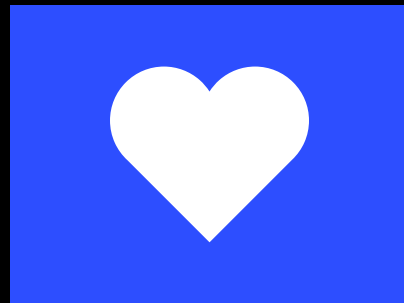


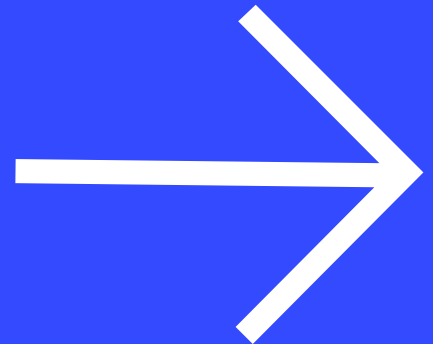
# Prophet Brand Relevance Index<sup>®</sup>

The brands consumers  
can't live without



2021

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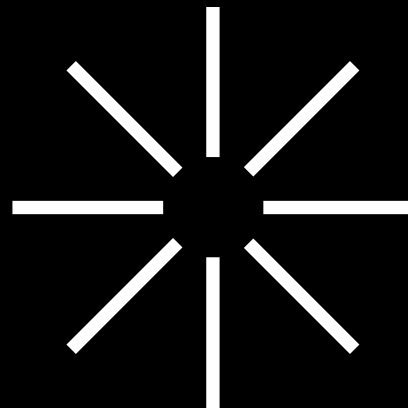




# We are in the middle of a brand relevance revolution.

While Prophet's ongoing research has shown that the drivers of relevance remain remarkably stable over time, last year's incalculable turbulence has shaken up the Prophet Brand Relevance Index® as never before. As dizzying as 2020 was, consumer behavior changes underscore the unmistakable connection between relevance and growth.

This research reveals brand lessons that transcend categories—creating a clear set of actions leaders must take to compete and win in this new landscape. It's about much more than keeping up with consumers. To achieve uncommon growth, brands must strive for relentless relevance, anticipating new ways to enrich their customers' lives and experiences.



# Introduction

**More than ever, relevant brands are winning with consumers.**

The definition of relevance hasn't changed much. But the ways companies must build and achieve it are radically different. The Prophet Brand Relevance Index®, in its sixth iteration, demonstrates how fast consumers are moving. Almost overnight, they've reconsidered beloved names like Disney, making room for brands that serve them better. This rigorous research, which now includes thousands of data points, reveals that a business without a powerful brand will not be able to compete in 2021. To build this year's Index, we asked 13,000 U.S. consumers to evaluate their favorite brands based on the core attributes of relevance.

Apple continues in first place, as it has every year, by delivering top marks across all drivers of relevance. But newcomers, including Peloton, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine and Costco, emerge in leading positions for the first time.

After months of pandemic living, political upheaval and social unrest—and with limited real-life interaction—people are seeking brands that enable compassion, community and connection. They want comfort and an occasional escape. And they demand that brands show up as truthful and transparent—while keeping their promises. As they weather some bleak moments, consumers want brands that will commit to building a brighter future and stronger society.



**Scott Davis**  
Chief Growth Officer  
Prophet



**Marisa Mulvihill**  
Partner, Head of Brand & Activation  
Prophet



**Chris Burzminski**  
Senior Engagement Manager  
Prophet

# Defining Relevance

Relevant brands find their way into people's hearts by continually doing what seems impossible. They adapt quickly to customers' changing needs and expectations. But they do so by remaining ever more true to themselves. Our research finds that this exceptional achievement—a constant balance between evolution and authenticity—is no accident. Four undeniable forces drive relevant brands.



# The Four Principles of Brand Relevance



Customer  
Obsessed



Ruthlessly  
Pragmatic



Distinctively  
Inspired



Pervasively  
Innovative

# Customer Obsessed

**Brands we can't imagine living without.**

These companies know what matters to customers, finding new ways to meet their most important needs.



# Ruthlessly Pragmatic

## Brands we depend on.

These are the brands that have our backs, making life easier by delivering consistent experiences. And they always make good on their promises.



# Distinctively Inspired

## Brands that inspire us.

Modern, trustworthy and inspirational, these are the brands with a larger purpose, helping people live out their own values and beliefs.



# Pervasively Innovative

## Brands that consistently innovate.

These companies never rest, always pushing for better products, services and experiences. They outperform competitors with new solutions for unmet needs.





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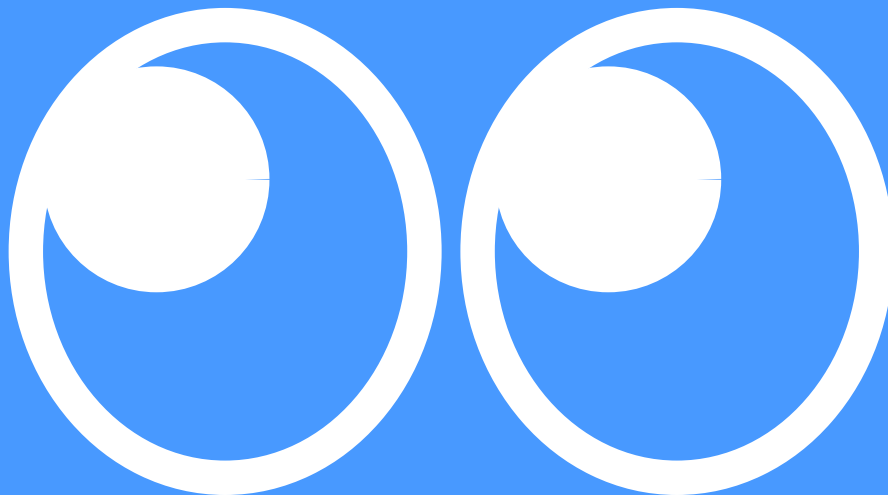
The top brands from this year's BRI have found compelling ways to fill the missing needs of consumers dealing with the global pandemic—making them feel comfortable, nurtured and connected.

**Marisa Mulvihill**

Partner, Head of Brand & Activation  
Prophet

# Insights

These top brands are multi-skilled players, determined to stay ahead of their changing customers. They're constant innovators and fast movers, executing on new efforts more quickly than competitors. They are attentive, intuitive and increasingly human, creating experiences that genuinely touch the lives of their customers.



The results are in...

**13,000+** consumers surveyed,  
**228** brands considered  
across **25** categories

# The Top 50 Brands in the U.S.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
									
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
									
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
									
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
									
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
									

# Industry Leaders

Airlines

**Southwest** 

Apparel



Appliance & Home  
Maintenance

**KitchenAid**

Automotive



Beverages

**Folgers.**

Financial Data  
Services



Fitness



Food Products



Gaming



Grocery &  
Drug Store



Health &  
Life Insurance



Healthcare  
Facilities



Home & Auto  
Insurance



Hospitality



Household &  
Personal Goods

**OLAY**

Media &  
Entertainment



Restaurants



Retail Banking &  
Investments

**Vanguard**

Retailers



Ride &  
Car Sharing

**Uber**

Shipment &  
Delivery Services



Social Media &  
Communication

**Google**

Software &  
Electronics



Telecommunications

**verizon**

Toys



# The Biggest Movers

These brands gained or lost the most relevance between this year and Prophet's 2019 BRI.

facebook

Disney

YouTube

food  
network

lyft

USA  
TODAY

Electrolux

PELOTON

charles SCHWAB

UNITED

# Key Themes

Brands making the most meaningful gains in our Index understand that consumers' cravings are changing. Companies that bring them comfort for instance, do best, as do those that help them connect with others. Those that prioritize truth and transparency are soaring. And while people prize the occasional playful escape, they are also demanding brand integrity. A company's purpose must now include responsible behavior and a commitment to building a better world.



# Comfort: Inner Peace

Brands that helped tame the chaos and confusion of the last year soared. People wanted to feel comforted in their uncertain lives—even if they could only feel it in small ways. As self-care took on new meanings, companies that helped consumers organize closets, up their sourdough game or find the perfect family couch resonated more than ever. Now that consumers know how good it feels, they're not going to give it up.

## **KitchenAid**

Many people think of it in terms of its iconic stand mixer, helping Americans bake their favorite recipes. But this pragmatic powerhouse turned customers into budding domestic gods and goddesses who appreciate all its offerings, from coffee roasters to major appliances.

## **IKEA®**

Few companies speak as expertly about making homes cozier. This brand helped turn kitchens into classrooms and patios to playgrounds. Home is where the heart is, and IKEA helped people rediscover that love.



# Connection: Community Comes Home

Smart brands have long built communities, but the pandemic fueled a fierce desire for connection. It is a turning point: brands are no longer just something people connect with or about. They are something to connect through. The highest-performers pushed their “brand as a platform” strategies into overdrive, often turning physical experiences into virtual. Through these brands, people found each other.



When gyms and fitness studios shut down, Peloton swooped in to save people craving a fitness fix, nearly doubling its sales. But Peloton knows bikes and treadmills are almost beside the point. It is building a universe of like-minded sweatmeisters who find specific ties to one another.



With so much time at home, it's no surprise that many gaming brands climbed the Index. While rival PlayStation scores higher overall, at No.6 versus No.17, Xbox shot up 36 places. Some of that, of course, is fueled by anticipating new consoles. But more meaningful is the brand move to launch Project xCloud, its new streaming service designed to build community through play.

# Joy: Free to Play

Brands that pour on happiness stood out like rays of sunshine. From TikTok dance-offs to Hulu binges, good-natured fun and easy escapism became as essential to consumers as hand sanitizer. Even though people could mostly only dream about vacations, hospitality and airline brands rose in relevance.

## PIXAR

The No.1 brand for “makes me happy” and “connects with me emotionally,” Pixar has always dominated the emotional aspects of the BRI. But with recent films like “Onward” and “Soul” and its extensive catalog of uplifting stories, Pixar once again proved it's a content provider that offers hope and beauty at pivotal moments.

## fisher-price

Navigating Zoom preschool is hard. The venerable toymaker, long focused on encouraging children, skyrockets in relevance, rising 38 places. This brand is a trustworthy companion — and always ready to play.

# Truth: From the Source

With so much happening so fast, people want information quickly. At the same time, they've become keenly aware of the high price of misinformation. Sources once considered completely reliable—even government agencies and officials—suddenly seem less so. When they can do so credibly, brands are stepping in to fill the gaps. They are becoming truth-tellers people can count on.



A top brand for “having a set of beliefs and values that align with my own,” it’s easy to understand why Johns Hopkins earns top scores as a regional health provider. But this year’s performance is driven by its COVID-19 dashboard, launched just two days after doctors diagnosed the first case in the U.S. Almost overnight, it became a definitive authority for anxious Americans—in and outside of the healthcare industry.



Dependable and inspiring, people say NPR is a source they trust more than any other media brand. With helpful additions to its NPR One app, an expanded library of podcasts and The National Conversation, its infinitely sane programming devoted to COVID-19, NPR helps people make sense of and find the truth about the world around them.



# Purpose: Making it Count

As they mull over questions about everything from privilege to the planet, from social justice to public health, people are redefining what they expect from companies. Sick of empty words, consumers want brands to genuinely live up to their promises. Encouraged by Black Lives Matter, they are demanding evidence of diversity. Suddenly more hip to green-washing, pink-washing and woke-washing, they reward companies trying to do better.



Grocery stores took on heightened importance this year. Store employees emerged as heroic front-line workers, even as shoppers tussled over legumes and cleaning supplies. Most grocery store brands lost ground, but Costco radiates relevance—and not just because it sells toilet paper in bulk. It lives its values, with early mask mandates and employee protections.



Nothing about Patagonia's purpose changed. It still stands for protecting the outdoors, especially public lands. But it is one of the biggest gainers in this year's Index, demonstrating that brand bravery matters. Whether encouraging voter turnout or suing against damaging federal policies, Patagonia earns people's trust not by what it says but through what it does.

# Top Ten Brands Spotlight

What are the most relevant brands  
in consumers' lives in 2021?



# 1 Apple

More  
relevant  
than ever

| Top brand for the  
sixth year in a row.

Apple takes the top honor again as No.1 in our survey, with near-perfect scores in all four drivers of relevance. This year, it continues to earn adoration with innovation, dependability and inspiration. Among the first retailers to proactively close stores, the launch of a lower-priced iPhone landed at just the right moment for cash-conscious consumers. Updated Macs and iPads dazzled homebound workers and students. And with Apple TV (we love you, Ted Lasso) it's establishing itself as a content genius, too.



# 2 Peloton

## Pedaling toward happiness

Up to No.2 from No.35,  
a top brand in being  
"distinctively inspired."

When gym and studio closures deprived exercisers of their fitness fix, they knew they needed the mental health benefits of sweat. Peloton, which earns the highest score for "connects with me emotionally," saved them, nearly doubling sales of its exercise bikes and treadmills. But more importantly, it connected them to others, both through its online communities and its constantly expanding variety of workouts available live and on-demand. These gems are powering triple-digit membership gains and impressively low dropout rates.



“

At Peloton, everything we do is centered on improving the lives of our Members. We see every touchpoint as an opportunity to motivate our Members to stay active, centered, and connected. We are continually inspired by our passionate community and our primary focus is shining a light on their experiences and telling those authentic stories to the world.

**Dara Treseder**SVP, Head of Global Marketing & Communications  
Peloton



# 3 KitchenAid

## Countertop comfort

As the pandemic continues, America is living in the kitchen in new ways. This ever-relevant brand claimed new importance, offering reliable machines that lead people to exotic endeavors: Sourdough bread. Croissants. Fluffy slime. Its digital content both celebrates and informs these makers-in-chief, encouraging them to new feats of domestic bravery. And it's also prescient. Way back in March 2020, it unveiled Kyoto Glow as the color of the year, bathing buyers in a serene, yellow-green symbolizing optimism and tranquility.

Best in "lives up to its promises," climbing to No. 3 from No. 6 overall.



**KitchenAid®**

“

We focus on our consumers by putting them at the center of everything we do. By purposefully creating products that push the boundaries on utility and style, KitchenAid fuels passion and individuality, allowing consumers to satisfy their craving to uniquely explore in the kitchen.

**Jon Bellante**  
Global Marketing Director  
KitchenAid

**KitchenAid®**

# 4 Mayo Clinic

## Pandemic truth-teller

Jumping to No. 4 from No. 24, ranking highest in "its values align with mine."

Healthcare brands rightfully grew in significance and prowess during the global pandemic, and Mayo Clinic was a trusted leader. It earns high marks in "has a set of beliefs and values that align with my own." Although it has locations worldwide and treats 1.2 million people annually, its impact is bigger as a health content powerhouse. During times of uncertainty and disinformation, Mayo Clinic has helped shape public health policy by conducting and sharing research so individuals can better understand how to protect themselves and their loved ones.



“

Mayo Clinic's beliefs and values around caring for the wellbeing of the whole person—physically, mentally, spiritually—haven't changed, but we started to tell people about them.

**Sherri Gilligan**  
Chief Marketing Officer  
Mayo Clinic



# 5 LEGO

## Innovating with empathy

This "makes me happy"  
brand leaps from to  
No.5 from No.28.

LEGO, which has always aced BRI measures of quality, inspiration and innovation, makes the top five for the first time. As parents watch children struggle with isolation, anxiety and boredom, the brand made quick moves to show up empathetically. It made a \$50 million gift to help families in need, created funny PSAs to promote handwashing and developed new products to boost remote learning. Best of all, it offers digital native children and adults a way to play away from screens. No wonder it ranks so highly in "makes me feel inspired."





# 6 Costco

## The best-behaved retailer

COVID-19 turned supermarkets into danger zones, with mad grabs for toilet paper and hazard pay for grocery clerks. While most food retailers fell in relevance in our Index this year, Costco soared, earning high marks for dependability and trustworthiness. Much of that stems from its commitment to safety, swiftly offering special hours for seniors and enforcing mandatory mask-wearing. At a time when most stores struggle with declining foot traffic, it keeps posting gains.

Up to No.6 from No.21, a top brand for "lives up to it's promises" and "I trust."



**COSTCO**  
WHOLESALE

# 7 Honda

## Comforting with consistency

Honda makes cars that people can count on—keeping them high in our ratings. But in what turned out to be the year of the family road trip, reliability and value took on new importance. Consistency is critical. The Accord just made the "Car and Driver Best Pick" for the 23rd consecutive year. Honda responded quickly to the pandemic, offering individualized relief for those struggling to make payments and deferred payments for new buyers. And it keeps finding new ways to engage people, like previewing the new Civic prototype on Twitch.

Driven by dependability, it holds onto the No.7 spot.



# 8 Johns Hopkins Medicine

## Data visualization for the masses

A top brand for  
"beliefs and values  
align with my own."

Johns Hopkins scores well as a regional health provider that serves close to 5 million people. But it catapults into our rankings for the first time on pure innovation: it built the influential COVID-19 dashboard before many had ever heard of the virus. Johns Hopkins quickly became the No. 1 authority on global contagion, using manual inputs and automated data from more than 200 sources. It's furthering the understanding of every user—from public-health experts to journalists to concerned citizens. It ties with Mayo Clinic for the top score in "has a set of beliefs and values that align with my own."



JOHNS HOPKINS  
M E D I C I N E



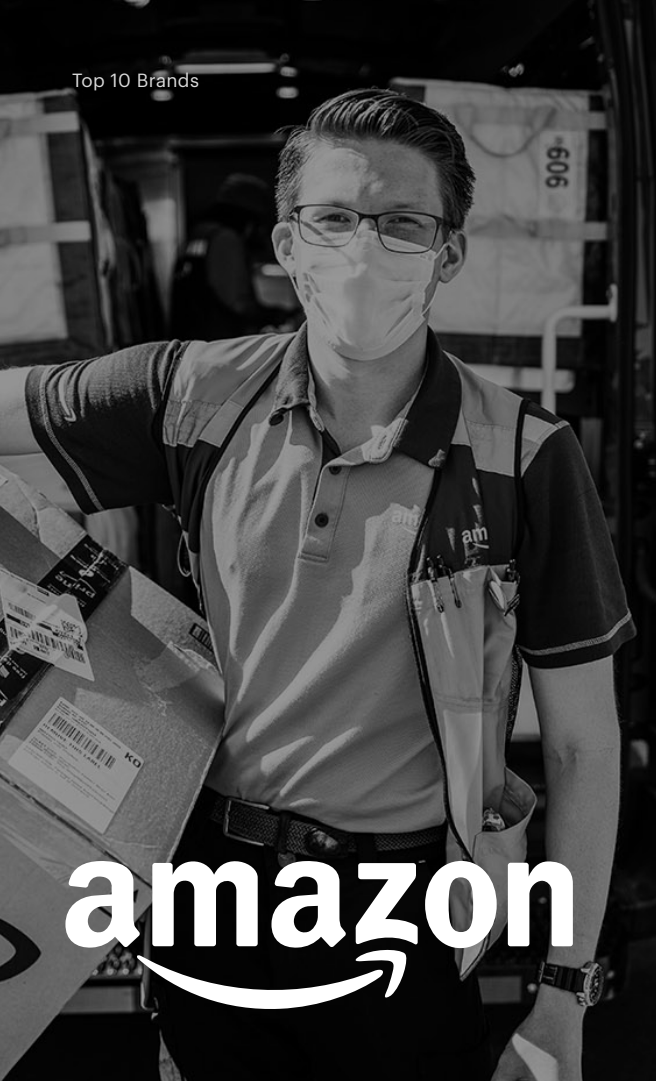
# 9 PlayStation

## Helping gamers help each other

Rising to No.9 from No.16, scores best in "is modern and in touch."

Sales of video games and hours spent gaming are skyrocketing. And in part, that's due to the long-awaited launch of PlayStation 5, which had the most successful sales launch of any console—ever. But PlayStation's bond with gamers remains unmatched. Seen as ultra-modern, "always finding new ways to meet my needs" and "engages with me in new and creative ways," it finds ways to take players to their happy place, while connecting them with other gamers. With a high-tech heart, it even offered free games to encourage people to play at home.





# 10 Amazon

## Utterly indispensable

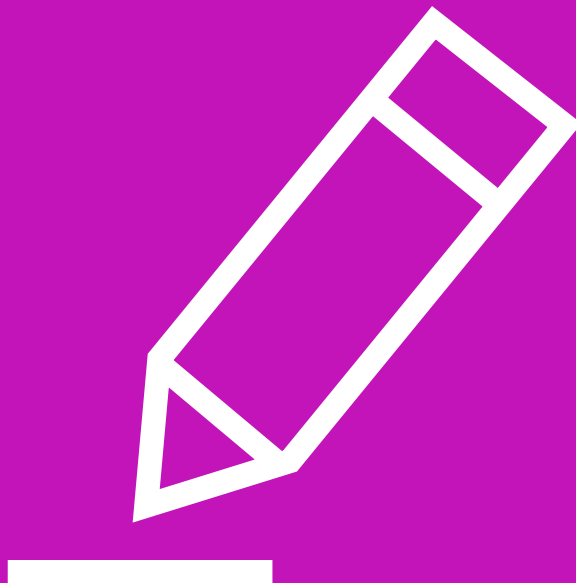
As e-commerce everything captures consumers' attention, Amazon takes an outsized role in helping people get their hands on what they need — despite major supply-chain upsets. And it continues to soar in key measures of pragmatism ("meets an important need in my life") and customer obsession ("I can't imagine my life without it"). People love its innovations and say it "is always finding new ways to meet my needs." With AmazonPharmacy in the works, we'll be on the look-out for which market the brand is going to conquer next.

At No.10, it excels at "always finding new ways to meet my needs."

# Methodology

Our clients have often asked for our perspective on the value of brand rankings. And while there are several brand lists and rankings out there today, none speak directly to consumers—the only true experts.

We created the BRI to help business and brand leaders measure the relevance of their brands, and provide them ways to improve it.



## How were the companies selected?

Companies from all industries that contribute materially to household spend in each respective market were included in the study. This data was sourced from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' February 2018 Report on Consumer Expenditures. Within each industry, the companies that were included achieved outsized business performance (MRY revenues and trailing 3-year revenue growth) within their respective industries. In some instances, smaller companies that have been driving change in these industries were also included given their significant traction with consumers. Given the methodology for brand selection, not all brands in every category could be included.

## What was the primary research objective?

To understand the principles that great brands execute against — in customers' minds — in order to establish themselves as relentlessly relevant.

## What does it mean for a brand to be relevant?

Relentlessly relevant brands do four things well — first, they're customer obsessed. Everything they invest in, create, and bring to market is designed to meet important needs in peoples' lives. Second, they're pervasively innovative. They don't rest on their laurels, even as industry leaders — they push the status quo, engage with customers in new and creative ways, and find new ways to address unmet needs. Third, they're ruthlessly pragmatic. They make sure their products are available where and when customers need them, deliver consistent experiences, and just make life that much easier for people. And, finally, they're distinctively inspired. They've made emotional connections, earned trust and often exist to fulfill a larger purpose.

## To what extent does this build on David Aaker's IP?

To a significant extent. Of all the characteristics of a brand, the one that is most necessary for its success is relevance. David Aaker's core point, that brands must create and dominate new subcategories, is central to the idea of relevance. Thus, it is a key aspect of Prophet's definition of a relevant brand.

## How many brands were rated?

228 brands were rated in total. Brands not included were those in the alcohol, tobacco and firearms categories and companies engaged solely or primarily in business-to-business (B2B) categories.

## How did Prophet develop this Index?

Prophet helps organizations grow better by building brands, transforming business and moving society. Over the last several years, our clients have asked for our perspective on other brand rankings and how they could use them to better their brand. We felt there was a void in the marketplace for a brand ranking that truly reflected the consumer's perspective. We created the BRI to help business and brand leaders measure how relevant their brands are to consumers and learn ways to improve their standing and drive uncommon growth.

# Let's talk.

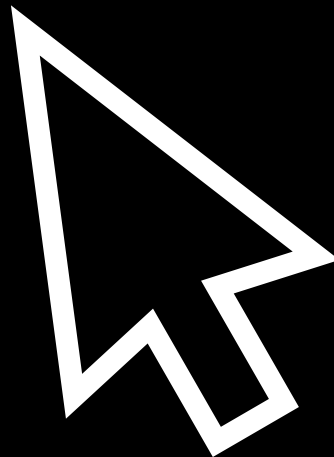
Prophet is a consultancy that helps clients find better ways to grow by focusing on three important areas: creating relevant brand and customer experiences, driving accelerated growth strategies and leveraging digital as a transformative force in their business.

Want to know more about Prophet or the BRI? We'd love to sit down and talk about how we can help you build a relentlessly relevant brand.

## Please contact us today.

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## Our Research Partner:



Dynata is the world's largest first-party data and insights platform. With a reach that encompasses over 62 million consumers and business professionals globally, and an extensive library of individual profile attributes collected through surveys, Dynata is the cornerstone for precise, trustworthy quality data. The company has built innovative data services and solutions around its robust first-party data offering to bring the voice of the customer to the entire marketing continuum – from strategy, innovation, and branding to advertising, measurement, and optimization. Dynata serves more than 5,500 market research, media and advertising agencies, publishers, consulting and investment firms and corporate customers in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific.

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