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LinkNYC

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A Q&A WITH LINKNYC

News on the go:
Informing audiences in smart cities

In 2014, the City of New York launched a competition for proposals to replace payphones across the five boroughs with Wi-Fi hubs.

The winner was LinkNYC, which promised to build at least 7,500 kiosks over eight years. Each “Link” would offer gigabit Wi-Fi, domestic calling and access to city services — all for free, underwritten by digital advertising on two 55-inch screens.

Today, about 1,700 kiosks have been installed, featuring city trivia, sports scores, advertisements and now top news headlines from AP updated 24/7.

To learn more about the content strategy behind these digital information hubs and how they engage passersby, we spoke with Amanda Giddon, the senior consumer marketing manager at Intersection, one of the companies behind LinkNYC.

Giddon shared how her colleagues can localize content down to a single Link, feedback about the network they’ve received and the formats they’re thinking of implementing in the future.



Amanda Giddon
Senior Consumer Marketing Manager
Intersection



Q: What is the engagement strategy of the content found on kiosks in the LinkNYC network?

What engagement means in the digital out-of-home space to me and the team is not necessarily stopping and staring — we actually optimize our content for consumption on the go. So that means it’s digestible in seconds, it’s legible on the street and it’s legible from a distance.

If you see our headlines and “Powered by The Associated Press,” you’ll notice that they’re somewhat short-form. You can see them from 100 feet away and only need a couple seconds to actually ingest that information. And you become a more informed consumer with the potential to make actionable decisions as you’re navigating your day.

People walk by a Link located on Fulton Street between Flatbush and Hudson avenues in Brooklyn.
(Photo courtesy of Intersection)

Q: Do you see headlines being localized to the neighborhood level?

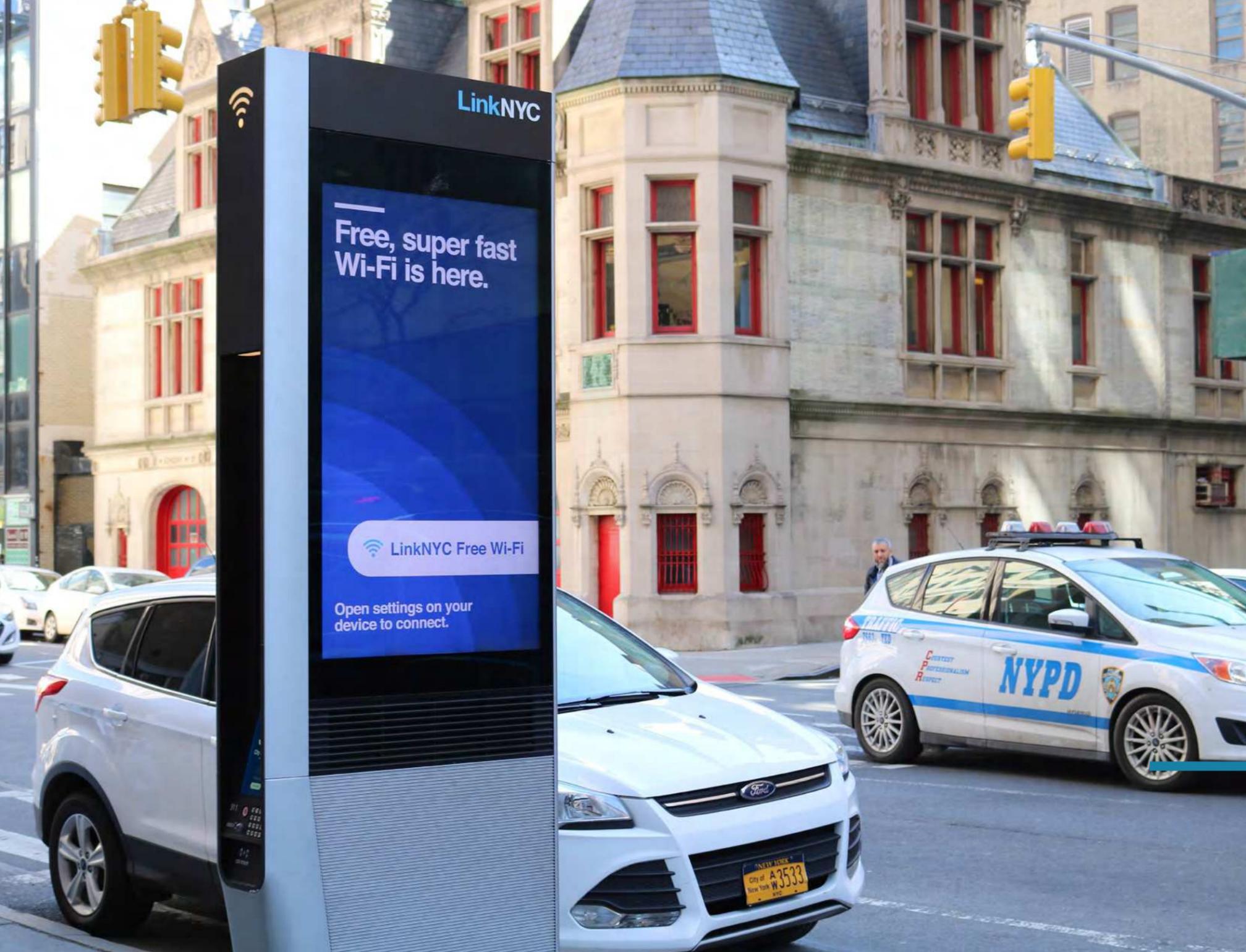
With the top news headlines, they're relevant to anyone who cares to engage and pay attention to them. But I think there are opportunities for more targeted execution — for example, showcasing fashion headlines in shopping corridors.

We also have what we call “day-parting capabilities” that allow us to play content at strategic times of the day to really increase relevance for consumers and create a high-impact experience on the street. That could mean showing business news during commuting hours.

And then we've done partnerships that allow us to display historical photos on a Link near the corner where they were originally taken. So people can see that image in the physical context of where it was captured, and I think there's definitely an opportunity to do that with news.

A long-exposure photo highlights a Link located near the intersection of 34th Street and 7th Avenue in Manhattan. (Photo courtesy of Intersection)





Q: In addition to headlines, how can visuals also attract passersby?

From my personal perspective, seeing full-width, full-bleed photos on the street is really visually arresting. And with the hustle and bustle of New York City, seeing historical, black-and-white images provides a really beautiful juxtaposition of the old and the new. And on this beautiful, future-looking, tech-forward hardware, it really catches your eye.

Q: What makes AP a good content partner?

I think the global coverage that The Associated Press brings to the table, along with its integrity and authority, is something we look for in our content partners. The team I've worked with to date has really helped us define and continue to refine what news looks like in the public space. So the partnership has been really key in shaping the consumer experience, along with the technical integration team, who's working with us closely to make sure all the moving parts align.

A Link advertises its Wi-Fi capabilities at the corner of Lafayette and White streets in Manhattan.
(Photo by Eric Bandy/AP)

Q: Have you heard any feedback about the headlines so far?

It probably does not come as a surprise that when we put content up on thousands of screens to millions of people, we usually get some attention. So we've heard some really great word-of-mouth and social media feedback, and I think people recognize that this is a new medium for them to consume this content and are appreciative of it.

And then there's also some constructive feedback, and that's really important to making our product better. I think the best example I have of that is when someone sees a headline on a Link, making sure they have the context of knowing how the story has developed up to that point.

So I spoke to the team at The Associated Press, and we started thinking about the ways to either provide that context or think about how we might be able to visually address it through design.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio poses during the public launch of LinkNYC on Feb. 18, 2016.
(Photo courtesy of the Mayor's Press Office)





Q: What types of content will LinkNYC include in the future?

From a news perspective, I think we should really start thinking about verticalized news. And now that we've delivered these top headlines, what else can we do? Maybe that means sports recaps or market news. Those are the things that I think people are interested in, and I talk to consumers as much as possible.

Outside of news, we have a bunch of other content campaigns that are considered the product's core. We provide real-time transit information. We have a points-of-interest campaign that showcases popular places near you based on real-time Foursquare check-in data we've tested. We have a local events campaign in partnership with WNYC to provide places you can explore in your neighborhood.

All of that ties together to create this content suite that really engages people and makes us a part of the community.

A Link displaying an AP headline can be seen at the intersection of Lafayette and Walker streets in Manhattan. (Photo by Eric Bandy/AP)

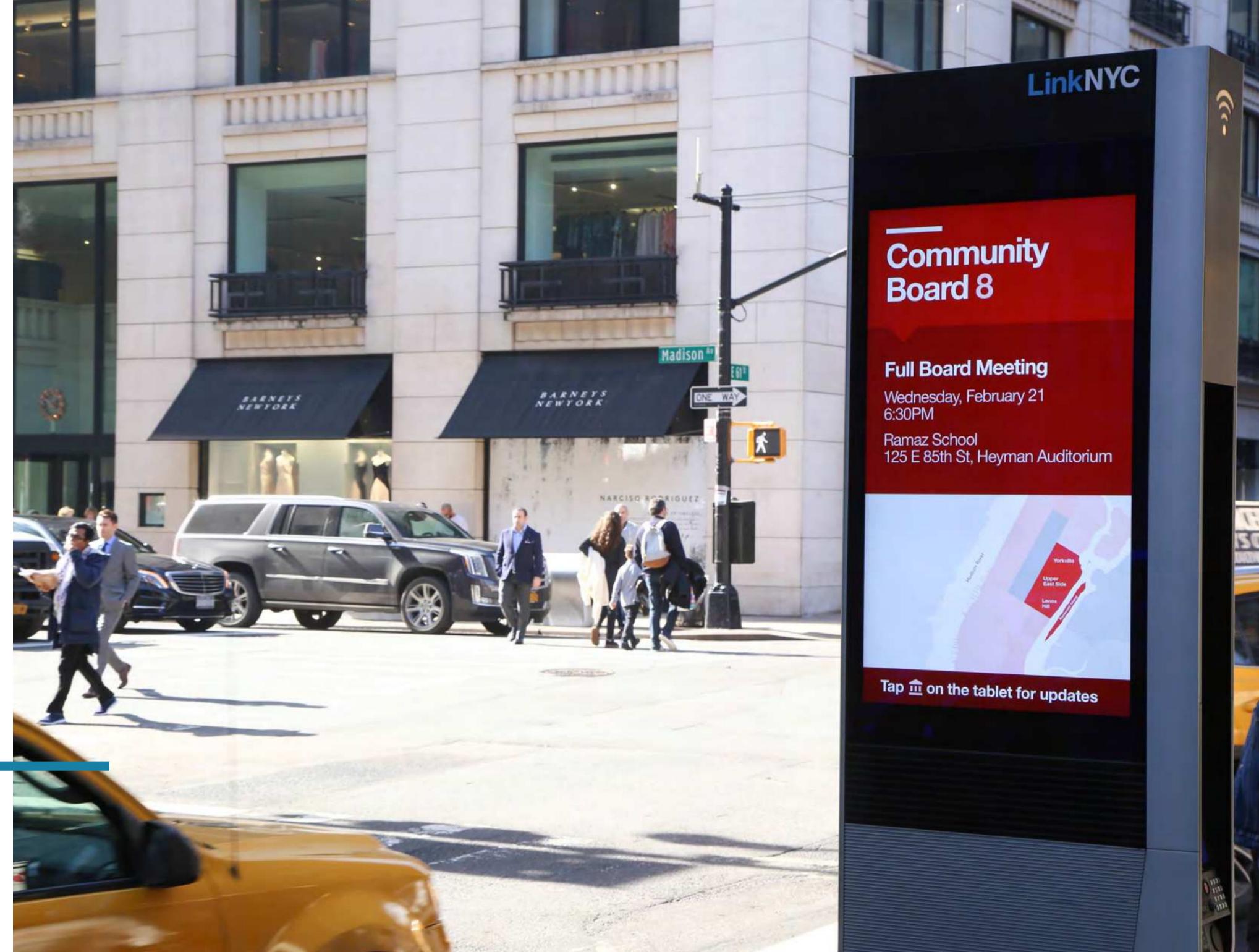
Q: What excites you about being a part of LinkNYC?

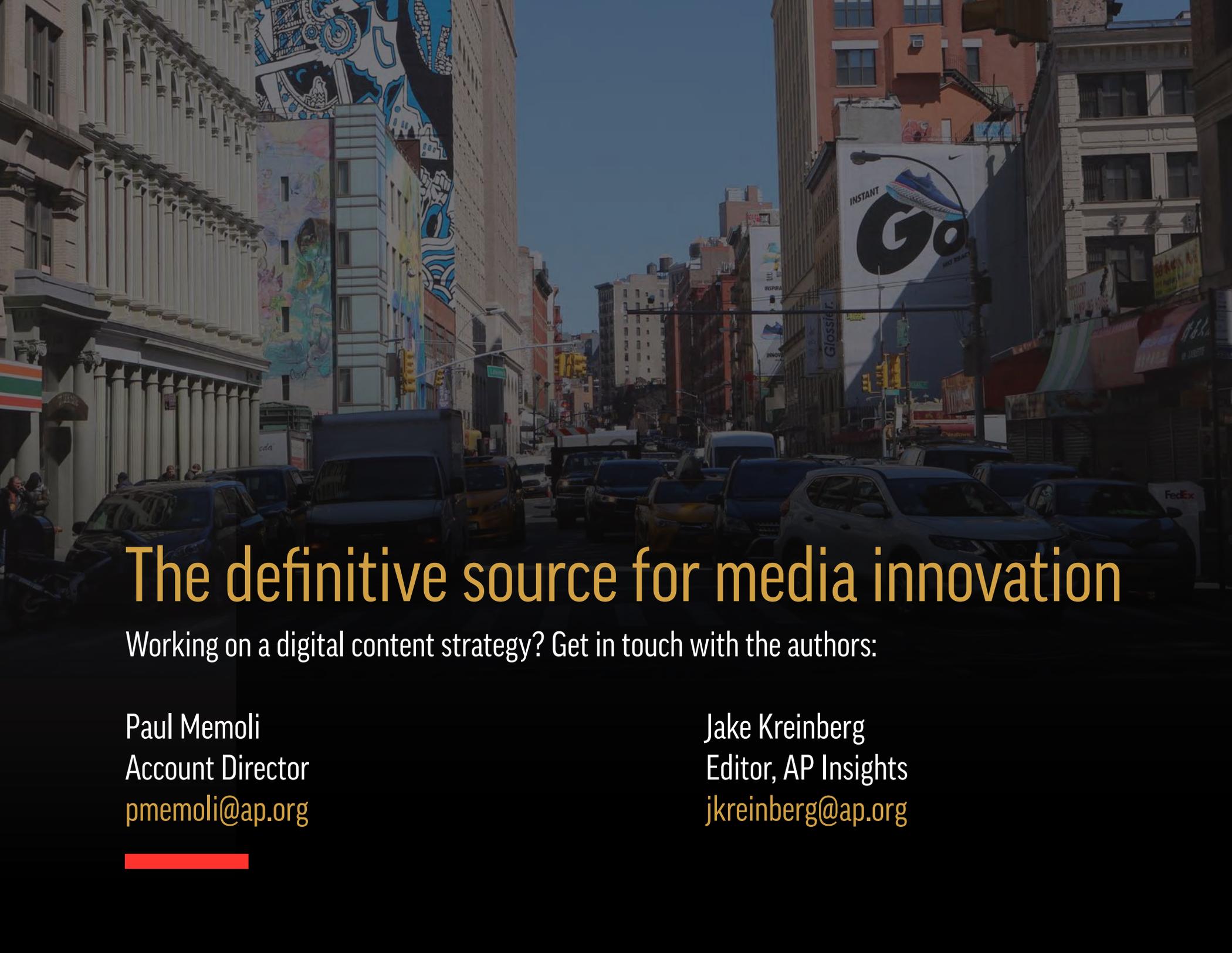
I grew up in the suburbs, and New York City was always this shiny thing that was kind of so close yet so far. So having that opportunity to create moments of awe for people on the street is incredible. If we can inspire others to feel that way, it's really powerful.

And then on the tech side, this is a really unique platform that can be responsive and integrate real-time data and trigger content based on environmental conditions. The potential there is really exciting to me as someone who has a digital media background and is really interested in the future of smart cities.

And that's something that really excites me and keeps me up at night because there's so much to think about — but in a good way.

Community board meetings are among the civic events displayed on Links, such as this one at the intersection of Madison Avenue and East 61st Street.
(Photo courtesy of Intersection)





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