Bridging distances

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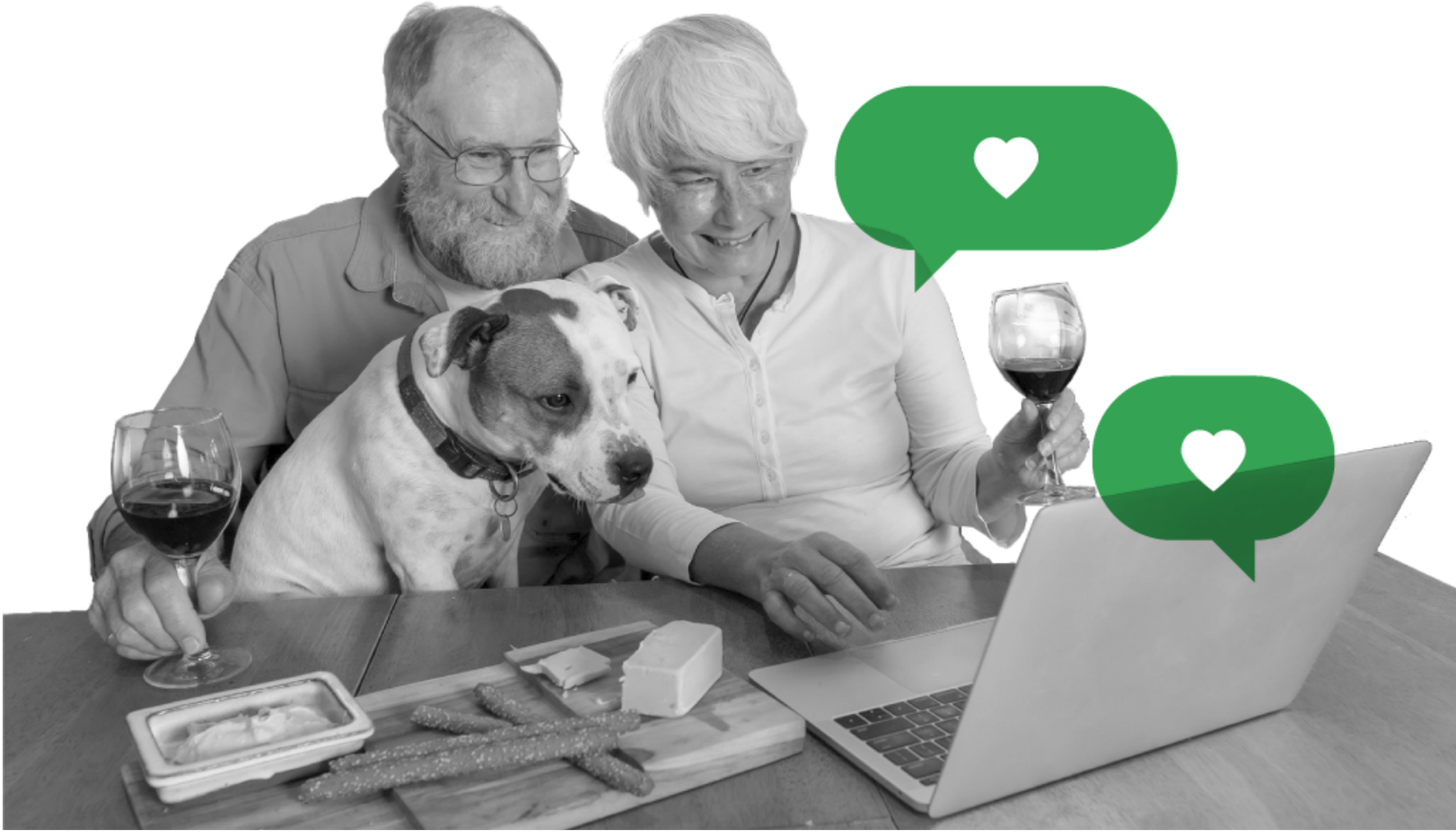
The pandemic kept countless people physically apart, and consumers quickly found ways to adapt. But in 2021, we saw that sense of separation deepen. As a result, consumers moved beyond finding brief moments of connection, to finding new ways to express themselves and nurture deeper, more ongoing relationships, both online and offline.

With much of Australia and New Zealand in extended lockdowns, COVID-19 remained a top concern for people and many were still wary of being in physical contact with others. But a pandemic can’t dampen the fundamental human need for personal connection and belonging, and rising searches show us how people are continuing to find new, often digital, ways to connect while separated.

One example is how people have started to change the ways they express affection. In lieu of physical touch or time spent together, many are searching for gifts to send to loved ones, and inspiration for the right words to wish them a happy birthday or anniversary.



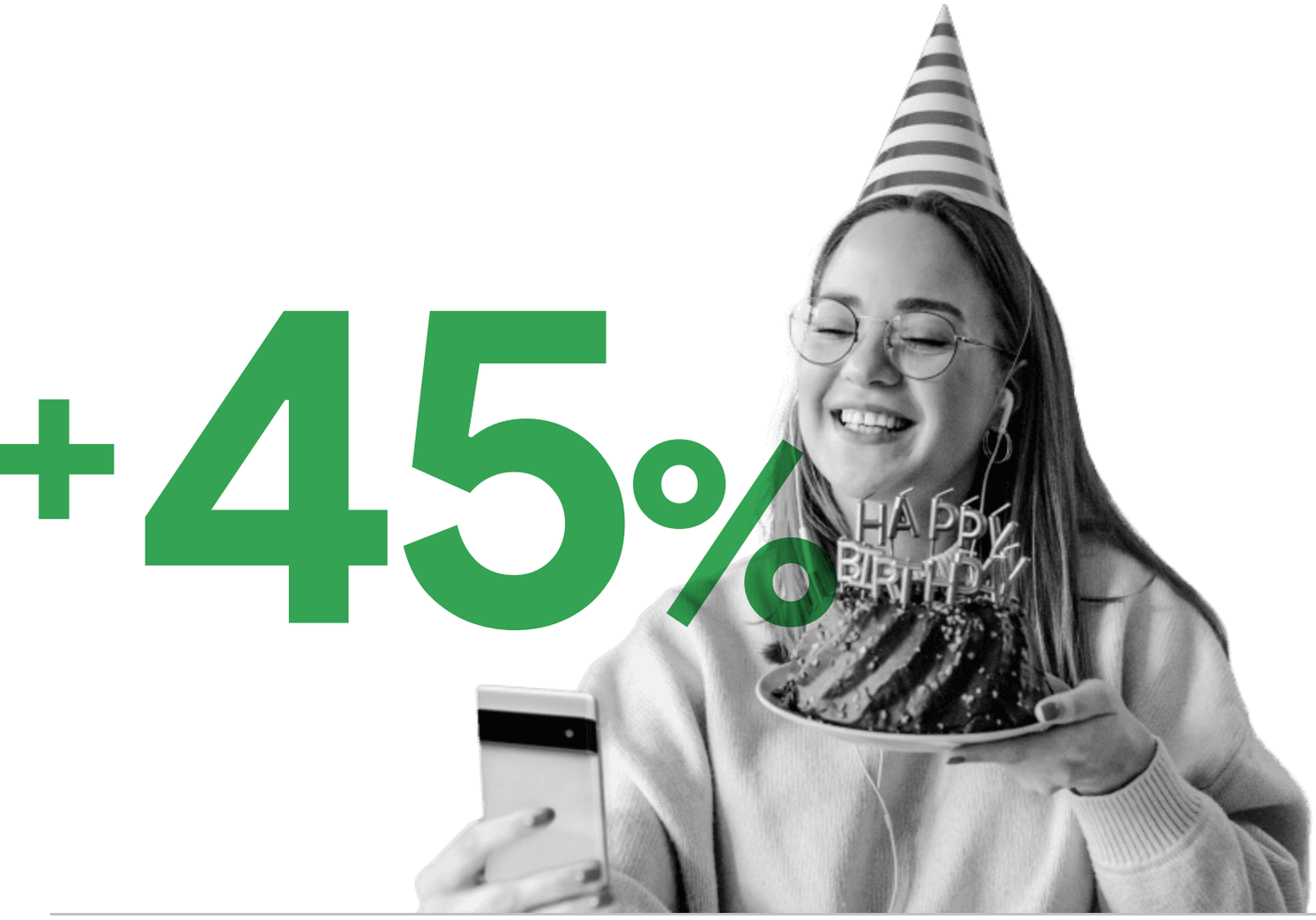
As the world grows more dependent on digital technology to form genuine human connections, brands should look for opportunities to connect meaningfully with customers online. A popular strategy for fashion brands is to allow customers to try on new outfits online, which has seen a 100 percent increase in searches for “virtual try-on” in New Zealand.

In marketing, we often say the medium is the message. But that doesn’t mean a channel should do all the hard work for you. Instead, it’s important to consider if you’re reaching the human behind every channel strategy, and what you can do as a brand to form deeper and more meaningful relationships with your consumers.

SEARCHES

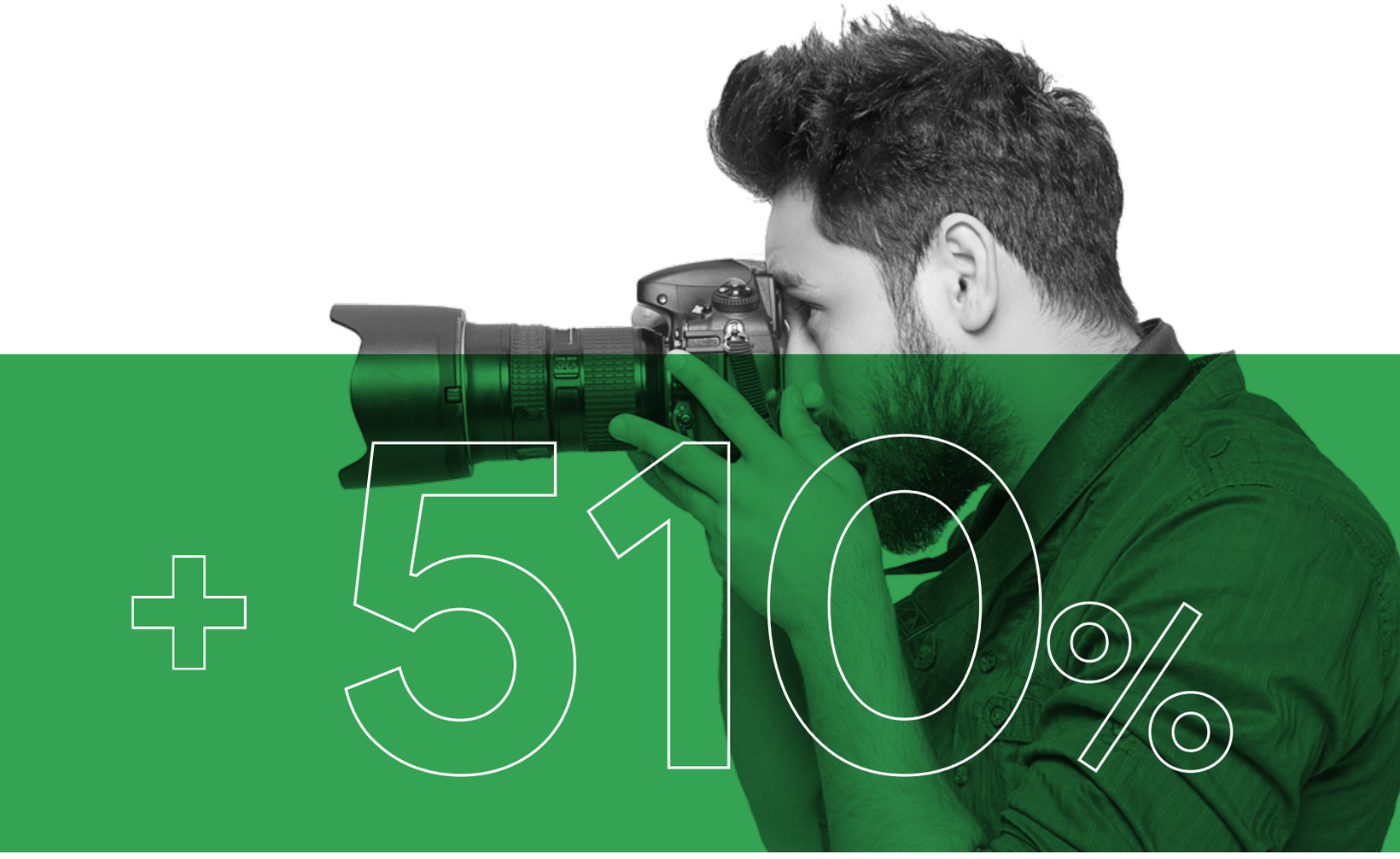
Online expressions of affection

Love languages evolve as times change, with people searching for ways to show affection from afar. For more than half the online population in APAC, that’s meant purchasing a gift for someone online – which is more than any other region in the world.[11]



Many people across Australia and New Zealand turn to Google Search for birthday or anniversary gift inspiration. Search interest in birthday wishes has grown by 45%.

Gifting has become an important expression of connection during lockdown, with 55% more searches for help to deliver gifts and hampers.

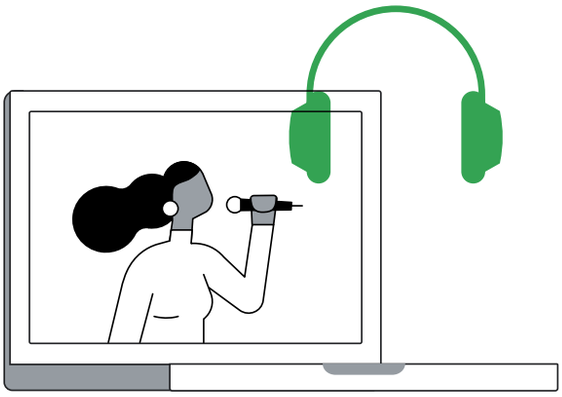


Photoshoots have seen up to 510% growth across Australia and New Zealand, as people capture moments that others cannot be there for.

Digital for personal connection

Technology is sparking interest in virtual versions of activities, such as escape rooms and concerts. Even holiday gatherings are going digital. In the lead up to Christmas 2021, 53% in Australia and 61% in New Zealand expected to celebrate with their loved ones via video calls.[12]

+120%



We've seen up to 120% growth in people searching for the online or virtual equivalent of offline experiences like virtual escape rooms or virtual concert.

+400%

Searches for Australian border restrictions increased 600% during 2021, and concerns about being separated from family over the festive season saw searches for virtual Christmas grow by 400%.

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

The emotional value of digital

3

Faced with physical distancing restrictions, people have adapted how they express themselves and are increasingly using digital tools to build personal connections. The opportunity for brands now is to build and nurture deeper relationships and develop emotional connections with their customers.

Harvard Business Review
An Emotional Connection Matters More Than Customer Satisfaction

"Emotionally connected customers buy more of your products and services, visit you more often, exhibit less price sensitivity, pay more attention to your communications, follow your advice, and recommend you more — everything you hope their experience with you will cause them to do."

1 Build customer love and loyalty by consistently delivering at each touchpoint

Research shows that consumer purchase journeys are driven by emotions. Shoppers want to feel reassured and empowered at every touchpoint, and will reward brands that help them navigate the "messy middle."

Explore how you can leverage the emotional power of digital to provide timely, accurate, and relevant information across your organic and paid communication channels.

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2 Tap into the value of virtual to augment real world experiences

Not everyone prefers in-person experiences, especially during a pandemic. Consider giving consumers the freedom to choose between online and offline events by using virtual channels to augment or replace physical experiences.

Google Project Starline is a new 3D technology that combines advances in hardware and software to enable friends, families, and coworkers to feel like they're together even when they're apart.

Heydoor marketplace allows customers in Australia to shop in cafes, restaurants, pharmacies, and more, without having to go indoors. It aims to help people who use wheelchairs and mobility scooters, people with prams or pets, or those who find crowds overwhelming or unsafe.

3 Invest in ad creatives that can connect and inspire

Get creative! Your advertising efforts are key to building emotional connection and driving campaign performance. In fact, creative is the dominant ROI driver across all media platforms, particularly digital.

To bring your brand and products to life, create ads that authentically showcase how your brand can help people in their everyday life. You can explore creative best practices to unlock better performance across Google Ads solutions.

Sources:

11. GWI, Wave Q2, 2021 27. Google Trends, AU, BD, HK, IN, ID, JP, MY, NZ, PK, PH, KR.
12. Pure Profile Christmas Report, 2021. Nationally representative sample, aged 18+ n=1,052 (Au), n=535 (NZ).