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The Williams Nicolson
Trend Index 2022

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This inaugural Williams Nicolson Trend Index analyses a year's worth of content from multiple sources to identify important signals of change.

The report identifies the strongest three trends impacting communicators, our clients and organisations in 2022 and beyond.

You won't find any flying cars here: these trends are shaping business strategy and decision making today.



What
does your
business
need to
know
today?



Radical Responsibility

- > **Stop planting trees**
- > Redefine your core business
- > Stimulate sustainability

The climate crisis is now a palpable reality: between 1970 and 2019 there were more than 11,000 weather disasters.¹



Interconnected planetary systems² mean this increase in the frequency and severity³ of weather events increases socio-economic inequality.

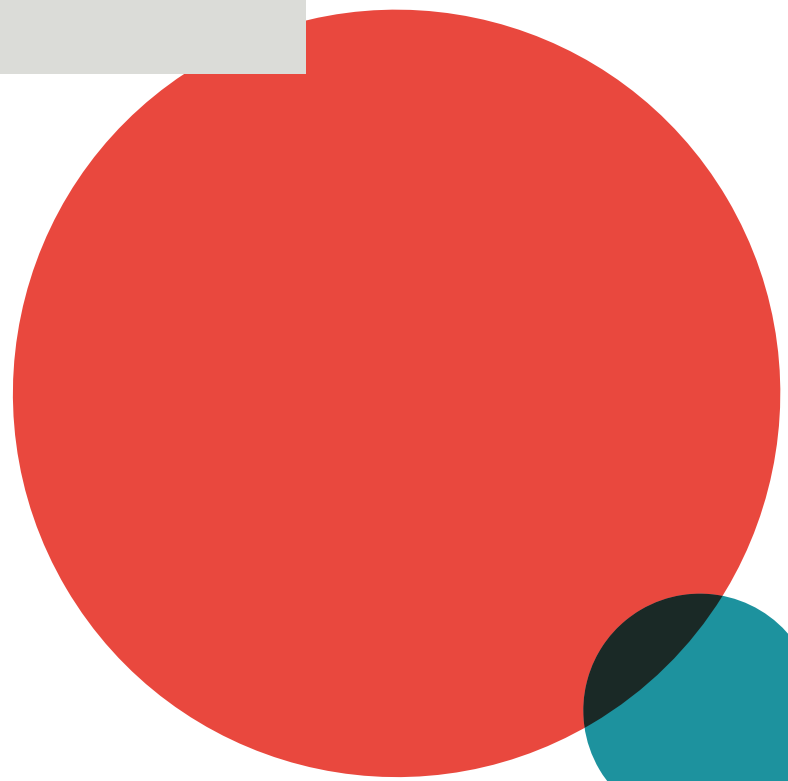
Governments around the world are starting to take urgent, essential, long-term action. Miami and Athens have appointed Chief Heat Officers;⁴ France has banned plastic wrapping;⁵ the European Union wants to phase out fossil fuel cars by 2035.⁶

But when we fear the economic implications of climate change, we are most likely to act.⁷ We turn to business.

In the absence of consistent regulation, business shoulders the responsibility to articulate an essential ambition for change⁸ and redesign operations, products and services to deliver that change. Society looks to businesses like yours, to deliver overdue solutions to the world's problems.

In a recent poll, more than 22,000 young Europeans listed the most serious problems for humanity.⁹ Almost half of the respondents named global warming first, followed by environmental degradation. Soon, sustainable solutions will be a rule, perhaps even a commodity, for companies.

Instead of token tree planting to reach net zero,¹⁰ business must rethink solutions like carbon offsets, which grant permission to pollute. Think beyond your core business; consider creative solutions to combat climate change and authentic actions with the legacy of a sustainable future.



Consider examples of going beyond your core business to find creative solutions to stem climate change.

Patagonia, an outdoor clothing company, is on a mission to spread the word of community owned energy. With the initiative 'We the Power',¹¹ Patagonia presents a platform and documentary spotlighting the growing community energy movement across Europe.

IKEA wants to halve emissions from its value chain by 2030 and become net-zero by 2050. To achieve these results, the company launched a buy back and resell programme, plus a renewable energy subscription service called Strömma aiming to bring wind and solar power to Swedish households.¹²

Both companies environmental credentials and commitment will generate shareholder value¹³ for business and wider society.



Communicators must take radical responsibility too. “Your actions matter,” said Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate at COP26. **“No action or voice is too small to make a difference.”**¹⁴ While there is obvious professional pride in avoiding “blah, blah, blah”, crafted language instigates action.

Consider the me too movement.¹⁵ A local, grassroots organisation initially founded by Tarana Burke in 2006, alerted millions to the global problem of sexual violence and connected a global community of survivors when the hashtag #metoo went viral in 2017.

Words and images change opinions, evoke action and save lives. The onus is on us to narrate hope, be passionate and positive so the generations to come are able to thrive.

Expose

In 2022, expose greenwashing and make authentic, strategic commitments.

Extend

The world needs you. Step up and out and beyond your core business.

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Redefined Reality

- > Product is dead
- > Invest in virtual certainty

The pandemic accelerated virtual connections. And not just for teenagers playing Fortnite.



From March 2020, people all over the world moved online – children, partners, grandparents, colleagues and communities.

The metaverse is a new market to create, define and trade value.¹⁶

Very few people had heard about the metaverse before Facebook rebranded as Meta.¹⁷ This is not just a reputational rebranding. Meta understands the next evolution in monetising virtual reality. The metaverse has provided a way for individuals to create and share NFTs around activities, affinities and interest.

Companies have already started to invest in this virtual world, creating products and special spaces for users. Atari is creating a cryptocurrency casino inside Decentraland.¹⁸ The beer brand Stella Artois created NFT racehorses for the digital horse racing platform ZED Run.

Forget the Emperor's New Clothes. The metaverse is already fuelled by substantial, corporate transactions, facilitated by blockchain technology and the advent of digital ownership via NFTs.

In the 90s, consumers bought plots of land on the moon as stocking fillers. The purchasers may yet have the last laugh when rent is due on Earth's natural satellite.

Verifiable digital ownership via NFTs redefines value and creates new investment opportunities in new marketplaces such as the metaverse.¹⁹

NFT

is the acronym for the term non-fungible token.

They are numerical codes with a digital transfer record that guarantee authenticity to their owners. Each NFT is unique and stored on public-facing digital ledgers called blockchains.

NFTs are a brand-new asset class which enables trade by clearly defining the ownership rights of digital assets. Beyond the trade of digital imagery, NFTs can operate as membership cards or tickets providing access to events, merchandise and discounts and acting as a digital key to exclusive online spaces.

Unlike cryptocurrencies, NFTs are not mutually interchangeable. They cannot be copied or exchanged for the same amount but can be transferred.

Consider the animated series made by actress Mila Kunis called Stoner Cats.²⁰ The NFT project can only be watched by the token holders.

The series raised \$8.4 million in its first 35 minutes, with a total of over 10,000 NFTs sold for 0.35 ETH (over \$800 each). Quentin Tarantino is another artist that will be selling NFT. His project will include never-before seen Pulp Fiction clips, first handwritten scripts, and exclusive commentary from the director.²¹

Metaverse

is a collective, shared, virtual space. It replicates reality through digital devices such as the internet, virtual reality, augmented reality and video.

The metaverse term was coined by Neal Stephenson in a 1992 novel called Snow Crash, meaning a vision of a computer-generated universe. In 2021 metaverse means a highly immersive, virtual world where people gather to socialise, play and work. Some examples of this virtual world are the games Fortnite and Roblox and virtual places like Decentraland and Upland.

The metaverse isn't just for cult film fans and the young. NFTs are transforming art; digital art has been sold for \$69.3 million from the artist Beeple at Christie's auction house.²²

Sotheby's have also invested in the NFT and metaverse world and opened a virtual NFT gallery inside the world of Decentraland.

Other art spaces, such as House of Fine Arts and Unit London gallery, are exhibiting NFTs.²³

This art and associated collective memberships have the potential to define personal identity as a new luxury status. Alexis Ohanian wore a badge that was a Cryptopunk of his wife, Serena Williams, to the MET Gala.²⁴

Investment in digital real estate has grown exponentially. It is already possible to buy properties inside the metaverse in platforms such as Decentraland, Upland and Sandbox. The world's first digital NFT house, Mars House made by artist Krista Kim, was sold for \$500,000 in March this year.²⁵ The new estate agents on the block are Metaverse Reit and Republic Realm, with the latter acquiring a set of land in Decentraland for almost \$1 million worth of MANA, the game's native token.²⁶ Other companies such as Roundhill and Wise are offering investments and venture capital funds focused on metaverse developments.

Look beyond

In 2022, look beyond reality for investments.

Create

There are opportunities to create exclusive experiences, products and spaces to generate financial value inside the online world.

Engage

Engage with your customers and stakeholders in a bold, immersive way.

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Revolutionary Reach

- > Traditional segments blur
- > Conquer communities
- > Serious fun

The evolution from manufacturing product to selling services has been defined and promoted by marketers since the 1950s.



From a product you can hold in your palm to a service sold with a smile, the parameters of sales have been defined by segmented experience.

Now, digital consumption has blurred lines. The world doesn't split neatly into distinct consumer groups, stakeholder categories and channels. The people you need to influence – and the multiple routes to those audiences – overlap.

A message designed for investors can just as easily be picked up by regulators, customers or the general public. It is an increasingly complex communications landscape.

B2B and B2C are no longer applicable.

Modern marketers define B2A – business to audience. We predict B2Community.

Reconsider, relearn and rethink your audience. Geriatric millennials are already 40. Gen Z and, in a not-so-distant future, Gen Alpha, are gaining economic power. These generations are migrating for new online destinations such as games. In recent research from Deloitte, playing video games was the favourite form of entertainment for Gen Z members (26 per cent).²⁷

Games have become an integral way to socialise and have experiences, like watching concerts such as Ariana Grande and Lil Nas X, a concert inside Roblox with a public of 33 million viewers.²⁸ Fast-food chain Chipotle used Discord to host a virtual job fair and received over 23,000 applications in one week.

Marketing segmentation

is the division of the market place into distinct subgroups or segments, each characterised by particular tastes and requiring a specific marketing mix.

Market segmentation is the practice of dividing a target market into groups you can reach. Segmentation traditionally looks at demographics, needs, priorities, common interests and psychological behaviours to better understand, market and sell to the target audience.

Platforms like Twitch, a place where gamers can live stream their own play, are now being used by other creators in the world of music, beauty, fitness, and cooking. Discord,²⁹ a service that was once a gamers communication place, is used by lots of people for classes, book clubs, different communities and virtual gatherings. Their popularity lies in providing the possibility to engage in micro-communities.

Some brands have been reaching their audience through pure entertainment, creating experiences where the brand and the product have a supporting role in the story.

Fashion house Balmain partnered with Channel 4 on a five-part drama series called Fracture.³⁰ All the cast's wardrobe were styled with looks from the brand's Fall 2021 collection. Balenciaga partnered with The Simpsons for a special episode³¹ and Zalando released a shoppable film to celebrate the launch of their Luxury on Your Terms campaign.³²

Delivering a message or content is more complicated and will continue to be. Meeting interests, making an impact can be achieved through experience, exclusivity, belonging, fun and knowledge.

Think

In 2022, think B2Community. Understand the multiple communities your audience is part of.

Know

Know where they are; start where they are.

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Move people

Strategy must be powerful enough to reach and move the people who matter; content must be engaging enough to cut through the noise; metrics must check audience understanding and impact.

Data-led communication is essential.



What do
you think?

About our authors

Williams Nicolson is a strategic communications and change management consultancy which delivers the very best strategic advice and data-led resources to equip leaders operating amid technological change, global competition and market volatility.

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Claire is a Chartered PR practitioner and a Fellow of the CIPR. In the past five years she has been named Headline Money's PR Professional of the Year, PRCA's In-House Professional and PRCA's City and Financial Professional of the Year. Last year, she was featured on the Yahoo Finance HERoes Women Role Model list. Claire sits on both the [30% Club Steering Committee](#) and the [Global Women in PR Executive Board](#).



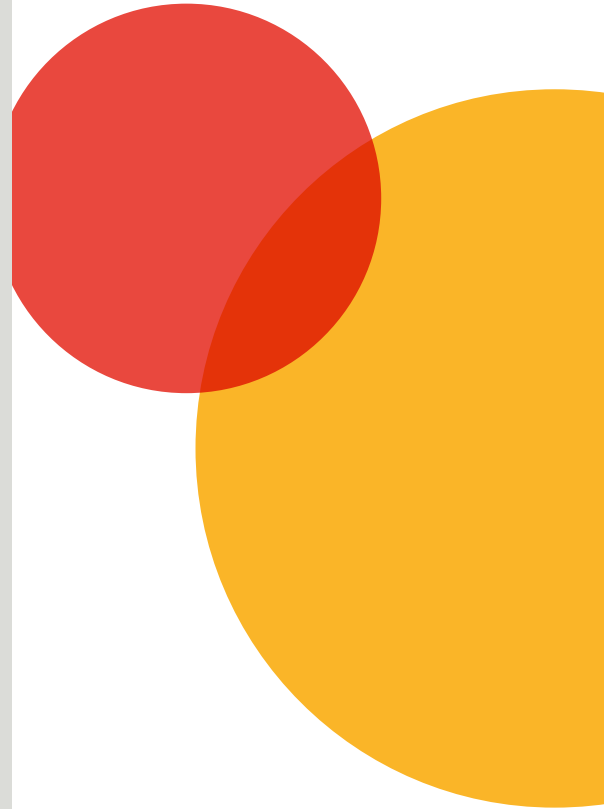
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