

# Your Restaurant's Guide to Mastering Customer Engagement for Real Results

Learn how your brand can cut through the digital noise and use data, personalization, and identity resolution to turn anonymous guests into loyal fans

**Wunderkind**



**RESTAURANT DIVE**

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There's a major digital shift happening across the restaurant industry, from quick-service establishments (QSRs) to full-service brands (FSRs). Apps, self-service, and omnichannel options are taking hold, and they're reshaping how customers interact with you.

This transformation is bringing new opportunities to the table when it comes to driving sales, increasing customer engagement, and creating new revenue streams.

But the most powerful benefit of all? Its potential to help your brand build relationships and create meaningful connections using value-driven messaging.

The restaurants that stand out won't be those with the coolest apps or offer the most rewards points but those that **turn casual visitors into loyal guests** who feel truly seen and valued.

# To Cut through the Noise, Make Every Message Matter

As you advance your digital journey, it's important to recognize the difference between having real conversations with your customers and overwhelming them with irrelevant and poorly timed messages. In other words, there are benefits to bringing more customer-focused technology into the fold – but there are drawbacks that can turn into disengagement, too, if you're not careful.

Every day, the same people who consider ordering from you are using their devices to manage their schedules, check in with friends and family, and catch up on news and entertainment. And they can use those same channels to interact just as easily with you when you **make your presence relevant and engaging** within the digital spaces they already frequent.

“If you want to build relationships, then you need to **meet the customer where they already are**,” says Matt Toland, head of food and beverage at Wunderkind. “There are now lots of ways to communicate with customers, but that means you have to be even more thoughtful about how and when you reach out.”





Once that customer has opted into your marketing messages, you know they want to hear from you. That means nourishing the relationship and personalizing messages and offers so it feels like you're talking directly to them—instead of just throwing out generic deals. Otherwise, there's a big chance they'll opt out again. All it takes is one click.

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Another advantage presented by digital interactions is the ability to **retarget consumers with offers that match their interests**. Picture a guest who's been checking out the burger options on your site. If they leave without making a purchase, and you have no identity resolution capabilities in place, you'll never know they were there — or what caught their eye. If you happen to send a broad marketing email a few hours later about a pizza deal, you unknowingly missed the opportunity to bring that guest back to your site and convert them with a timely, relevant offer.

With the right tools, you can **deliver messaging tailored to interests and behaviors**, making customers much more likely to return to your restaurant again and again.

But remember: **Your brand isn't the only one trying to engage with your customers**, and that's the biggest drawback to consider in this new landscape. Lots of competition and noise stand between their attention and you. This crowded landscape only underscores the importance of reaching them on the right communication channel when they're most receptive.

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# How to Humanize the Digital Experience

Even though customers love the convenience of digital, they also want an experience that feels seamless and “real,” from discovery to loyalty.

The right tools bring them closer to your brand instead of reducing them to a number by helping you:

- Communicate beyond transactions
- Gather and act on feedback
- Show appreciation and recognition
- Provide value beyond the meal
- Create memorable moments

First-party data is the key to humanizing each customer’s digital journey: It gives you insights to act on and appeal to. There’s just one problem: **Many of your customers are “window shopping”** when it comes to restaurant site visits. They’re looking at new menu items, browsing offers or specials, or deciding what they’re going to order later. But many of these interactions are lost because FSRs and QSRs don’t have identity solutions in place to collect first-party data.

“If you don’t have that, you’re missing out on a ton of opportunity to **retarget these customers with personalized messages** that remind them why they want to eat at your restaurant and what you have to offer,” says Toland.



## First-Party Data Helps You Know and Nurture Guests

What comprises first-party data, and how do you use it to anticipate and meet needs at every stage of the journey?

Start by capitalizing the top-of-funnel traffic visiting your website or app. Capture key first-party data like email addresses or phone numbers early. Once you have this direct connection, you can engage with guests in a personalized way, from guiding them during their first visit to encouraging them to become part of your community. Prioritizing sign-ups and opt-ins helps you nurture relationships over time, tailoring communications and offers to evolving interests and preferences.

“Restaurants get tons of site traffic, but the majority of it is anonymous,” says Toland. “If you can’t identify them when they come to your site, then you won’t be able to retarget them with their interests.”

Identity resolution, such as Wunderkind’s identity solution, helps you identify anonymous traffic and serve up personalized, high-converting messages to increase online orders and drive digital revenue. It also enables you to understand what site visitors are interested in based on their browsing behavior.

Without this solution in place, first-party data is typically limited to information about purchases.



# 5 Key Signals that Drive Engagement

Your restaurant should be able to monitor five key intent signals to optimize guest engagement and drive retargeting.

## 1. Identification signals

What they do: recognize a guest, even if they aren't signed in, through IP addresses, device IDs, or email capture.

What they enable: the ability to know who the guest is so you can retarget them.

## 2. Behavioral signals

What they do: track specific actions taken by a guest (browsing a specific part of the menu, adding a meal to their cart, clicking on your loyalty page, etc.).

What they enable: personalized outreach and retargeting based on behavior, such as when a guest leaves without completing their order, encouraging them to return and finish their purchase.

## 3. Product signals

What they do: monitor engagement with specific menu items or categories, such as repeated views of family meal bundles, catering options, or seasonal specials.

What they enable: targeted outreach, such as sending a Saturday morning text about a limited-time mimosa deal to guests who frequently view your brunch menu.

## 4. Lifecycle signals

What they do: indicate where a guest is in their relationship with your brand (first-time visitor, a regular, someone who hasn't ordered in a while, etc.).

What they enable: tailored messaging, such as a welcome sequence with a first-order discount for new email subscribers, or a personalized "we miss you" campaign with an incentive for lapsed guests.

## 5. Transactional signals

What they do: leverage purchase history to anticipate what guests may want next.

What they enable: tailored follow-ups based on purchases, such as offering dessert add-ons to guests who recently purchased pizza and wings, encouraging repeat visits and higher spend.

# It's All About Personalization, So Make Every Interaction Count

When it comes to FSRs and QSRs, personalization may not mean what you think it means. A few years ago, a mention of a guest's birthday or using their name in a promotion was enough to impress. But those gestures are mere table stakes now, says Toland, especially as loyal customer bases change and new generations form their own expectations. Brands need to nurture long-time guests while welcoming new customers to the experience.

“These customers expect you to know **what they order, when they order, and even how they order**,” he explains. “When you have that information, you can retarget them with messages specific to those preferences, as well as what they've recently been exploring on your site or app.”



That approach is much more effective than generic promotions. Consider a guest who doesn't eat meat: Serving up ads about pork tenderloins or chicken tacos will completely miss the mark (and guarantee you don't make a sale).

Using AI to power decision-making gives you a significant advantage by enabling you to deliver true personalization at scale. (After all, there's only so much your marketing team can do on their own.)

“Depending on who they are and how loyal they are, some customers may need a little carrot to convert or submit their order,” explains Toland. “Others may only need a quick reminder. Using AI to determine how likely someone is to complete their order can help you tailor incentives appropriately and preserve top-line revenue.”

# Don't Forget to Listen, Learn, and Act

Although it may often seem that way, today's consumers aren't acting unpredictably. Instead, the traditional models for understanding their behavior no longer fit.

Being able to determine what motivates a seemingly hard-to-predict consumer can help your restaurant stay agile and relevant. For this reason, there's value in monitoring behavior metrics.

"If I'm going to your restaurant's website every Tuesday at 6pm for dinner, your platform should know that I'll be very interested in engaging around that time ... and you should schedule your messages accordingly," says Toland. "When you have first-party data to inform your outreach, **you'll know when and how a specific customer is engaging with the site**, what they're doing, and the type of information they're looking for. And because there's no way for humans to analyze all that data, AI makes this level of personalization achievable."

**AI can predict customer behavior** to optimize conversion, targeting, and re-engagement. It can also intelligently incorporate feedback mechanisms into digital touchpoints and help you determine what to do with those insights. As it continuously learns from user interactions, you can use what AI tells you to refine marketing strategies, optimize interactions, and select the best channels for customers.



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# The Path Forward Is Built on Connections

The future of building loyalty and engaging customers is personal, emotional, and digital-first.

For FSRs and QSRs, technology can be the bridge that makes customer connections possible. The most successful brands will learn to leverage digital solutions to humanize the guest experience so every interaction feels intentional, relevant, and meaningful.

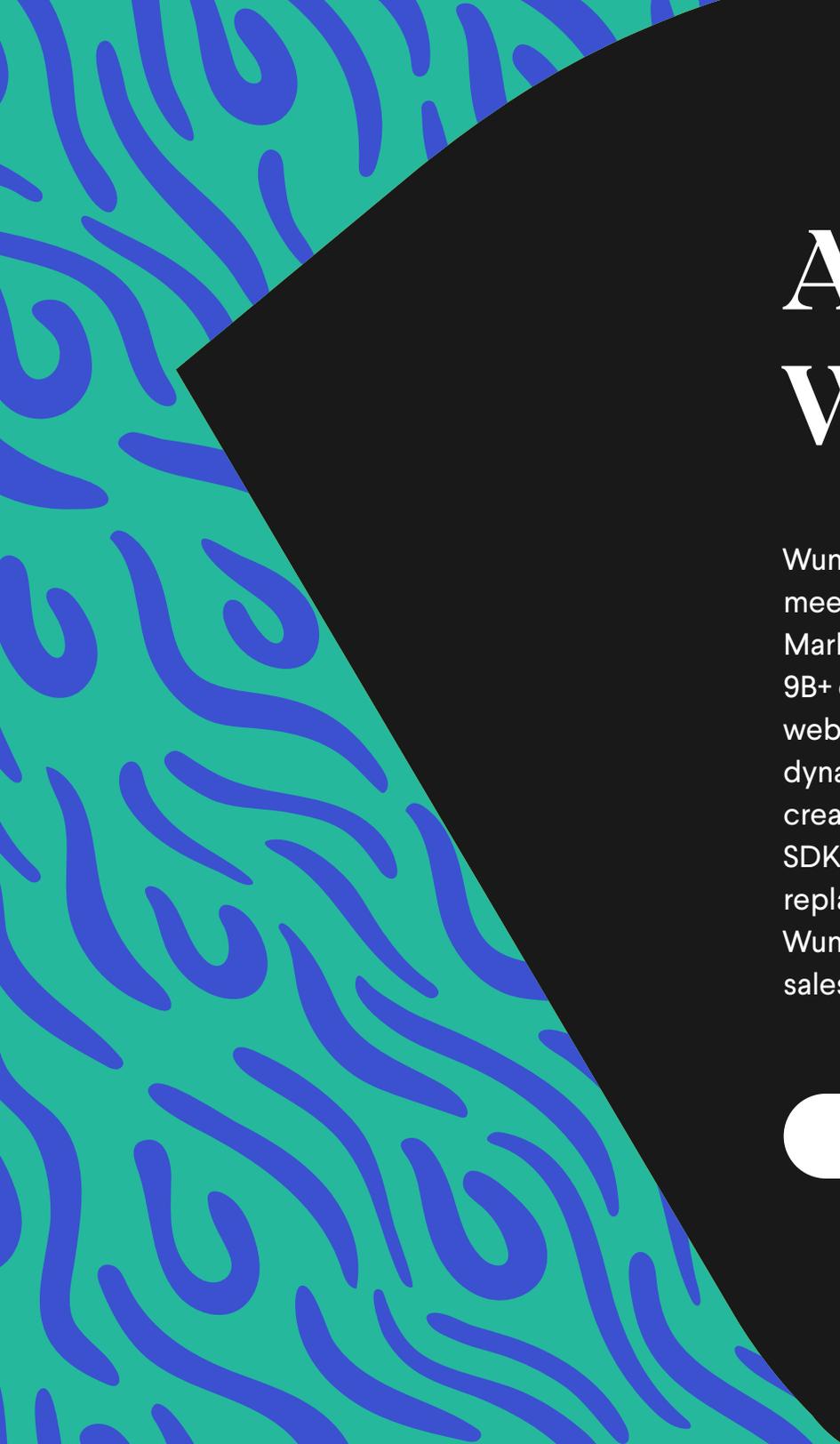
To meet these new expectations, it's essential to audit your current customer journey and identify gaps that may be stalling your loyalty engine. By realizing where you're missing out on opportunities to personalize and create emotional connection, you can offer experiences that resonate with long-time guests and new customers.

Finding the right partner will help you build these lasting customer relationships faster and more efficiently, ensuring that your brand stands for delivering genuine connections and memorable experiences at every digital touchpoint.

## Big Wins with Wunderkind

A family-style, full-service restaurant partnered with Wunderkind in 2024 to assist with driving revenue via online meal and catering orders, collecting email addresses for its CRM list, and encouraging loyalty signups. In the first year of the partnership, Wunderkind unlocked a new revenue channel for the restaurant that drove more than \$1.13 million in last-click revenue.

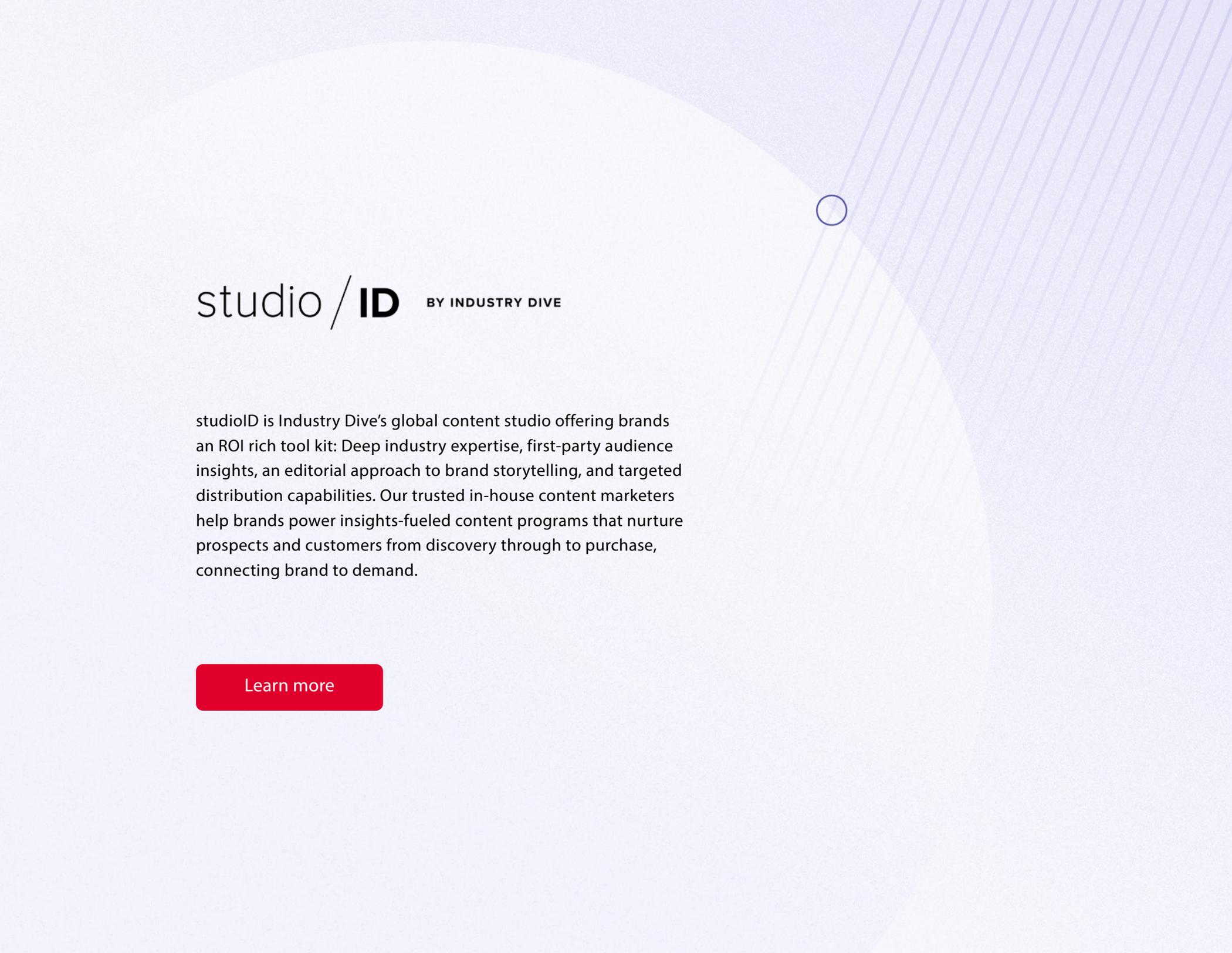
- **50% increase** in total online orders annually
- **\$1.1 million increase** in last-click revenue
- **353,000 email addresses** collected in the first 12 months



# About Wunderkind

Wunderkind is redefining agentic marketing decisioning, where identity meets AI to drive personalized performance at scale. Our Autonomous Marketing Platform (AMP) uses a proprietary identity graph — tracking 9B+ devices and 2T+ digital events annually — to transform anonymous web traffic into known customers, without third-party cookies. AMP dynamically triggers messages across email, text, and ads, optimizing creative, channel, and timing in real time. Seamlessly integrating via SDKs, APIs, and natively with ESPs, it fits any stack without requiring replatforming. Brands like Harley-Davidson and Kendra Scott rely on Wunderkind to unlock reach and revenue, with \$5B+ in attributable sales annually and consistently top-ranking channel performance.

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