

DIFFERENT TAKE

A SECTION THAT FOCUSES ON CULTURE,
HISTORY AND SOCIAL TRENDS

*“I look at
creativity as
a download
from God”*

TROY CARTER

Troy Carter, who founded talent management company Atom Factory in 2010, describes his approach to the business as “disruptive.” In 2011, he co-founded Backplane, a Silicon Valley startup that “redefines social media by allowing celebrities and brands to connect with fans, foster community, and cultivate brand loyalty.” In 2012, he created A \ IDEA, a product development and branding agency, as well as AF Square, an angel fund and tech consultancy. As Lady Gaga’s manager, Carter helped cement the pop star’s formidable online presence by cultivating a “fans first” philosophy. He began his career in Philadelphia working for Will Smith and James Lassiter’s Overbrook Entertainment, joining Bad Boy Entertainment in 1995 where he worked with groundbreaking artists such as Notorious B.I.G.



TROY CARTER: TAMING THE FAME MONSTER

Lady Gaga's manager tells Brunswick's **David Sutphen** about building social networks, the changing face of music and what brands can learn from Little Monsters

“What I love about what I do is that it’s a real meritocracy. In both music and tech, people judge you by what you bring to the table. It’s not about your age, your sex, or the color of your skin”

“Technology isn’t a threat to the music business. We’re going to see this convergence of technology and media in a way that hasn’t existed in the past”

“Social networks were not built for real fan/artist relationships or real consumer/brand relationships. Our bet is that the future of social is going to go in a direction of very specific niche networks”

“The world is in flux. So Pepsi, Coca-Cola or even Google could be the next big music label”

Photograph: © Kevin Mazur



“We’re going from a conversation about privacy to one about transparency”

“I speak to a lot of brands trying to figure out their social media strategy. Brands with 20m, 30m, 50m ‘likes’ on Facebook. But they really don’t see how to turn that into customer satisfaction. How to turn it into a transaction. How to turn it into a long-lasting relationship”

“You’ve got to be completely transparent. If you offer people value in exchange for information and you’re transparent in your use of that information, you build a trusted relationship. A lot of people would then be willing to share that information, especially if they are under 25 years old”

“Now you can reach fans directly – and it’s free. You can give them a ton of free content so they can experience the music in a unique way. We make it a complete and immersive experience”

“Gaga wore a bra with guns on it and it was a big story. And then it was gone. It’s like a bee sting. It hurts in that moment and then it’s gone and you forget about it”

“We understand the audience. We understand the culture. We can add value in that space”

“Gaga was at the Sony screening of The Social Network. She came out of the theater, calls me and says, ‘I want to make a social network for my fans’”

“Whether it’s Roe vs. Wade, or the Civil Rights Movement, or being against going to war, I want to be next to artists that are on the front line of that sort of change. It’s not just about having a pop song on the radio”

“I go to dinner with friends in Silicon Valley and they tell me how many billions of people they are reaching – billions of page views. Then you look at SoundScan on Wednesday morning and the top album sold maybe 125,000 – if it’s Christmas. Our metric of success has to change. Our ideas of scale have to change. The ways we reach consumers have to change”

“The first album that I bought as a kid with my own money was Eric B. is President, where they were wearing custom Gucci outfits. Imagine if the next day I went back to that album, the outfit was changed, or if I could buy the outfit right there. And it could be updated throughout the entire album cycle?”

“How do I learn from what has been built before? How do I learn from other artists’ mistakes? How do I build bigger? A lot of the decisions I make are based on thinking about the kids that are coming behind me. How do I pass lessons on to them the way things were passed on to me?”

“Companies that rest on their last idea, they’re dead. Companies that had a big hit this year and think they’re going to ride that hit, they’re dead”

Lady Gaga shot to fame in 2008 on the strength of her debut studio album, *The Fame*. She has gained worldwide recognition for her outré sense of style in music, fashion, and performance. Her third studio album, *Born This Way*, released in 2011, broke the iTunes record for fastest to reach No. 1 on release day. Gaga is one of most prolific pop stars online – at last count, 2.1bn combined views of her videos online, 57m “likes” on Facebook, and 37m “followers” on Twitter. She is also a global activist and philanthropist, having been an outspoken supporter of many important issues including LGBT rights, HIV/AIDS awareness, body image issues, and youth empowerment. In 2011, she launched the Born This Way Foundation, backed by Harvard University and the MacArthur Foundation, to promote acceptance and fight bullying. Last year, with Troy Carter, she launched her social network, LittleMonsters.com



LittleMonsters.com was the launch project of startup Backplane, which Troy Carter co-founded. The website allows users to chat about fan interests, as well as issues such as bullying and LGBT. It is also a vehicle to promote Gaga’s Artpop album, which is being launched as an app. When assessing the beta site last year, Mashable quoted Backplane CEO and co-founder Matt Michelsen saying the company’s core mission is, “To unite people around interests, affinities and movements.” Reviewing Gaga’s network after it was opened to the wider public last summer, *The Huffington Post* commented: “The look and feel of Gaga’s site are familiar, with a top nav bar similar to Google+, a Pinterest-like layout and Facebook-esque ‘like’ buttons peppered throughout the site for users to express their approval of posts and fellow Monsters.”

David Sutphen is a Partner and Head of Brunswick’s Washington, DC office, advising corporations and nonprofits on strategic communications, reputational and public affairs matters, with a focus on media, technology, telecommunications and diversity.