us appreciate the open spaces and fresh air we have around us every day. I live near the beach and have always drawn calm and inspiration from the sea, which definitely connects me more with my creative brain. I have the best ideas talking to myself as I walk out in the fresh air and just having time and space to think. It helps the mood too. As a family we all did Joe



KARI OWERS — O FOUNDER

Creativity to me is about never standing still, having that hunger to learn something new and explore what you could do with it.

With my commute disappeared and more time at home, I have filled my spare hours the last year with learning. I love to learn new things – whether it's a practical skill or an inspirational talk from a leader. My favourite app has been The Do. Lectures which hosts a whole heap of inspirational talks from entrepreneurs about topics like creative thinking, scaling a business or unlocking your purpose. Each speaker has a really engaging style and its helped fuel lots of creative ideas for my own business.



MICK HOWARD — MANAGING DIRECTOR, CLEARLY DRINKS

The reduction in travel over the past year, has offered more time to focus on the strategic direction of the business, and to accelerate a number of key initiatives and investments in our people, brands, ESG commitments and our manufacturing capabilities. That's the work stuff.

On the personal front, a bit of running, cooking, and humour has helped me remain positive and motivated. Listening to, and supporting family, friends, and team members has been constantly front of mind; I believe that you reap what you sow. It's not so much about putting on a brave face – more like instilling belief, and positivity, when others are feeling at their lowest.

JOHN BEATTIE — LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION MANAGER, SEVEN STORIES — NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

As a member of the Seven Stories team, it won't be a surprise that I love reading! With the extra time available through lockdowns, I've been able to make a habit of reading books I've had on my to-be-read pile for ages! I've also been staying in touch with friends by trying new hobbies in our "hobby club". In this weekly catch-up, we take it in turns to lead a virtual workshop based around a new hobby. So far, we've 'mastered' life drawing, making cakes and bird feeders, learning to dance and even making espresso martinis!

KERRY LENG — HEAD OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS AT NEXUS

As a family we love to go to new places. Weekends and holidays are usually filled with getting out and about, seeing new things. Lockdown has stopped us doing that and our world has become very, very local.

Our local walking routes started to become a bit tiresome until one

day I decided to take a couple of sketchbooks out with us. I haven't drawn in years and the kids initially rolled their eyes, of course. But do you know what, drawing makes you see the world in front of you differently. I found that I started to appreciate our local area much more once I was

actually paying attention to the detail. I found I was seeing the local landscape so much more clearly and it made me want to create more. Taking that one creative step made me happier and feel more fulfilled. And it got the kids out of their bedrooms and off their phones too – result!

CHARLIE NETTLE — AV DAWSON AND FOUNDER OF 'THIS IS MARKETING'

I've finally got into a better routine around exercise, having struggled for a long time to do any exercise in the week. My wife has also started running, so we're able to do that together, which gives us a little 'adult time' (albeit we don't chat that much while we're running as we're usually both struggling for breath!). I've also found time to kick off a social good marketing initiative that I've been keen to launch for a while – 'This is Marketing', which is about getting the profession to be better recognised and valued. I now play the piano pretty much every day, which is really helping me to improve at a much faster pace than previously, its also something I really enjoy doing for relaxation. I did have a period where I was trying to meditate but I haven't cracked the relaxing to that level yet!



LAUREN REGAN — CREATIVE DIRECTOR, O

Right at the start of lockdown I made a conscious effort to punctuate the beginning and end of the workday by doing something creative, which didn't involve looking at a screen. The thing I've enjoyed most is practicing piano and really pushing myself to improve week on week. I love being outside and am at my

most creative when I'm moving, getting a dog in the middle of lockdown has certainly forced me to take time to get fresh air, clear my head and be able to creatively tackle problems – there's nothing quite as "motivating" than a 5 stone dog to get you away from your desk.

CHARLOTTE CAMPBELL — DIRECTOR OF FUNDRAISING AND OPERATIONS

Over the last year I have used much of my gained time to continue to renovate my home, learning new skills and spending more time than I care to calculate holding a paint brush in my hand! Working from home and the world slowing down has also allowed me to spend more time trying new recipes and walking – I have never appreciated living by the sea as much as I have in the last 12 months.



AGENCY

Feeling ready for a reset? Why not book one of our Seriously Creative Strategy days to define your post pandemic purpose, re-engage your workforce and craft a customer message fit for the future?

We'll help you fine tune your channel strategy to communicate more meaningful messages in the right places, saving you time and maximising your marketing budget.

Then we'll show you how to upgrade your measurement and develop your team to learn the skills they need to take your communications to the next level.

**LET'S GET SERIOUSLY CREATIVE TOGETHER...
IT'S A DAY YOU'LL NEVER REGRET.**

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