

MODELS TRUST.

MODEL AGENCY PERFORMANCE 2021

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Introduction

Choosing the right representation is one of the most important decisions of a model's career. Models Trust's annual agency performance benchmarking report offers fact-based information and advice to help models and agencies improve the quality of their representation.

It is based on feedback from who we trust most: nearly three hundred currently signed models from across the world who we surveyed earlier this year. By helping models to make more informed choices, and agencies to perform better, they have created safer workplaces and more sustainable careers for models everywhere.

Our benchmarking survey shows that agencies on average performed poorly over the last year. They averaged scores of only between 3.1 to 4.0 out of 5 across the eight categories of crucial services and practices that all agencies should provide their models.

The top 25 percent agencies, however, served their models very well in the face of the COVID pandemic. They averaged scores of between 4.1 to 4.9, which is what we consider acceptable performance.

These best agencies come in various sizes, locations and types, but they share four distinctive strengths that set them apart from lesser agencies.

Also, we found two opportunities that both these best and those lesser agencies can focus on to improve their models' success.

We have combined our benchmarking results with our other research to provide advice to help models choose the best representation. This includes details of Models Trust's new *Trust Club* of high-performing, ethical agencies.

This report contains the following sections:

- OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS
- QUALITY OF REPRESENTATION OVER THE LAST YEAR
- FOUR DISTINCTIVE STRENGTHS OF THE BEST AGENCIES
- TWO INDUSTRY-WIDE IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES
- ADVICE ON CHOOSING THE BEST REPRESENTATION
- MODELS TRUST *TRUST CLUB* AGENCY PERFORMANCE

Models Trust, (www.modelstrust.com), formerly the Responsible Trust for Models, is an independent, non-profit organisation working with all parts of the fashion industry to make modelling safer and more sustainable. In 2020, Models Trust conducted *Brighter Future* – a year-long industry consultation on creating safer workplaces and more sustainable careers for models. Our annual agency performance survey and *Trust Club* are two examples of how we are using these insights to work with models, agencies, and brands to create a brighter future for models everywhere.

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In addition to all our respondents we thank everyone who contributed to the design, distribution, analysis and publication of our benchmarking survey and this report, especially Polina Malanova, Nyasha Matonhodze, Brana Dane, and Jasmine Sichel.

Our survey respondents

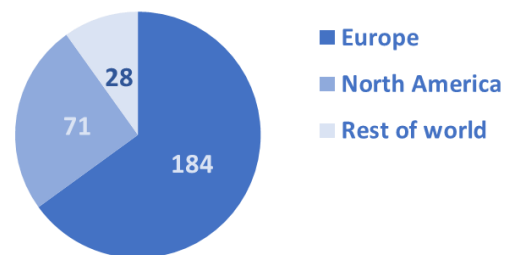
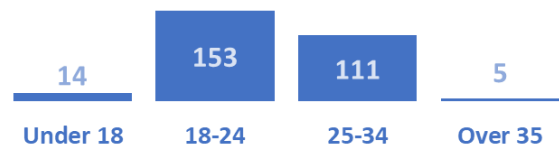
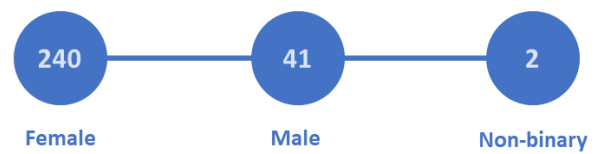
We used email and social media to ask currently signed models to complete our online benchmarking survey. It consisted of ten multiple-choice questions about themselves and their agency as well as 21 multiple-choice questions assessing their agency's performance over the last 12 months.

Respondents answered these second set of questions using a scale from either *never* to *always*, or *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, which we then quantified as scores from 1 to 5. We also asked two optional questions: one asking their agency's name, and the other for additional comments on the quality of representation of their agency, some of which are quoted in our report.

Models Trust directly administered the survey, which was completely anonymous: not even it knew the names or contact details of any respondents. As our **Respondents' gender, age and location** charts show, 85 percent of our 283 survey respondents are female and nearly all are aged between 18 to 34. Two-thirds live in Europe, a quarter in North America, and the rest in Africa or the Middle East, the Asia Pacific, and Central or South America. Furthermore, two-thirds of respondents are of white ethnicity, and three-quarters have two or more years' modelling experience.

As our **Agency location, size and type** charts show, one-third of our respondents' agencies are located in the UK, a third in the rest of Europe, and a quarter in North America, with the remainder in Africa or the

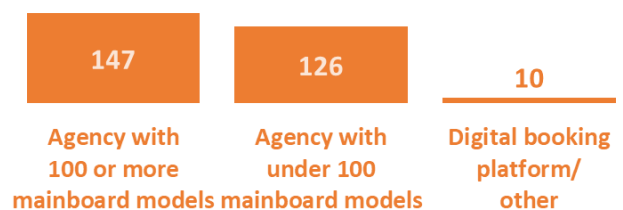
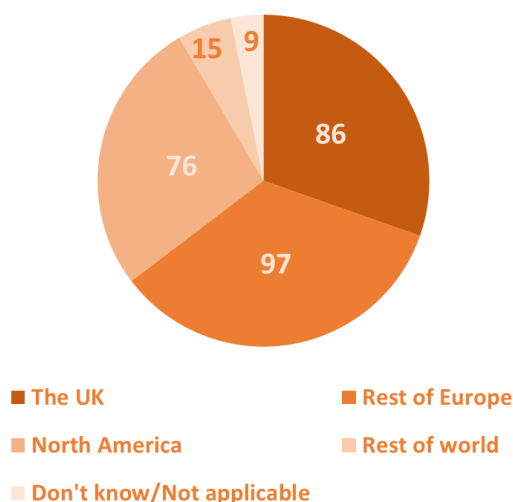
Respondents' gender, age and location



Middle East, the Asia Pacific, or Central or South America.

Just over half are large agencies (which we defined as having over 100 mainboard models) and over half are mother agencies, that provide additional longer-term career advice and support in return for commissions from our respondents' other agencies.

Agency location, size, and type



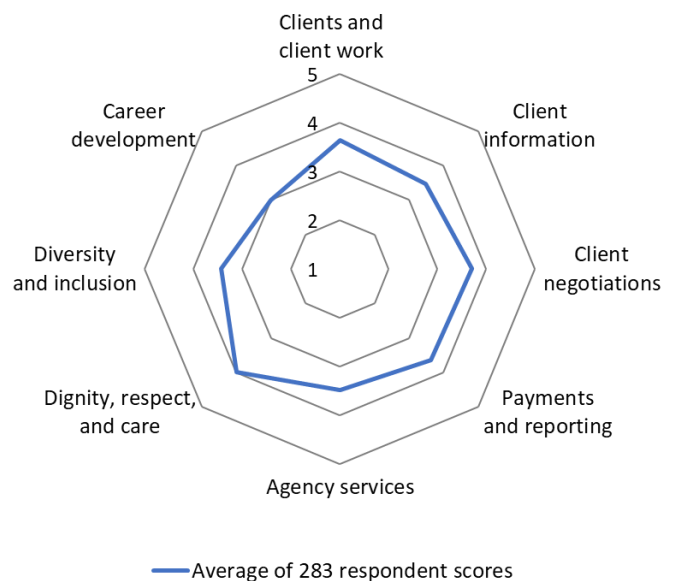
Quality of representation over the last year

We measured how well agencies represented their models by scoring our survey respondents' answers using scales of 1 (*never or strongly disagree*) to 5 (*always or strongly agree*). We grouped these scores into the eight categories shown on our **Category scores—all agencies** chart, with each category's score representing the average scores from two to four individual questions. These categories represent the crucial services and practices that agencies should be providing their models.

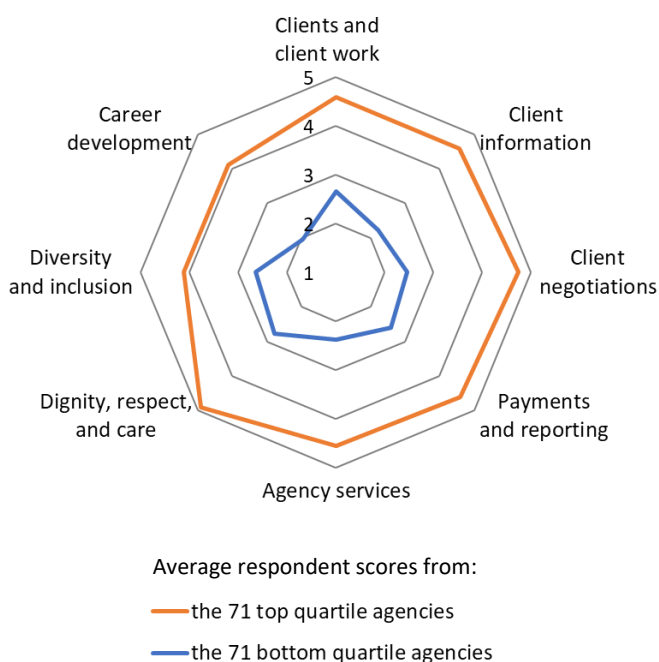
This chart shows that the average category scores for all our respondents' agencies ranged from 3.1 (for *career development*) to 4.0 (for *dignity, respect and care*). This corresponds to average responses between *sometimes* or *neither agree or disagree* to *mostly or agree*.

We consider this overall quality of representation to be unacceptably poor. given how crucial agencies' performance across these categories are to their models' safety, wellbeing, and success, and that they typically charge 40 percent of their models earnings for their services. Models should expect their agencies to score between 4 (*mostly or agree*) and 5 (*always or strongly agree*).

Category scores — all agencies



Category scores — overall top and bottom quartile performing agencies

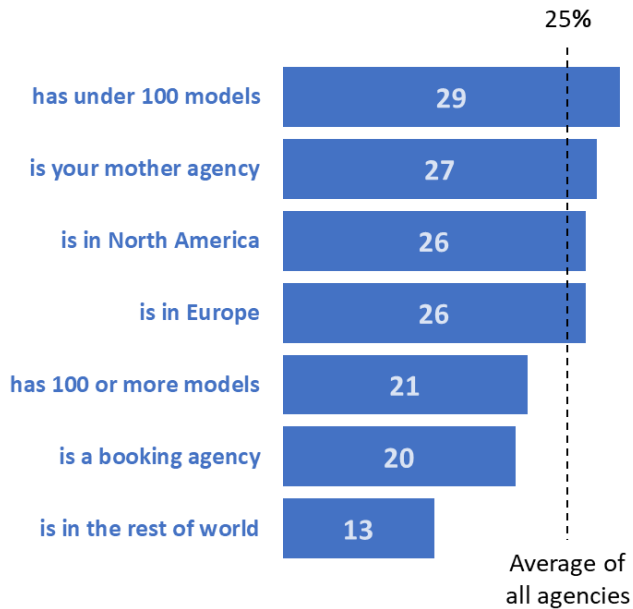


Of course, this has been an exceptionally tough year for agencies. But there is a bright light: we identified the top 25 percent (or 'top quartile') performing agencies in our survey from their overall average score across all eight categories. As our **Category scores — overall top and bottom quartile performing agencies** chart shows, the quality of representation of these 71 best performing agencies met our expectations across all categories.

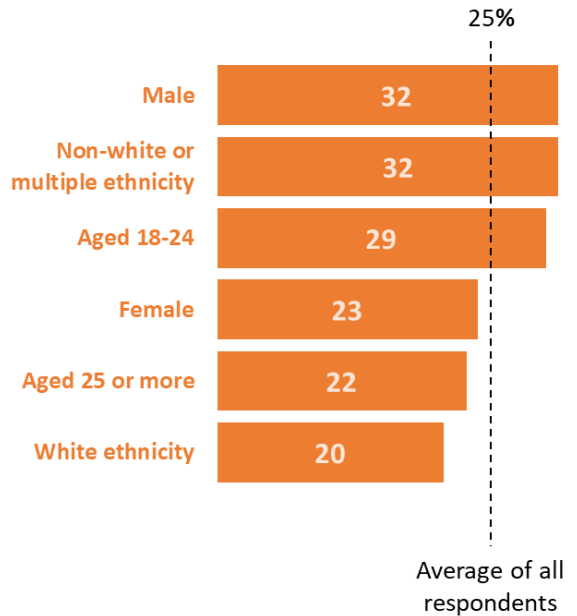
We applaud these top agencies' commitment to their models. This certainly must not have been easy given all COVID's challenges. But we feel sorry for those unfortunate models who are signed to the 71 bottom quartile agencies. They must have had a truly miserable last year, given their agencies' average scores between 2.0 and 2.8. For example, when asked whether their agency found them enough work to sustain and advance their career, models in these worst performing agencies on average answered *rarely*, compared with *mostly or always* for those in the best performing agencies.

Identifying these top performing agencies is not straightforward. As our **Percent of top quartile performing agencies by size, location and type** chart shows, these best agencies are a bit more likely to be smaller (which we defined as having fewer than 100

Percent of top quartile performing agencies by size, location, and type



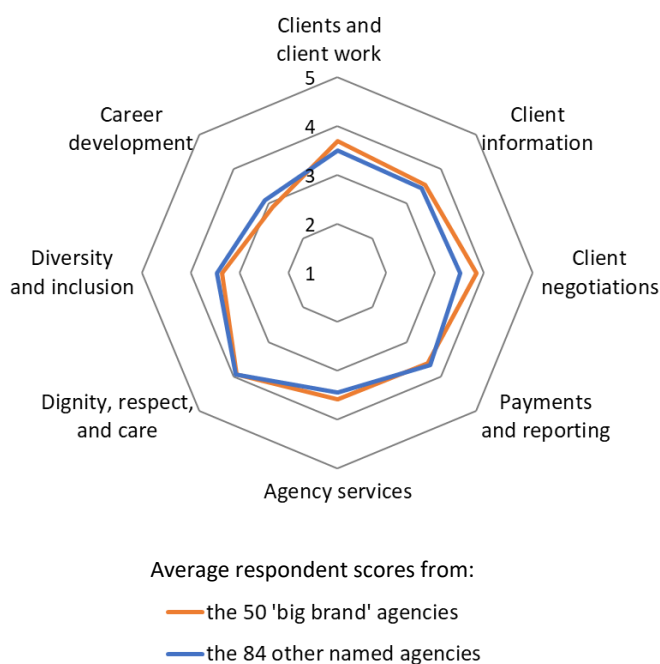
Percent of respondents scoring their agency as a top quartile performer



models on their mainboard) and to be our respondents' mother agency. The percentage of these best agencies in North America is pretty much the same as in Europe, but there are large differences across European countries and worryingly low scores

for agencies in the rest of the world that we will need to investigate further.

Category scores — 'big brand' versus other agencies



As our **Percent of respondents scoring their agency as a top quartile performer** chart shows, a greater percentage of male respondents and those aged 18 to 24 scored their agencies as top quartile performers. So did models of non-white or multiple ethnicities, a finding that also needs further research.

Just under half of our survey respondents elected to name their agency. From this list, we identified what we considered 'big brand' agencies—agencies with over a hundred models on their boards, and with a substantial national or worldwide presence and name recognition — such as *Elite*, *Ford*, *IMG*, *Models 1*, *Premier*, *Select*, and *Wilhelmina*.

The percentage of 'big brand' agencies scored as top quartile is the same as that of other named agencies, and as our **Category scores — 'big brand' versus other agencies** chart shows, their average performance across all categories is similarly unacceptably poor.

We had expected the 'big brands' to perform better. Maybe they were hit particularly hard by COVID. Whatever the case, at least over the last year, signing to a 'big brand' was no guarantee that you would receive better quality representation.

Four distinctive strengths of the best agencies

“I’m very lucky to be represented by an agency that I can call my family. They have been a guide and a light for me over the last three years, always there to reassure me and open the way for me.” (survey respondent)

As shown previously, we cannot easily identify the best performing agencies in our survey from their size, location or the sorts of models they have signed. We did, however, find four distinctive strengths of these best agencies, where they scored on average above four in our survey and where other agencies averaged three or lower.

- 1. Client work:** the best agencies found enough work to sustain and progress their models’ careers over the last year. They also excel at explaining their models’ needs and preferences to their clients, so that their models are best set up for success. We applaud those agencies who doubled down on their commitment to their models in the face of the pandemic. We know that many lesser agencies effectively shut down over the last year, leaving their models in the cold. As one respondent commented: “I signed to [my agency] a year ago. I’ve maybe corresponded with them twice. No feedback whatsoever. I’ve never been booked for anything. No advice. No follow up. I’m actually not even sure what I’m supposed to do.”
- 2. Services:** the best agencies provide their models with services – such as test-shoots, website listings, and live-away accommodation – of high quality and reasonable prices. We know from our past research and from our community that overcharging and the provision of unnecessary services is a widespread problem, and is effectively a ‘back door’ lesser agencies use to charge higher commissions from their models. As one respondent commented: “[My agency] charges \$700 for ‘website fees’ which don’t exist, it just takes our money.”
- 3. Payments:** the best agencies pay their models within a reasonable time. They also provide clear and regular updates on finances that show itemised details of what models earned from their client work and what expenses they incurred. This timeliness and transparency of payments was especially important over the last year for models to manage their finances and reduce the risk of not getting paid in the face of the pandemic. As one respondent commented: “I find myself often chasing payments due and don’t feel like [my agency] fights hard enough to get clients to pay me on time. Also, I have experienced not getting paid at all because I’ve worked with businesses that go insolvent before they pay.” And another: “My agency has paid me the incorrect amount on every single job I have ever done for them. They have refused to explain my pay slips. Now I’m working with a lawyer.”
- 4. Career development:** the best agencies communicate openly and honestly to their models about their performance, including sharing feedback from their clients. Those agencies excel, too, at providing constructive information, advice and training on the skills their models need for castings, shoots and other events, so that they are best placed to win work. These best agencies understand that investing in their models’ knowledge and skills creates more sustainable careers that will reward both models and themselves over the longer term. We know that many lesser agencies do not share this view. As one respondent commented: “Since the beginning I have always asked for connections in regards to runway training, posing training, and just general model training but [my agency] has always insisted I was ‘fine’, even though my work and my confidence would benefit. I honestly just feel like a lost sheep most of the time.”

Two industry-wide improvement opportunities

We earlier described how career development is a distinctive strength of the best performing agencies. However, within this category there are two performance improvement opportunities for all agencies, including the best performers.

- 1. Managing body size and appearance:** body size and shape, and skin and hair appearance are fundamental to a successful modelling career. We are therefore alarmed that our survey respondents scored their agency's provision of constructive information, advice and training on these as only 2.8 (between *disagree* and *neither agree or disagree*). Even the best 25 percent overall performing agencies only scored 3.9 (between *neither agree or disagree* and *agree*). Clearly, there is an opportunity here for industry-wide improvements. We definitely do not advocate that agencies compel their models to fit a single standard. Instead, agencies should consider how they can better help their models discover their own distinctive image, how they can best market it, and how they can healthily and sustainably maintain and evolve their look.
- 2. Managing career, business, and brand:** our survey respondents scored their agency's provision of constructive information, advice and training on managing their career, business and brand a lowly 2.7 (between *disagree* and *neither agree or disagree*). The best 25 percent overall performing agencies managed 4.0 (*agree*) – a good deal better, but still at the very bottom of what we consider acceptable. Given that models are predominantly sole business contractors, it is perhaps unsurprising that agencies do not think it is their responsibility to help them manage their business and personal brand. However, we think they are missing a big opportunity: models who are more knowledgeable and skilled about business will likely create more successful and sustainable careers which in turn will be more financially rewarding for both themselves and their agencies.

“I wish there was more sensitivity and support around making sure there is adequate hair and make-up [support] for my African hair. Many clients don't take this into account and I'm often paired with a make-up assistant that is not seasoned in black hair care OR I am expected to do my own hair for no additional fee.” (survey respondent)

Advice on choosing the best representation

We said at the very start of our report that choosing the right representation is one of the most important decisions of a model's career. Unfortunately, most of our survey respondents' agencies over the last year performed well below what we consider acceptable.

To be fair, the global pandemic has placed enormous challenges on all agencies. The good news is that the industry's best performing agencies rose to these challenges to deliver the crucial advice and support their models needed to work safely and successfully. Identifying these agencies is, however, difficult: as we previously explained, they come in all sizes, locations, and types, and we found no evidence that the larger and better-known 'big brand' agencies outperformed others.

We can say with certainty, however, that all Models Trust *Trust Club* agencies (see the next section) are top quartile performers. Models thinking of upgrading your representation should first look at them.

For other agencies, assess how well they perform across the **four distinctive strengths of the best agencies** we detailed earlier.

There are a few ways to do this. Ask agencies to explain how they perform in these areas. Look at their contract, policies, and other documents to check if those support what they say. Also, ask models who are currently signed with them about their experiences. We have found that models want to help each other, and especially those who are just starting out.

And, of course, look online and on social media for guidance from trusted sources – for example, model coaches such as Models Trust Advocate, Marie P. Anderson.

The key is to do as much research as practicable rather than solely relying on an agency's recruiting pitch: again, remember, choosing the right representation is one of the most important decisions of a model's career.

Keep in mind, too, that great representation very much depends on how well an agency's priorities, practices and culture align with each model's own goals, experience. How well a model personally gets on with their booker and others is also vital. A model may decide, for example, that at this point in their career the more personal care and guidance from a smaller agency is more important than a larger agency's greater range of potential clients. As one survey respondent commented: "Everyone is different so some models will have totally different experiences with agencies. A good friend of mine has the same bookers as I do but is not as happy with her experience as me. It all depends!"

Experienced model who have the skills and time to take more control of their representation, or those for whom modelling is more of a side career, should also consider signing to a digital booking platform.

Legitimate platforms – such as Models Trust *Trust Club* members *Ubooker* (whose co-owner is a Models Trust Advisor) and *The Model Cloud* – properly vet both clients and models to create safe marketplaces to find and negotiate work. Besides giving models more control, these platforms can charge a fraction of a typical agency's commission plus will pay as quickly as within 10 days of a job's completion. Balanced against these benefits, platforms are not set up to deliver the same level of personal marketing or career advice and support found at the best agencies.

Many models are increasingly expanding their careers into other creative and performing professions, such as influencing, film, music, and photography. They should consider expanding their current representation by signing to an agency that covers that type of talent. Model agencies and platforms are increasingly adding dedicated boards for influencers and others. Also, depending on their contract with their current agency, it is possible to sign to a talent agency in addition to your current model agency.

Models Trust *Trust Club* agency performance

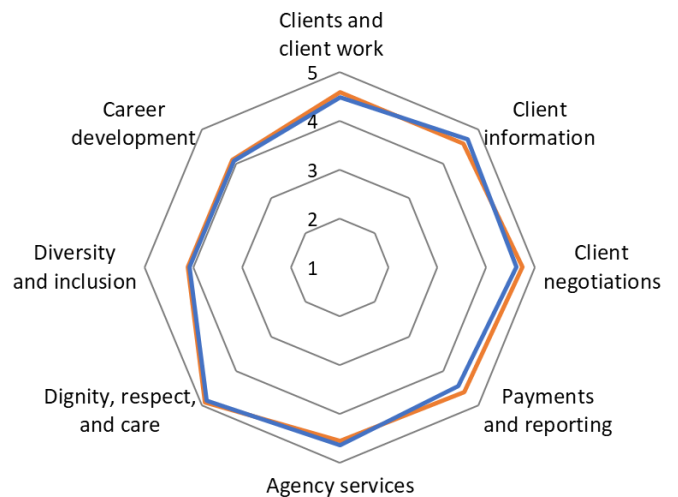
We know there are many agencies who aim to deliver the highest quality and most ethical representation for their models. Models Trust launched *Trust Club* earlier this year to enable these agencies to prove they are doing so and to understand how they can perform even better.

Every year, Models Trust independently surveys all models in each Models Trust *Trust Club* agency about their experiences and reports their collective and anonymous feedback to their agency. Agencies can use these reports to identify their own distinctive strengths as well as opportunities for improvement.

At the time of this report, we have completed model feedback surveys of four Models Trust *Trust Club* agencies: *2pm Management*, *ATTNTN Management*, *Hyphenate Management*, and *We Speak Model Management*. Their results show that all four are top quartile performers. The average category scores across these agencies are shown in the **Category scores — *Trust Club* versus top quartile performing agencies** chart.

The latest list of *Trust Club* agencies is on Models Trust’s website. As we mentioned earlier, models thinking of upgrading your representation should first look at them. What excites us is their commitment to

Category scores — *Trust Club* versus top quartile performing agencies



Average respondent scores from:

— the 71 top quartile agencies

— the four Trust Club agencies

placing their models’ voices at the centre of what they do, their willingness to independently verify the quality of their representation, and their innovative solutions

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