

Cannes Lions 2023 wrap-up: What mattered—and what didn't—to marketers this year

Article

Every year, there are a handful of topics that dominate the conversations at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. Here's what was—and wasn't—top of mind for marketers

and business leaders on the Croisette this past week.

AI was this year's buzzword. As predicted, there was no hotter topic on the Croisette than generative AI. Business leaders approached the topic from all angles, from how marketers and creators can use the technology to improve content creation efficiencies and creative effectiveness to how the technology has ignited a new era of creativity.

The Weather Company's activation was a case in point: The company partnered with artists like Alex Fefegha to generate AI images of how historical events could have played out had the weather been different, based on its weather data. "Generative AI is starting to be used by brands to take storytelling to new dimensions," said Alasdair Lennox, global executive creative director of brand consulting firm Landor & Fitch, which won a Silver Lion award for innovation.

Gen Z took over the Croisette. Many marketers remarked that this year's festival looked and felt much younger than in previous years. Nowhere was that more true than at TikTok's daily Frosé Soirée happy hour. Over at Pinterest's Gen Z-inspired beachfront activation, dubbed the "Pinterest Manifestival," visitors could experience Gen Z trends IRL, including tattoos and tooth gems.

"Gen Z is our fastest-growing audience, and the way they use Pinterest is different," said Julie Towns, Pinterest's vice president of product marketing and product operations. "Older generations are more project- and planning-based, while Gen Z are using Pinterest to find themselves and their style." Meanwhile, Pinterest CEO Bill Ready and CMO Andréa Mallard took to the main stage for a discussion on how tech impacts Gen Z's mental well-being and how the company's **Inspired Internet Pledge**, announced at Cannes, aims to fix that.

But members of Gen Z weren't just there for the fun—they were also there to educate marketers: 22-year-old creator and business owner Emma Chamberlain spoke to a jam-packed audience at Spotify Beach about brand-building and navigating partnerships, while 23-year-old JUV Consulting founder Ziad Ahmed led a conversation about brand bravery with actress Auli'i Cravalho during Insider's CMO breakfast.

The metaverse was missing. Marketers barely said "metaverse," except to note that nobody was using the word. Instead, marketers stuck to words such as "immersive" to describe metaverse-like concepts, which were admittedly far fewer on the Croisette this year. Even

Meta's metaverse vision was muted, and its **Reels activation** was the centerpiece of Meta Beach this year.

While marketers shouldn't take that as a sign that Meta is pivoting from the metaverse, Alvin Bowles, Meta's vice president of global business group, Americas, said Reels is "a huge growth opportunity" and where the company's focus is right now. Just this week, Meta expanded access to Instagram Reels ads to more advertisers, and announced several enhancements to Reels ad options on both Facebook and Instagram, like app promotion ads.

The economy wasn't as big of a concern as last year. While executives like Blake Chandlee, TikTok's vice president of global business solutions, acknowledged that the past year has been "challenging," the overall mood at Cannes was joyous. It felt as if brands, agencies, and tech platforms have now adjusted to today's economic reality and are even cautiously optimistic for H2 2023.

But one way in which the ad revenue slowdown was apparent was in the makeup of the players along the Croisette. Influencer marketing agencies like Whalar and Influential were posted up alongside Big Tech players like Meta and Google. While influencer marketing isn't recession-proof, "it's recession-resistant," said Ryan Detert, CEO of Influential, adding that Influential, which took over Twitter Beach, would show up in an even bigger way next year.

More is to come on what the arrival of creators and influencer marketing to Cannes Lions means for the ad industry in next week's Marketing and Advertising Briefing.

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