Rotten Apple

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A One-Act Play

by

Megan Pieczonka

\*Note: The following scene is an excerpt from the script. Full script available upon request.

Cast of Characters

Mike Warren: A man in his late 40s.

The Creative Director.

Elise Goudy: A woman of color in her early 30s.

The Digital Marketing Manager.

Jason Valentini: A man in his late 50s.

The CMO of the ad agency.

Renee Jarnot: A woman in her early 40s.

The social media strategist.

Cara Delahunt: A woman in her mid 20s.

The secretary.

Scene

A conference room in an advertising agency in NYC.

Time

The present.

ACT 1

Scene 1

SETTING: A conference room lined with windows overlooking NYC. It is a cold winter morning and the windows are slightly frosty. The air is gray and filled with palpable tension. The whole space feels overtaken by the massive oak conference table in the center of the room. 12 chairs surround the table. There is a TV on one wall and a small mounted basketball hoop on the other. The door to the room is to the right of the TV.

AT RISE: MIKE WARREN is sitting with his feet on the conference table tossing a small soft toy basketball in the air. ELISE GOUDY is fiddling with her pencil while reading papers in her manila folder. RENEE JARNOT is sitting very still - she looks perplexed. JASON VALENTINI is sipping his coffee and standing at the window taking in the views of the frozen city. CARA DELAHUNT is taking notes on her laptop. The group has been discussing the future of advertising. They recently lost Apple as a client and are trying to find ways to innovate as an agency to become relevant and prestigious again.

CARA

Um, sorry to interrupt, uh but we only have about 20 minutes left before your next meeting, sir.

JASON  
Uh okay. Let’s speedround the last few topics, shall we? Let me look at my notes quickly…

(He sits down and looks at his paper.)

Ah, yes, I wanted to get your thoughts on emerging social media platforms. The fifth article in your folder talks about the changing social media landscape. It says: “A new crop of social platforms will vie for consumer attention. Users are fleeing Twitter’s chaos for other platforms that facilitate public conversations. And the hunt for the next big Gen Z social app is spurring the rapid rise of BeReal, Gas, and others, putting Snapchat and TikTok on notice. While we don’t expect any of these newer platforms to pose a significant challenge to the top five this year, there’s a good chance at least one of them will finish 2023 in a much stronger position.”[[1]](#footnote-0)

RENEE

Well I think the most important new social platforms are the ones without ads.

ELISE

Precisely. I read recently that “more than 82 percent [of people] say they find the targeted [online ads](https://www.inc.com/shama-hyder/digital-marketing-in-age-of-privacy.html) seen on all social media platforms to be annoying, invasive, and unhelpful.”[[2]](#footnote-1)

RENEE

Yeah, it’s really unfortunate how many people really hate ads. They’re just exposed to so many shitty ads that they can’t stand any of them, even the good ones.

(Pause)

Anyways, we know that ad-free social platforms have been popping up more and more recently, like BeReal and Mastodon. If these types of apps get more popular we will need to find ways to promote our brands and their products without using traditional ads.

JASON

That’s a very good point. So what's the best way to do that?

ELISE

Well, the first thing is to establish a clear brand presence on any up and coming social media platforms. I mean, “we saw what happened with TikTok, it's been around for a couple years and the brands who did take advantage of TikTok at the very beginning definitely benefited from it a whole lot more as opposed to the brands who are trying to build their online presence on the platform now. Because once a platform is dominated and once that image has been formed, it's really difficult to change that and enter a market that is already saturated and is quite busy. So, keeping an eye out for emerging platforms and making sure to build that presence on those platforms early on is gonna be really important.”[[3]](#footnote-2)

JASON

100%. That makes a lot of sense. You know, that was probably one of our downfalls with Apple, because we didn’t seem to be on the front end of building a brand presence on new platforms. But I’m still a little confused as to how we establish a brand presence on these new ad free platforms.

RENEE

Well, with ad free platforms the best way to develop a presence is with consumer generated content. It’s possible to do this with influencers, but in a subtle way. The goal with this type of content is to create hype that gives trends a sort of virality. This type of trendy-viral content will receive a lot of attention and shared and earned media. I mean, overall, advertising on a platform without ads is really about finding some type of cultural aspect or trend to tie your brand to that gets people to talk about and share your brand. Does that make sense?[[4]](#footnote-3)

JASON

Yeah, uh-huh. I think I get it. Cara, did you get all that?

CARA  
Um, yes sir.

JASON

Great. Is there anything else about ad free social platforms we should discuss?

ELISE

Yes, uh, just briefly. To add on to what Renee was saying, I think subtle product placement is going to be very important on platforms like BeReal. I mean, it’s worked for Netflix for years, so it should work on other ad-free platforms as well. It’s definitely something we should be doing in campaigns for our clients.

(Pause)

You know, I’d also like to note that I personally don’t think that a platform can remain ad-free long term. So, while it is important to build brand presence on these platforms now, it might be easier to maintain that presence, let's say, in 5 or 10 years because those same platforms will cave and need ads to sustain themselves.[[5]](#footnote-4) I’m of the belief that nothing is ad free forever.

(MIKE scoffs and makes a mocking face.)

JASON

Is there something you’d like to add, Mike? You’ve been awfully quiet until now.

MIKE

No sir, I think the ladies have just about covered it.

(ELISE glares at MIKE - he smirks back.)

JASON

Okay, well let’s move on then.

MIKE

That is a terrific idea. You know I was actually brainstorming something pretty ingenious while listening to the hens squawking.

(ELISE mouths something profane and RENEE gasps at MIKE’S last remark.)

Picture this: a totally immersive social media platform based in the metaverse.

JASON

What?

MIKE

Like, uh, you know, I’m thinking the next up-and-coming social platform will be based in the metaverse. How cool will that be?

(Pause. Uncomfortable silence.)

Okay, I mean, at first it seems like a crazy idea, but it does combine a lot of things we’ve been talking about like you could have virtual influencers, and personalization, and uh… like a bunch of other stuff. Point is, this is what is coming next.

(Pause)

Hello? Anybody listening? Maybe we should, as an agency, work to be at the forefront of this new metaverse social platform.

ELISE

I’m not so sure, Mike. I mean, going back to what I said earlier, I think we as humans want that human touch so I don’t think we’d be ready for how sterile a social platform in the metaverse may be.

RENEE

Yeah, I mean maybe in the very distant future the metaverse might materialize more, but I think currently or even in a couple years from now, we won’t have the technology necessary or easily accessible for something like that.

ELISE

Not to mention, “even if the technology works, it comes down to whether or not people really like it or not, or even want to use it.”[[6]](#footnote-5)

MIKE

(slightly pissed off and snarky)  
Jesus Christ, you guys are no fun. And for the record, I did some research before and found this:

(reading from his laptop)

“Meta’s heavy investment in the metaverse and AR/VR technology indicates greater adoption for this type of immersive technology,” and that “Marketers are only beginning to utilize AR/VR in advertising campaigns, and some early success indicates that as AR/VR tech becomes more mainstream that marketers will look to develop more immersive experiences to enable consumers to interact virtually with their favorite influencer.”[[7]](#footnote-6)

ELISE  
I mean, I see what you’re saying. The metaverse probably will grow in the coming years, but I still think the idea of a popular social media platform in the metaverse is unlikely. Think about it, we go on social platforms to interact with friends and family and connect with reality. I think trying to translate that into the metaverse where the whole goal is to create a different reality just really wouldn’t work well.

MIKE

Oh my God it’s like you don’t have ears!

ELISE

(under her breath)

Asshole.

MIKE

No, what I’m saying is…

JASON

(reprimanding MIKE)

Mike! That’s enough of that. I don’t want to talk about this any further. We’ve only got a few minutes left so please do not instigate anything.

(Long pause)

END OF EXCERPT.

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1. *Insider Intelligence,* “Four ways the worldwide social media landscape will change in 2023” [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. *Inc.,* “[5 Emerging Social Media Platforms to Watch in 2023](https://www.inc.com/xintian-tina-wang/5-emerging-social-media-platforms-to-watch-in-2023.html)” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Faren Karimkhan direct quote [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Faren Karimkhan paraphrase [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Matt Read paraphrase [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Matt Read direct quote [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. *Mintel, “*Social Media Influencers - US - 2022” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)