

By

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The past month has been a whirlwind for the Blink team. We opened a new office in San Diego, hired eight new Blinkers and secured three new clients that we will be serving from America's Finest City.

Learning and cooperating between different offices isn't new to us though. Our research market firm, Northwest Insights (NWI), has a large remote segment of its workforce and the NWI office is a few miles from Blink HQ.

Working between offices has accelerated our adoption of collaboration tools such as Slack, Mavenlink, and InVision. These tools are helpful, but - like great design - effective communication requires empathy.

And that brings me to the topic of today's post: *building a future on empathy*.

I saw that phrase on a digital display while attending two sold-out conferences in Boston. Both conferences were "marketing industry" events, but they couldn't have been more contrasting in their venue or programming.



The first conference I attended was Hypergrowth — a single-day, single-stage conference hosted by [Drift](#), a messaging tool that lets companies get closer to their customer. The event was hosted in a skyscraper with an impressive view of Boston. In its first year hosting a conference, the Drift team brought together 1,300 early adopters, innovators, and rule-breakers. They also made a believer out of me... we're testing Drift on our site now.

My favorite speaker was Benjamin Von Wong, a photographic artist who taught us about the process behind crazy shots, such as this [mermaid on 10,000 plastic bottles](#). Perhaps more relevant to most of the audience was the tip, “Virality is in the headline.”

That is to say, a few simple words that provide the right (or wrong) context have a disproportionate amount of influence on the success of an idea. You can see great examples of this on shows such as *Shark Tank* and *Mad Men*.

The next conference I attended was Inbound — a massive event hosted by HubSpot that leveraged the entirety of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. This year’s event had 21,000 attendees and featured 273 speakers including Rand Fishkin, Judd Apatow, John Cena, and Michelle Obama.

Over the course of three days, I met executives and copywriters, UX researchers and software engineers, designers and product managers, and marketers and salespeople. There were so many personalities — so many perspectives to consider. And incredible crowds that tested everyone’s patience.

One particular interaction stuck with me. I met an Australian gentleman who thought Michelle Obama had bombed. He felt that, in her conversation with Roxane Gay, the former first lady had misplaced a cry for women’s empowerment and that she had lost a big part of the crowd over the course of their 45-minute session.



When I asked why, I listened carefully to his response. Despite my opposing opinion, we had a respectful conversation and moved on to other topics, including opportunities for Blink and his agency to work together.

Without empathy, our chance encounter would have gone much differently.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, according to Dictionary.com.

Consider the situation with my new friend from Australia. If I hadn’t listened to him, I wouldn’t have understood his particular problem with the session. Without empathy, I couldn’t have pushed through to resolve our differences and continue a productive dialogue.

As it turns out, [he wasn’t alone](#) in his opinion. You can watch the [whole session](#) here and judge for yourself.

At Blink, we cultivate empathy among our team and clients with every research study we complete. User experience research generates the evidence that sows the seeds of innovation in our designs. By taking the time to survey, observe, or listen to people, we understand their motivations and expectations.

We avoid the [reality distortion field](#), a term coined to describe how Jobs could seemingly spin “his own version of reality” and make you believe it. By facing reality every day when we conduct [usability tests](#), focus groups, and other kinds of research. Our [Evidence-driven Design](#) methodology leads to successful product innovations and marketing initiatives because ideas are tested and proven with our clients’ target users during the process.

Testing ideas in the lab gives our clients the confidence to pursue big bets. Even “crazy ideas” such as an IoT shower don’t seem so outrageous once you’ve seen customers light up when they use one.

[Visit web page at <https://blinkux.com/ideas/building-a-future-on-empathy> to view embedded content]

Our new office is a strategic investment that improves our ability to recruit diverse participants for studies and build empathy for the user. **How can we help you design for the future?**

Brent is Director of Client Services at Blink. He's also possibly the world's slowest 7-time marathoner.