

MARKETING LIVE CONFERENCE RECAP

Effective Marketing in Lean Times: Creative Approaches to Delivering Value

BY JESSICA SWANSON | FEBRUARY 14, 2024

Marketing / Live Conference Recap

"When you have a really lean budget, learning how to speak the language of your C-suite will either stop your budget from getting cut more, or potentially get you back to earning a little bit more of that budget," said Jessica Bryant, SVP of marketing for NCR Veeva. During times of economic uncertainty, organizations place increased scrutiny on strategies and budgets—even those in marketing.

Driving marketing value in a challenging economy was the topic of an executive panel discussion moderated by marketing journalist Lisa Lacy at [From Day One's Atlanta marketing conference](#).

To show the distinct value of her team's work, Bryant has shifted her C-suite reporting from vanity metrics like impressions and traffic to data that demonstrates revenue impact. "I took a different tack and brought it down the funnel to talk about the things marketing is doing that are actually driving your pipeline, or increasing your sales velocity, or increasing your cycles. And that changed the conversation," she said.

Katie Conrad, general manager of customer performance and insights at Delta, went a similar route. By "being the experts in what we're doing, that changes customer behavior." Conrad and team use data points to focus on and illustrate those changes.

Since Covid and beyond, companies have responded to budget pressures in a variety of ways as the economy evolves. Delta has leaned into known growth areas, Conrad says, such as high-performing demographics and segments, as well as places where customers are already signaling purchase intent. Once those are identified, from a channel perspective she asks, "How do you truly make sure that whoever is driving that purchase, whether through social commerce or paid search, is protected right before the purchase?"



The panelists explored how marketing teams can sustain growth and prove value when budgets tighten.

Relying on proven partners to ensure stability during new product launches is an approach that says Hawkins Johnson, VP of marketing and consumer strategy at TNT Sports, Warner Bros. Discovery, has adopted. "Using tried and true partners is the way that we've fixed into that. Knowing what works, aligning with partners where there are measurement studies and things like that attached."

Johnson also stresses clear ROI reporting to reassure senior leaders and uses hyper-targeted marketing to keep sports relevant to its audience. "We live in a world where consumption shifts are happening in real time," she said. "It's good to advertise in the public conversation, but also outside of it. And then, of course, social is another way to be hyper-targeted. So where your fans are and remind them of what we have on our suite of networks."

Innovation With Minimal Risk

There are many ways to test new campaigns and processes with minimal financial or business risk. Conrad suggests involving data teams up front and using their forecasting capabilities to estimate potential impact.

Johnson recommends leveraging beta opportunities, in part because of built-in perks or data reporting. TNT Sports works with partners running beta programs to experiment with new advertising concepts. "Usually there are some perks that come along with being one of the first to try something. And usually there's a measurement study associated with it, because they want to see if it works and how we like it as well."

"Start small and fail fast," said Bryant, advocating for contained experimentation. "Figure out what you want to measure, define it clearly, and measure that metric. Then if you don't see the change you want, fail fast. Try something different."

There's also more time in the day to be innovative in the age of AI. Panelists agreed that generative AI adds value by eliminating low-level tasks and accelerating work on higher-value ones.

Bryant says the company utilizes AI to reduce its reliance on agency partners for concepting and in-house asset production, but also cautions against overuse or decision-making. Many team meetings start with AI insights, which she says "is great, but also want that creativity and that authenticity from humans as well, as our brand is unique. AI doesn't necessarily know everything about brand yet, so we need to be careful with that."

There are two primary use cases for AI at Delta, says Conrad: creative efficiencies and analytics. Her team uses Adobe tools to "pull and synthesize insights for the everyday marketer" while also empowering the rest of the analytics department through dashboard access.

The usefulness of AI outputs will only emerge if broader strategy is outsourced to AI. "If you come in with a strategy based on your knowledge and expertise in the brand, it should be," Conrad said.

Bryant cautions that "untrained marketers [can] create nonsense" as well. However, once marketers are trained in prompt engineering, she agrees that "if your prompt has nuance, if it has originality, if it has that untapped framing that only your brand can have, then that nonsense goes away 100%."

Citing a 600% year-over-year jump in the use of AI for Cyber Monday shopping and trip planning, content plans need to expand from traditional SEO to include generative engine optimization (GEO), says Conrad. Delta is adjusting its paid search parameters to broader terms, she says, to allow for flexibility in AI interpretation.

Reconsidering Priorities for Continued Success

NCR Veeva has reduced its spend on large-scale video production in the last 18 months, says Bryant, favoring shorter, more authentic content. This shift has resulted in lower production costs, but has also seen stronger performance. "That has really worked very well for us, and actually outperformed a lot of the bigger things that we were doing."

Conrad endorses optimizing the mix of marketing campaigns and channels. Fewer, more focused campaigns will be more effective, she says, than a larger volume of ad-hoc campaigns, ensuring the impact of your media spend.

Skills like curiosity and lifelong learning are crucial to the future of marketing as well, said Johnson. "Being an eternal learner will never hurt you, whether it's AI or whatever the next thing is, there will always be something to learn."

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