



April 2022



The Best (and worst) of April Fool's Day

Once a day for practical jokes (salt in the sugar jar), we've come to expect pranks from our favourite brands on April Fool's Day. This year was no different, seeing everything from new 'product' launches to Black-Mirror technology, to unlikely brand collaborations.

Several of our own clients participated this year. MADE.com launched their first-ever 'Grow Your Own Sofa', Iceland hilariously added CBD to their hash browns to have consumers starting the day stress-free, and Papa John's partnered with Pot Noodle to launch Pot Pizza – every snack-lover's dream meal.

But not every brand got it right. UK beer subscription site Bier Company tricked customers into signing up for a monthly subscription with a message stating they had won "free beer for life". The ASA received over 40 complaints once the prank was revealed, with some angrily calling the stunt a "scam" on Twitter.

McDonald's also disappointed their audience by refusing to participate at all, tweeting "Okay we've got to tell you. We had an April Fools ready – a hybrid Big Mac Breakfast McMuffin but it looked too good, and our boss was worried you'd all try and order it."

The most successful pranks are those which poke fun at the brand themselves (we're thinking of Subway's bread-scented room diffuser, "Eau de Dough"), particularly as the now-expectant masses are less easy to fool.

At best, a well-calculated April Fool's prank can be a great short-term boost for brands, with the potential to spark earned media opportunities. However, poorly placed jokes can be costly, so it is important for brands to think hard before they jump on the bandwagon next year.





Sustainability and Web Design

When it comes to Web Design, sustainability isn't a factor many consider but the truth is, the way your website looks and functions impacts our environment. Whether its hi-res images slowing load speeds, fancy fonts people struggle to read or an overload of unnecessary content, all it takes is some TLC to make your website eco & user friendly.

Data centres consume the same amount of global energy ([1.4%](#)) as countries like Spain and Australia. Global computing is responsible for [3.9%](#) of annual global emissions. In comparison, aviation contributes [2.1%](#) and the UK 1%.

As well as these figures sounding alarming for our environment, they can also affect your user's experience when browsing your website. Sites that use a lot of data can be slow and inefficient. Optimising your website can improve performance, UX and accessibility, in addition to reducing carbon emissions, hosting costs and site maintenance.

Removing unnecessary images from your website can shorten load times for your users and reduce how much data your website uses. With any images you'd like to keep, you can compress these to reduce their file size without affecting their quality. Even blurring the sides of the images or making them black and white can significantly reduce memory usage.

Replacing images with icons is also beneficial to the environment and user, as they use much less data than images. Removing unnecessary layers on icons can reduce their memory usage even more. You can also easily edit icons into your brand colours, so they look just at home on your website. System fonts like Times New Roman, Arial and Tahoma are also zero waste.

As well as annoying your users, autoplay videos are terrible for the environment. Videos use a lot more data than images and, as you can't stop them from playing, every time a user visits the webpage, more unnecessary data is consumed.

You can also help your users and the environment by getting rid of any tracking you aren't using. Not only does this use less data, but it also improves privacy for your users.

Carrying out a content audit for your website can give you an understanding of what blogs your website already has. So rather than creating new content, you can reuse and recycle existing pieces. You can also combine blog posts that are too similar. Fewer web pages = less data and quicker loading speeds. A streamlined content structure for your website can also improve traffic, as it helps search engines and new users to find your website.

With the world becoming more digitised and data-driven day by day, it's important we all do our bit for the environment and our users.





Could Elon Musk Authenticate the Twittersphere?

Elon Musk has succeeded with an offer to buy Twitter at a valuation of around \$43 billion. The left-wing Twitterati reacted in horror, while those on the right rejoiced. Musk views Twitter as the "de facto town square" and is buying the company to protect free speech, describing himself as a "free speech absolutist."

What's interesting about Elon's vision and Twitter's origins is that Jack Dorsey and Evan Williams didn't know what the platform was going to be. "There was this path of discovery with something like that, where over time you figure out what it is." Said Williams in a 2018 interview.

This path to discovery saw Twitter turn into one of the world's most influential media platforms, but its ad-funded model has come with negative consequences. An algorithm designed to hold attention and engagement for profit has resulted in the amplification of content likely to have divisive reactions (not just a Twitter problem).

There has been plenty of evidence of the platform being weaponized to take advantage of this. In 2018, Twitter released more than 10 million tweets that had been circulated by propaganda farms and associated fake accounts from Russia and Iran, with the sole intention of disrupting Western democracies by increasing division in society.

No one can argue that these tactics worked and likely continue to do so. Western democracies are more politically divided than ever. Suspicion of mainstream media is high, trust in experts is at an all-time low and conspiracy theories spread like wildfire. The politics of fear finds fertile ground in such conditions.

The result was consistent calls for greater regulation and the censorship of extreme opinions. The removal of former U.S. President Donald Trump from the platform was a high-profile reaction to such calls. Musk has floated the idea of reinstating Trump and others who have been banned from the platform. There are concerns such action could lead Twitter to descend into greater toxicity. For advertisers, the fear expressed by industry leaders is that Twitter would become a much more high-risk environment to be seen in, as a result.

Yet, that could be short-sighted. One of the ways Musk has posited to improve the platform is to authenticate all humans. The exposure of industrial-scale propaganda demonstrates how misinformation and negativity are amplified and given legitimacy through fake social proof (likes and approving comments from bots).

If Musk is successful at removing such inauthentic activity, one would hope this would improve matters considerably. Particularly if this involved identity confirmation. Counterarguments to misinformation would suddenly become weightier and more effective by sheer proportion alone; misinformation would become a less valuable currency as a result. Fringe opinions would be more likely to remain fringe, without false social validation. Toxicity, bullying and harassment would be reduced without the mask of anonymity to hide behind. The platform could essentially regulate itself into greater harmony.

Monthly Active Users could drop dramatically in the wake of such a concerted non-human purge, but this would expose the real scale of opportunity for advertisers. We would know exactly how many real people there are to reach and would be able to revalue this accordingly with more reliable business results. All enabled by plans to overhaul the business model, fewer ads and possibly a subscription. There would be no need to protect overinflated user numbers to appease shareholders. Perhaps we should reserve judgement on the takeover being all bad. The scale of the opportunity will undoubtedly change, but, as long as an advertising opportunity remains, the result could be a more authentic one.



Channel 4 Privatisation: What we Know, and What Questions Remain

For 40 years, Channel 4 has been at the forefront of British culture and media, and – due to its unique model of being commercially funded, but publicly owned – its remit from content delivery to financial responsibilities is unlike any other broadcaster. With the recent announcement that the Government plans to privatise Channel 4, the next 40 years have the potential to be extremely different.

The Government's rationale for the move has been to allow Channel 4 to 'remove its straitjacket' and allow it to 'thrive in the face of a rapidly-changing media landscape'; though Channel 4 itself dismayed the announcement as 'extremely disappointing', coming just days after the broadcaster was nominated for 44 BAFTA awards.

Much of this award-winning content is produced through independent British production companies, many of whom are concerned as the majority of their funding comes via Channel 4. Under a private owner, we could see this funding cut, moved or stopped entirely – though potentially maintained or even increased depending on the clauses of the sale. Regardless, it is almost certain that there will be a shift away from delivering programmes to under-served audiences, although it has been confirmed that the broadcaster will need to retain a commitment to primetime news programming.

Privatisation tends to be a lengthy process; notably, it took 5 years for Royal Mail to complete its privatisation following the initial announcement. That said, the government has announced (rather ambitiously) that they want the acquisition to be completed before the next general election - just two years away. As a result, it may not be too long before we start to see movements from the parties involved, and advertisers should prepare for a variety of outcomes.

The implications for advertisers will depend largely on which party completes the acquisition – and, to date, no such frontrunner has emerged. Two companies which immediately spring to mind are ITV and Sky which, if successful, could essentially create a duopoly within the UK advertising industry. If this were to happen, either party could leverage their majority share of the UK TV market to demand more from agencies and individuals. However, there's a stumbling block to such a move: strict UK competition regulations would make any such acquisition difficult.

If an overseas company was to purchase Channel 4 – and names such as the recently-merged Warner Bros. Discovery have already been floated – then we could see a shift in the network's programming towards more US-centric content. This could cause a significant shift in Channel 4's audiences and, thus, have profound implications for media plans. Also, we cannot yet rule out the possibility that a major streaming service such as Netflix, having recently lost an estimated \$50 billion from its market value after a disappointing Q1 report, may opt to reconsider its strategy by purchasing a mainstream network such as Channel 4. If this were to occur, a wealth of campaigns centred around Channel 4's linear programming and All 4 streaming platform would be disrupted instantly.

While the amount that Channel 4 sells for is yet to be determined, as it will depend on how much freedom the new owner would obtain over the current business model, it is likely to be in the region of £1 billion. With so many questions yet to be answered, the proposed privatisation is certain to prove to be one of the biggest shake-ups to the UK broadcasting industry in decades.





So long Universal Google Analytics, There's a New Face in Town!

Google is sunsetting Universal Google Analytics (UA) on 1st July next year, pushing companies to speed up their migration to Google Analytics 4 (GA4). If businesses don't have GA4 set up yet, now is the time.

Google Analytics 4 is a next-generation measurement solution that comes with a revamped interface, lots of new exciting features and a unified web and app measurement capability. GA4 represents a fundamental shift from the Universal Analytics we are familiar with. Data collection, setup and configuration, alongside the interface and reporting, are all very different. Due to these crucial differences, companies cannot start tracking everything in GA4 and compare like for like.

Whilst there's a lot that has been simplified in GA4 (such as the interface, base setup, and data model), the fact that it's so different means that companies should spend more time on planning their migration and learning the platform. It might take a year to collect enough meaningful data before being able to switch over, so there's not a lot of time left. It's highly recommended that companies have a complete and accurate GA4 set up by 30th June this year. This gives a year of historical data by the time UA stops processing reporting data.

On 1st July 2023, standard Universal Analytics properties will stop processing new data into the reports – though existing 360 license customers will get an additional three months before their reports stop showing new data on 1st October 2023.

Thereafter, companies will have access to UA report data for at least 6 months before those properties are fully removed. If companies need to store any historical data, this will be the time to export any required historical reports.

With such a major shift oncoming, the earlier companies start using GA4, the sooner they will be able to benefit from the latest enhancements and boost audience and marketing insights with machine learning, predictive reports and privacy-first features that are crucial today.

For businesses anxious about making the switch, the7stars' Google Analytics champion Violetta Konar has created a handy checklist to guide you through the migration process.



This month's mini stories

Twitter has introduced its new alternative text tools, addressing a long-awaited accessibility fix that is set to improve the user experience for those with disabilities. The launch will make the accessible image descriptions more obvious for users, including a black badge with the acronym 'ALT' on images with alt text. After tapping on the badge, users will be able to see the image descriptions that can be read without the use of a screen reader or other adaptive tools. This joins other accessibility features such as live automated captions for videos and voice tweets, as well as visual settings such as high contrast and font size.



Here at the7stars we have been celebrating our recent win in the large company category of Campaign's Best Places to Work 2022. This is a huge achievement and, once again, we are all extremely proud of it. This recognition is felt across the whole agency, especially given ever-evolving competition and the welcome increase in attention across the sector toward staff wellbeing, diversity and issues of importance to us all. The recognition this year is testament to the positive community environment our agency has cultivated and offers to employees. We feel this allows us the opportunity to support one another and, in turn, to deliver the highest standards of work for our clients.

WarnerMedia and Discovery officially completed their merger earlier this month in a multibillion-dollar deal. The new parent company, Warner Bros. Discovery, can list both HBO and Discovery+ under its banner, and aims to create a streaming portfolio to rival the longstanding dominance of Netflix and Amazon. The merger comes at a time of unprecedented uncertainty for the SVOD industry. The saturation of streaming platforms, coupled with the rising cost of living, have led many consumers to rethink their monthly subscriptions. And with Netflix losing subscribers for the first time in a decade, Warner Bros. Discovery is already looking to streamline its offering. One of its first major decisions was to cancel the CNN+ streaming service, just weeks after it launched to disappointing viewing figures.

