TRENDS 2021

A look at what's ahead for the future of business, technology and design from Accenture Interactive.

Accenture Interactive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Fjord Trends 2021, the over-arching theme is mapping out new territory. With the events of 2020 upending so much of what we took for granted, we now need to look ahead with focus and a desire to help people solve their challenges on their own terms. In many ways, the 21st century starts now.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought clarity and surprises alongside its chaos and tragedies. It's highlighted what's important to us, it's inspired community spirit and ingenuity, and it's generated change on a huge scale around the globe.

There's comfort to be drawn from the fact that the world has faced a common adversary but, while we've all been in it together, we've each been experiencing it in our own ways. Brands and businesses will need to understand people's new context, empathize with the way they feel, and provide the tools to let them "hack" their own solutions.

In Fjord Trends 2021, we delve into seven trends that we believe will be most important for organizations, employees, and customers over the next 12 months and beyond.

COLLECTIVE DISPLACEMENT

TREND 1

How and where we experience things changed in 2020, leaving us with a shared sense of displacement as we seek new ways and places to do the things we need and love to do. Working, shopping, learning, socializing, parenting and taking care of our health has all changed for many of us.

This trend looks at how this all relates to business and brands, and what it means to their employees and customers. It'll take new solutions to deliver experiences in a context outside of a brand's control. For example they'll need to get around the fact that public touchscreens are no longer a favored interaction, and look for ways to deliver joy through immersive experiences and sense of agency, the loss of which we're feeling deeply.

Almost overnight, people started living very differently, which changed the way they gather information (because their opportunities to stumble upon new things were suddenly limited), and which stifled their ability to enjoy much of what was familiar. The brands on the other side of that equation need to seek new ways to interact with people in different places and times, and to offer them experiences that appeal in their new circumstances.

The concept of innovation is sometimes wrapped up in technology but it's increasingly being driven by people's talent for coming up with new ways — or "hacks" — to deal with their challenges. Technology plays a key role, less as the headline act and more as a facilitator for people's ingenuity. Their urgent problems couldn't wait for wholesale solutions, so they innovated their own fixes with whatever tech they had at hand.

This trend is about how people's creativity is shining through, from home-workers repurposing their ironing board as a standing desk to entrepreneurs launching new businesses. With live shows on hold, performers are finding new routes to audiences, and people are repurposing sites like TikTok and platforms like video games to get important messages out.

Everyone wants better solutions, but the era in which a brand was expected to create a finished solution has gone. It's time for new thinking and new approaches. Perhaps the most important switch is that from prescriptive innovation to suggestive innovation.

DO IT YOURSELF INNOVATION

TREND 2

TREND 2

DO IT YOURSELF INNOVATION

SWEET TEAMS ARE MADE OF THIS

TREND 3
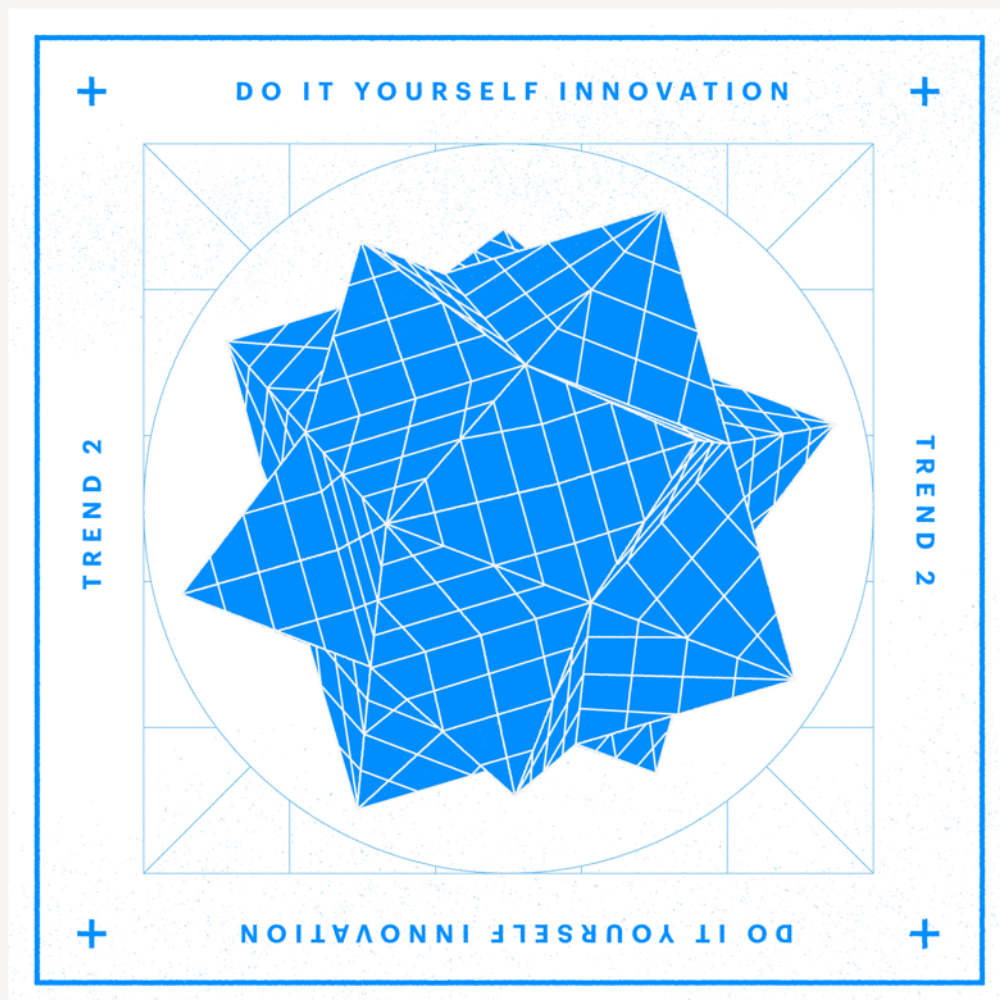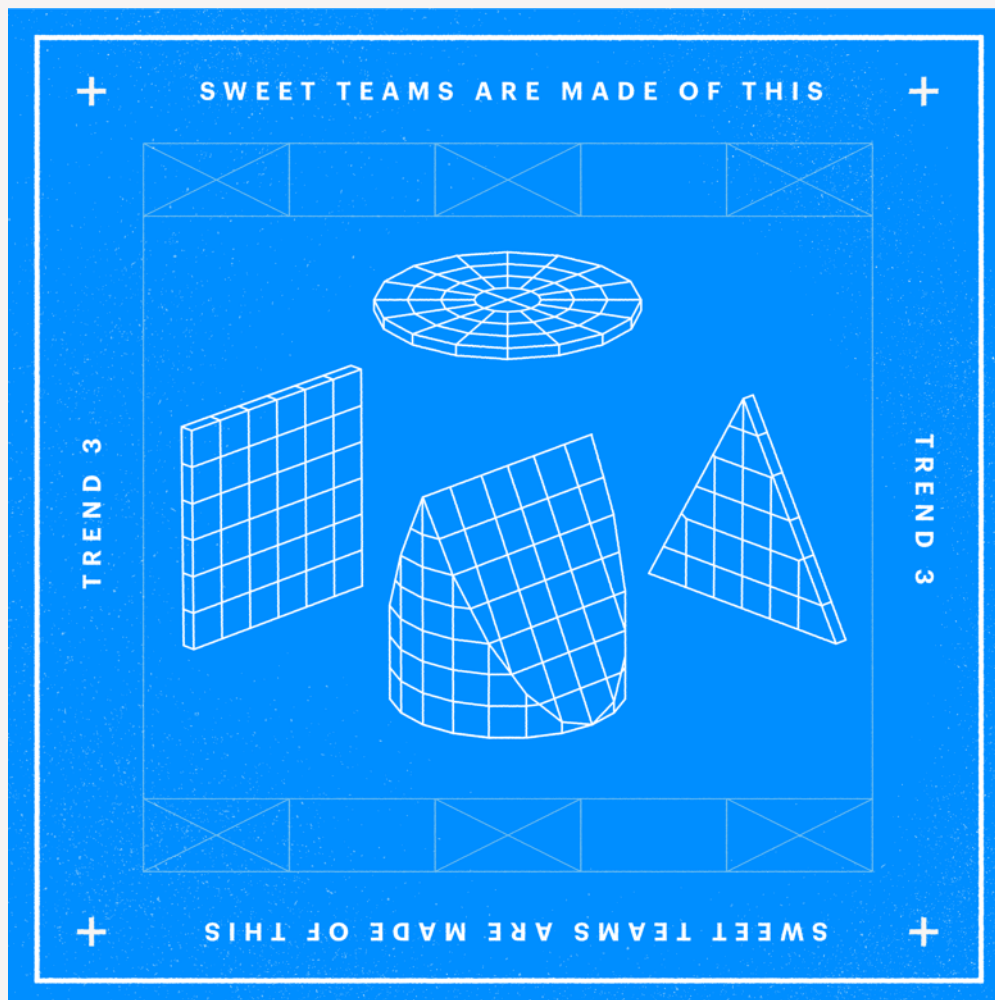
For a significant proportion of those who still have jobs, working from home has become living in the office, which is having a huge effect on the reciprocal agreement between employer and employee, and the many assumptions around it. Who pays for the coffee? Who has final say over what people wear for a work-related video call in their own homes? Whose responsibility is it to preserve home-workers' right to privacy?

This trend is about the relationship between people and their work, and employers and their teams.

The future won't be one-size-fits-all — in fact, it's possible that the employee experience will look different for every organization.

In this trend, we explore the four main areas where employers have opportunities (and responsibilities) to innovate: technology, culture, talent and control. For now, the future of work is unclear — instead, we are entering an era of prototyping what the future of work could look like.

Many of us have been spending much more time on screens to interact with the world — and even with our neighbors. Consequently, people have noticed a certain sameness caused by templated design in digital. Organizations must reconsider design, content, audience and the interaction between them to inject greater excitement, joy and serendipity into screen experiences.

This trend is about how we need more from the screens through which we live our lives. Interactions are ripe for a reboot, in ways that challenge and inspire us, excite us and bring the element of chance back to our daily routines.

Brands that break free from outdated norms and restrictive design templates (while taking an ecologically conscious approach) will be noticed and hankered after.

LIQUID INFRASTRUCTURE

TREND 5
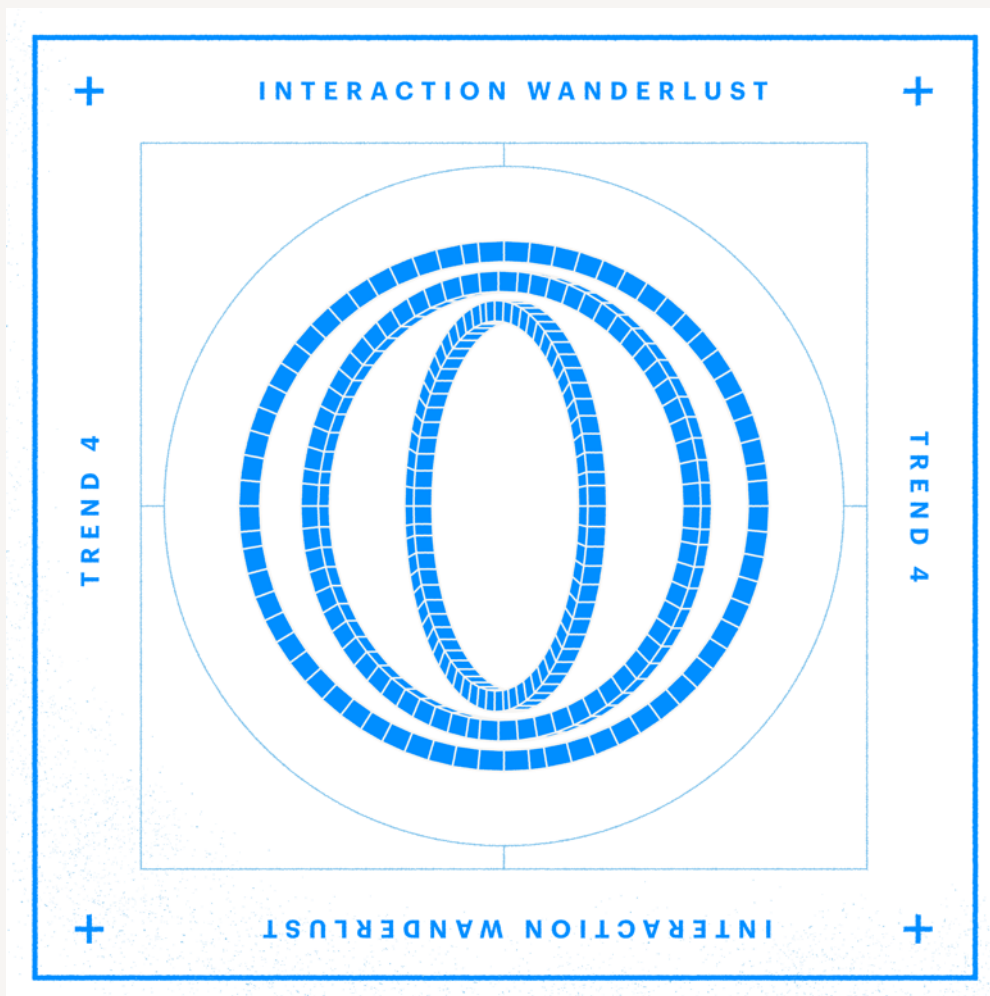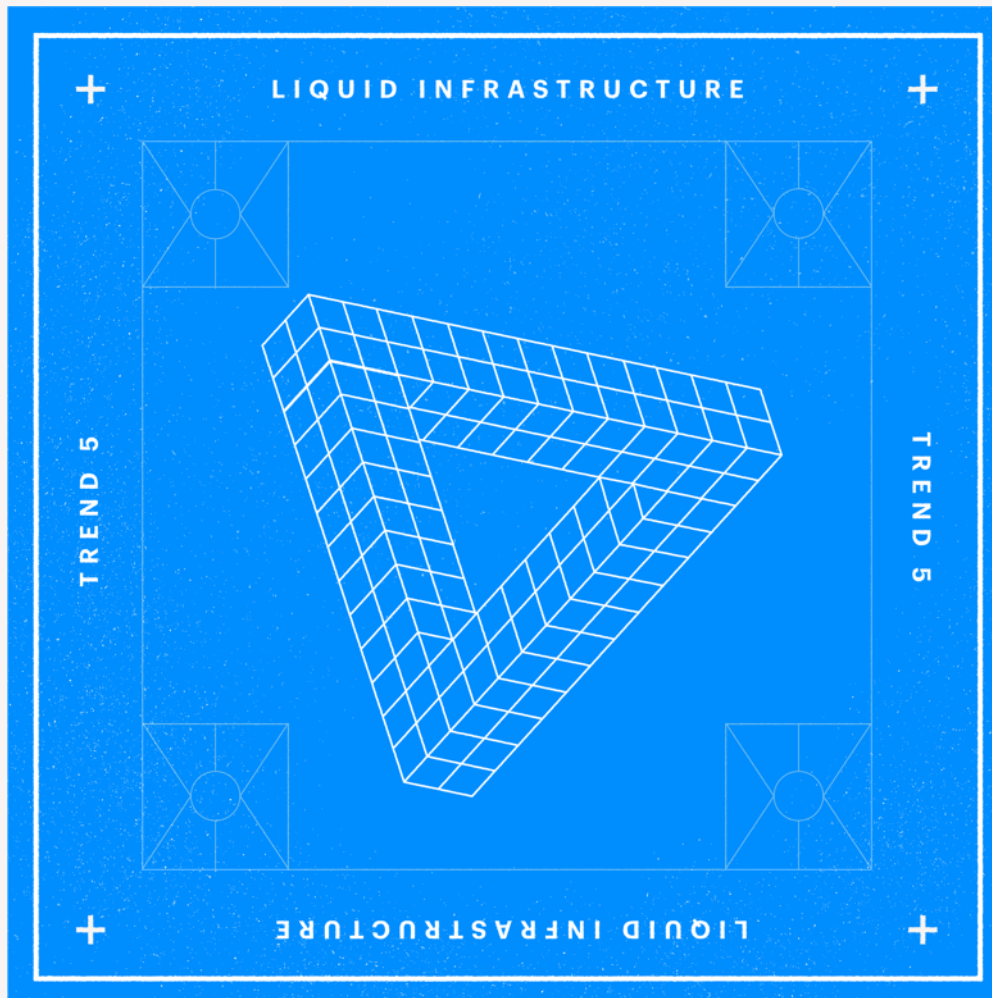
How and where we get things changed a lot in 2020. People started spending more time and money shopping online and in their neighborhood so they could avoid travel, and prioritize their communities over the convenience of ordering from an ecommerce giant. Organizations must rethink all their physical assets and focus on points of delight in the last few feet before purchase.

This trend is about the expansion of "liquid expectations", which we've talked about for a while. It's about the fact that people want the same immediate gratification and delight from a delivery experience that they took for granted in store — no matter where they are. Largely, they're being disappointed, so this is a huge opportunity space.

Organizations can (and should) build agility and resilience across their supply chains so they can adapt quickly to change.

People care deeply about what brands stand for, and how they express their values. Right now, with many inequalities (existing and new) that should be addressed, companies must work hard to manage the narratives that shape their brand. However, baked into the very concept of empathy is the fact that it's impossible to be empathetic to everyone all the time.

This trend is about how companies prioritize the subjects that matter most to

them, build their behaviors around those subjects, and shape their narrative to talk about them.

Successful brands will be those that create, shape and execute their experience and the stories they tell in close harmony. It's important to treat empathy as the way your whole company behaves, and not as a one-off project.

EMPATHY CHALLENGE

TREND 6

TREND 6
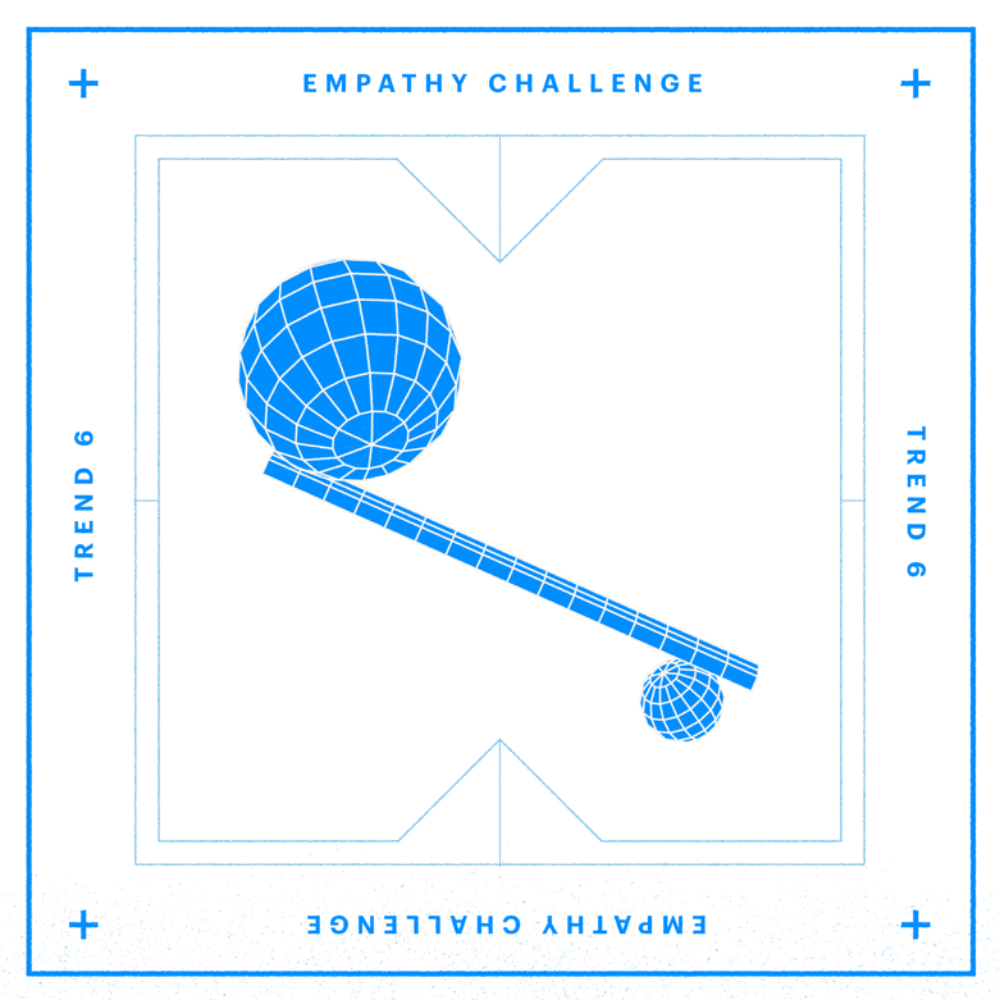
One of the reasons many of us found 2020 emotionally challenging was the cancellation or disruption of the rituals we've built our lives around. Rituals are the habits to which we attach meaning and feelings. They're the things we do regularly that may seem small but their effect on our mental wellbeing is big.

This trend is about companies' opportunity to help people in their search for new meaning through new rituals that bring them joy and comfort. It starts with understanding the blank space left by a lost ritual and designing the right thing to take its place.

Rituals often associated with brands tend to fall into four categories: ritual as portal (a transition point between the different versions of ourselves), ritual as sense of belonging (those that relate to community and social connection), ritual as comfort (those that sit in the "me time" bucket), and ritual as anchor (the moments that give us a framework and mark the passing of time).

FJORD TRENDS 2021

In the current transition phase from crisis response to a new operational model, we have the opportunity to examine the changes thrust upon us and the innovations we've seen emerge, and to reflect on how we want to move forward.

The reassuring thing is that we're all in the same boat of uncertainty and unpredictability. We're all exploring, which is creating a safe space for experimentation, prototyping and learning. Throughout history, after a global crisis, a new era of thinking has begun. Right now, we have an opportunity to decide what we want the 21st century renaissance to look like.

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