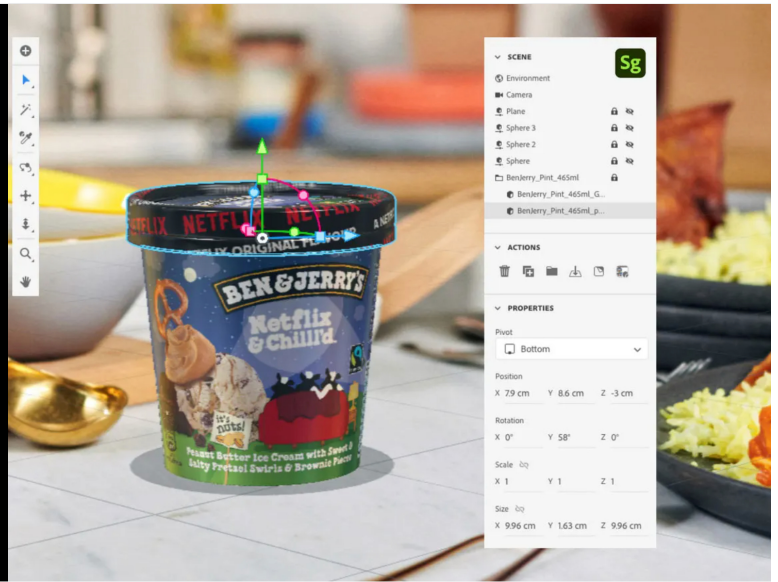




How Ben & Jerry's is leading the virtual photography revolution

Watch the video



Eliminated travel, food stylist, materials, and location fees

Able to create infinite versions of product shots at low cost

Used data to inform and improve creative output



"The assets we created in Adobe [Substance 3D] Stager are completely on brand, rendered amazingly quickly, and they look hyper-realistic. Anybody who looked at them wouldn't be able to tell that they weren't just shot using traditional photography."

Gail Cummings
Global Digital Design Lead, Ben & Jerry's

Ben & Jerry's uses these solutions:

- Creative Cloud
 - Adobe Substance 3D Stager
 - Adobe Illustrator
 - Adobe Photoshop
 - Adobe Stock
- Experience Cloud
 - Adobe Analytics
 - Adobe Audience Manager
 - Adobe Target

Serving up an all-new flavor of virtual photography

Gail Cummings needed to find a way to take photographs without a camera.

As the global digital design lead at Ben & Jerry's, it was her responsibility to introduce and lead technology from a visual standpoint. Under normal circumstances, this looked like researching and implementing solutions to help the company create images that looked as good as their world-famous ice cream tasted. But the circumstances were anything but normal.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the way customers were interacting with Ben & Jerry's was changing. To keep customers safe and comply with local regulations, the company needed to temporarily close their legendary "scoop shops." And because many customers were sheltering at home and limiting trips to the grocery store, accessing pints of their favorite flavors wasn't as easy as it used to be.

This meant that Ben & Jerry's needed to find a convenient new way to connect their customers to their product. So the company set out to make ice cream delivery part of their "new normal." And Cummings would have to find a way to visually support this new initiative in the midst of a business-altering pandemic.

Food Pairings: ice cream delivery goes mainstream

Although Ben & Jerry's ice cream was — and still is — widely popular in many markets, delivery wasn't the mainstream method of getting "Vermont's Finest" to their fans. But ice cream delivery at such a high level soon became a capability that they needed to perfect — fast. With 38 global markets, there was a dizzying array of possibilities for how to do this. Delivery posed a host of practical challenges — but with each passing day, customers staying home meant lost opportunities not just to sell ice cream, but also to share the company's mission, connect with customers, and grow the brand. So the company intensified their focus on delivery to meet the growing demand for their products.

One of the most natural ways to get ice cream into homes was by coupling Ben & Jerry's pints with delivery orders from customers' favorite restaurants. Enter the "Food Pairings" campaign, a new initiative that inspired customers to construct the most delectable delivery meals possible — including dessert, of course. With the same attention to detail a sommelier would pair wine and food, Ben & Jerry's paired their inventive flavors with popular delivery meals like pizza, burgers, and kebabs. The campaign gave Ben & Jerry's a way to connect with customers during the pandemic — and get customers their ice cream without shifting established purchasing behaviors.

One serious concern stood out about ice cream delivery — "If It's Melted, It's Ruined" (which, coincidentally, is also the company's motto for their global warming campaigns). For all the convenience that delivery offered, it also provoked customer anxiety about product integrity after who-knows-how-long en route to people's

campaign, for all the convenience that delivery offers, it also provides customer clarity about product integrity and who knows how long en route to people's homes. Ben & Jerry's had already found a solution to ensure that each pint arrived in perfectly frosty condition. Now, they had to prove it to their customers.



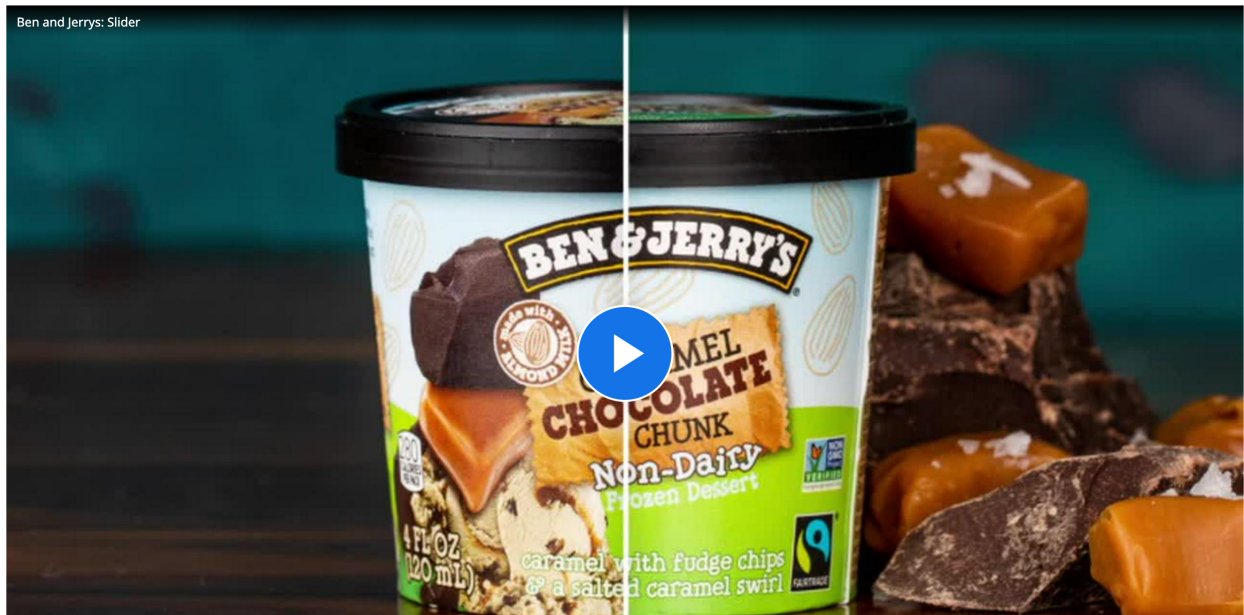
The way to customer trust is through their eyes (and then their stomachs)

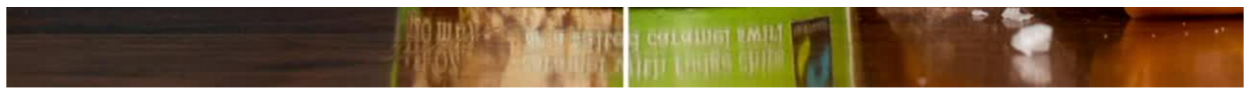
To ensure the success of this new campaign, Ben & Jerry's needed to connect with customers with the same — or more — power and integrity of any of their pre-pandemic marketing efforts. They needed to develop customer trust in their delivery method — and the way to do that was through photography. Beautiful images would help customers envision this new service and encourage them to give it a try. Getting the photography right was critical.

There was just one problem. The company stopped all photoshoots to protect employees from the pandemic.

But to run the Food Pairings campaign successfully, Ben & Jerry's needed the ability to create an enormous number of photos. With 38 markets, more than 150 ice cream flavors, and an assortment of food pairings partners, the campaign required more visual assets than the company had ever produced at one time. Ben & Jerry's needed their campaign to work — which meant that they needed to find a new way to produce photography. The solution had to be realistic and efficient. But most importantly, it needed to capture the authenticity of the Ben & Jerry's brand — a brand that originally dubbed itself the ice cream by "Two Real Guys."

At first, the photo ban seemed like a major hurdle. But in their 40 years of business, Ben & Jerry's had often been a pioneer, both in the food industry and business in general. They'd learned how to adapt to change — including their visual identity. For instance, the brand had successfully transitioned their famous hand-drawn artwork into vector form with help from [Adobe Illustrator](#). Years later and further into their digital transformation, Ben & Jerry's looked to technology yet again to help them adapt to their new business reality.





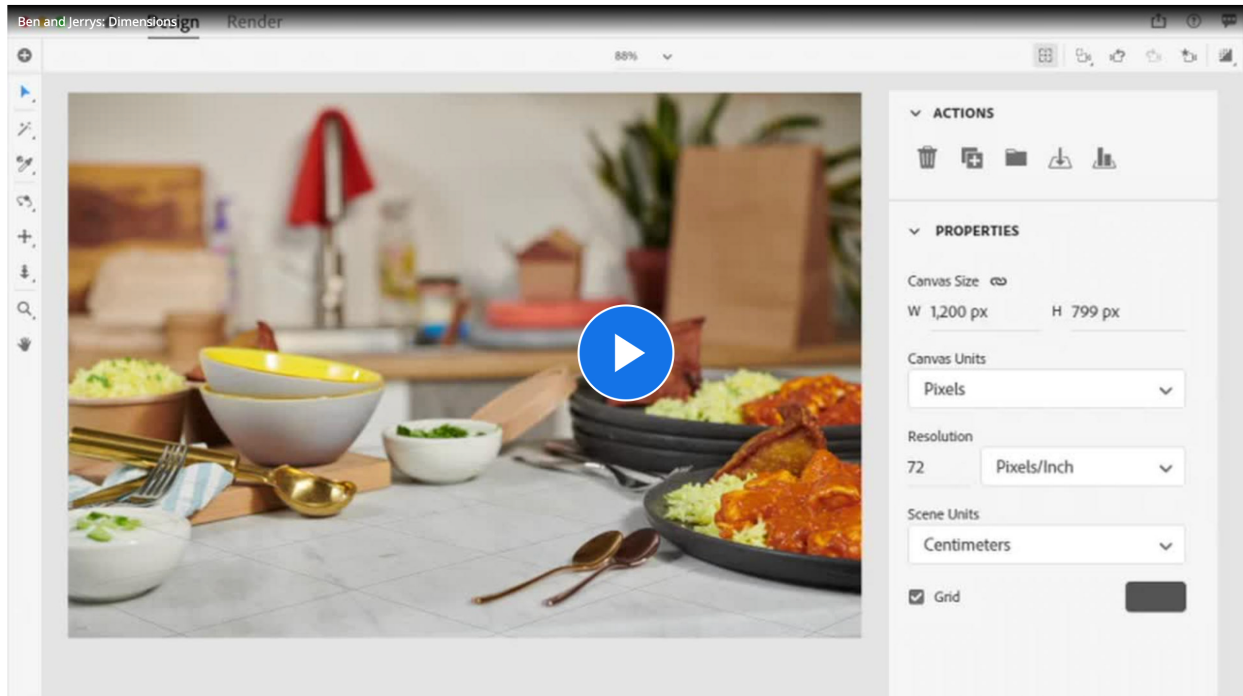
Food photography without the food — or the photography

When Cummings was first introduced to [Adobe Substance 3D Stager](#) in 2017, she thought it was interesting — but not right for Ben & Jerry's. Per Cummings, "We all thought it was super cool, but didn't really know how we could use it for our brand." The software promised to create 3D images that looked stunningly realistic, complete with control over lighting, perspective, depth, and texture. Yet the Ben & Jerry's team wanted their assets to be like their ice cream — nothing artificial. The warmth and heart of traditional photography, they believed, couldn't be conveyed through 3D software.

The pandemic — and resulting lack of studio photography resources — prompted Cummings and team to reconsider. So they put Substance 3D Stager to the test.

Phase One was proof of concept. If Cummings could mimic the results she was seeking, she knew she'd have a shot at making the Food Pairings Campaign successful. And potentially revolutionize Ben & Jerry's approach to photography. Digging into the software for the first time, she was able to create realistic 3D renderings of ice cream pints using Substance 3D Stager. With background imagery from [Adobe Stock](#), Cummings used Substance 3D Stager to composite a 3D pint onto a 2D image. The Match Image feature made it quick and simple to achieve the same lighting and perspective in both images. The result was something that looked very close to a traditional photograph.

"I showed it to the team, and they were really happy with the progress. The pints looked great, and everything looked realistic," said Cummings.



As Cummings dove more deeply into Substance 3D Stager, she and her team moved to Phase Two — producing custom backplates. When the stay-at-home measures lifted, the team was able to hold a small in-studio photoshoot with photographer Greg Comollo, complete with a 360° camera. Although they were producing some custom photography, the nature of this shoot was different than usual. Rather than trying to capture the perfect shot for the thousands of food and ice cream combinations the campaign required — which would have taken months — the team spent a few days producing enough environmental shots to serve as the background images for the future product assets.

When combined with the 3D [Substance](#) renderings, the results were astounding.

As Cummings said, "You would never know the difference if you put them side by side with a regular photograph." By getting familiar with Substance 3D Stager and using a little bit of custom photography, Cummings and team had produced a huge number of visual assets in weeks — not months — for a fraction of the budget. Digital photography was also a more sustainable option for Ben & Jerry's, cutting out the travel and materials needed for in-person shoots. But most importantly, the images all lived up to the brand's high standards. "It's helped us gain control over our assets. We have a whole asset bank that's built and ready to go. It's really exciting," continued Cummings.

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"[Substance 3D] Stager condensed what would have taken us a year down into three months."

Gail Cummings

Global Digital Design Lead, Ben & Jerry's

Catering to the taste of every customer

For Mike Hayes, Ben & Jerry's global head of digital and technology, the move to digital photography opened up new realms of possibility for customer experience. Working alongside Cummings, he addressed the operational changes and challenges required to deliver the same high-quality digital experiences Ben & Jerry's

customers had come to expect. Picking up where Cummings left off, Hayes needed to work out a way to keep the business growing mid-pandemic — all while staying true to the brand.

“Over the last few years we've gone from producing a couple thousand assets annually to now needing to produce over 25,000 in a given year. We had to figure out how to increase our scale — simply — but also keep the quality up. It was an immense, complex challenge,” said Hayes.

Before the pandemic, Ben & Jerry's was already adept at delivering personalized experiences. But Substance 3D Stager opened a new set of opportunities. With a fully stocked library of image assets, Ben & Jerry's was now able to run their Food Pairings campaign with a higher level of personalization than ever before. And now, they could extend this higher level of personalization across all their digital marketing.

Because in the food industry, marketers need to be able to cater to customers' tastes — literally. One of the ways Ben & Jerry's does this is through [Adobe Audience Manager](#). Used as a data management platform (DMP), Audience Manager gathers information about flavor preferences from customers who visit the Ben & Jerry's website. This makes it simple to remarket to customers using assets that reflect favorite flavors. The more targeted Ben & Jerry's can be with their experiences, the more meaningful customer relationships they can build. As Hayes said, “We think it's important to use technology, digital channels, and content to provide value to our fans — not post things customers would find annoying to their newsfeed for the sake of being seen.”

But the value Ben & Jerry's provides goes far beyond ice cream and ice cream delivery services. As a brand with a powerful social mission, it's critical that they deliver messages that really resonate with their audience. To help with this, Ben & Jerry's uses [Adobe Target](#) to test and optimize customer experiences. Target helps Ben & Jerry's communicate the right messages to the right customer so their important ideas can reach the greatest number of people — and hopefully help change the world for the better. As Hayes says, “We want to make an impact with everything we do, whether it's on the creative or technology side.”

To make their biggest impact, Ben & Jerry's measures customer experiences with [Adobe Analytics](#). In addition to its typical use cases, the company has started to use Analytics to inform a strategy they call “data-driven creativity” — in other words, letting insights from Analytics inform the type of content they produce. While it might sound like a paradox, data-driven creativity has helped the company be more creative and effective in their communications. By putting their time and energy into experiences that they know will be effective, Ben & Jerry's can make even better progress towards protecting their market share during the pandemic — as well as achieving their social mission goals and targets.

As Cummings says, “It's helpful from a creative perspective to have information from Analytics so we know the decisions we're making aren't arbitrary. We know what fonts and colors are performing best, and we can see the results in real time. It's not based on opinion. It's based on facts.”



A triple-scoop of change never tasted so sweet

“My biggest takeaway from our current situation is to not write technology off just because you don't think it's right for your brand. Because in a year, it could be perfect and save the day,” said Cummings.

Even during a challenging moment in time, Ben & Jerry's found a level of stability they hadn't anticipated. Stability that came from moving forward — not standing still or playing it safe. Where other businesses run away from controversy, Ben & Jerry's runs toward it. Ben & Jerry's is a brand that's not afraid of revolution, whether it has to do with ice cream flavors, social activism, or their new virtual photography process. The results of their actions are clear.

Today, Ben & Jerry's ice cream delivery is live in nearly half of their global markets. There's been 50% growth in their delivery app downloads. And they've saved hundreds of hours of labor and thousands of dollars per month by making the move to virtual photography. Despite the many changes 2020 has thrown their way, Ben & Jerry's is only growing stronger.

But some things, at least for the moment, are here to stay — like Ben & Jerry's virtual photography process. As Cummings says, “We'll be utilizing Adobe Substance 3D Stager for e-commerce asset creation moving forward. We'll still use traditional photography for social media and lifestyle images. But Substance 3D Stager condensed what would have taken us a year down into three months. I think that's one of the only positives of COVID. Also, I'm a much better baker now, by the way.”

The other thing that's here to stay? Customers' favorite ice cream flavors. Even in a pandemic, it seems that tastes haven't changed too much. Customers are as big of Ben & Jerry's fans as ever — and Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough remains their number one global flavor, even after 40 years.

Resources

View these additional resources about Ben and Jerry's:

[Adobe Summit and Adobe MAX Sessions](#)

[How Ben & Jerry's made delivery delicious](#)


[Get the scoop on Ben & Jerry's 40 years of optimization](#)

[How Ben & Jerry's uses virtual photography to create perfect pints](#)

Video

[Ben & Jerry's stays true to its social mission](#)


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