

# BRINGING THE PAST FORWARD



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CREATING

MODERN

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LEGACY

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BY

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**IN THEIR AMBITION** to help brands live on, marketers have become practiced at manufacturing things for fans to hold onto. Time-stamped and logoed merchandise, brand-history books and postcards to show that “you were here” are typical of the artifacts marketers have made for their fans. While there is near-term revenue on top of short-term sociability to be gained by selling fans these ways to express their affinity, marketers often fail to realize all the enduring benefits they desire. That is because artifacts that only look back risk becoming less relevant relics of the past for people who are living for today and tomorrow ahead of yesterday—for people who are living in the age of now.

In turn, brands working on building modern legacy need to transform their thinking. Artifacts once created to mark only a single point in history must evolve just as people do in order to move from being a sign of the past to a still vital sign of the times. This doesn’t mean heritage brands should stop showing a reverence for its artifacts, including icons, from the past. Nor does this mean that entirely new brands should create without heritage and tradition in mind. Instead, it means that in order to grow in relevance, brands and their chief artifacts can never get stuck in the past. Brands need to give modern-day consumers continuously new ways to help them bring the past forward.

In recognition of this modern context, where artifacts can no longer just be backward-looking to achieve an enduring consumer relevance, our strategy team initiated the Legacy Lab. Beginning in 2012, this multi-generational, cross-cultural, ongoing study examines the different aspects of legacy for people consuming in today's modern world: authoring lasting legacies that matter, assembling legacies that stay vital and creating artifacts that give the past a present and future. Currently, our learning reflects the input of more than 900 social media followers, in addition to more than 400 survey respondents and 60 one-on-one interviews, from more than 20 countries.

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In our study, we observed that versus traditional artifacts, modern artifacts tend to exhibit five new traits. Versus transporting people back, they now also transport them ahead. Versus representing something for traditional reuse on occasion, they are a part of sharing traditions with more people more of the time. Versus binding family, they help to unite communities. Versus having value since they are scarce, they have value because they are selected. Versus surviving only because they are resilient, they survive because they adapt. What follows are examples of how some modern legacy brands are reframing the artifacts they create to help bring these five new traits to life.

## ARTIFACT TRAITS

The logo for Tiffany & Co. is displayed in white serif font on a blue rectangular background.

### 1 Progressing

The idea that artifacts help to transport people back in time is not new. An engagement ring from Tiffany & Co., for example, serves as a tangible reminder of a memorable life moment and is the catalyst for retelling the proposal story that starts, “Remember when.” The idea that artifacts don’t just transport us backward, but onward, is a more contemporary idea. So, a charm bracelet from Tiffany doesn’t just document memories made, it inspires and leaves room for memories to come. The story of the bracelet wearer, told via the charms, remains a work in progress. Therefore, the modern artifact doesn’t just exist as part of the past but as a key part of a story being written each day.

The logo for The French Laundry is displayed in white serif font on a blue rectangular background.

### 2 Sharing

The idea that artifacts play a role in re-creating tradition is not new. A look at a saved menu from The French Laundry, for example, may serve as the occasional reminder to return to the famed restaurant for a milestone anniversary. The idea that artifacts shouldn’t be reserved for revisiting on rare occasion but are for sharing in new ways, on more occasions, is a modern idea. In turn, Thomas Keller’s cookbook doesn’t just give those touched by The French Laundry the ability to relive the experience, it also creates the ability to share with more people and in more kitchens. And the recipes, modern artifacts, aren’t only shared according to tradition but in perpetually new ways.



### 3 Uniting

The idea that artifacts help to connect family from one generation to the next is not new. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear stories about how a Harley-Davidson has been passed down from father to son. For many, Harleys are “in the blood.” The idea that artifacts can do more than bind families, that they can also build and unite communities, is a more current idea. In addition to bikes, Harley-Davidson designs wearable gear including jackets, boots and eyewear that define a lifestyle greater than lineage. In turn, fans—legacy assemblers who cut across age, gender and geography—don’t just ride the bikes they inherit, they also display the lifestyle they choose.



### 4 Selecting

The idea that artifacts in rare supply hold high value is not new. A pair of anniversary boots from Lucchese, hand-tooled and hand-painted to commemorate 125 years in business, cost \$12,500. Past the special product and packaging materials, Lucchese made only 125 pairs. The idea that artifacts attain value not because there are few, but because they are selected, is now in fashion. Accordingly, Lucchese offers its assemblers the ability to create Classic boots of their choosing from a menu of designs. The ability to create is more democratic: Now, anyone can design a pair. The value is not from limited access but from the selection of how the modern artifact is made.



### 5 Adapting

The idea that artifacts that are treasured are also preserved is not new. The Ritz-Carlton, for example, believes in creating indelible marks and has, correspondingly, captured some of its most memorable scenes on artful posters and postcards as keepsakes. The idea that form also matters, that artifacts must adapt to endure, is a byproduct of the age of now. So, when The Ritz-Carlton created digital posters and postcards, where its assemblers co-create the art, the brand showed an adaptive ability: making artifacts for modern users and uses. Now, memories are not just preserved temporarily on paper but captured as digital artifacts meant for a lifetime.

In the age of now, the key is for brands and their consumers, authors and assemblers, not to be so looking backward as to get left behind. Artifacts can help to reminisce, but they can also help to progress. Artifacts can be a part of tradition for the few, but they can now be shared with many to help travel further. They can have high market value

when they are scarce, but they can also have a high personal value based on how they are selected. They can linger for a long time, but they can also adapt in content and form for the times. Having a history does matter for marketers, but only in relation to the present and future. It matters as long as they can bring the past forward. ■

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*Mark Miller is the Chief Strategy Officer at Team One, an ad agency with global expertise and proprietary research in premium categories and aspirational consumers.*