

NINE BY NINE

81 BRANDS CHANGING OUR WORLD

2021: A RETURN TO OUR DEFAULTS

There's a graph that has been in every. single. agency. presentation. over the past year. You know the one: "ten years in eight weeks." It tells the story of an industry which saw a whiplash-inducing digital shift during the early days of pandemic closures over the Spring of 2020.

The problem? The data fueling that narrative was sketchy, at best. With the exception of restaurant delivery and e-grocery, we'll have seen a 3% retained digital growth after the 2020 eCommerce boom has receded. Target and Walmart in-store sales are thumping, while online growth has slowed.

Or, to put it more simply: **we've returned to our defaults.** Best Buy, Lowes, Home Depot. We're going back to the "store of yore", and eCom teams are feeling the pain.

This year's *Nine by Nine* will explore the nature of a customer who has returned to brick and mortar. What does she find? For one, more direct to consumer brands on the shelf than ever before. She also finds an explosion of private labels occupying an ever-growing amount of space. When she does shop online, she finds that DTC brands are engaging in more channels than ever before. Not only are brands omnichannel, now so are their customers.

If you can manage to acquire a customer in the cookieless future, good luck on selling them any product. In 2021, supply chain issues are impacting every part of the customer journey. With supply down, and demand up, there's less of a reason to discount what inventory remains. Many retailers are launching resale marketplaces in response, others are launching digital sample sales or offloading B-stock on their primary channels. It's a war out here.

So we find ourselves in the midst of an inflection point: a plenitude of brands, with very little to sell, eager to continue to tell their stories and engage their communities, but unable to do so purely through Commerce.

If a brand has nothing to *sell*, do they have anything to *say*?



NINE BY NINE

In the creation of this report, we found nine recurrent themes from the past year of running the retail trade media operations of Future Commerce. Across three podcast properties, a newsletter, and producing five broad consumer research studies, we have zeroed in on the nine themes that are creating new and exciting opportunities for consumers and brands alike.

This year's report focuses on the brands, the retailers, the services, and collective organizations, which are changing our world for the better. We believe that, because everyone has to engage in Commerce, that it is a force to bring about change in the world. Those rated on this year's *Nine by Nine* are doing that in nine distinct ways:

- Evolving from digital retailer to omnichannel business
- Providing greater access to customers of all sizes and income levels
- Putting the customer at the center of the experience
- Appealing to niches by providing curated marketplaces
- Evolving low-cost private label products into sought-after brands
- Innovating in new and exciting ways in "The Metaverse"
- Speaking directly to the C.A.R.L.Y. psychographic
- Engaging in performance art and absurdism to attract a new audience
- Promoting the well-being of their customers

In numerology, the Number 9 represents wisdom and responsibility. The ultimate goal of Number 9 is to serve humanity. What's more, Nine (九 pinyin jiǔ) is considered a good number in Chinese culture because it sounds the same as the word "long-lasting."

If ever there was a time to look to the world of retail for wisdom, responsibility, and durability, it is now.



2021 9X9 CATEGORIES



DTC COMES OF AGE



INCLUSIVE BRANDS



PUTTING THE
C IN CX



NICHE MARKETPLACES



PRIVATE-LABEL GRAILS



METaverse AS MALL



C.A.R.L.Y.



PERFORMANCE ART
AS COMMERCE



WELLNESS BRANDS



What makes a brand meaningful?

Together with Klaviyo and Shipium, Future Commerce has created a report that details the brands that are adapting to our ever-changing world. We are illuminating nine brands across nine categories in an effort to spotlight change-makers and truth-tellers.

We didn't set out on this journey alone. We have joined forces with 30 of the most brilliant minds in our industry to examine the question "what makes a brand meaningful?" It's a simple question, with quite a subjective answer. The reality is, it depends on who is answering the question. So we sought a wide array of diverse thinkers, founders, builders, and innovators to join us. We've mined hundreds of hours of content, interviewed dozens of operators, and together we've created a framework that will allow us to not only rate the efficiency of a brands' ability to change the world, but help us to discover emerging brands who are hard at work building a better tomorrow.

The **Future Commerce Expert Network** includes operators at brands like Tapestry, Clorox, Starbucks, Disney, SC Johnson, and Wayfair.

You can find a full list of our contributors at the end of this report in the section entitled Methodology. We also included our 80+ **Future Commerce Alumni**, contributors to our podcast content over our 250+ episode, 5-year span.

This is not a list. This second annual report of *Nine by Nine* will spotlight brands that are making their mark on the world in categories that we believe will define our future.

The future is, after all, what we make of it. Together we can shape a future we're all proud of.

— The Future Commerce Team



NOBULL
SKIMS
Glossier.
allbirds

DTC Comes of Age: Digitally-native brands embracing omnichannel

Sponsored by Shipium

Has any term been more reviled—or more often redefined—than DTC? The wave of DTC darlings reaching exit from venture-backed, to acquisition, has reached a fever pitch during this past trip around the sun. The upperclassmen of digitally-native brands are making their foray into the public markets, and we’re beginning to see financials for the first time. The verdict? eCommerce is expensive, omnichannel is a requirement for scale, and very, very, few of them have reached revenues that justify private market valuations.

That’s where we are. But where are we going?

Brands in this category are redefining omnichannel. It’s no longer enough to just be present in every channel. Physical retail, marketplaces, vending, and home delivery, of course. The new expectation for DTC is to create channels out of thin air. Live streaming, SMS concierge, store-in-store, entertainment venues, restaurants, symposiums.

Brands like **Skims** have fought for channel relevance in a growing category, achieving the scale of distribution that Skims has in a short three years is a marvel, even if your founding team includes Kim K. Another standout includes **NOBULL**. The “HIIT” brand is now the official brand of Crossfit, has physical distribution, and forged strategic relationships with the likes of Spotify.

For every new channel that emerges, a new holdco and rollup appears as a path to eventual exit for brands that are gaining traction as DTC has its coming of age. Some brands are graduating to becoming their own holding companies, because why do we have insular marketing teams? Why do we have insular technology teams? We're better together.

“So many DTC brands are handicapped by a glass ceiling, struggling to grow after achieving initial successes. When it comes to a roadmap for growth, the technology and techniques we have popularized, and believe in at Shipium, are optimization tools, not enablement tools.”
- Jason Murray, Shipium



DTC Comes of Age: Brands

	Brand	Category	Noteworthy
1	Skims	Shapewear	Kim K takes the podium on our list, and at the Tokyo Olympics, as the official undergarment of the U.S. Olympic team.
2	NOBULL	Apparel	NOBULL had a transcendent year, becoming the title sponsor of The Crossfit Games, while expanding well beyond that community into broad fitness.
3	Glossier	Skincare	Glossier made a strategic retreat in their physical retail and popup strategy during COVID, but came out on top. Their shroom-themed Seattle flagship is a (literal) trip.
4	Fabletics	Apparel	Fabletics was well-positioned for growth with a brick and mortar presence that benefits from the emergence of 'comfy cozy culture'
5	Rogue Fitness	Fitness	Rogue was able to ride the wave caused by the rising tide, keeping products in stock due to on-shore manufacturing.
6	Parachute Home	Home	Parachute invested heavily in owned channels like direct mail, and most recently, brick and mortar.
7	Allbirds	Footwear	Allbirds steps out in a public market debut while their physical retail grows faster than their category offerings.
8	Away	Travel	Travel might not be a virtue, but Away's navigation of the pandemic was virtuous.
9	Truff	Food	The luxury hot sauce brand. So hot right now.



9x9 CATEGORY #1

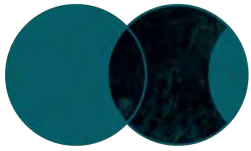
DTC Comes of Age: Digitally-native brands embracing omnichannel



NINE BY NINE

81 BRANDS CHANGING OUR WORLD

**Future
Commerce**



Disney

GAP

megababe

TOPICALS

Inclusive Brands: Championing Diversity Inside & Out:

Sponsored by Klaviyo

Inclusivity matters, full stop. Brands can no longer claim ignorance when it comes to incorporating the myriad expressions of gender, race, ethnicity, body shape/size and abilities into the fabric of their organization. They must do this both internally, and consumer-facing.

“Aspirational” brands — code for *exclusive* — are so two-thousand-and-late. *Inclusive* is the new expectation.

To the enterprise, internal diversity means changes in hiring practices, policies, and diversity amongst the executive ranks. It also means readdressing a brand’s mission and corporate culture. Over the last year, a number of brands have made public pledges around diversity, but yowzers, it’s hard to keep up with who actually fulfilled their commitment. We look forward to seeing how The 15% Pledge and Pull Up for Change continue to hold brands accountable.



According to Val Geisler, Customer Evangelist at Klaviyo, “if a brand says they’re for *everyone*, then the customer misreads this message as if the brand is for *no one*. This creates a shadow of discomfort, and when people are uncomfortable, they’re less likely to share their data. Long gone is one-size-fits-all marketing.”

Inclusivity in 2021 is not about having the historically underserved or underrepresented being **invited** to the table, it’s about **replacing the table**. See: the proliferation of Black-owned beauty brands creating products based on application, not skin color. Inclusivity in 2021 is apparel brands designed for

non-conforming bodies, such as Old Navy's shift towards 0-30 sizing as their new in-store standard.

It's this expanded view of inclusivity that inspired us not only to create this stand-alone category for this year's report, but also incorporate it as a dimension within our ranking rubric for ALL brands in the report.

As our methodology section in the end of this report shows, growth and positive future outlook are heavily weighted in our quantitative scoring. Because of this we recognize that public corporations which report earnings, and those startups which publicly announce funding rounds, will naturally gravitate to the top of our rankings.

Not the least of which is **Disney**, which can hardly be ignored for their strides in trying to provide experiences for people of all ages and backgrounds. Their investment in content like *Mulan*, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, and *Shang-Chi* also support representation of AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) persons in a year where we saw hate crimes perpetrated against those of Asian descent.

Rihanna's **Fenty** took on the Victoria's Secret model head-on, going so far as to directly hire five former Angels. The unapologetic and irreverent tone struck a chord on social media, where the brand has amassed an enviable following. The growth of Rihanna's empire has minted her as a billionaire, while providing beauty and intimate apparel to a traditionally underserved customer base.

The brands included in this category are making good on commitments and opening up lines of communication with consumers in new ways to realize growth, and to bring about change.



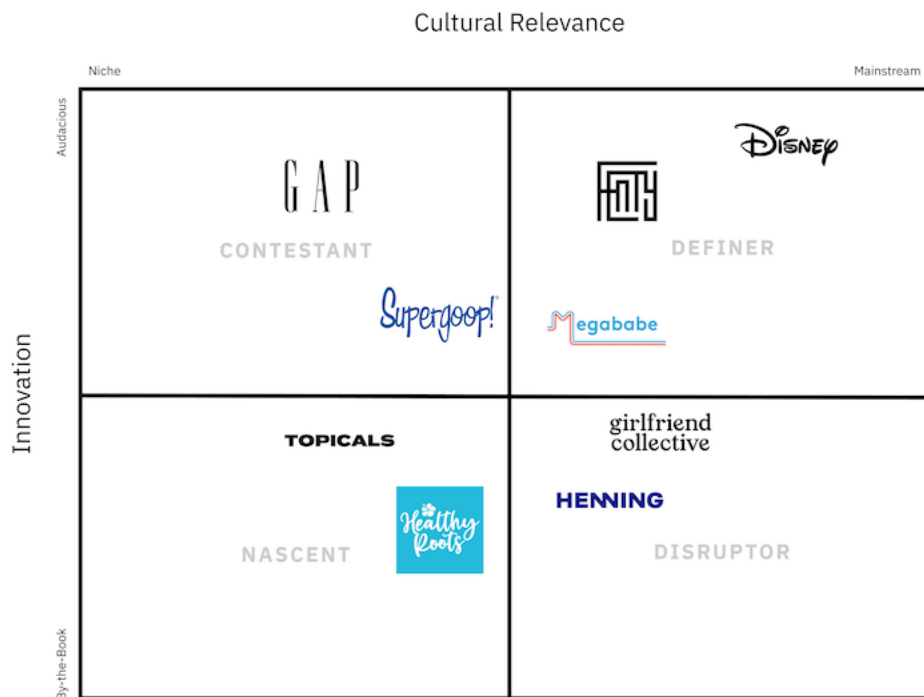
Inclusive Brands: Brands

	Brand	Category	Noteworthy
1	Disney/Marvel	Media	Back from last year's 9x9, Disney is the gold standard in offering something for everyone.
2	Fenty Fenty X Savage	Beauty/Intimates	Rihanna became a billionaire due to the success of her inclusive beauty brand, Fenty and intimates brand, Savage.
3	GAP Brands	Apparel	Old Navy gets the nod on this year's list due to size inclusivity, Athleta signs Simone Biles and Allyson Fenix. Is GAP back??
4	Megababe	Personal Care	Founder and <i>Body Talk</i> author Katie Sturino is on a mission to ensure every part of every body feels the love. Men too, with Megaman.
5	Girlfriend Collective	Apparel	Ethical and size-inclusive, this brand doesn't sacrifice anything while addressing everyone.
6	Topicals	Skincare	Inclusive "flaunt your flaws" skincare brand puts models with eczema front-and-center.
7	Henning	Apparel	This plus-sized luxury brand has us gushing.
8	Healthy Roots Dolls	Toys	Founder Yelitsa Jean-Charles is a Forbes 30-under-30, giving girls a doll with curly hair you can wash and style.
9	Supergoop!	Skincare	SPF-in-everything, for everyone, affordably-priced, and available everywhere.



9x9 CATEGORY #2

Inclusive Brands: Championing diversity inside and out



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Future Commerce



Putting the C in CX: Truly consumer-centric experiences

Talking to the brand operators right now — it's very easy to distance yourself from consumers. In fact, the word "consumer" is, itself, othering. We find that to be sort of a gross word. Customers are people, after all.



What if “customer loyalty” was a two-directional phrase? While marketers are busy trying to coax customers to purchase more through sophisticated rewards models, customers are begging for brands to be loyal *to them*.



Today's customer is acutely aware of how much power they hold. Just this year, Kellogg's Cereal Straws made a dramatic reappearance due to a poll on Change.org. Dunkaroos are in lunch boxes once again due to a Twitter meme. The *Justice League Snyder Cut* was the result of relentless campaigning by a fandom.



Very few companies are as customer-obsessed as **CAMP**, an experiential retail chain that brings the element of play back into the retail toy store concept, but without the luxury price tag of the FAO Schwartz of yesteryear. **Costco** has its own religion (Future Commerce's Brian Lange chief among them), and a Twitter thread about their hot dogs is born every 30 seconds.



Rather than being reactive, the future of brand-to-consumer relationship is to incorporate shoppers into product and category development. **Barstool** have waded into commerce, growing a formidable merch business while widening their content beyond sports. Founder Dave Portnoy can often be found deep in Twitter mentions (@stoolpresidente) engaging with fans and critics alike.

Brands featured in this category are champions of the customer. They're not just customer-obsessed, or customer-centric, their customers are practically board members with a seat at the table.



One struggle is that CX is an umbrella term...but shipping, fulfilment, availability, (etc) are all as much about CX as the branding, logo, site design, customer support.”

- Jason Murray, Shipium



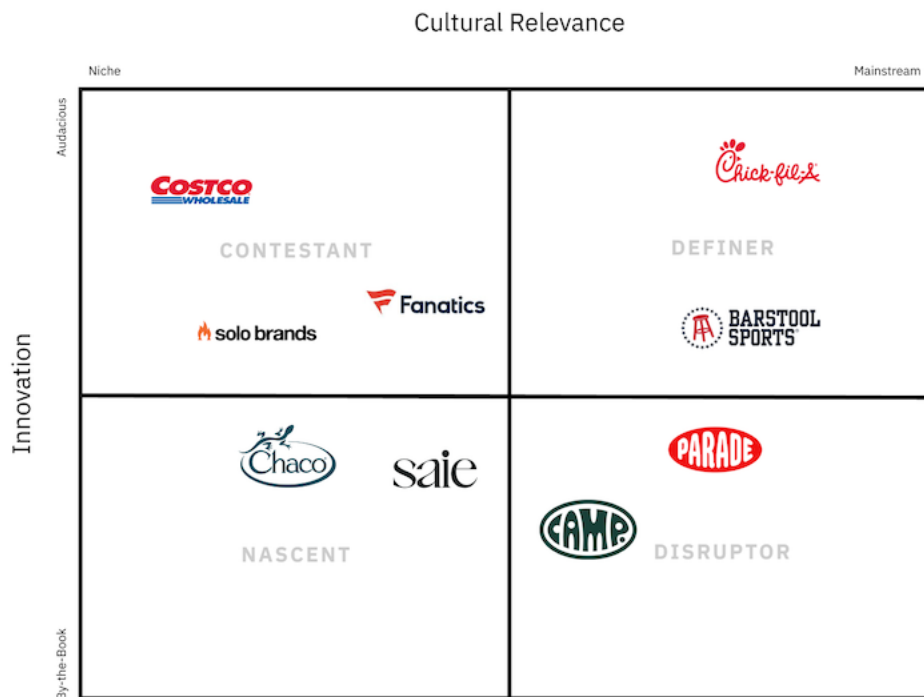
Putting the C in CX: Brands

	Brand	Category	Noteworthy
1	Chick-fil-A	Evangelical Chicken	<i>Literal</i> God-tier CX. "Hate their politics, love their chicken."
2	Costco	Retail	The best retailer in the world. Full stop.
3	Solo Brands (Chubbies, Solo Stove)	DTC Holding Co with obsessed customers	Solo is proof that a holding co can actually be more than just an efficiency of scale.
4	Barstool Sports	Media Brand with impressive DTC business	From pizza reviews to podcasts, this media brand has obsessed fans that drive 9 figures of revenue in <i>merch alone</i>
5	Fanatics	Officially Licensed Everything	The de-facto source for officially licensed gear.
6	Chacos	Footwear	Chacos' repair program is next level. We only wish this was available for everything we buy.
7	CAMP	Modern Experiential Toy Store	CAMP built a toy store for their customers to <i>play</i> in. What a novel concept.
8	Saie	Clean Beauty	Saie drives innovation to fulfill its promise to its customer to do no harm.
9	Parade	Size-inclusive womxn's intimates	Parade is one of the few brands engaging the trans community. Size-inclusive from day one. One of the few brands to make a repeat appearance from 2020.



9x9 CATEGORY #3

Putting the C in CX: Truly consumer-centric experiences



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81 BRANDS CHANGING OUR WORLD

**Future
Commerce**



FOOD52

goop

Grove®
COLLABORATIVE

SLICE

Rarible

Niche Marketplaces: Selling a narrow category of goods

Sorry, Mr. Gates. Curation, not content, is King. Fortunately, Niche Marketplaces excel in both. Modern curation can take many forms. Education. Expert reviews. Editorial. We're starting to see the traditional media approach being spun up as Internet media, and they quickly become a destination for purchasing goods.

No matter whether you're in home and bedding, furniture, or pet care, it's tough to stand out right now.

Where a brand chooses to sell its goods is important. Selling direct to consumer is just one part of the pie. As those brands become omnichannel they're going to need to find places to be discovered and validated. Niche marketplaces are an ideal place to find both of these in one. And so that's what you find here - the emergence of marketplaces focused on category.

Rarible is more than an NFT marketplace, it is a curated art gallery for high-quality NFT projects. Beyond selling digital goods, it is also a community forum for discussion around emerging projects, as well as a democratized commons for voting which projects deserve to be featured. Rarible also launched a token which produces a yield for holders, which shares profits from the sales of the platform to token holders, rewarding holders for launching projects on the niche platform.

Other physical retail marketplaces are recognizable as being more than just commerce markets, but also content plays. **Slice**, **Food52**, and **Goop** are all formidable content-to-commerce giants. Goop makes a return appearance for this year's *Nine by Nine*, after launching Goop Lab in 2020, and expanding their offerings (beyond the jade egg) into apparel, travel, and philanthropy.

Niche marketplaces are setting the stage for the future of DTC brands. In the future, every brand will be a marketplace. We're seeing the beginning stages of this with the success of post-purchase co-selling marketplaces. Watch this space.

“By 2025, the thing that everybody will see as the modern expression of direct to consumer eCommerce will have a marketplace-like component.

- Phillip Jackson, Future Commerce



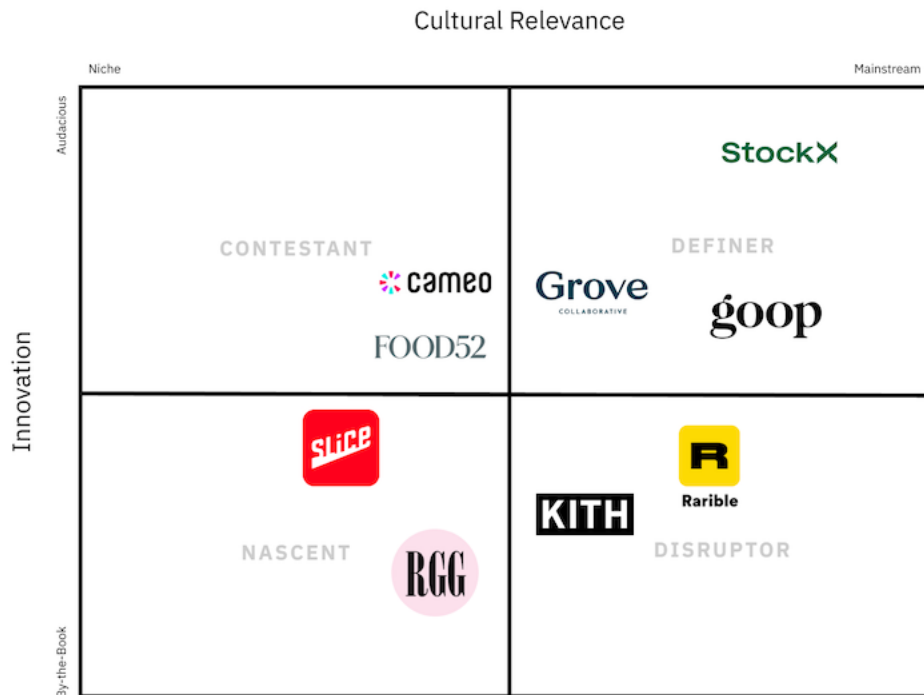
Niche Marketplaces: Brands

	Brand	Category	Noteworthy
1	Food52	Food/Bev	For millennials like us it's weird to say but true - Food52 paved the way and is now the OG niche marketplace.
2	Cameo	Talent	Cameo gave us a talent marketplace to connect with celebrities, building a \$100M business in the process.
3	Goop	Health/beauty	Gwen set the standard for audience-first marketplaces, and jade eggs.
4	Kith	Lifestyle	Ronnie Fieg created a brand that is both aspirational, and accessible. He made New Balance cool again. The new standard for building retail marketplaces.
5	Grove Collaborative	Consumer packaged Goods	Curated products that are good for your home, and good for the environment.
6	Radical Girl Gang	Retailer	A marketplace for independent women-owned brands.
7	Rarible	NFT Art Gallery	2021 might be remembered as the year of the NFT, and Rarible is the MoMA – Museum of Meta Art.
8	StockX	Luxury	The luxury resale platform authenticating everything from Yeezys to Birkins.
9	Slice	Food	Discover great pizza, support local businesses.



9x9 CATEGORY #4

Niche Marketplaces: Selling a narrow category of goods



NINE BY NINE

81 BRANDS CHANGING OUR WORLD

 **Future
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Private-Label Grails: House brands elevating their retail parent

The Holy Grail: something Karl Marx tells you to find. But seriously, these days Grail means the ultimate thing you spend money on. So how in the world could a grail be part of a private label?

TARGET.

Cat & Jack



Hearth & Hand

Smartly[™]



**GOOD &
GATHER**

*more
than
magic*

The reason private labels are becoming grails is because private label products are becoming better than name brand products. Costco's **Kirkland** trail mix? Better than name brand. Compare Whole Foods 365 with traditional CPG organics. We know what we would pick. These brands and others have created incredible private label products that are not only desirable because of their excellent, excellent quality, but are also expertly designed to be more easily merchandised and marketed. They compete with other modern brands on every level.

Target, for instance, began revamping its private labels a few years back. This is not new by any means, but it launched their private men's label Goodfellow & Co. about three or four years ago which eventually replaced the license that it had with Mossimo. And now they've just launched a pet food brand called Kindfull, which looks way more interesting than the other stuff sitting on the shelf.

When considering all the new, beautiful and hyped brands of the world, think for a second about the likely volume of customers discovering and purchasing these sleek entries, compared to dollars spent on house brands. They can't hold a candle to the scale of big-box private labels that are being sought out by consumers now. From **Trader Joe's** to **Amazon**, some private labels have become synonymous with superlative quality.

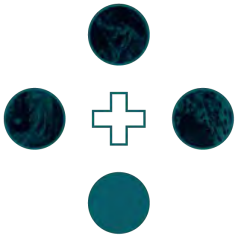
The dirty truth is, a lot of these in-house brands may not even be recognizable as a low-cost, value brand anymore. Get ready for a new world of best in class brands created by in-house teams.

Because house brands aren't traditionally broken out into sales figures, it's difficult to rank the success of these. As such, this is one of two unranked categories on this year's *Nine by Nine*.



Private-Label Grails: Brands

Brand	Category	Noteworthy
Cat and Jack (Target)	Apparel	If you feel like Target dominates this list... it's because they do.
Hearth and Hand (Magnolia/Target)	Home	The Gaines own the home category, so when they teamed up with Target the outcome was doomed to the wildest of success.
Smartly (Target)	Beauty	Price has always won private label customers. Smartly takes it to a whole 'nother level with sub-\$2 beauty and personal care.
Nod (Tuft & Needle/Amazon)	Home/bedding	The respect for the quality of Tuft and Needle's mattress was easy to transfer to an Amazon exclusive with Nod.
Trader Joes	Food/bev	"TJ's" has become universally understood and loved. But this house brand isn't just copying established brands, it's creating new products in a more innovative way than anyone else in Food/bev. Grail.
Good and Gather (Target)	Food/bev	It's difficult to overstate how many brands Target has that live rent-free in the minds of a consumer.
Amazon Basics	Luggage	Do we want Amazon bags almost as much as Away? Pretty much.
More Than Magic (Target)	Beauty	Aptly titled, this tween beauty brand is on-trend, and sought-after.
REI	Apparel/Outdoor	A coveted house label that commands as much respect as any storied outdoor brand, but for less.



Metaverse as Mall: Brands exploring the interplay between the Virtual and the Physical

You'd be forgiven for hearing the phrase of the year, 'The Metaverse', and having a visceral reaction. The phrase is invariably followed by an onslaught of word salad: a confused or unintelligible mixture of seemingly random words and phrases. Is it linked to VR? Is there a cryptocurrency component? Is there a volatile speculation tied to digital pictures of clouds and rocks?

Yes. On all accounts.

But it's the sum of its parts being greater than the whole that makes the concept of a metaverse so compelling. Our economy, societies, and even our identity within those communities, now have digital counterparts. That counterpart now doesn't just have broad awareness in the culture, it has broad *adoption*. This is what makes the collection of seemingly disparate technologies so compelling: The Metaverse isn't going to replace real life: it adds an additional layer of depth and interaction on top of the real world.

The Metaverse is broken down into nine distinct areas of focus to replicate real life, digitally:

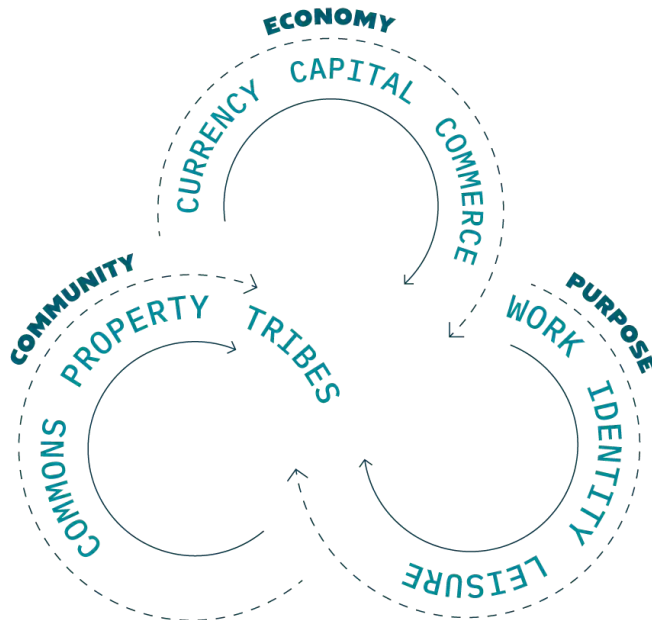


Figure: The Metaverse now has a functional society

We have a thriving meta **Economy**—marketplaces, investment and lending, and a currency to transaction. **Communities** have formed around shared spaces, shared values, and the goods that are being transacted. And many are finding that they can participate in these communities with a digital extension of their consciousness. Said more simply, your **Identity** in the metaverse is one of your own creation.

Play-to-earn games like Zed run and Axie Infinity provide for entertainment, but they also have provided new types of jobs. Virtual stablehands are being hired to manage Zed horses. There are more Axie token holders in the Philippines than credit card holders. It's time to take notice that meaningful employment in the metaverse is here.

The boundary between physical and digital is becoming much thinner.

How does this affect physical retail? By 2025, we're projecting that the modern definition of omnichannel should include digital goods sales. If not collectibles, then tokens that provide access to exclusive marketplaces, clubs, or events.



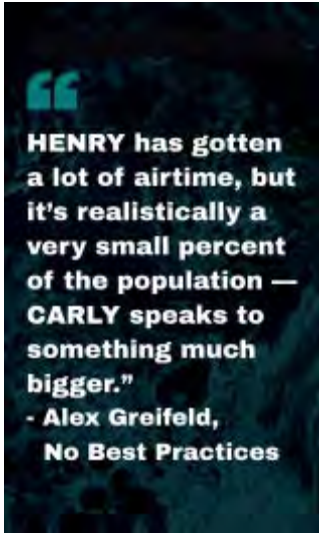
Metaverse as Mall: Brands

Brand	Category	Noteworthy
Ethereum	Currency	Smart contracts on Ethereum make us redefine what currency can be. Currency in the metaverse is infrastructure.
Aave	Finance	Decentralized finance allows LPs to provide liquidity and receive an APY. Borrowers can pay an APR. \$4B market cap and \$14B assets under management.
OpenSea	Commerce	OpenSea is the digital shopping mall of the Metaverse.
Loot	Property	Vine founder Dom Hofman's latest creation. In the metaverse, we don't build top-down. Loot is in-game items... that have no game yet.
Roblox	Commons	Howard Schultz imagined a third place between home and work. Roblox is the fourth place.
Axie Infinity	Work	Play-to-earn gaming might provide the on-ramp to new jobs, guilds, and organized labor.
Fortnite	Leisure	The night club of the metaverse. Concerts are just the beginning.
Discord	Tribes/Communities	This isn't even a contest - Discord is where the Metaversians come together.
Bored Ape Yacht Club	Identity and Intellectual Property	Bored Ape is more than a profile picture project. It's a universe of IP that is available copyright-free to all who hold the NFT. Including traditional corporations.



C.A.R.L.Y (Can't Afford Real Life Yet)

C.A.R.L.Y. (Can't Afford Real Life Yet) is a psychographic of a consumer who hasn't made it yet. They share expenses amongst their peer group, and believe memes are a personality type. They single-handedly revived Crocs. Status now also relies on how 'very online' one is. FOMO is at an all-time high, as the half-life of a meme shortens, and being 'ootl' (out of the loop) means social isolation.



CARLY is a stark contrast to her counterpart, H.E.N.R.Y. (Higher Earner, Not Rich Yet), who you came to loathe during the past year. You know the dude: posting social justice tweets from a private cabana by the beach in Tulum, equating global travel with becoming more patriotic, and sharing his receipts from Erewhon. Ugh.

CARLY's worldviews stand in stark contrast to HENRY's. Where HENRY is a staunch atheist, CARLY actively seeks spirituality. The rise in numerology and astrology in the past 18 months tell only part of the story. CARLY holds ironic seances, does live Tiktok tarot, believes in manifesting, and burns sage. Holding a Telfar bag is as much a signal of affluence as it is a signal of your ideological leanings. It's not that CARLY doesn't have money to spend, it's that they spend it irrationally, and often at the expense of basic necessities. In the words of one Gen Z CARLY: "I'll go without lunch for a week to afford eyelash extensions."



While we covered CARLY in-depth in our inaugural edition of *Nine by Nine*, there is more to say. This year we saw CARLY's coming out as a consumer. Last year's report focused on how CARLY thinks. This year, we focus intently on what they buy. This unfortunately means that CARLY is reconciling with the effects of fast fashion while also buying up **DUNKIN** merch. It's complicated.

SHEIN

DUNKIN'

afterpay ↻

The creator economy has enabled this generation to become more entrepreneurial. Why buy expensive candles when you can make them for yourself and your friends? The DIY Era means that they can learn just about anything on Youtube, memorialize themselves making and learning in public via **TikTok**, and sell their wares via marketplaces like **Depop**.



To CARLY, everything is a content funnel: starting with their pastimes and ending with their own journey to enlightenment.

In order to connect more deeply with CARLY, brands will seek to connect with them on a spiritual level. They will seek to be more inclusive than with their millennial counterparts, which is no easy task. Brands' channels and tactics will need to evolve, too. We predict a wave of job recs for "chief meme officers" in the near future.

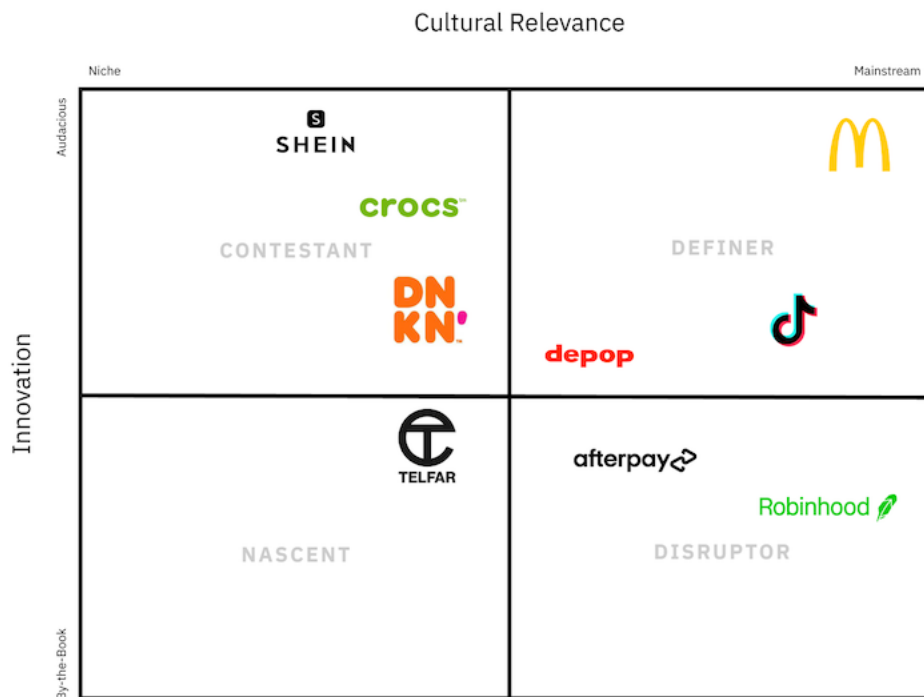


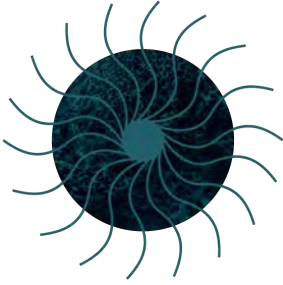
C.A.R.L.Y.: Brands

	Brand	Category	Noteworthy
1	McDonald's	Food	McDonald's ability to command the culture is unrivaled. Collaborations with Travis Scott had people lining up for hours to get a meal. Merch sales included a chicken nugget-shaped pillow.
2	TikTok	Social Media	TikTok videos aren't shaping our culture, the TikTok algorithm is.
3	Crocs	Footwear	2021 is the year of the Croc. Yeezy's most sought-after shoe is a knock-off Croc (a Croc-off?) Selehe Bumberry designed luxury Croc-offs. Even Allbirds copied them. Sheesh.
4	Shein	Apparel	Shein gamified "hauls" (buying more than you need) and then showing it off on live streams.
5	DePop	Resale Marketplace	Imagine making a resale app that allows you to slide into DMs. That's DePop.
6	Dunkin Donuts	Food	Dunkin X Charli D'Amelio pioneered fast food influencer collabs, and a line of merch that was painfully self-aware.
7	Afterpay	Finance	Making BNPL available IRL.
8	Robinhood	Finance	2021 will be the year that "meme stocks" taught us what a short squeeze was, launched an SEC investigation, and launched \$HOOD on the NASDAQ.
9	Telfar	Apparel	Telfar Clemens' genderless "Bushwick Birkin" bag became accessible to all in 2021.



9x9 CATEGORY #7
C.A.R.L.Y. (Can't Afford Real Life Yet)





Liquid
Death

MSCHF



Podsuite

Performance Art as Commerce: Auteurs, Artists, and Anarchists

Dadaism. Performance Art. Maximalism. Whatever you call it, these brands leverage absurdism to make their voices heard.

Modern performance art uses commerce as its canvas. The brand operators fall into three operating modes: **Artists, Auteurs, and Anarchists**. Brands in this category don't make products for mass consumption. They create ideas that have viral reach. Absurdists are adapting products to make social statements on capitalism and consumption. Dadaists of the 19th century did much the same, and in this way, some brands have become the New Dadaists.

A prescient example of **The Anarchist** is heavy metal canned water brand **Liquid Death's** painting of 100 skateboards... with Tony Hawk's blood. The storyline: he has bound his soul to the board.

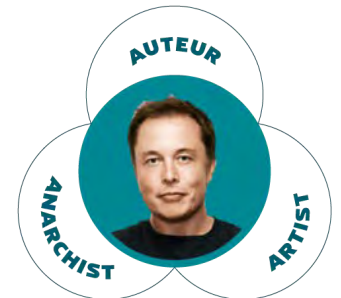
While shocking, the stunt was effectively a copycat of **MSCHF's** banned Nike customizations as a collaboration with Lil Nas X. The so-called Satan Shoes contained a drop of blood as well as a pentagram and the number 666. MSCHF's creation of a miniature toy line of failed startups, and late capitalism games such as Finger on the App, firmly position it as an **Auteur** of absurdist commerce.

And then there's **KFC**. Their steamy web shorts series featuring a "Sexy Colonel", played by Mario Lopez; and their collaboration with PC manufacturer CoolerMax which featured a gaming PC with a warming drawer for chicken nuggets firmly positions KFC as an **Artist**.

The standout in this category is the one and only **Elon Musk**, who is the embodiment of the three personas represented in this category. Underground trains, flame throwers, Dogecoin, and rockets launching Teslas into the atmosphere — nothing is too absurd for Elon.

Consumer brands are the most shocking boundary-pushers today. We'd tell David Blaine to eat his heart out, *but he might just do it*. We live in the attention economy. Venturing into the absurd garners eyeballs without having to pay for every single interaction.

To the performance artist brand, every day is April Fool's.





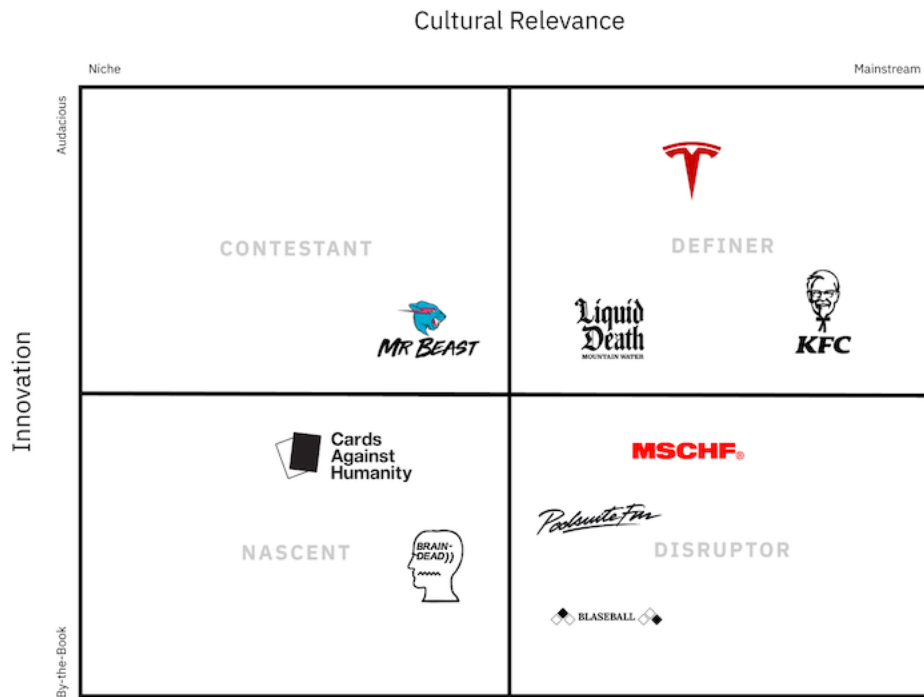
Performance Art as Commerce

	Brand	Category	Noteworthy
1	Tesla/ SpaceX (Elon Musk)	All	The PT Barnum of performance art, Elon uses his various platforms (Launching a Tesla on a SpaceX rocket), to Dadaist crypto pumping (Dogecoin), to sci-fi semi-realities (Hyperloop).
2	MSCHF	Auteur	Founder Gabriel Whaley continues to set the bar for Dadaist stunts like pre-purchasing a “Public Domain Cartoon Mouse” collectible, which will deliver in 2024 when Mickey Mouse enters the public domain.
3	Liquid Death	Anarchist	Metalheads drink water, too.
4	KFC	Artist	Ok, but what about a sexy Colonel Sanders?
5	Mr. Beast	Auteur	The Youtuber is now a restaurateur, a venture capitalist, and a philanthropist.
6	Cards Against Humanity	Anarchist	You can be a dadaist too, back and forth, forever. (Just don’t play it with your mom.)
7	Blaseball	Anarchist	Blaseball is a baseball simulation horror game.
8	Brain Dead	Artist	This collective is changing how to bring artists to market.
9	Poolsuite	Artist	Relive 1992 again, even if you weren’t alive the first time. Poolsuite is the embodiment of <i>anemoia</i> —nostalgia for a time that existed before you were even born.



9x9 CATEGORY #8

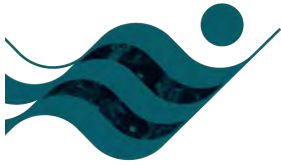
Performance Art as Commerce: Auteurs, Artists, and Anarchists



NINE BY NINE

81 BRANDS CHANGING OUR WORLD

Future Commerce



Walmart ✨

Calm

GHOST 🖱️

Wellness Brands

The New Abnormal has arrived. We're in the weird world of post-pandemic confusion, and health continues to take front-and-center in our psyches. Not just physical health—mental as well, as months of isolation, adaptation, and information overload have filled the glass of our cognitive capacity over the brim. Again, the pandemic played the role of great accelerator, as GenZ was already hyper aware of the importance of wellness.

Brands that take a holistic view of their impact on their customers, employees, and partners—how they're influencing the physical, mental, relational and more—will find gains in the market to be consistent and more stable. Reputation, NPS, retention... the list goes on. This isn't just about a better world. This is smart business.

Brands like **Apple** and **Walmart** are amongst the highest ranked in this list, due to their outsized impact. Walmart Health expanded its offering to bring health services to physical stores. As more than 90% of Americans live within 10 minutes of a Walmart, their efforts stand to be the most impactful, especially considering their creation of an insulin product. Apple ranks highly due to their non-hardware policy changes, which not only include privacy changes, but also a commitment to combat CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material) on iCloud.

But look to a new breed of brands that built the foundation of their company on being a positive influence on their customers - and beyond. Brands like **Madhappy** have built improving mental health into the core of everything they sell.

The more unpredictable the world becomes, the more we seek safety and shelter in routine. Wellness brands promote not just a healthy body or peace of mind, brands that rank highly in this category encourage other category competitors to aim higher, to expand their own offerings and services.





Wellness Brands: Brands

	Brand	Category	Noteworthy
1	Apple	Health	Apple's commitment to healthcare also includes digital wellness, child safety, and privacy.
2	Moderna	Pharma	Pioneering mRNA didn't just unlock the Covid vaccine, it will fundamentally change therapeutics.
3	Walmart Health	Retail	From launching their own insulin, to building clinics into each of their own stores, Walmart is bringing healthcare to rural America.
4	Athletic Greens	Nutrition	This monoprodut brand has delivered on product innovation in a crowded market. NSF Certification makes this the most credentialed greens you can consume.
5	Calm	Mental Health	Calm partnered with Kaiser Permanente, demonstrating the seriousness of their commitment to mental health.
6	Modern Fertility	Health	Fertility is one of the most important considerations for women's health. Modern Fertility is making it a more accessible category.
7	Hims/Hers	Health	Now public via SPAC, Hims set the bar for DTC health brands.
8	Alma	Marketplace	Mental health is one of the most important parts of holistic health and Alma is the real deal.
9	Ghost	Supplements/Beverage	Supplements for everyday life, gamers, and for every body.



9x9 CATEGORY #9 Wellness Brands

Cultural Relevance



NINE BY NINE
81 BRANDS CHANGING OUR WORLD

**Future
Commerce**

Conclusion:

Of the over 200 brands we rated from our wealth of contributions in our Future Commerce Expert Network, we distilled it down to 81. Businesses have a number of challenges ahead in 2021 and beyond. The goal for Nine by Nine is to nurture this group and maintain it as a long-running program here at Future Commerce. As time goes on, we'll be making revisions to the list and making additions as we see new brands entering into the marketplace. We'll also revise the positions of brands based on news or information that has come to light since the original publication of this inaugural edition. We hope to inspire others to create experiences that bring a sense of joy and fulfillment to the customer relationship. As customers face unknown hardships in the years to come, they will willingly part with their hard-earned money for products, goods, and services. Our hope is that a bit more of those dollars will go to brands that are making this world a better place for all of those involved: from factory workers, to logistics teams, to customer experience personnel.

Every human being involved in the creation and acquisition of goods deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. We feel tremendous confidence that this list of 81 brands on Nine by Nine represents those who have the greatest opportunity to fulfill that vision.

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Learn more at www.shipium.com



Chord: Contributor

About Chord

Chord's headless commerce platform helps brands enhance their businesses by giving them cutting-edge headless commerce technology and access to meaningful first-party data. Chord's unique offering of scalable headless tech software, paired with its sophisticated data management, insights, and governance tools, is made for commerce entrepreneurs by commerce entrepreneurs.



Gorgias: Contributor

Gorgias is a leading helpdesk for Shopify, Magento and BigCommerce merchants where retailers can manage all of their customer communication and tickets in one platform (including email, social media, SMS, live chat, phone). It's powered with machine learning to automate up to 25% of commonly asked questions, and seamlessly integrates into your existing tech stack to deliver better customer support. To learn more, visit gorgias.com/futurecommerce.



Avalara: Contributor

Avalara helps businesses of all sizes scale globally and get tax compliance right. With international tax solutions from Avalara, businesses can manage duties and cross-border tariffs, calculate VAT and GST, automate tariff code classification for shipments, obtain registrations, and manage sales tax returns so they can grow globally and serve customers around the world. Headquartered in Seattle, Avalara has offices across the U.S., and in Brazil, Europe, and India.



Nosto: Contributor

Nosto enables retailers to deliver personalized digital shopping experiences at every touch point, across every device. An AI-Powered Personalization Platform designed for ease of use, Nosto empowers retailers to build, launch and optimize 1:1 omnichannel marketing campaigns and digital experiences without the need for dedicated IT resources or a lengthy implementation process. Leading commerce brands in over 100 countries use Nosto to grow their business and delight their customers. To learn more, visit www.nosto.com

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About Future Commerce

Future Commerce is a retail media research startup focused on helping eCommerce businesses create strategic vision. We create content for modern brand marketers to shape the future of their retail and DTC businesses. Our podcasts, original research, essays, and video programming serve over 40,000 decision makers in retail, DTC, marketplace, services, and technology companies that power commerce experiences all around the world.

The eponymously-named **Future Commerce Podcast** has a global audience of over 25,000 listeners. Our media properties include our weekly **Insiders** letter, which are long-form essays that cover the psychological effects of commerce, and how brand marketers, merchants, founders, capitalists, and operators can adapt to meet customer needs. **Step by Step** is a quarterly miniseries which covers the A-Z of a topical area of customer experience, from marketing automation to logistics. **The Senses** is a weekly newsletter that aggregates retail and eCommerce news, and synthesizes it for busy operators to make sense of rapidly-changing conditions that affect their business. Our forthcoming series **Infinite Shelf**, hosted by Ingrid Milman Cordy, will focus on omnichannel and in-store technologies.

The **Future Commerce Content Studio** partners with technology service providers and consumer brands who desire to create longform content for their growing audiences and communities. Our clients include Shopify, Klaviyo, Octane AI, and Chord.

The **Future Commerce Expert Network** is a closed group of 80 operators and decision makers in retail trade.

Future Commerce was founded in 2016 by Phillip Jackson and Brian Lange, and is headquartered in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Nine by Nine Diversity Index

Amongst the 200 brands rated on our second annual Nine by Nine report, nearly 40% are female-founded or have a female chief executive. Roughly 20% have BIPOC or AAPI representation as a founder or chief executive.

Of the 81 finalists of our report, the overall diversity breakdown was 29.2% female-founded and 22.2% POC representation overall.

Methodology

With learnings from the 2020 report under our belts, the Future Commerce team set out to make the 2021 9x9 development process bigger and better – in terms of both scope and substance.

After qualitatively assessing Categories & Brands included on last year's report for fit within the current zeitgeist, we updated Category hypotheses and Brands to consider within each, which have critical relevance at this particular moment in time. In partnership with market research firm [Method + Mode](#), we invited the **Future Commerce Expert Network** to rate interest in 12 potential Categories, and nominate up to three brands for each. This quantitative poll revealed the 9 most compelling Categories to include in the report, and helped round out our brand list.

We ended up with a whopping 200 brands for consideration this year.

The next phase was building our scoring rubric. Five dimensions were included in this year's brand score:

- Outlook/Profitability
- Cultural Relevance, powered by [Surge.ai](#)
- Earned Media Value (EMV)
- Product Innovativeness
- Social Consciousness: Internal and Customer-Facing Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

A variety of sources were used to calculate a score across each dimension for a Total Score for each brand; sources included CrunchBase Pro, earnings press releases/media reports, Google News/Trends metrics and other publicly available data.

Our Cultural Relevance scores were powered by Surge.ai. Surge.ai is a real-time insights platform, dedicated to surfacing unified consumer behaviors that unlock knowledge around the consumer journey. Brand Mentions is sourced

via Instagram and includes all-time history of both brand and user-defined mentions. YoY YouTube Search contains all brand-related keywords from July 2020 through July 2021. These metrics were chosen as a proxy for Cultural Relevance given overall consumer penetration of Instagram and YouTube, as well as consumer reliance on these channels across the customer journey. Finally, we conducted 1-on-1 interviews with sponsors and select members of the Future Commerce Expert Network, to provide depth and context for why key brands made the list this year.

Our hope is that through leveraging qualitative & quantitative inputs, from a variety of sources & collaborators in conjunction with the Future Commerce editorial POV, the 2021 9x9 Report delivers a unique, thought-provoking take on the current retail landscape.

Rubric

Our scoring methodology for 2021 is found below. Future Commerce, partnered with Method + Mode, developed a scoring rubric to assist in the ranking of the report.

A number of updates were made from the 2020 report. Namely, *Social Consciousness* was given its own scoring, and EMV was deprioritized when compared with 2020.

	<i>Metric</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Model "Perfect" Score</i>
Outlook	Subjective Analysis	Excellent / Good / Neutral / Fair / Poor	5-1	5
	YoY Stock Change (if Public)	Up / NA or Flat / Down	1, 0, -1	1
	Investment in Past 12 Months (if Private)	Yes / No	1, 0	1
Cultural Relevance, Powered by Surge.ai	All-Time Social Media Mentions: Index to Median	Outperforming / Over-Indexing / Median / Under-Indexing / Underperforming / NA	5 - 0	5
	YoY Change in YouTube Search Results	Up / NA or Flat / Down	1, 0, -1	1
Earned Media Value	Subjective Analysis	Mass Media / Endemic Media / Trade / None	3 - 0	3
	Google News Hits: August 15, 2021	Extremely Outperforming / Sig Above Median / Above Median / Below Median / NA	5-1	5
Innovation	Subjective Analysis	Disruptor / Competitor / Entry / NA	3 - 0	3
Social Consciousness	<i>Internal</i> : Diverse & Inclusive Organization / Executives		1 - 0	1
	<i>External</i> : Diverse & Inclusive Positioning / Mission or Product		1 - 0	1
Brand Score				25