

MARKETING LIVE CONFERENCE RECAP

What's Changing in the Way People Connect With Brands

BY JESSICA SWENSON | OCTOBER 15, 2026

"I think it's a generational opportunity. I think it's the thing of our time," said Peter Loftus, chief marketing officer of Publicis Creative US & Leo US at Publicis Groupe. He sees AI as a broad opportunity on par with the first iPhone—that was the last time he felt this kind of magic.

"What I don't buy into is that it's going to eliminate the need for human creativity." He believes that creativity is one of society's most timeless, foundational vocations, and it is approaching a shift. The future of creative direction is bringing the "taste, sensibility, and craft to AI" that only a human can offer. "The work's going to change a lot, and we're going to have to do the work very differently."

This evolution and its impact on the brand-employee-consumer triad was the topic of a fireside chat between Loftus and moderator Christian Farr, a reporter for NBC5 News, at From Day One's Chicago marketing conference.

Citing Leo's HumanKind study in partnership with Ipsos, Loftus revealed that despite a deep unease surrounding AI, 58% of Americans are using it. His team identifies a perceived lack of respect as the source of that paradox.

"People across all demographics felt 'people don't genuinely respect or care about me,' and because of that fact, they're doubling down. They're trying to create their own destiny, and they're using AI to do it." he said. "And they're doing it in an environment where 6 out of 10 people feel that institutions don't have their best interest at heart, so they're not feeling respected."

Because they don't see a future for themselves in today's industry, younger workers' goals have shifted from seeking the corner office to creating side hustles that become their main ambition, says Loftus. "We could enter maybe the greatest era of creativity ever in our business, but we have to bring that next generation along for the ride because they are incredibly complex and creative."



Peter Loftus, CMO at Publicis Creative US & Leo US, was interviewed by Christian Farr, General Assignment Reporter, NBC5 News, during the fireside chat

Companies could help slow this shift by simply listening to people and treating

them fairly. The Leo HumanKind study showed that 61% of respondents will pay more for something—even in a down economy—when they feel respected by a brand. Loftus offered examples of brands addressing key customer pain points, like T-Mobile's five-year price lock and Uber's teen accounts.

Encouraging brands to be transparent with consumers about AI content, he said, "If people want to be treated fairly, then transparency is table stakes, and we know from the data that we will be rewarded in kind as marketers if we are honest with people."

This applies most strongly to GenZ, known for their paradoxical nature as they seek meaning both in life and from the brands they interact with. "If more brands listen to them more, and recognize that multiple things can be true about them at the same time, it can't fit them in a box. I think they'd be more successful."

Focusing on AI solely as an efficiency play is another common mistake that Loftus sees companies make. "I think the argument that AI is an efficiency driver is the major issue I have. Absolutely, it can make you more efficient. There's no question, and it should. But I actually think the most powerful thing in AI today is insight." He suggests using it to pull information such as pain points and trend data from key social communities to inform your creative.

Loftus offered three key takeaways for marketers: find your company's consumer respect gap and address it, hold onto your humanness to amplify AI's power, and use AI as a tool to find the insights you need to create meaning.

And now is the time, he says, to shape the future of AI. "We're all using it, so it's on us to craft a future that we want with it. We have to be vocal, and we have to demand that AI fits into the worldview that we see. We need to stand up and say exactly what we think that should be to craft a better future."

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