

VOL 09 ♦ ISSUE 44 ♦ DECEMBER 2025

TRADE FLOCK

Story of the Month

**Somaliland
and the World**
A Political Reality
Living Outside
International Permission

SPOTLIGHT

The Modern
Restructuring of
Marketing's Core

Why Performance
Marketing
Is No Longer
a Growth
Strategy



**SIDRA
SHARMEEN**
CEO & Founder
Viz Digital Marketing

MOST STRATEGIC

**MARKETING
LEADERS** TO WATCH
IN 2025



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THE MINDS SHAPING MARKETING'S FUTURE

Marketing is no longer a function that sits downstream of business decisions. It now shapes them. In a year defined by economic caution, AI acceleration, and a more discerning consumer, marketing leadership has become a strategic discipline grounded in judgment, timing, and trust.

2025 is unfolding as a test of clarity. Budgets are tighter. Attention is fragmented. Consumers are more informed and less forgiving. Growth today is not driven by louder campaigns or faster launches, but by leaders who understand how brands earn relevance through consistency, credibility, and purpose that holds up under scrutiny. Strategy has moved from the planning room into everyday execution, where every message carries long term consequences.

The leaders featured in this edition stand apart because they see marketing as a system, not a set of tactics. They ask sharper questions before choosing channels. They invest in insight before scale. They understand that data is only as powerful as the judgment applied to it, and that technology is a tool, not a substitute for human understanding. These are leaders who balance performance with patience, creativity with accountability, and ambition with responsibility.

What unites them is not a shared industry or geography, but a shared mindset. They recognise that trust is the most valuable currency a brand can hold today. They build teams that think beyond short term metrics and create narratives that resonate across markets, cultures, and moments of change. They lead with intention, knowing that strategy is revealed not in presentations, but in decisions made under pressure.

Most Strategic Marketing Leaders to Watch in 2025 is a recognition of those shaping the future of growth with discipline, intelligence, and relevance. Their work reflects where marketing is headed and why thoughtful leadership will define the next era of brand building.

Vipin Kumar
Editor, Tradeflock

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USA 2025

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CXOs of 2025

Real Estate Titans
of The USA 2025

Most Iconic
Women Leaders
in USA 2026

USA's Most
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MOST STRATEGIC MARKETING LEADERS TO WATCH IN 2025

NAME	DESIGNATION	COMPANY
Alvin Neo	Chief Customer & Marketing Officer	NTUC Enterprise Co-operative Limited
Claire Laine	Global Marketing Director (COVERGIRL)	Coty Inc.
Jo Boundy	CMO	Commonwealth Bank
Linda Boff	CEO	Said Differently
Matt Che	CMO	Budweiser APAC
Mukta Maheshwari	Chief Marketing Officer; Vice President & Category Head - Fabric Care	P&G India
Sidra Sharmeen	CEO & Founder	Viz Digital Marketing
Susie Wong	Chief Marketing & Experience Officer	National Gallery Singapore
Todd Kaplan	CMO	Kraft Heinz North America
Tulani André	Vice President - Social Media	National Geographic

Most Strategic Marketing Leaders to Watch in 2025



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Fortune Primero

MOST STRATEGIC MARKETING LEADERS TO WATCH IN 2025



Empowering Success With Smart Vision

SIDRA SHARMEEN

CEO & Founder, **Viz Digital Marketing**

Marketing did not change overnight. It shifted quietly, almost unnoticed, as technology rewired how people discover opportunities, make decisions, and imagine their futures. Today, marketing is no longer confined to campaigns or performance metrics. It sits at the intersection of human behavior, data intelligence, cultural context, and global mobility. Businesses that understand this grow with relevance, and professionals who recognize it build careers that travel far beyond borders.

Sidra Sharmeen belongs to this new generation of marketing leaders who did not enter the industry through theory or titles, but through lived experience. Her understanding of marketing was shaped long before it had a name, through conversations with customers, real-time problem-solving, and learning how clarity and patience can change outcomes. Early roles in customer support revealed how trust is built, while her work in data operations reinforced the importance of clean information and meaningful patterns in decision-making.

These experiences eventually came together in Viz Digital Marketing, a platform Sidra founded to bridge gaps she repeatedly saw across industries and geographies. Viz supports individuals and businesses through job placement, study-abroad guidance, profile building, digital visibility, and cross-border growth, all within one integrated ecosystem.

What began as a response to fragmented systems evolved into a global service model designed around continuity, context, and long-term value.

In this conversation with TradeFlock, Sidra reflects on the journey that shaped her leadership, the choices that defined Viz's growth, and the future she is building at the intersection of marketing, technology, and human ambition.

Q What's one early job or side hustle that taught you the ropes of digital marketing and still shapes your decisions today?

Early experiences often teach lessons you only understand much later. When I look back, one memory always brings a sense of warmth and clarity. During the COVID period, I spent a lot of time helping small local businesses with basic IT fixes. Those were simple visits, yet they somehow turned into mini digital marketing sessions. I still remember sitting in the back of a small shop, fixing their connection and showing them how a single online update could bring customers back. Those interactions opened my eyes to how technology, behavior, and communication blend together. The experience became a quiet foundation for everything I do today. It taught me to rely on data, value automation, and always design solutions that make sense to real people, not just systems.

“

Digital marketing is the bridge that connects brands to the world—and I love building that bridge across the UAE, UK, Canada, Australia, and the US.

Q

Which milestone in your career trajectory feels like the highlight of your journey so far?

Some milestones grow on you slowly, and you only realise their weight when you pause long enough to feel it. The moment Viz officially became a registered company remains one of my favorites. I remember holding the papers and wondering where this journey would lead. The goal back then was simple. I wanted to create something meaningful with the skills I had and the determination I carried. Watching the agency transform into a global-service operation has been incredibly moving. It became a journey of self-growth as much as a journey of business growth. The highlight is not just the expansion. It is the understanding that consistent effort, quiet resilience, and genuine intent can build something far bigger than your first idea.





Q What were the toughest challenges from your early entrepreneurial days, and what helped you turn them around?

Every entrepreneur goes through a phase when things feel heavier than expected, and I had my share of those moments. The early days brought challenges that felt intertwined. Managing work across borders, keeping pace with technology, and handling infrastructure needs often left me with long days and even longer thoughts. The turning point came when I built more discipline into my routine and trusted data to guide decisions. Support from people who believed in growth also helped more than they probably realised. Each challenge gradually reshaped my mindset and brought a calmness I did not have before. Those early experiences taught me how to stay steady, adapt quickly, and make decisions with a clearer head.

“Travel is the best teacher. Every journey opens a new market, a new connection, and a new opportunity for global expansion.”

Q Which marketing gap fired you up the most to launch Viz, and how is your agency filling that hole right now?

The idea behind Viz did not arrive as a grand plan. It grew slowly from watching business owners struggle with scattered teams and disconnected solutions. I kept seeing the same frustration. One team handled marketing, another handled IT support, someone else managed HR tech, and job placement was a headache in its own right. This patchwork approach drained time and energy, and many owners felt overwhelmed long before seeing any real results. That observation motivated the creation of Viz. Today, the agency operates as a unified ecosystem that supports everything from marketing strategy and automation to IT consulting, job placement, and tech-driven operations. Clients get a single team that understands their entire journey, making progress smoother and more reliable.

Q In the wild ride of agency life, what's a recent entrepreneurial test you've beaten, and what quick lesson from it would you share with other founders?

Agency life has a way of testing you when you least expect it, and the most recent example came through a demanding digital transformation project. The timeline was tight, and the requirements kept evolving, which pushed us to operate with sharp coordination and complete focus. Watching the team handle each stage with patience and commitment made me incredibly proud. When the project was successfully delivered, the lesson stood out clearly. Adaptability shapes outcomes more than anything else. Technology shifts quickly and clients evolve with it. Staying curious, staying flexible, and staying open to change creates a mindset that carries you through challenges with far more confidence.

Q Now that AI is part of almost everything, what change did it bring to you, your strategies, and approach?

AI has changed the way I approach leadership and decision-making by bringing much more clarity and precision into the process. Earlier, many strategic choices depended largely on experience and intuition, whereas now those instincts are supported by insights and patterns that emerge far more quickly. This has made planning more focused and allowed decisions to be taken with greater confidence and context.

From a strategic standpoint, AI has helped us work more efficiently by reducing time spent on repetitive execution and allowing greater attention to vision, innovation, and people. It enables us to personalise solutions, optimise performance, and respond to market shifts with agility, while still relying on human judgment at the core. I do not see AI as a replacement for thinking or creativity, but as a strategic partner that strengthens both. This balance has helped us work smarter without losing the human connection that remains essential to leadership.

Q What's the most significant risk you've taken as a leader, and what was the outcome?

One of the most significant risks I took was deciding to build Viz as an integrated ecosystem instead of limiting it to a single service offering. This decision required strong belief in a long-term vision and the willingness to invest early in systems, talent, and structure, even when the outcomes were not immediately visible.

Over time, that choice proved to be transformative. Viz evolved into a multi-service, global platform capable of delivering end-to-end solutions across markets. The experience reinforced a core belief that strategic risks, when taken with intention and discipline, often create the strongest foundations for sustainable growth. Looking back, the risk was not just about expansion, but about building something resilient enough to grow with purpose.

Q How do you keep the team motivated during tough times or conflicts?

During challenging periods, motivation comes from trust, transparency, and a shared sense of purpose rather than pressure. Clear communication is especially important so

that everyone understands not only what is happening but also how it fits into the organisation's overall direction.

When people feel valued and included in conversations, resilience develops naturally. I focus on encouraging a solution-driven mindset and make sure progress is acknowledged, even when it comes in small steps. Consistency in leadership and empathy in approach help maintain confidence during uncertainty. Over time, I have learned that teams remain motivated when they feel respected, aligned, and clear about why their work matters.

Q How do you envision your business over the next five years, and what are your plans to make it happen?

Over the next five years, I see Viz growing into a globally recognised, technology-driven ecosystem that supports businesses and professionals across multiple markets. The focus will remain on innovation, AI-enabled services, and scalable systems that are designed to deliver long-term value rather than short-term outcomes.

Making this vision a reality requires intentional growth. Strengthening leadership, investing in automation, building strategic partnerships, and continuously evolving our capabilities are all part of that plan. Sustainable growth, quality execution, and meaningful impact will continue to guide our decisions as we move forward.

Q Who has been your most impactful mentor, and what did you learn?

My most impactful mentors have come through a combination of experiences and leaders who demonstrated discipline, patience, and clarity while navigating complex situations. Observing how they approached decision-making taught me that leadership is less about authority and more about responsibility.

The most valuable lesson I learned is that consistency and integrity are what create lasting success. When leaders remain grounded, transparent, and focused on long-term value, trust develops naturally. Over time, I have come to see trust not as a soft outcome, but as the strongest foundation any organisation can build. ♦



MARKETING AT THE COST OF CULTURE

Marketing reaches its strongest influence when it moves in rhythm with culture rather than attempting to dominate it. Current consumer behavior reflects this shift clearly. Industry surveys in 2024 and 2025 show that more than half of global consumers now discover new brands through social platforms, while over 80 percent state that trust and value alignment influence purchase decisions more than promotional frequency. Growth, therefore, is increasingly shaped by cultural relevance and credibility instead of reach alone.

Many brands, however, continue to approach culture as a sequence of moments to activate instead of a system that requires understanding and continuity. Constant visibility has become a default objective, pushing teams toward rapid reactions that favor speed over substance. Cultural references appear briefly, disappear quickly, and rarely connect to long-term brand behavior. Engagement rises temporarily, yet meaning fails to accumulate, leaving audiences aware of the brand but unconvinced of its intent.

Our research suggests that audiences now assess cultural participation with a high degree of literacy. Performative alignment is quickly identified, particularly when social language or community symbols appear without supporting action. Campaigns built on borrowed narratives often struggle to convert attention into loyalty because cultural engagement without commitment feels extractive rather than respectful.

Brands that leverage culture effectively demonstrate a different pattern. Nike's continued relevance stems from decades of investment in athlete communities, grassroots sports,

and identity-driven storytelling, allowing cultural participation to feel earned rather than opportunistic. Duolingo's recent success on TikTok reflects a similar principle, where humor and self-awareness align with platform culture while remaining consistent with brand personality instead of chasing every trend. In India, Zomato's culturally grounded communication continues to resonate because it mirrors everyday consumer sentiment rather than imported global formats.

Restraint plays a critical role in this approach. Selective participation signals confidence and respect, while constant cultural insertion often signals insecurity. Research indicates that consumers disengage more readily from brands that oversimplify or misrepresent cultural identity than from those that choose not to participate at all. Silence, when intentional, preserves credibility.

Measurable outcomes support this discipline. Studies consistently show that brands aligned with shared values and authentic representation experience stronger customer retention and higher lifetime value compared to those driven purely by short-term performance tactics. Cultural alignment compounds gradually, strengthening memory, trust, and advocacy instead of producing fleeting spikes.

Marketing leaders face a clear implication. Culture cannot remain an accessory applied during campaign planning. Cultural understanding must inform positioning, messaging, and organizational behavior over time. Growth follows naturally when marketing listens longer, commits deeper, and earns relevance rather than borrowing it. When culture becomes the strategy itself, marketing regains its power to build brands that last. ♦◆

THE MODERN RESTRUCTURING OF MARKETING'S CORE



Earlier this year, during a closed-door leadership discussion, a senior CMO made an observation that lingered long after the meeting ended. Every metric looked healthy. Every channel was active. Every tool was in place. Yet confidence was missing. Growth felt fragile, and trust felt conditional. The data told one story. The market told another.

This quiet disconnect explains why marketing's core is being restructured in 2025. The discipline has not lost

relevance. It has lost alignment between scale and meaning.

For years, marketing expanded outward. New platforms multiplied. Automation accelerated. Content volume exploded. Efficiency became the measure of progress. Audiences responded by becoming harder to impress and quicker to disengage. Attention fragmented. Loyalty weakened. The cost of persuasion rose even as budgets followed. What once felt like momentum now feels like motion without certainty.

“By 2027, global advertising spend is expected to exceed 1.4 trillion dollars, yet competitive advantage will depend less on scale and more on system intelligence and restraint.”

Industry forecasts underline the tension. Global advertising investment is projected to reach nearly 1.2 trillion dollars by the end of 2025 and is expected to cross 1.4 trillion dollars before the decade closes. Growth remains strong on paper. Concentration tells a different story. A small number of platforms are capturing an increasing share of spend, while differentiation becomes more elusive for brands competing in the same spaces. The market is expanding, yet confidence is narrowing.

This pressure has forced a structural rethink. Marketing no longer functions best as a sequence of campaigns. Campaigns create visibility. Systems create continuity. Modern buyers do not move in straight lines. Research, evaluation, reassurance, and decision-making now unfold across long and uneven journeys. Static calendars struggle to keep pace with this reality. Adaptive systems learn, adjust, and respond without waiting for a quarterly review.

Trust has emerged as the anchor of these systems, and trust is under strain. Recent digital trust studies show that no major industry currently earns the confidence of even half its consumers when it comes to handling personal data. At the same time, more than eight in ten consumers say data privacy rights matter deeply to their brand choices. Modern marketing operates inside this contradiction. Relevance is expected. Intrusion is rejected. Respect has become the currency that determines whether personalization feels helpful or unsettling.

As a result, data strategy has changed in spirit as

much as in structure. First-party and zero-party data now carry greater strategic weight than third-party scale. Consent has become part of brand experience rather than a legal checkbox. Every interaction where information is requested has become a moment of judgment. Brands that treat data as a relationship build resilience. Brands that treat data as inventory lose goodwill quietly and quickly.

Artificial intelligence has intensified these dynamics. AI has moved into marketing's core as an intelligence layer rather than a support function. Teams now use predictive models to anticipate churn, identify intent, and shape journeys at critical moments. Creative exploration happens faster. Operational friction decreases. Capability expands rapidly.

Judgment, however, has not expanded at the same pace.

“By the middle of the decade, marketing teams will value judgment as highly as automation, as organizations rebalance speed with responsibility.”

Strategic forecasts for the next two years reveal an emerging counterbalance. Analysts predict that by 2026, half of global organizations will introduce AI-free evaluation environments in response to declining critical-thinking skills. Marketing will feel this shift earlier than most functions because speed has long been its advantage. Discernment is becoming equally valuable. Technology may accelerate output, but meaning still depends on human judgment.

Experience has therefore moved to the center of marketing's future. Experience is harder to replicate than messaging. Experience reflects truth across product, service, delivery, and tone. Customers no longer separate what a brand says from how it behaves. Each interaction reinforces or erodes belief. Marketing leaders are increasingly accountable for outcomes that extend beyond awareness into retention, advocacy, and long-term value.

Looking ahead, the structure of marketing will continue to evolve toward intelligence-led orchestration. Predictive decisioning will replace retrospective attribution. Creator relationships will mature into trust networks built on consistency rather than reach. Agent-based AI systems are projected to grow from under ten billion dollars in 2026 to more than thirty billion dollars by the end of the decade, with marketing among the first functions to deploy them at scale. Governance and brand discipline will determine whether this growth strengthens or destabilizes trust. ♦

MOST STRATEGIC
**MARKETING
 LEADERS**
 TO WATCH IN 2025



*Building Growth Engines with Insight, Innovation,
 and Customer-Centric Leadership*

ALVIN NEO

*Chief Customer & Marketing Officer,
 NTUC Enterprise Co-operative Limited Group, Inc*

Alvin Neo has spent his career building growth engines for some of the world's most recognisable brands and organisations. Over the past two decades, he has held senior leadership roles at consumer goods giants such as Procter & Gamble and Gillette, healthcare leaders including Johnson & Johnson and Parkway Pantai, as well as entrepreneurial and technology ventures like Netdecisions and Diversitec. Today, as Chief Customer and Marketing Officer at NTUC Enterprise Co-operative Limited and Managing Director of NTUC Link, he is shaping the strategic marketing, customer engagement, and loyalty initiatives for FairPrice Group, Singapore's household name in retail.



He is shaping the strategic marketing, customer engagement, and loyalty initiatives for FairPrice Group, Singapore's household name in retail.

Defined by Scale and Impact

Alvin's career is defined by both scale and impact. He has delivered measurable growth in consumer goods, healthcare, and emerging markets across Asia, Europe, and beyond. From leading high-performing marketing and sales teams in complex, matrix-driven organisations to steering entrepreneurial ventures, Alvin brings a rare combination of corporate rigour and start-up agility to every role he undertakes.

At FairPrice Group, Alvin oversees strategic marketing, brand building, customer engagement, and partnerships, ensuring the company remains customer-centric while driving business performance. As functional CEO of NTUC Link, he leads initiatives that elevate loyalty programmes and consumer experiences, strengthening the bond between the brand and its customers. His focus goes beyond campaigns—it is about creating meaningful experiences that inspire loyalty and enrich daily life for consumers.

International exposure has been a defining feature of Alvin's journey. He spent four years in China, one year in Indonesia, and another in the UK, navigating diverse markets and consumer behaviours. At Johnson & Johnson, he revitalised the Diabetes Care business across 12 Asia Pacific markets, achieving the fastest regional growth globally in 2012. He also spearheaded innovation

and pipeline strategy for J&J's Emerging Markets Consumer division, shaping long-term growth across APAC, EMEA, and LATAM. These experiences honed his ability to translate insights into strategies that deliver both growth and meaningful consumer impact.

His time at Parkway Pantai further demonstrates his ability to scale operations. As Group Chief Marketing Officer, he managed 200 professionals spanning marketing, sales, product innovation, customer experience, and CRM functions. He also launched the Future of Healthcare Marketing practice, blending digital strategy, analytics, and human insights to transform patient and consumer engagement. Under his leadership, Parkway Pantai's marketing evolved from traditional campaigns to a fully integrated, data-driven, and consumer-first approach.

Honing Skills that Make Powerful Influence

Alvin's foundation in brand and business strategy was laid at Procter & Gamble, where he managed regional marketing for Oral-B across 13 Asia Pacific markets and Greater China. His early experience as a brand manager in haircare, baby care, and healthcare categories honed his skills in product innovation, consumer insights, and market execution—skills that continue to inform his leadership today.

What sets Alvin apart is not just his strategic acumen but also his ability to inspire teams and foster collaboration in complex organisations. A commissioned officer in the Singapore Armed Forces, he developed discipline and strategic thinking early in life, traits that continue to define his leadership approach. He is equally comfortable driving digital transformation as he is building human connections, consistently balancing innovation with execution.

Alvin's contributions extend beyond the boardroom. He served as Executive Council Member and Chairman of APPIES at the Institute of Advertising Singapore, shaping marketing standards and celebrating excellence across the industry. His career is a testament to the power of insight-driven strategy, innovation, and customer focus.

Whether transforming loyalty programmes, scaling healthcare portfolios, or leading global marketing campaigns, Alvin consistently turns vision into measurable growth, building brands that matter and experiences that resonate. For him, marketing is more than just a discipline. It is a vehicle to make everyday life better for the people and communities he serves. ♦



Leadership Lessons from

SETH GODIN

What a Non-Conformist Career Teaches About Modern Leadership

In the world of business, authors and writers hold a spot generally overlooked. These writers might not be business wizards, but they understand business at its core. This makes them a preeminent choice for college students and people in general to understand the basics of business. One such author whose influence on modern business thinking is difficult to quantify, yet impossible to ignore, is Seth Godin.

With more than 19 best-selling books, a daily blog that has run uninterrupted since 2002, and ideas that reshaped how companies think about marketing, leadership, and culture, Godin occupies a unique space in global business discourse. Unlike conventional corporate leaders, his career has been shaped not by linear promotions or organisational power, but by repeated resistance to the status quo.

The Failure of Squidoo and the Reality of Product-Market Fit

In 2005, Seth Godin founded Squidoo, a user-generated content platform that enables individuals to build focused, content-oriented web pages

called Lenses. Despite initial traction, as millions of web pages were created, Squidoo struggled to keep up with Google's more algorithmically oriented search engine. In 2014, Seth officially shut down Squidoo and all of its content was transferred to HubPages.

After this, Seth did something unprecedented: he acknowledged his failure, describing it as a meaningful initiative that could not achieve long-term sustainability.

VISION ALONE IS NOT SUFFICIENT FOR THE SUCCESS OF A BUSINESS. LEADERS MUST DISTINGUISH BETWEEN CREATIVE ENTHUSIASM AND MARKET REALITY. SQUIDOO DEMONSTRATED THAT EVEN STRONG COMMUNITIES AND EARLY ADOPTION CANNOT COMPENSATE FOR STRUCTURAL MARKET SHIFTS OR PLATFORM DEPENDENCY.

Rejection from Traditional Publishers Before Becoming a Bestseller

Before becoming a globally recognized author, Seth had his fair share of challenges to deal with. Several of his early books received lackluster response

and many of his book proposals faced a lot of resistance from traditional publishers. His ideas around Permission marketing were considered unconventional in the late 90s, an era dominated by 'interruption marketing'. Seth couldn't care less about what people thought, as a result, he published the book anyways. The book went on to reshape digital marketing strategies globally.

Over time, Godin would publish 19 books, all of which will be critically acclaimed, including the likes of Purple Cow, Tribes and This is Marketing.

MARKET REJECTION IS OFTEN A SIGNAL OF ORIGINALITY, NOT FAILURE. LEADERS INTRODUCING DISRUPTIVE IDEAS MUST BE PREPARED FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESISTANCE, PARTICULARLY WHEN THEIR THINKING CHALLENGES ESTABLISHED BUSINESS MODELS.

Choosing a Job at Yahoo Over a Conventional Entrepreneurial Exit

In 1986, Godin founded a website called Yoyodyne, which featured contests, online games and scavenger hunts to market companies to participating users. Then, at the height of dot.com era, he sold the website to Yahoo. However, rather than enjoying his retirement on some island, Seth stayed with the company as Vice President of Direct Marketing. This helped him observe and understand the strengths and constraints of corporate

scale. Godin later reflected that the experience helped him understand how bureaucracy, incentives and risk aversion dictate innovation inside big corporations.

LEADERSHIP INSIGHT OFTEN COMES FROM PROXIMITY, NOT DISTANCE. BY CHOOSING IMMERSION OVER IMMEDIATE INDEPENDENCE, GODIN GAINED FIRSTHAND UNDERSTANDING OF ORGANISATIONAL DYNAMICS THAT LATER INFORMED HIS WRITING.

Writing a Daily Blog for Over Two Decades Without Monetisation Pressure

Since 2002, Seth Godin has published a blog post

every single day, without advertising, subscriptions, or sponsored content. The blog has become one of the most widely read marketing and leadership platforms in the world, despite violating nearly every conventional content monetisation strategy.

Godin has consistently stated that the blog's purpose is not traffic or revenue, but trust, contribution, and idea-sharing.

LONG-TERM INFLUENCE IS BUILT THROUGH CONSISTENCY, NOT OPTIMISATION. LEADERS WHO FOCUS SOLELY ON SHORT-TERM METRICS OFTEN SACRIFICE CREDIBILITY. GODIN'S BLOG DEMONSTRATES HOW SUSTAINED VALUE CREATION COMPOUNDS INTO AUTHORITY AND TRUST OVER TIME.

Launching altMBA Without Accreditation or Institutional Validation

In 2015, Godin launched altMBA, an online leadership and management workshop that deliberately avoided traditional degrees, grades, or accreditation. The program focused on peer accountability, creative leadership, and real-world problem-solving. Despite skepticism from academic institutions, altMBA quickly gained global participation and strong alumni advocacy.

The program challenged conventional assumptions about education, credentials, and professional development.

LEADERSHIP REQUIRES REDEFINING LEGITIMACY. ALTMBA SHOWED THAT CREDIBILITY CAN BE BUILT THROUGH OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY RATHER THAN FORMAL VALIDATION, A CRUCIAL INSIGHT FOR LEADERS BUILDING ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONS IN LEGACY-DOMINATED SECTORS.

A Career Steeped in Learning, Experimentation & Not Giving Up

Seth Godin's career offers a rare case study in leadership defined not by hierarchy or authority, but by intentional divergence. From failed startups and rejected ideas to unconventional platforms and long-term consistency, his journey underscores a fundamental truth of modern leadership: progress is rarely comfortable, linear, or widely approved at inception. ♦



MOST STRATEGIC MARKETING LEADERS TO WATCH IN 2025



Leading in an Era of Brand Reinvention

CLAIRE LAINE

**Global Marketing Director (COVERGIRL),
Coty Inc.**

In a beauty industry defined by relentless launches, algorithm-driven trends, and rapidly shifting consumer expectations, longevity is no longer a shield. Legacy brands are expected to compete with the agility of challengers while maintaining the trust built over decades. Marketing leadership in this environment requires more than creativity. It demands discipline, cultural sensitivity, and a deep understanding of how brands evolve without erasing what made them meaningful in the first place.

This balance between heritage and modernity sits at the core of the work led by Claire Laine, Global Marketing Director for COVERGIRL at Coty Inc. Based in New York and internationally oriented by experience, she operates at the intersection of global brand strategy, product innovation, and storytelling in one of mass beauty's most competitive categories.

A Global Foundation Shaped by Scale and Precision

Claire Laine brings over a decade of beauty marketing experience across premium, founder-led, and large-scale consumer brands. Her career reflects a deliberate progression through

organizations where brand clarity and execution excellence are non-negotiable. Her early experience spans roles at The Estée Lauder Companies, where she worked on makeup launches in France, and Parfums Christian Dior, where she managed fragrance and skincare marketing across the UK, Ireland, and global markets. At Dior, she led marketing for flagship fragrance franchises such as J'adore and Miss Dior, overseeing 360 launch strategies, retail animation, media execution, and commercial forecasting across one of the brand's most critical categories.

She later joined Unilever, working on global brand relaunches and premium innovations for Dove skincare and deodorant. There, she launched multiple products across benefit platforms, managed cross-functional global teams, and led integrated communication campaigns across retail, PR, and e-commerce. These roles sharpened her ability to manage complexity at scale while balancing creativity with commercial accountability.

Refining Brand Leadership in a Founder-Led Environment

Before joining Coty, Claire Laine held senior global brand marketing roles at Charlotte Tilbury Beauty, one of the fastest-growing premium beauty brands at the time. Reporting directly to the CMO and working closely with the founder, she led global product launches and campaigns during a period of significant international growth.

Her responsibilities included building global marketing calendars, defining innovation pipelines, and delivering 360 go-to-market strategies for hero launches such as Pillow Talk and Hot Lips collections. Operating in a founder-led environment reinforced the importance of storytelling, brand instinct, and speed, while maintaining strategic rigor across regions.

Leading COVERGIRL's Eye Category at Global Scale

Since 2021, Claire Laine has been responsible for global brand marketing and product development for COVERGIRL's Eye category, spanning mascara, eyeshadow, brow, and eyeliner. Her role includes leading the marketing strategy and innovation pipeline for the category, developing creative assets with in-house teams, and overseeing launches from initial concept through market execution.



In modern beauty marketing, relevance is not created by reinvention alone, but by the discipline to evolve without losing who the brand has always been."

Under her leadership, COVERGIRL has introduced premium Lash Blast mascara innovations, including Cleantopia, Supercloud, and Eye Enhancer, and has repositioned and expanded the Clean Fresh Brow range. These launches reflect a focus on product storytelling, clean beauty cues, and building brand equity within a highly competitive mass-market segment. She also leads and develops a growing team, reinforcing the role of mentorship and collaboration in sustaining long-term brand success.

The Future of Marketing Built on Credibility and Continuity

As consumer expectations continue to evolve, mass beauty brands face increasing pressure to communicate authentically, relevantly, and consistently. For leaders operating at a global scale, success lies in creating frameworks that allow brands to adapt while remaining unmistakably themselves.

Claire Laine's leadership reflects this shift toward thoughtful evolution rather than constant reinvention.

Her career across luxury, consumer goods, and founder-led brands has shaped a marketing philosophy grounded in clarity, discipline, and cultural awareness. ♦



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MOST STRATEGIC
**MARKETING
LEADERS**
TO WATCH IN 2025



Leading at the Intersection of Trust, Creativity, and Scale

JO BOUNDY

CMO, Commonwealth Bank

Few marketing roles carry the weight of public trust quite like those inside a national bank. Every message is read through the lens of responsibility, every campaign must balance clarity with caution, and every brand decision has implications far beyond awareness or preference. In such environments, marketing is no longer about amplification. It becomes a function of credibility, consistency, and long-term relationship building.

That reality frames the leadership of Jo Boundy, Chief Marketing Officer of Commonwealth Bank, where brand, customer experience, and commercial outcomes are tightly interwoven. Her role sits at the convergence of creativity and governance, growth and trust, customer ambition and institutional responsibility.

With more than 25 years of global experience spanning travel, finance, media, and technology, Boundy brings a perspective shaped not by a single industry but by scale, complexity, and execution under scrutiny. Her career has been built inside large, publicly listed organisations where marketing decisions are inseparable from reputation, regulation, and enterprise performance, and where leadership is measured not just by vision, but by sustained delivery.



A Career Anchored in Customer and Employee Experience

Jo Boundy's leadership philosophy has been forged through environments that demanded both strategic depth and operational precision. She spent over a decade at Qantas, progressing through senior roles that spanned internal communications, digital transformation, entertainment, loyalty, and group-wide marketing leadership.

As Chief Marketing Officer of the Qantas Group and, earlier, CMO of Qantas Loyalty, she operated at the intersection of brand, data, and customer engagement. Loyalty ecosystems, digital platforms, and content were treated not as isolated functions, but as interconnected drivers of long-term value and commercial growth. Her remit extended into partnerships, customer propositions, and experience design, reinforcing a view of marketing as a growth engine rather than a communications layer.

Earlier chapters of her career were shaped within communications and technology environments, including leadership roles at LEWIS PR, secondments with Google, and work with BT Group. These formative years built a strong foundation in reputation management, stakeholder engagement, and the mechanics of influence across complex organisations.

Bringing a Customer Lens into Financial Services

In 2022, Boundy became Chief Marketing Officer at Commonwealth Bank, bringing a leadership style deeply rooted in the customer and employee experience. While aviation and banking differ in their products and regulations, both demand reliability, clarity, and trust at scale.

At CBA, her role spans brand stewardship, data-driven marketing, customer communications, and experience design, all within a highly regulated financial environment. The challenge is not simply to modernise the brand, but to ensure that every interaction reflects the bank's responsibility to its customers and communities.

A defining element of her leadership approach is the belief that employee experience and customer experience are inseparable. By focusing on how teams engage, communicate, and feel empowered internally, the brand promise becomes more authentic and consistently delivered externally.



When marketing is built around real customer and employee experience, trust becomes the strongest driver of long-term growth.

Marketing as a Commercial and Cultural Engine

Throughout Boundy's career, marketing has been treated as both a commercial discipline and a cultural force. Growth, in this view, is driven by relevance and experience rather than volume of messaging. This perspective has guided her work across loyalty programs, digital platforms, and enterprise brand strategy, particularly in environments where trust cannot be compromised.

Her broader industry involvement reinforces this philosophy. She serves as a Non-Executive Director at Bus Stop Films, supporting inclusive pathways for people with disabilities into the screen industry, and previously held advisory and vice-chair roles at ADMA, contributing to conversations on regulation, data, and responsible marketing practices.

Redefining Marketing Leadership in High-Trust Categories

As financial services and other high-trust sectors navigate digital disruption, rising customer expectations, and increased accountability, the role of marketing leadership continues to expand. It now sits at the intersection of growth, ethics, and experience.

Jo Boundy's career reflects this evolution. Her ability to bridge commerce and creativity, strategy and delivery, positions her as a leader suited to environments where marketing must repeatedly earn trust, not assume it. In such settings, success is measured not by short-term attention but by sustained confidence and relevance over time. ♦

II ElevenLabs

Redefining Human-Like Speech For a Voice-Driven World

Voice is one of humanity's most powerful tools for communicating, yet for decades now, it has remained one of the most difficult media for machines to replicate convincingly. In most cases, the speech sounded flat, mechanical and emotionally detached, limiting its adoption in a wide range of applications. That paradigm, however, is being challenged by ElevenLabs, a generative AI company that has positioned voice not merely as an output format but as a core interface for the next generation of human-machine interaction. Since its founding in 2022, ElevenLabs has rapidly become one of the most influential players in AI-driven audio, setting new benchmarks for realism, emotional depth, and scalability in synthetic speech.

Origins and Founding Vision

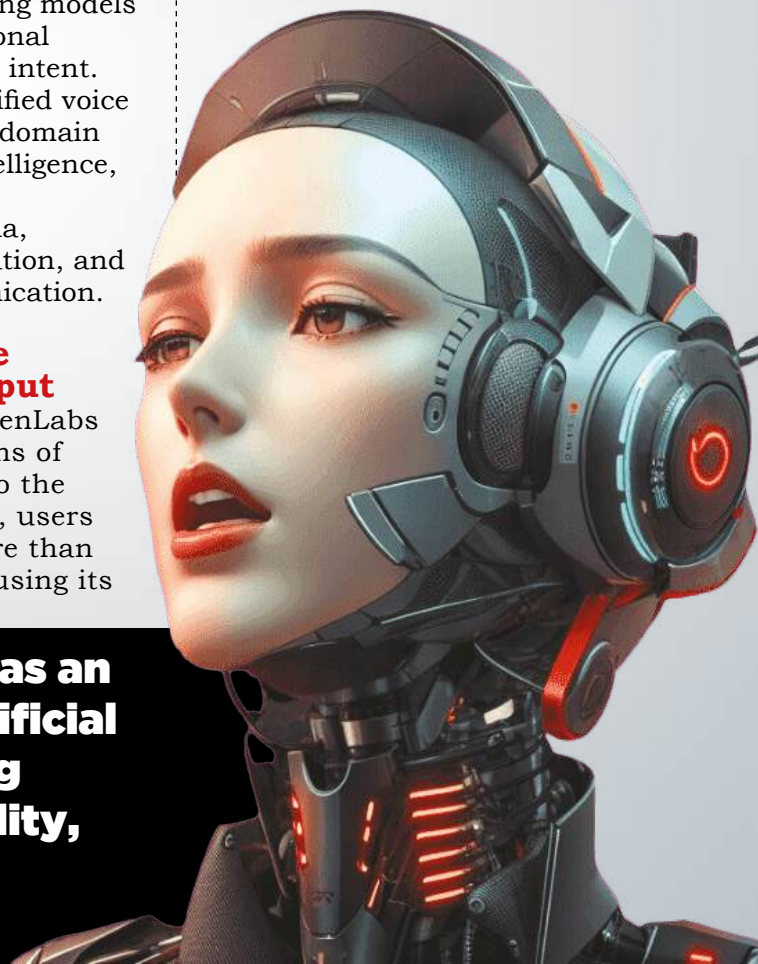
ElevenLabs was founded in 2022 by Piotr Dabkowski and Mati Staniszewski, both of whom had prior experience in machine learning and large-scale software models. The company was established in London to address the long-standing issue of unnatural AI speech by building models that capture emotional nuances, tone, and intent. The founders identified voice as an underserved domain within artificial intelligence, despite its growing importance in media, accessibility, education, and enterprise communication.

Platform Usage Skills and Output

By mid-2023, ElevenLabs already had millions of users. According to the company, by 2023, users had generated more than 10 years of audio using its

text-to-speech models. This metric accurately reflects the high infrastructure capacity and sustained user demand. This is because generating audio requires much more computational power than generating text.

Today, ElevenLabs' infrastructure capabilities



"The founders identified voice as an underserved domain within artificial intelligence, despite its growing importance in media, accessibility, education, and enterprise communication."

have surpassed those of its competitors by a wide margin. Users can now generate audio in over 70 languages, up from 29 at launch. This has enabled the company to scale its operations across multiple countries in sectors such as media, education, and enterprise markets.

Enterprise Penetration and Adoption

ElevenLabs' success and growth extend beyond individual creators. According to Contrary Research, 41 per cent of Fortune 500 companies use ElevenLabs in some form, including customer support automation, media localization, internal training modules, and voice assistants. This level of penetration places ElevenLabs among the fastest enterprise-adopted AI audio vendors in the market.

Revenue Growth and Commercial Performance

ElevenLabs' revenue trajectory demonstrates sharp acceleration and trust among the masses. The company reported approximately \$4.6 million in annual revenue by the end of 2023, having generated negligible revenue before its public launch earlier that year. By April 2025, reported revenues reached \$100 million, and by September 2025, revenues doubled again to \$200 million, reflecting strong subscription retention and enterprise licensing growth.

This is one reason industry experts believe ElevenLabs is poised to become one of the world's largest AI companies. The revenue growth is unlike

AT A GLANCE

Industry:
Software

Headquarters:
London, UK

Type:
Privately Held

Founder:
Piotr Dabkowski and
Mati Staniszewski

Founded in:
2022

Funding:
\$19 million in Series A
funding; \$80 million
in Series B round; \$180
million in Series C
round; Total Disclosed
Funding: \$280 million

that of any other AI firm on the planet, including OpenAI, which took years to achieve similar revenue.

Capital Raised and Valuation Benchmarks

Investor confidence in ElevenLabs is reflected in its funding history. The company raised \$19 million in Series A funding in 2023, led by

Andreessen Horowitz, Nat Friedman, and Daniel Gross. This was followed by an \$80 million Series B round, which pushed the company into unicorn territory. In 2025, ElevenLabs closed a \$180 million Series C round, valuing the company at approximately \$3.3 billion. Total disclosed funding now exceeds \$280 million.

Market Position and Strategic Relevance

The global text-to-speech market is projected to exceed \$6.6 billion by 2030, driven by demand in accessibility, media localisation, and AI assistants. ElevenLabs' combination of rapid revenue growth, enterprise penetration, and linguistic scale places it among the most commercially significant players in this expanding market. Its focus on emotional realism sets it apart from legacy speech-synthesis providers and positions it as a foundational layer for voice-first applications.

ElevenLabs: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Thinking of ElevenLabs as another generative AI company does it no justice. Unlike ChatGPT and other AI engines such as Gemini and Grok, ElevenLabs has many more use cases and is more likely to be purchased, given that it does what it is supposed to do. Today, voice interaction is where the world is heading. As voice becomes a primary interface for digital interaction, ElevenLabs stands as a clear example of how generative AI can translate technical innovation into sustained commercial value. ♦

MOST STRATEGIC MARKETING LEADERS TO WATCH IN 2025



Rebuilding Marketing Systems

LINDA BOFF

CEO, Said Differently

Marketing industries reach inflexion points when existing structures slow progress rather than enable it. Complexity grows, speed declines, and creative ambition gets buried under process. At those moments, leadership demands more than incremental improvement. It calls for a fundamental rethink of how work is designed, delivered, and valued.

This mindset has defined Linda Boff's career, now as Chief Executive Officer of Said Differently. After shaping marketing transformation inside some of the world's largest organizations, she now leads a company built to challenge how modern marketing systems operate at their core.

Leadership Forged in Transformation

Linda Boff spent more than two decades at GE, where she served as Global Chief Marketing and Communications Officer during one of the most complex corporate transformations in recent history. Her tenure coincided with GE's shift toward a future-focused identity centered on technology, innovation, and digital industrial leadership.

Her remit extended far beyond brand and communications. She also held roles

as President of the GE Foundation and Chief Learning Officer, placing her at the intersection of culture, leadership development, and social impact. Close partnership with CEOs, boards, and senior executives positioned marketing as a strategic lever for enterprise-wide change rather than a downstream function.

Earlier leadership experience at Citi added depth in financial services to a profile already grounded in global scale. Across industries and roles, a consistent approach emerged. Marketing operated as a driver of growth, relevance, and organizational momentum.

Crossing from Scale to Reinvention

A deliberate shift followed her years at GE. In 2024, Linda Boff became CEO of Said Differently, choosing reinvention over continuity. The move reflected a belief that the traditional holding company model no longer serves the pace or complexity of modern client needs.

Said Differently operates on a fundamentally different structure. A global talent network replaces fixed hierarchies, allowing precision-curated teams to assemble quickly around specific business objectives. Speed, clarity,



and outcome-driven execution anchor the model, helping clients reach stronger work faster without sacrificing quality.

The merger with Brainvire positioned Said Differently as the first global independent organization designed to balance consulting, strategy, creative, and technology with equal rigor. Integration, rather than specialization in silos, sits at the heart of the approach.

"The future of marketing belongs to leaders willing to redesign the system, not simply operate harder within it."

Creativity as an Operating Principle

Linda Boff's leadership philosophy treats creativity and marketing as renewable, expansive resources rather than finite tools. Her career reflects a conviction that legacy organizations regain vitality when creativity is paired with strategic discipline and commercial accountability.



The future of marketing belongs to leaders willing to redesign the system, not simply operate harder within it.

Industry leadership has extended beyond operating roles. Service as Chair of The Ad Council, participation on the Association of National Advertisers Executive Committee, and advisory work with Citation Capital and Evidenza reflect sustained commitment to the industry's future. Board leadership at Dunkin' Brands Group added governance experience within a consumer brand context.

Recognition has followed sustained impact. Inclusion on Forbes' list of the Most Entrepreneurial CMOs in 2024 and Adweek's B2B Innovation Lifetime Achievement Award in 2023 reinforced a career defined by boundary-pushing leadership.

Designing What Comes Next

As CEO of Said Differently, Linda Boff applies decades of transformation experience to building a company aligned with how modern work actually happens. Talent flexibility, integrated thinking, and client-centric execution define the operating model.

Her journey mirrors a broader shift within marketing leadership. Builders and system designers now shape the future alongside brand stewards. By stepping outside traditional frameworks, Boff continues to extend a legacy rooted in reinvention, relevance, and long-term value creation. ♦

29 December, 2002

REID HOFFMAN FOUNDS LINKEDIN

In the early 2000s, while Silicon Valley was busy recovering from the Dot-Com crash, Reid Hoffman was pursuing an idea that would change the world forever, at least the corporate one. Instead of chasing rapid monetization or mass consumer virality, he envisioned a professional network, rooted in trust, identity and long-term career value. That idea became LinkedIn.

Launched in 2003, LinkedIn did not explode overnight, nor was it designed to. Instead,

it compounded steadily, ultimately becoming the world's largest professional networking platform and one of the most successful consumer-enterprise hybrids in technology history. By the time Microsoft acquired LinkedIn for \$26.2 billion in 2016, the platform had fundamentally reshaped how professionals connect, hire, and build careers globally.

Reid Hoffman's Background Before Launching LinkedIn

A blend of philosophy, technology, and product experimentation shaped Reid

Hoffman's path to LinkedIn. He graduated from Stanford University and later earned a master's degree in philosophy from Oxford as a Marshall Scholar. His early career included roles at Apple and Fujitsu, followed by the founding of SocialNet in 1997, an online dating and social networking platform that predated many modern social networks. While SocialNet ultimately failed to scale, it provided Hoffman with critical insights into network effects, user identity, and the difficulty of building trust online.

After SocialNet, Hoffman joined PayPal as an executive vice president, where he worked alongside Peter Thiel and Elon Musk. PayPal's success reinforced Hoffman's belief in network-driven platforms and helped him build relationships that would later prove instrumental in LinkedIn's early funding and hiring.

Special Note: Several iconic companies emerged from PayPal's early team, now called the PayPal Mafia, including Tesla, SpaceX, LinkedIn, Palantir, YouTube, Yelp, Yammer, Affirm, Solar City, Quora, Airbnb, and Kiva.

The Founding of LinkedIn

LinkedIn was founded in December 2002 and officially launched in May 2003 by Reid

Hoffman and a small founding team that included Allen Blue, Konstantin Guericke, Eric Ly, and Jean-Luc Vaillant. Unlike consumer social networks of the era, LinkedIn was built around real identities and professional credibility rather than anonymity or entertainment. The platform's core thesis was that careers, unlike friendships, are long-term assets, and that professionals would behave differently in a network tied directly to their reputations.

By the end of its first month, LinkedIn had approximately 4,500 users, growing primarily through invitations rather than advertising. This deliberate, trust-first growth strategy limited early scale but strengthened engagement and data quality.

Early Growth and Network Effects

LinkedIn reached 1 million users in 2004, roughly a year after launch. Growth remained steady rather than explosive, a pattern Hoffman later described as intentional. By 2006, the platform had crossed 5 million users, and by 2009, it had reached 50 million members, marking its transition from a niche network to a global professional infrastructure.

A defining feature of LinkedIn's expansion was its focus on network effects within industries rather than across the general population. Professionals joined because their peers were present, recruiters joined because talent was present, and employers joined because recruiters were present. This circular dependency became LinkedIn's strongest moat.

Monetisation and Business Model Evolution

LinkedIn introduced monetisation gradually, beginning with premium subscriptions and recruitment tools rather than advertising. By 2011, the year LinkedIn

“Several iconic companies emerged from PayPal's early team, now called the PayPal Mafia, including Tesla, SpaceX, LinkedIn, Palantir, YouTube, Yelp, Yammer, Affirm, Solar City, Quora, Airbnb, and Kiva.”

went public, revenue reached \$522 million, with hiring solutions accounting for the majority of income.

By 2015, LinkedIn's annual revenue had grown to \$2.99 billion, driven by talent solutions, marketing solutions, and premium subscriptions. This diversified revenue model allowed LinkedIn to monetise without compromising user trust.

IPO and Microsoft Acquisition

LinkedIn went public in May 2011, debuting at \$45 per share and closing its first trading day at \$94.25, valuing the company at approximately

\$8.9 billion. The IPO was one of the most successful tech listings of the decade.

In 2016, Microsoft acquired LinkedIn for \$26.2 billion in cash, representing a premium of about 50 per cent over its market value at the time. At the time of acquisition, LinkedIn had over 433 million users worldwide.

Scale and Global Impact

As of 2024, LinkedIn reports over 1 billion members across more than 200 countries and territories, with over 67 million companies listed and approximately 14 million job openings at any given time. The platform has become a core layer of the global labour market, influencing hiring, professional branding, and corporate visibility.

A Network That Redefined How the World Works

Reid Hoffman did not merely build a successful technology company; he architected a new layer of global economic infrastructure. LinkedIn's rise was never about speed or spectacle, but about patience, trust, and an unusually clear understanding of how professionals think, behave, and invest in their careers. By anchoring the platform in real identities and long-term value, Hoffman transformed networking from a transactional exercise into a compounding asset.

From its modest, invitation-only beginnings to becoming a billion-member platform embedded in the global labour market, LinkedIn stands as proof that sustainable growth often outperforms viral ambition. ♦



Transforming Tradition

MATT CHE

Chief Marketing Officer,
Budweiser APAC



Matt Che's rise to Chief Marketing Officer at Budweiser APAC is as inspiring as it is impressive. His journey reflects a combination of determination, cultural insight, and innovative thinking. Before stepping into the corporate realm, Matt embarked on a transformative year of backpacking across Southeast Asia, where he immersed himself in diverse cultures and local flavors. This adventure ignited his passion for connecting brands with consumers in meaningful ways, shaping his understanding of market dynamics and consumer behavior. His travels taught him invaluable lessons about authenticity and cultural resonance, principles that now underpin his marketing strategies at Budweiser.

Strategic Brand Leadership

With a robust background in marketing and brand management, Matt has honed his skills across various roles in the beverage industry. As CMO, he faced the daunting task of revitalising Budweiser and Harbin in a fragmented Chinese beer market teeming with competitors. Recognising the need for a bold transformation, he set forth to modernise the image of these storied brands, ensuring they resonate with today's discerning consumers.

Matt's strategic vision centres on creating brands that embody modern values in a rapidly changing market. He understood that Budweiser's legacy needed to be reimagined to connect with a new generation of drinkers. This realisation drove him to implement innovative marketing strategies that have not only revitalised Budweiser but also redefined its market presence.

Commitment to Ethical Marketing

At the heart of Matt Che's leadership philosophy is a steadfast commitment to ethical marketing and a positive workplace culture. He champions transparency, creativity, and collaboration, fostering an environment where innovative marketing initiatives thrive. For Matt, ethical marketing goes beyond compliance; it's about forging authentic connections with consumers. In a landscape dominated by conscious consumerism, he emphasises that marketing should reflect genuine commitments to quality, sustainability,

and social responsibility. His campaigns effectively communicate the brand's values, resonating with consumers increasingly mindful of their choices.

Innovative Marketing Strategies

Matt's success is driven by innovative strategies that have transformed Budweiser's market presence. By understanding the intricacies of the Chinese consumer landscape, he crafts marketing initiatives that resonate with local cultures. Utilising data-driven insights, he creates targeted campaigns that deepen brand loyalty and expand audience reach. Notable achievements include refreshing Budweiser and Harbin to appeal to modern consumers through campaigns centred on sustainability and community, ensuring the brand remains relevant and responsible. Matt also leverages digital platforms and collaborations with influencers to enhance Budweiser's visibility and engagement, fostering a strong sense of community among consumers.

Driving Transformative Change

Under Matt's leadership, Budweiser has successfully redefined its brand image, emerging as a preferred choice among modern consumers in China. His accomplishments include winning a Grand Prix at the Spikes Asia Awards in 2023 for the Corona Extra Lime campaign, a testament to his innovative marketing prowess. Navigating a rapidly changing market, Matt has led initiatives that prioritise brand evolution, ensuring Budweiser's legacy remains relevant.

His approach centres on launching campaigns that generate authentic, engaging content, fostering a deeper connection between consumers and the Budweiser brand. By prioritising collaborations with influencers and leveraging data analytics, he has significantly enhanced brand visibility and resonance.

In addition to refreshing the brand image, Matt has focused on sustainability initiatives, aligning Budweiser with global movements that emphasise responsible consumption. His leadership has been instrumental in implementing practices that promote environmental stewardship, demonstrating that a commitment to sustainability can coexist with business growth.

Commitment to Mentorship and Innovation

Matt's vision for Budweiser APAC not only centres on innovation and ethical marketing



Matt's strategic vision centres on creating brands that embody modern values in a rapidly changing market. He understood that Budweiser's legacy needed to be reimagined to connect with a new generation of drinkers.



but also emphasises the importance of mentoring the next generation of industry leaders. As the beverage industry evolves, Matt is dedicated to ensuring that emerging marketers are equipped to navigate its complexities. He actively engages with young talent, sharing insights from his journey while inspiring them to think creatively and embrace innovative approaches.

Matt's commitment to mentorship reflects his belief that nurturing fresh perspectives is essential for the industry's future. He understands that the next generation will face unique challenges, and he aims to empower them with the knowledge and confidence needed to excel.

Beyond his professional endeavours, Matt draws inspiration from his love for diverse cuisines and cultures. His travels enhance his creativity, enabling him to infuse Budweiser's campaigns with authentic cultural narratives that resonate with consumers. This cultural relevance underscores his belief that successful marketing must reflect genuine connections with the audience.

Through his unwavering dedication to mentoring and innovative strategies, Matt Che is shaping not just the future of Budweiser APAC but the entire beverage industry. His leadership exemplifies the transformative power of ethical marketing, making him a beacon of inspiration for aspiring marketers everywhere. ♦

Story of the Month

SOMALILAND

The World's Longest Act of Looking Away

For more than thirty years, Somaliland behaved like a country while the rest of the world behaved as if it were an administrative error. On paper, it barely existed. On the ground, it voted, taxed, policed, argued, reconciled, and moved on. The contradiction lived quietly for so long that many people stopped noticing it, much like a clock that keeps ticking in a room where everyone insists time has frozen.

Somaliland never waited for permission. It did not write op-eds demanding recognition or stage diplomatic performances meant to shame the international community. It did something more stubborn and less dramatic. It governed. Roads were repaired because they were broken, not because a donor was watching.

Disputes were settled not because they lingered, but because a foreign mission demanded calm. Institutions accumulated memory, which meant they also accumulated mistakes, the way real institutions always do. Over time, that ordinariness became its most unusual feature.

What has changed recently is not Somaliland's conduct, but the usefulness of pretending it does not exist.

When Reality Becomes Awkward for Policy

For years, ignoring Somaliland carried no obvious cost. It did not collapse. It did not export chaos. It did not demand intervention. The international system is comfortable with places that either fail loudly or submit quietly. Somaliland did neither. It simply continued, like

a train running on a track the map refused to acknowledge.

Gradually, the gap between description and reality became harder to manage. Traders adjusted documents to match practice rather than policy. Security analysts learned to speak carefully in public and plainly in private. Aid organizations realized that instructions written elsewhere often made little sense on the ground. None of this forced a decision, but it created friction, and friction has a way of drawing attention.

At some point, a place that works without recognition starts to embarrass the logic that excludes it.

Why Israel Is Looking Without Sentiment

Israel did not arrive at Somaliland through emotion

or ideology. It arrived the way sailors read coastlines, by noting depth, access, and shelter. The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have become crowded corridors where trade routes, security concerns, and technological infrastructure overlap every day. Stability there is no longer an abstract good. It is a practical requirement.

From that vantage point, Somaliland appears less like a diplomatic puzzle and more like an available anchor. It controls its coastline. It manages its territory. It offers predictability in a region where unpredictability has become expensive. Israel's interest reflects a wider shift taking place quietly across global politics, where states are beginning to ask a simple question before all others. Can this place be relied upon?

This is not defiance. It is impatience with delay.



The longer the world delays recognition, the more it trains itself to operate outside its own rules, and that habit will reshape diplomacy far beyond the Horn of Africa.

America's Silence and Its Weight

The United States watches Somaliland with greater caution, and that caution is shaped by memory. Recognition, once granted, travels far beyond the immediate case. It invites comparisons, demands consistency, and unsettles arrangements that have been kept intact largely through habit.

Yet silence also speaks. While Washington weighs implications, others learn the terrain. Influence rarely collapses in a single moment. It thins, shifts, and reappears in unexpected places. By the time it is noticed, it often looks less like a loss and more like an adjustment that happened without permission.

The American dilemma is not moral. It is temporal. How long can reality be deferred before it starts writing policy on its own?

What Recognition Would Actually Do

If Somaliland were recognized, daily life would look much the same. Markets would open. Schools would run. Streets would remain familiar. The changes would happen in places most people never see. Contracts would stop carrying asterisks. Insurance rates would change their calculations. Infrastructure projects would move without legal gymnastics.



Money would move first, as it usually does, followed by logistics and data. Ports would expand with a clearer purpose. Trade routes would become routine rather than provisional. Regional relationships would adjust. Ethiopia would negotiate access to the sea with fewer ambiguities. Gulf states would deepen engagement

carefully. European policymakers would revise assumptions quietly. China would assess the opportunity without commentary.

The most profound shift would be psychological. Somaliland would no longer be spoken about as an exception that needs explanation. It would simply be part of the landscape.

The Uneasy Thought Beneath the Surface

What makes Somaliland uncomfortable for many governments is not its claim, but its implication. It suggests that statehood might be connected, once again, to performance. That borders drawn long ago do not automatically guarantee relevance. That continuity, however uncelebrated, might count for something.

For countries held together by fragile compromises, this is a difficult thought. It is easier to maintain old language than to admit that some places have quietly outgrown it.

Where This Is Likely Headed

The future will not announce itself with a vote or a declaration. It will unfold through routine decisions. Security cooperation will deepen before embassies appear. Trade will normalize before flags are raised. Some states will move early and say little. Others will arrive later with explanations prepared.

Somaliland has time. It has already lived for decades without acknowledgement. The greater test lies with the international system, which must decide whether it can adapt to a place that proved, patiently and without spectacle, that existence does not always require approval. ♦



Marketing with Purpose, Innovation, and Impact

MUKTA MAHESHWARI

**CMO, VP & Category Head
- Fabric Care, P&G India**

A great brand doesn't just sell products; it shapes culture, influences behaviour, and earns consumer trust. Few understand this better than Mukta Maheshwari, Chief Marketing Officer and Vice President & Category Head - Fabric Care at P&G India. For over 16 years, she has not only driven business growth but also built brands that stand for something bigger. Her marketing philosophy is simple yet powerful: brands must be meaningful, consumer-centric, and socially responsible.

Mukta's leadership is rooted in purpose-driven storytelling, digital transformation, and data-driven decision-making. Whether it's championing gender equality through Ariel's #ShareTheLoad campaign or leveraging AI to personalise consumer experiences, she has redefined the role of marketing in the FMCG industry. Under her leadership, P&G India has not only strengthened its market position but also sparked conversations that challenge societal norms.

A Worthful Journey

Mukta's journey from an aerospace engineering graduate at IIT to a marketing powerhouse at P&G speaks volumes about her ability to blend analytical thinking with creative storytelling. After earning her MBA from IIM Calcutta, Mukta began her career at P&G in Singapore, working

across multiple brands and markets, including the Philippines and ASEAN. Each role shaped her ability to decode consumer behaviour, build scalable brand strategies, and drive growth in competitive markets.

One of her most transformative roles was as Vice President, Fabric Enhancers in ASEAN, where she led the double-digit growth of Downy and launched the Downy Natural Essential Oil Scents Range. This was a strategic move to cater to evolving consumer preferences, reinforcing P&G's commitment to innovation.

Purpose-Driven Leadership

Now leading P&G's fabric care category in India, Mukta is responsible for some of the company's most iconic brands, including Ariel and Tide. But for her, detergent is more than just a cleaning agent—it's a vehicle for change. Through campaigns like #ShareTheLoad, she has turned Ariel into a symbol of progressive values, reshaping gender perceptions in Indian households. Over nine years, the campaign reduced the number of men who believed household chores were solely a woman's responsibility from 79% to 25%, proving that marketing can drive cultural and behavioural shifts.

While purpose-driven marketing is her forte, Mukta is equally focused on delivering tangible business results. Under her leadership, P&G India has achieved \$2 billion in sales in FY24, an 8% increase despite economic challenges. The Home Products division saw a staggering 37% rise in profits, further cementing P&G's leadership in key segments like fabric care, sanitary napkins, and shaving razors.

Her success lies in her ability to balance brand purpose with category growth. Rather than competing for market share, she has focused on expanding the entire category, ensuring that P&G's growth outpaces industry trends. This approach, combined with her emphasis on digital acceleration and AI-driven insights, has enabled P&G to stay ahead of evolving consumer needs.

Connecting Brands with Consumers

Mukta's impact extends beyond product innovation; she is also transforming the way brands connect with consumers. She has championed AI and data analytics to craft hyper-personalised campaigns, ensuring that consumer engagement is both relevant and

While purpose-driven marketing is her forte, Mukta is equally focused on delivering tangible business results. Under her leadership, P&G India has achieved \$2 billion in sales in FY24, an 8% increase despite economic challenges.

impactful. A testament to this approach is the launch of the Venus Bikini Razor, a product that was born out of deep consumer insights, catering to an unmet need in the Indian market.

At the core of her leadership is a commitment to ethical branding, inclusivity, and consumer trust. She believes that today's consumers expect more from brands—authenticity, responsibility, and a clear sense of purpose. As she continues to shape P&G India's marketing vision, Mukta remains steadfast in

her goal: to build brands that not only lead in market share but also make a lasting difference in people's lives.

Her journey is far from over. As she continues to push the boundaries of innovation, digital transformation, and category expansion, Mukta is leading P&G India's marketing strategy while redefining the future of consumer engagement in the FMCG industry. ♦



SHERRONE MOORE

Faces Criminal Charges

A Fall from Grace That Shocked College Football

Hours after the University of Michigan unexpectedly announced the firing of its head football coach, Sherrone Moore, the college sports community was hit with another shocking news of his arrest and criminal charges. Moore's rapid rise to a top position in American college sports was suddenly halted in December 2025, replaced by legal troubles, institutional investigation, and emotional distress for players and staff.

From National Contender to Controversy in a Single Week

At age 39, Sherrone Moore became a permanent member of Michigan football, having served as an assistant and offensive coordinator; he succeeded Jim Harbaugh as head coach and achieved good results in his two seasons. However, on 10 December 2025, the University of Michigan announced that Moore was dismissed for cause following an internal investigation that uncovered credible evidence of an improper relationship with a staff member, a clear breach of university policy.

The news shook not just Ann Arbor and the wider college football community, but the

entire sport, as Moore was the head of one of the most revered programmes. The charges struck a chord with the broader issues of work-based limits, power dynamics, and institutional accountability. Moore was arrested hours later, in Pittsfield Township, just a few miles from Michigan Stadium, in a case reportedly involving the same woman.

Allegations That Transformed a Career Overnight

When Moore was finally arraigned two days later, prosecutors presented an alarming list of charges that painted an even more disturbing picture of what a violation of the workplace entailed. The Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office reported that Moore was charged with three felony counts of home invasion in the third degree and two misdemeanour counts of stalking in a domestic relationship and breaking and entering, all related to an alleged incident at the woman's residence following the end of their relationship.

According to prosecutors, Moore's alleged behaviour was highly intimidating, as he made statements implying he was emotional, such as when he said, "My blood is on

your hands, and I am going to hurt myself in front of the victim." Authorities stated that Moore had broken into the house without authorisation and behaved in a manner that caused terror to the woman.

The felony charge of home invasion carries a maximum sentence of up to five years' imprisonment and fines, marking a significant change from Moore's previous status as a prominent college football leader. The stalking charge could lead to up to one year in gaol and probation, while the misdemeanour of breaking and entering would result in shorter gaol terms.

Bail, Conditions, and Court Roadmap

During his initial arraignment, Moore, who appeared via video call from gaol, was released on a \$25,000 bond. The judge imposed strict conditions, such as requiring him to wear a GPS tracker, undergo mental health treatment, remain within the state of Michigan, and have no contact with the alleged

victim. His next hearing is scheduled for 22 January 2026. The release was a brief respite in a highly publicised legal case, but it also emphasises that the accusations against Moore go far beyond administrative misconduct; they place him at the centre of a serious criminal investigation.

Ripples Through a Program and a Community

The impact extended beyond Moore. Interim coach Biff Poggi, preparing the Wolverines for the Cheez-It Citrus Bowl



"My blood is on your hands, and I am going to hurt myself in front of the victim."

against Texas, voiced how players felt betrayed and unsettled by the scandal. He held team and family meetings to help them cope.

Michigan's athletic department faced scrutiny. Critics questioned if systemic issues were overlooked, urging a review of the culture and oversight especially after Moore's rise and fall.

University President Domenico Grasso reaffirmed the commitment to integrity and respect, stating Moore's dismissal reflected a zero-tolerance policy towards impolite behaviour towards leadership.

A Career Interrupted and Questions Ahead

Sherrone Moore's career was once a story of rapid ascent from assistant roles to leading one of the most prestigious college football teams. His dismissal came just

under a year after he was appointed head coach and followed previous difficulties, including a suspension related to a sign-stealing scandal that extended into the new season.

Today, his legacy is divided

between a successful sporting career and his legal troubles. Both the criminal and institutional cases against him could influence the future of his career and how high-profile sports programmes address conduct, responsibility, and professionalism.

Where the Story Moves Next

The wider story is likely to continue developing on several levels- legal, institutional, and cultural- as Moore has undergone his arraignment, with subsequent hearings postponed to early 2026. Unanswered questions remain about how the court system will handle the allegations, how the University of Michigan will restore credibility among its athletes and the wider community, and how the college football community will react to such a large-scale scandal.

What began as a startling human resources issue involving one of the most highly regarded college football teams has escalated into a far-reaching court case that touches on personal behaviour, social responsibility, and the core principles of leadership in sport. As the Michigan team prepares to take the field with new leadership, the spectre of Moore's sudden fall and the allegations against him will continue to be a key part of this remarkable and troubling story of college sports. ♦



Redefining Marketing and Visitor Experience in the World of Art

SUSIE WONG

Chief Marketing & Experience Officer,
National Gallery Singapore

The world of art is a complex one, where marketing and experience management play crucial roles in connecting audiences with creativity. At the forefront of this dynamic landscape is Susie Wong, the Chief Marketing & Experience Officer at the National Gallery Singapore. With over three decades of experience spanning various sectors, Susie is a bold and energised business leader renowned for her innovative approach to marketing and her commitment to creating exceptional visitor experiences.

“Susie's leadership style encourages collaboration and creativity, fostering an environment where team members feel empowered to share ideas and contribute to the gallery's mission”

Career Journey of Susie Wong

Susie Wong's remarkable career spans over three decades, beginning at the Economic Development Board (EDB) in Singapore. This foundational role provided her with critical insights into market dynamics and the importance of fostering relationships between government and industry, emphasising the need for collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Her exploratory phase included positions at renowned Singaporean companies such as Singapore Technologies and Sembawang Corporation, as well as advertising agencies like Dentsu and Young & Rubicam. These experiences equipped her with a well-rounded perspective on marketing, enabling her to navigate various industries effectively.

A transformative four-year stint in the United States broadened her horizons and fuelled her curiosity about innovative marketing strategies. Immersed in a new cultural landscape, she gained valuable insights into global marketing practices and consumer behaviours, developing a passion for leveraging digital channels to engage audiences.



Susie's defining phase at IBM saw her rise from an individual contributor to executive leadership through nine job-role rotations. As Director of Performance & Programmatic Marketing for the Asia-Pacific region, she excelled at driving digital strategies and building marketing competencies. Her data-driven approach informed strategic decisions and enhanced campaign effectiveness.

After IBM, Susie served as Chief Digital & Marketing Officer at Fuji Xerox Singapore, revitalising the corporate brand and shifting its focus from device-centric to solutions-led. Currently, as Chief Marketing & Experience Officer at the National Gallery Singapore, she enhances online presence and visitor engagement, creating a vibrant, inclusive cultural hub. Her leadership in digital transformation and visitor engagement initiatives demonstrates her commitment to making art accessible to diverse audiences.

Commitment to Ethical Marketing and Work Culture

Beyond her strategic initiatives, Susie is known for her strong focus on ethical marketing practices and cultivating a positive work culture. She emphasises transparency, inclusivity, and innovation in her approach to marketing and experience management. Susie's leadership style encourages collaboration and creativity, fostering an environment where team members feel empowered to share ideas and contribute to the gallery's mission. This open culture not only enhances team morale but also drives collective innovation, ensuring that the gallery remains responsive to the needs of its diverse audience.

Her commitment to ethical practices has not only strengthened the gallery's reputation but has also resonated with visitors, creating a welcoming atmosphere that invites engagement and dialogue. By promoting a culture of trust and respect, Susie has ensured that the National Gallery Singapore is not just a place to view art but a community space where people can connect, learn, and share experiences.

Susie's leadership has positioned the National Gallery Singapore as a leading visual arts institution in Southeast Asia, drawing a diverse audience and enhancing the cultural fabric of the region. Her strategic focus on

"By promoting a culture of trust and respect, Susie has ensured that the National Gallery Singapore is not just a place to view art but a community space where people can connect, learn, and share experiences"

marketing initiatives has not only elevated the gallery's profile but also helped build strong relationships with key stakeholders, including artists, community organisations, and educational institutions.

An Extraordinary Journey

Susie's journey through diverse industries, her strategic mindset, and her unwavering commitment to innovation and inclusivity make her a powerful force in the world of arts marketing and experience management. Her ability to navigate challenges, implement transformative strategies, and foster a positive work environment continues to drive the National Gallery Singapore's success as a premier destination for art enthusiasts. As she forges ahead, Susie's vision and leadership will undoubtedly leave an indelible mark on the arts community, inspiring future generations to appreciate and engage with the world of creativity.

Today, the world of arts faces numerous challenges, from funding issues to the need for greater accessibility. Susie's work exemplifies how effective marketing can serve as a bridge between art and the public. Through her innovative approaches, she is redefining what it means to experience art, ensuring that it remains relevant, engaging, and accessible to all. ♦

IF YOUR WORLD IS GETTING SMALL,
**SIMPLY MAKE
IT BIGGER.**

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SUSTAINABLE LUXURY:

WHY THE FUTURE OF HOUSING LIES IN GREEN ENERGY

By **Raahil Reddy,**

Director of Residential Projects at Fortune Primero

Redefining Luxury Housing in Urban India

High-end housing in urban India is on the verge of change. The usual markers of premium living, which include upper tier amenities, luxurious levels of customization, and a desirable area, remain important, but do not symbolize luxury without other aspects. There is a new sense of luxury introduced to the value system, one that emphasizes sustainability, comfort, and environmental accountability just as much. Contemporary homebuyers, particularly younger and more globally conscious buyers, desire homes with ample natural light and ventilation, with carbon-neutral materials, and designs that focus on their well-being. That shift in their thought process is already being experienced by developers, as homeowners expect sustainability incorporated at all levels of the design and build process.

Rise of Environmentally Conscious Homebuyer

This change is taking place among a sizeable cohort of homebuyers, many of whom are now viewing sustainability as a lifestyle choice instead of an alternative upgrade. These homebuyers desire homes that support physical and mental well-being through things like open space, intelligent layout, and connection to nature. Therefore, the home real estate sector is starting to redefine luxury where sustainable health-based living is a priority.

Green Energy as a Pillar of Modern Luxury Living

Green energy features have become some of the most significant indicators of luxury new-age homes. These developments to common areas in a premium home include solar power installations, energy-efficient smart meters, motion sensor-controlled lighting systems, and AI-powered optimisation systems. These energy technologies aid in minimising utility costs and support low-carbon living. Rising energy costs, coupled with pressures of climate change, have meant these features are now deemed essential for sustainable future-ready living.

Climate-Resilient Design and Open Space Planning

Another trait of modern luxury homes is climate resilience. Developers are designing developments with large open spaces, which are sometimes upwards of 80% of the lot size. These open spaces enhance air movement, minimize heat gain, and create better microclimates. Likewise, water-sensitive furnishing is similarly relevant, incorporating rainwater harvesting, groundwater aquifer recharge, greywater reuse, and permeable surfaces into sustainable communities.



Biophilic Design Transforming Urban Luxury

The practice of biophilic design, which introduces aspects of nature into internal environments, is gaining a prominent role in luxury housing. Balcony sky gardens, multiple levels of planting, shaded passageways, and amenities oriented towards nature are being improved through automatic irrigation systems and artificially intelligent systems that check leaf moisture and plant health. These features enhance visual quality but also improve air quality and reduce stress.

Sustainable Luxury as a Long-Term Investment

Luxury residences or high-end homes that are also sustainable are emerging as solid investments for the long term. Their energy efficiency, climate resilience, and adaptability to regulations over time help maintain stability in both the primary and resale markets. The evolving definition of luxury suggests a change in culture that honours responsible and nature-aligned living over excess. ♦

MOST STRATEGIC MARKETING LEADERS TO WATCH IN 2025



Challenger Thinking Inside Big Brands

TODD KAPLAN

CMO, Kraft Heinz North America

There is a moment every marketer eventually reaches when the question stops being how to grow and becomes how to stay interesting without losing scale. Big brands come with gravity. They come with history, infrastructure, and expectations that reward safety. The harder problem is figuring out how to move fast without pretending the weight is not there.

That tension is central to how Todd Kaplan approaches his role as Chief Marketing Officer for North America at The Kraft Heinz Company. His career has never followed the comfort path of brand maintenance. It has followed the more uncomfortable route of reinvention from within the system, where creativity must answer to results and cultural relevance must earn its place on the balance sheet.

This is not marketing driven by disruption for effect. It is marketing driven by the belief that scale should amplify bold ideas, not dilute them.

Turning Relevance Into Momentum

Todd Kaplan's career spans more than two decades across consumer brands, sports, entertainment, and large-scale partnerships, all



environments where attention is earned rather than assumed. His leadership instincts were shaped early through global sponsorship and cultural platforms, long before relevance became a boardroom word.

Nearly eighteen of those years were spent at PepsiCo, where his rise through the organization culminated in his serving as Chief Marketing Officer. The responsibility was not symbolic. The remit covered an \$11.5 billion portfolio including Pepsi, Bubly Sparkling Water, and MUG, with accountability across retail, foodservice, and eCommerce.

As Vice President of Marketing for the flagship Pepsi trademark, Kaplan led a turnaround that returned the brand to sustained growth after more than a decade of decline, delivering consecutive quarters of positive sales and record brand equity. The work was not about nostalgia. It was about reintroducing a cultural perspective without abandoning commercial discipline.

Building Brands People Choose

One of the clearest expressions of Kaplan's approach came during his leadership of PepsiCo's North American Water Portfolio. This was not a maintenance role. It was a redefinition mandate.

He led the creation and launch of Bubly Sparkling Water and LIFEWTR, two of the most significant innovations in PepsiCo's recent history. These brands were built around cultural insight, design clarity, and creator-led storytelling, not incremental category extensions. The result shifted the water portfolio into a primary driver of category growth while opening new consumption occasions.

The pattern is consistent. Spot the whitespace. Commit fully. Scale with intent. Treat creativity as a business lever, not a decoration.

Reimagining Legacy Food Brands

In 2024, Kaplan stepped into his current role as Chief Marketing Officer for Kraft Heinz North America, taking stewardship of some of the most iconic food brands in the world. The challenge is layered. Food culture is changing. Consumption habits are fragmenting. Loyalty now has to be earned repeatedly.

His mandate spans brand strategy, creative development, innovation, and business performance across a diverse portfolio. The focus is not reinvention for novelty. It is relevant with respect. Modernizing how brands show up while preserving the emotional connections that made them staples in the first place.

“The strongest brands grow when curiosity leads, culture stays close, and creativity never loses accountability.”

Marketing here becomes both a cultural signal and a commercial engine, with storytelling, product innovation, and content strategy moving in tandem rather than competing for priority.

Recognition Backed By Results

Industry recognition has followed the work. Kaplan has been named among Forbes' World's Most Influential CMOs and Entrepreneurial CMO Top 50, recognized by Business Insider as one of the Top 25 Most Innovative CMOs globally, and honored with Adweek's Brand Genius Award.

The throughline across these acknowledgements is not just creativity. It is impact, sustained growth, and teams built to perform under pressure.

Redefining Scale Without Playing Safe

Modern CPG marketing no longer rewards quiet competence. It rewards leaders who are willing to challenge category assumptions while remaining accountable to the business.

Todd Kaplan's career reflects that balance. Challenger thinking does not disappear at scale when leadership refuses to let it. It gets sharper, more disciplined, and far more consequential. ♦

WHY PERFORMANCE MARKETING IS NO LONGER A GROWTH STRATEGY



In a world where every click, impression, and conversion can be tracked with pixel-level precision, marketers once believed they had finally conquered uncertainty. Performance marketing promised transparency, accountability, and growth measured in real-time. Advertisers could see exactly how much they spent and what they got in return. The logic was irresistible: allocate budgets to channels that deliver measurable outcomes and let data prove success or failure. That logic now feels outdated because the very metrics that once justified performance marketing are showing diminishing returns and failing to capture what actually drives sustainable growth.

The digital advertising landscape continues to expand rapidly, yet paradoxically yields weaker signals of real impact. Worldwide ad spending is poised to grow again in 2025 as brands increase their investments in digital channels, with analysts forecasting an 8.8% rise in advertising expenditure this year, driven in part by artificial intelligence tools that reshape how ads are bought and placed. Despite this growth, the share of spending that actually translates into meaningful demand creation rather than short-term activity is under scrutiny.

Performance marketing excels in driving actions that can be attributed directly to an ad campaign, such as clicks, form fills, lead submissions, or

purchases. These actions are valuable because they appear on performance dashboards as concrete results. Yet the Facebook pixel, search click-through, or cost per lead number only tells part of the story. Contemporary benchmarks, such as an average cost per lead of more than \$70 on major search platforms, illustrate that costs are rising even as returns flatten or require more sophisticated tracking to make sense. This rising cost structure makes it difficult for performance channels alone to serve as engines of growth rather than as utilities for harvesting demand that already exists.

Beyond the cost dynamics, the attention economy itself

is fragmenting. Consumers spend their daily hours across a broader mix of media formats, from social video to gaming and audio entertainment, making it harder to capture meaningful engagement through narrowly targeted ads. The consequence for performance marketers is that the historical assumption of abundant and responsive attention no longer holds. Cumulative ad exposures on countless platforms have made audiences more resistant to direct response prompts. They tune out messages that feel transactional and repetitive.

Conventional performance metrics also struggle to account for the forces that actually shape long-term growth. Brand preference, emotional connection, trust built over multiple experiences, and cultural relevance are intangible yet powerful determinants of consumer behavior. Performance models inherently favor what can be counted today rather than what will be remembered tomorrow. When a strategy revolves solely around measurable outcomes, it risks overlooking defensible differentiation that comes from strategic clarity, product value, and customer experience.

Even sophisticated artificial intelligence tools that promise better targeting and optimization risk exacerbating this problem. The latest generation of AI advertising assistants automates campaign creation and placement, allowing even small advertisers to execute performance-oriented campaigns with ease. These tools optimize for efficiency but not necessarily effectiveness in a broader strategic sense. As AI marginally improves efficiency,

it does not inherently address the bigger question: why should people choose one brand over another?

Performance marketing's limitations show up starkly when viewed through ROI analysis. Certain digital tactics like email marketing still deliver strong returns, sometimes exceeding 120% ROI. However, these gains often come from nurtured relationships rather than purely transactional interventions. Other studies show that combining brand and performance efforts yields exponentially better results, with balanced strategies outperforming performance-only

This rising cost structure makes it difficult for performance channels alone to serve as engines of growth rather than as utilities for harvesting demand that already exists.

approaches by wide margins. These insights suggest that long-term growth is rooted in a blend of sustained reputation building and targeted performance activity rather than short-run optimizations.

The Indian market mirrors these global shifts. Digital media now accounts for nearly half of the total advertising expenditure in India's burgeoning Rs 1 lakh crore ad ecosystem, indicating how central digital channels have become. Yet this dominance also highlights the risk of overreliance on performance formats, especially in a context where differentiated storytelling

and cultural nuance still drive consumer preference.

Marketers who cling to performance tactics without a broader growth framework risk creating activity that feels busy but yields little strategic lift. Sustainable growth requires a foundation that performance channels can support, not replace. Clear positioning, distinctive creative narratives, experiential engagement, and customer lifetime value thinking are elements that performance marketing inherently de-emphasizes because they cannot easily be collapsed into click-through statistics or short conversion windows.

Today's most resilient brands understand that growth is not merely the sum total of tracked conversions. Growth emerges from customer belief, advocacy, memory, and habitual usage. Performance marketing contributes by efficiently capturing demand created through deeper strategic work. It reflects interest rather than generates it. It accelerates visibility for an existing proposition but does not inherently create the proposition itself.

The future of effective marketing lies in harmony rather than dominance. Performance channels will remain integral to execution, but they will function as amplifiers of strategic momentum built through brand value and customer experience. Marketing leaders who recognize this transition, and invest accordingly, are the ones who will shape the next era of growth—not by chasing metrics that look good on dashboards but by fostering relevance that persists in the minds of customers long after the click has occurred. ♦

MOST STRATEGIC MARKETING LEADERS TO WATCH IN 2025



Commanding Attention With Purpose

TULANI ANDRÉ

Vice President - Social Media
National Geographic



Social media has reached a point where visibility alone no longer defines success. Platforms are crowded, attention spans are compressed, and audiences have become deeply selective about what they engage with and why. In this environment, leadership is not measured by how loudly a brand speaks, but by how thoughtfully it earns its place in the cultural conversation. Social strategy today demands restraint, discernment, and an ability to balance scale with meaning.

That philosophy underpins the work of Tulani André, Vice President of Social Media at National Geographic, where storytelling carries both creative responsibility and public trust. Her role sits at a rare intersection, combining cultural awareness, editorial judgment, and platform fluency within one of the world's most respected storytelling institutions.

Building a Leadership Foundation Rooted in Research, Strategy, and Public Responsibility

Tulani André's career did not begin in entertainment or brand marketing, but rather in public service and policy environments where communication has tangible consequences. Early roles with the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Department of State established a foundation grounded in research, audience understanding, and narrative accountability, shaping an instinct for clarity and responsibility that continues to define her leadership approach.

As social media emerged as a strategic discipline, she transitioned into agency and media roles that demanded both analytical rigor and creative execution. Her work across organizations such as Edelman, A&E Television Networks, and Dentsu Creative strengthened her ability to design campaigns that were not only engaging but structurally sound and purpose-driven.

In addition to her professional roles, André served as an instructor at General Assembly, teaching digital marketing, social media strategy, and analytics. Teaching reinforced a discipline that remains central to her work, ensuring that insight and intent consistently guide execution rather than following it.

Scaling Social Strategy Across Media and Entertainment Ecosystems

As social platforms became the primary interface between media brands and audiences, André stepped into senior leadership roles where culture, fandom, and storytelling converge. At Fox Corporation, she served as Vice President of Social Media, overseeing platform strategy and content direction across a diverse and fast-moving portfolio.

Her move to Prime Video and Amazon MGM Studios marked a significant expansion of scale and complexity. As Global Lead for Social and Editorial, and previously as Head of Social for action, thriller, and horror genres, she led global social strategies for content categories defined by passionate fandoms, emotional storytelling, and rapid cultural cycles.

These roles required mastery beyond metrics. Success depended on understanding audience behavior, navigating creator ecosystems, and responding to cultural moments with precision, where timing, tone, and context often mattered more than reach alone.

Stewarding One of the World's Most Trusted Brand Voices

In 2023, Tulani André assumed responsibility for social media at National Geographic, a brand whose authority is built on decades of scientific rigor, exploration, and visual storytelling. The mandate is fundamentally different from entertainment marketing. National Geographic does not compete for attention through frequency or spectacle. It earns engagement through credibility, curiosity, and purpose.

Her leadership focuses on ensuring that social platforms extend the brand's mission rather than dilute it. Strategy, research, planning, and creative execution operate as an integrated system, enabling National Geographic to reach new and younger audiences while protecting the integrity of its voice.

Under her direction, social media becomes a bridge between discovery and participation, inviting global audiences into meaningful conversations about science, culture, wildlife, and the planet, while maintaining the trust that defines the brand.

Defining Impact Through Consistency Rather Than Virality

A defining characteristic of André's leadership is a clear resistance to trend chasing. Success is measured by sustained relevance and resonance, not short-lived spikes in attention. Campaigns are built to stand out through clarity of purpose, thoughtful storytelling, and respect for audience intelligence.

This approach reflects a broader evolution in social leadership. Platforms continue to change, but foundational principles remain constant. Understanding audiences, respecting context, and aligning content with brand values form the basis of long-term engagement and credibility.

Shaping the Future of Social Leadership

As social platforms increasingly shape how people understand the world, leadership in this space carries cultural and ethical

"THE MOST POWERFUL
SOCIAL STORYTELLING
IS BUILT ON TRUST,
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THE AUDIENCE AND THE
STORY BEING TOLD."

responsibility. The role has evolved beyond execution to include interpretation, stewardship, and trust-building.

Tulani André's career reflects that shift. Across public service, media, entertainment, and now one of the world's most respected storytelling institutions, she has built a leadership practice grounded in insight, intention, and integrity. Her work demonstrates that social media, when led with discipline and purpose, can remain one of the most powerful storytelling tools of the modern era. ♦

The Art of Sustaining Human Touch in the Race to Become AI-Led

These days, the fastest race inside organizations is no longer about markets or products, but about how quickly artificial intelligence can be embedded into everyday decision making. Leadership conversations increasingly revolve around automation, efficiency, and predictive capability, while presentations celebrate speed as proof of progress. Simultaneously, public debate continues to circle around job displacement and ethical risk, creating a quiet contradiction that often goes unexamined. Companies are eager to master systems designed to reduce human involvement, while still expecting trust, creativity, and judgment to survive intact.

This tension is becoming visible across industries. Businesses want machines to think faster and decide with greater accuracy, yet still rely on human intuition when consequences grow complex. Efficiency earns praise, hesitation is framed as delay, and nuance is often treated as operational friction. As organizations move closer to becoming AI-led, something subtle begins to thin out. Decisions appear cleaner on paper, yet conversations lose texture. Processes improve, while relationships begin to feel distant.

Enterprise adoption figures make this shift difficult to ignore. By 2024, more than seventy percent of global organizations had integrated AI into at least one core function, while parallel workforce and customer studies highlighted rising concerns around emotional disconnect and declining trust in automated interactions. Consistency at scale has become achievable, yet consistency alone has never been enough to build confidence. Human trust has always depended on

context, accountability, and the reassurance that someone is responsible beyond the system.

Organizations navigating this transition more thoughtfully reveal a different pattern. Technology supports human capability rather than displacing it. Creative and strategic ownership remains with people, while automation absorbs repetition. Adobe's integration of generative AI across its creative suite demonstrates this balance, where production speeds increase without removing authorship or intent. The work moves faster, yet still feels guided rather than generated.

Financial services offer another clear example. Global banks increasingly rely on AI for fraud detection, risk modeling, and personalization, while preserving human advisors for decisions involving long-term impact and emotional weight. Trust remains anchored in knowing a person stands behind the recommendation, even when intelligence is machine-assisted.

Internal culture reflects similar outcomes. Organizations framing AI as augmentation rather than replacement report stronger adoption and lower resistance. Employees engage more openly when systems remove friction instead of authority. Learning environments that emphasize judgment, ethics, and collaboration alongside technical fluency sustain this balance.

The future will not be shaped by how quickly organizations become AI-led, but by how deliberately they preserve human presence while doing so. Progress measured only in speed rarely sustains trust, while leadership guided by human judgment continues to outlast every technological cycle. ♦



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