

# PARADIGM SHIFT

Black Neon Digital Future Forecast 2020



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### Introduction

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A combination of magic and logic, alchemy and analytics or heart and head, are what guides us at Black Neon Digital to look head and plan how we will shape the future for ourselves and our clients.

Whatever phrase you choose to identify with we can be certain you must trust your intuition and use that as a source to guide your business decisions. We also know that when intuition is backed by data, clear business direction with aligned flourishing people, we are onto something.

Here we will share with you a few of the macro trends we feel are going to become increasingly important for 2020. As we reassess what is important to us, we open the door to exciting business models and ways of communicating ideas.

The common thread between each of our trends is that they signal a shift in perception, bringing close the things we value most, at the heart, respecting people. In essence they are not trends at all, they are a collective movement, a paradigm shift.

We hope you enjoy exploring our themes:

- Value-Able
- Crafting Access
- Data Diamonds
- Close To Home
- Sustainability Imperative
- Too Much Information
- Lab Destiny



Jodi Muter-Hamilton  
Founder, Black Neon Digital

# 1. Value-Able



We will see a continued increase in values-based businesses emerging. Such as vegan approved clothing and clean beauty products. We have to be careful that we are not just shifting focus and problems around without truly addressing issues.

For example vegan garments, accessories and shoes are made from man-made plastic and synthetic fibres, unless they have been created using plant-based, bio materials and leather alternatives. The leather industry has its own issues too, so as always the answer is not black and white. We know we have a 'plastics problem' so how we approach making new garments that do not have a negative, but perhaps even a planet positive impact will be crucial to understand. Our communication of garment origins and qualities are key to ensure we are not misleading consumers and 'greenwashing'. We need to offer information and allow consumers to make their own informed buying decision.

The gender-neutral product offering

will grow beyond wardrobe staples as we see increasing benefits for customers and retailers alike. If you are a retailer you'll know that having the opportunity to sell the same product to as many different people (genders, sizes, ethnicities) as possible is a wonderful thing. We know that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' perfect product, but if there were retailers would be very happy.

Businesses such as The Modist, founded by Ghizlan Guenez and their brand Layeur have created an extremely desirable offer. Not only for the modest market, but for women who are interested in universal elegance. Whilst staying true to their heart, The Modist have challenged preconceived ideas and opened the door for others to be curious about what is on offer from a beautifully curated online store.

These business models have shown success that looks set to continue to grow, heralding that traditional retail approaches need to become more inclusive and innovative.



Clockwise from top: Layeur by The Modist; Mashu

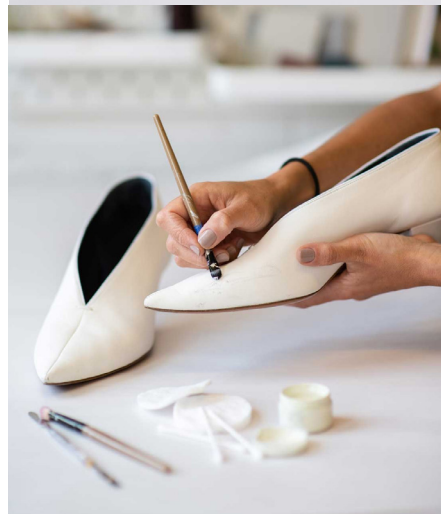
Clockwise from top:  
Photo by Aaron Marcus  
Sutton, for The Restory; Layla  
Sargent, Founder of The Seam,  
wearing an outfit made by her  
grandmother, the main  
inspiration behind The Seam;  
the desk where Layla sews.

## 2. Crafting Access

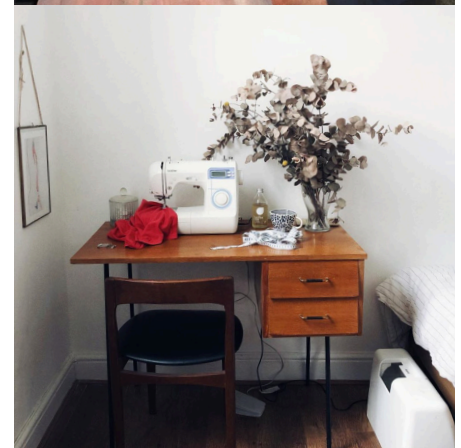
We will see an exciting entrepreneur boom creating values-based businesses founded by people who want to bridge traditional fashion craft skills with access and convenience for the consumer. These businesses honour tradition whilst creating what is essentially technology and communications platforms. Previously, we have seen brands work with remotely located craftspeople connected by NGO's or not-for-profit organisations or by visiting and representing garments for a different market.

Now, we will see the makers become equal and central to the business. They are the business facilitated by a technology platform. We may even see bold moves that address profit share, such as dividing profit equally between all people/ shareholders that make up the business. This may even extend to counting the planet as a shareholder to ensure planetary care needs are met and can be funded by profit share. Existing examples of 'Crafting Access' include The Restory, an on-demand service providing modern aftercare for luxury fashion accessories, and The Seam, a social enterprise who connect skilled seamstresses and tailors to people in their neighbourhood who need clothes made or altered, a bit like Uber.

Another iteration to this is the rise in the fashion rental and resale market. In which we have seen many new players come into play through



last year, what we are looking forward to finding out this year is how the numbers stack up. What is also exciting to see will be, how far we push the boundaries of the rental concept. Could new outfit choices be selected and left in our gym locker ready, like an amazon locker meets changing room? That would be great, but would the distribution and delivery costs be prohibitive, how much would someone really pay for convenience?



### 3. Data Diamonds

Not everything has to make money! Shocking to imagine, but not all products or business ideas directly need to make money. Businesses large and small will be increasingly testing retail formats, product ideas and new markets in an agile way. We see this through pop-up shops - such as the Glossier's recent London venture - unusual partnerships and limited edition products distributed in a variety of ways to test locations, marketing and sales channels. This is a great way for brands who do not currently sell direct-to-consumer to test the market without over committing resources or finance.

Data and analytics have a huge part to play to enable businesses large and small to understand their customers in a more informed way. Data is what makes experimental retail valuable.

If brands fail to capture data and engage with their new, receptive audience and potential customers they will miss a huge opportunity to understand what their customer really wants and grow their business. Recruiting a Data Analyst will certainly be something brands and even editorial publications will be looking to do this year, if they haven't already.



Ensuring you capture and make the best use of data is an essential part of getting to know and keep your customers. Once you understand your customer you can craft interactions that are truly personal and meaningful. Nurturing a relationship can be extremely rewarding and valuable for both customer and retailer.

**Cathy McCabe, CEO, Proximity Insight**



## 4. Close To Home

Over the past decade our focus has been on creating and expanding our online footprint. We have increasingly looked at new ways to create social media reach and gain market share by utilising multiple online channels.

Whilst this will remain important we will revisit what we are doing to reach our audience in real life (IRL), face-to-face to create authentic dialogue and engagement rooted in human connection. The term “think globally, act locally” aka ‘GloCal’ comes to mind as we act locally but give access to the moment via online global reach such as podcasts, live-streams etc. This

The creative landscapes are the best place to look for some of the answers, with STEAM debates, hackathons, art-rich programming and ideas agencies like ours, the world is becoming smaller and these new modes of thinking and making in the on and offline are becoming seemingly more fluid. At CommuneEAST we are currently building augmented landscapes that weave VR into the mix, VR has been a lonely place for a long while, but hacking gaming tech and working with coders we have been able to drive a new vision of that, a place where augmentation, VR and IRL work together and is alive for contributors to jump in. We will enable live experiences that can loop in virtual reality and projected digital realities together, you can draw, build, creative and it can exist in front of another persons’ eyes for them to observe and interact. The extension of the synthetic, the digital and the real-time all working together, this where things start to become interesting.

**Leanne Elliott Young, Co-founder, CommuneEAST**



*Personal Space*

The Wing, London

will also be tipped on its head when we can be ‘local’ across the world at the same time, all experiencing the same event or instance but apart. What business will be next to ride alongside the Peloton phenomenon? How do we create a meaningful experience both on and offline?

Imagine if Instagram vanished tomorrow, how would we safeguard our community? Amazing email newsletters, one-on-one zoom calls with founders...what can we exchange to cross-pollinate and add value to each other, after all a relationship is not a one way broadcast. We will also

When curating the member’s events programme at The Wing, The analogy I tend to use is that of a magazine, only this magazine exists IRL. In this instance, I am the editor of said ‘monthly magazine’ and so it’s my responsibility to ensure that there are some great regular columns, special guests and a fantastic lead story. Event curators, like myself, are ultimately in charge of making sure there’s an excellent balance in the programme and that we are not only thematically hitting all of our key strategic pillars such as health, contemporary art, politics and business but that we are also looking at all of these themes through a varied, diverse lens and through different formats such as in conversations, workshops, facilitated discussions and one on ones to avoid ‘panel fatigue’.

**Jade Coles, Lead Events Curator, The Wing**

increasingly experiment with exclusivity around access. Such as private events, invite only online augmented reality experiences, exclusive products for those who attended events in real life as we explore what it takes to make one-of-a-kind experiences. As marketers we have given so much ‘content’ away for free, now it’s time to see what people will really value, what we choose to monetise and what we choose to grow.

Clockwise from  
top: Photo by  
Aleksandra Jankovic;  
both Envelope 1976



## 5. Sustainability Imperative

No longer can we ignore the need to create a plan for sustainability and communicate our vision. Looking at PEOPLE and PLANET, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) and robust ways that support transitioning to a more sustainable product and business model such as B-Corporation, businesses will need help to navigate sustainability. Help can come in various ways from seeking sustainability consultants or building in-house sustainability teams. We will see an increase in open-source access to best practice business models and measurement such as Kering's Environmental Profit & Loss (EP&L) tool. Collaboration is key to making a healthier fashion industry. A new approach that isn't all based on productivity and profit will enable us to curb some of the 'bad habits' of the past of the consistent corporate growth model.

We will see consumers continuing to push brands to change. No longer is it good enough to be passive, sit on the fence, do nothing and hope for the best. Consumers will buy elsewhere, or start their own brand!

An exciting convergence of sustainable and streetwear/trainer brands that seek to combine the ethics of Patagonia with the cult appeal of Balenciaga, Supreme or Palace Skateboards will open up a huge market opportunity. It seems incredible to imagine that a hoodie could sell for over £1000 and not be



The work of the All Party Parliamentary Groups we undertake at Fashion Roundtable is intrinsic to ensuring a more sustainable future for the fashion industry. Attending policy meetings, sitting in on committee hearings and being a part of Whitehall roundtables is vital for us to ensure the needs and concerns of the fashion industry are understood by parliamentarians and policy leaders. We support the industry through advocacy and by guiding policy implementation. We also act as a valuable resource to translate policies that affect the fashion industry back to them in language they can connect with.

Our parliamentary and community events are always packed with leading names from the sector and enable us to be the vital link between fashion and policy: quite literally Front Row to Front Bench.

even be made ethically or sustainably. When fashion is rooted in grassroots movements and interactions that transcend the clothing, such as street, skate and hip hop culture we have the opportunity to create change and wide ranging impact that becomes intrinsic to culture.

Our parliamentary and community events are always packed with leading names from the sector and enable us to be the vital link between fashion and policy: quite literally Front Row to Front Bench.

**Tamara Cincik, CEO & Founder,  
Fashion Roundtable**

## 6. Too Much Information (TMI)



Knowledge is power, but Too Much Information (TMI) without the ability to navigate and distil it can have an adverse effect. Not knowing who or what to trust can lead to disempowerment. There is an increasing desire for technology and innovation to solve our trust and verification issues, from blockchain to garment certification standards. Perhaps the future may entirely disregard these ways of ensuring trust, and simply show us a video of a company's founder, factory manager or marketing team and run a lie detector test at the same time. Now that could be interesting!

TMI and trust is also something that the beauty industry is on the brink of finding an issue. A few years ago - until we heard about microbeads - were we actually looking at the back of our cosmetic products to find out what ingredients they contained? Fast forward to today's 'clean beauty'

movement. Educated consumers are looking for paraben-free, sulphate-free and phthalate-free with packaging made from recycled material sourced from sustainably-managed forests. The list goes on. The beauty industry faces the same issue as the fashion industry, which is creating a universal definition of what is 'clean'. With no set definition as yet, without a standard, terminology can be misleading and open to misuse, as per 'greenwashing'.

With beauty allergens a concern, we are seeking products with identifiable and as few ingredients as possible. Considering natural versus organic or products with certifications such as Soil Association COSMOS can guide us in our buying decisions. Hopefully, in the future, we won't need a chemistry degree to understand what we are putting on our skin (beauty) or body (clothes).

Companies are seeking to find new



solutions with investment in natural innovation, such as Evolved by Nature, whom Chanel are minority stakeholders. Evolved by Nature seeks to replace harsh synthetic additives with a new kind of silk. This call to nature is also mirrored in the fashion industry with increasing interest in finding bio-fabrics such as Desserto vegan leather made from Cactus plants. The challenge with innovation meeting high quality production is often where companies struggle to scale sustainable solutions, however we are confident with backing from large brands this should become less of an issue.

In 2018, the annual campaign Zero Waste Week reported that 120 billion units of packaging are produced every year by the global cosmetics industry, the majority of which were not recyclable. The National Geographic found that for US-made products, plastic packaging is now used 120 times more than it was in 1960.

With growing pressure from consumers, the emphasis to find a packaging solution that has 'preservative' qualities, still instills the sense of luxury, and can be easily distributed is high on beauty companies' agenda's.



## 7. Lab Destiny

If we are doing all our own homework, well we may as well administer the products ourselves too, right? We feel that companies such as Deciem aka The Abnormal Beauty Company have signalled the rise of 'Home Beauty Labs'. Their minimal branding and packaging that focuses on the ingredients leaves no option but to become an expert in Hyaluronic Acid 2% or aha 30% + bha 2% peeling solution (which is actually incredible). We equally feel empowered and bewildered searching Google to receive enlightenment. Once we are enlightened, we feel the need to share our new-found knowledge with everyone who lets us. Are we all destined to create home beauty labs?

Without a legal definition of what constitutes clean beauty, the best we can do as individuals is assess what our values and needs are, and choose beauty products that uphold them. Finish what you have and replace it with better. Invest in brands that care about the same things as you - this is (in my opinion) the only way to make long term, sustainable changes to your beauty regime.

**Khandiz Joni Towill**

We predict there will be a revolution of two sides: a backlash of cosmetic companies where people make their own 'customised beauty' products and supplements to keep control and make it truly natural, and a rise of at home beauty labs where people test the limits of what they can buy on the internet, incrementally testing

the lengths they can push medical grade ingredients or even learning via youtube 'how to inject facial fillers and botox'. As we push the boundaries close to our own choices we will inevitably become our own judge of what works, or not.

According to consultants at Kline & Company, Asia is a hub for many technology skin care innovations, as well as the home of key markets for beauty devices, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, some of which are posting double-digit growth in 2016. The sector's sales saw 71 percent growth in 2017. Smart beauty tools that enable home 'technicians' to perform microdermabrasion, infrared

anti-ageing or test pollution levels will become more popular in the UK (and Europe) as we see the trend for the 'natural glow' to shine through increase. Companies can also connect devices to the internet (Internet Of Things) so that data can be analysed to support strategic business decisions.



## In summary

What does the future hold? More alignment with ourselves, connection with each other, the online world and more innovation and experimentation. All with the aim to create more sustainable products and better lives for ourselves and others around us. How we approach this next decade will define our legacy.

One thing is certain, we must act now, we do not have time or resources to waste.

The question is, how can we do this in a way that is right for our own business?

Perhaps we can help you answer that...

Feel free to drop us an email at [info@blackneondigital.com](mailto:info@blackneondigital.com)

### With many thanks to

**Cathy McCabe, CEO, Proximity Insight** A retailtech platform that helps brands including Matchesfashion to get closer to their customer.

**Leanne Elliott Young, Co-founder, Commune East** An ideas institute that helps brands navigate their IRL & URL conundrums.

**Jade Coles, Lead Events Curator, The Wing** A network of community & work spaces for women of all definitions.

**Tamara Cincik, CEO & Founder, Fashion Roundtable** The bridge between the fashion industry

and policy leaders, Front Row to Front Bench.

**Khandiz Joni Towill, Multidisciplinary Artist and Co-founder, Concious Beauty Union**

[www.blackneondigital.com](http://www.blackneondigital.com)

We want to see creative, innovative businesses and their founders thrive. Through our editorial platform and podcast series hosted by Jodi Muter-Hamilton, Founder of Black Neon Digital, we inspire new ways of thinking and business models that support a more sustainable industry. Our agency builds brands with integrity.