



ONE-ON-ONE WITH ALYSIA BORSA

EVP, Chief Marketing and Data Officer at Meredith



IN-DEPTH LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW SERIES

Although COVID-19 has created an extremely challenging business environment for leading multi-platform media company Meredith, traffic to its digital properties and viewership for its local news broadcasts remain high. Alysia Borsa, the executive vice president and chief marketing and data officer at Meredith (and member of the Global CMO Growth Leadership Coalition on COVID-19), explains the company's approach to keeping consumers engaged during the crisis and shares her plans for moving forward.

1. What's the issue that's most pressing to you right now? What's keeping you up at night?

From a business perspective, it's not about the situation now. It's about when and how quickly we will recover. When will people begin purchasing again? When will the ecosystem recover? Timing is the most unknown element right now and contributing to the most stress. It's also about our teams. How do we keep our people happy, healthy, and motivated?

- We have maintained a lot of communication and interaction with our teams. Video conference calls have been critical to keeping everyone connected.
- Having fun has been a key to helping people achieve more of a home/life balance.
- We distribute communications to the team about wins across the entire organization.
- We are staying close to our roots. Our cultural values will set the foundation for when we come out of this.

2. In your opinion, which brands are resonating during this time? Why?

Our research suggests that 83 percent of people are trying new brands as a result of COVID-19. We see that the brands that are resonating are the ones that are being authentic to what they are. Brands in key categories that really have a human connection with consumers are successful now, and probably will be post-coronavirus. Effective themes include:

- Helping the greater good.
- Supportive tones that show brands "doing more and saying less."
- Staying authentic. Brands shouldn't represent themselves as something they aren't because of COVID-19.
- Make sure you are prepared for a post-coronavirus world.

3. What lessons have you learned?

- We need to be more flexible, adaptive, and faster now and in the new world: changing and customizing messaging, shrinking the time from ideation to launch.
- "Big and splashy" will fundamentally change. No more massive events, content creation will be less formal and more real, an acceleration of e-commerce and performance-driven marketing, virtual and live experiences will increase. Family and home will be more important.
- Key learning for Meredith: within the first couple of weeks consumers wanted our brands to inspire them, guide them, and help them escape from the COVID crisis.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

ZAID AL-QASSAB
CMO at Channel 4

DEAN ARAGON
CEO Shell Brands International and Global VP at Shell

ALYSIA BORSA
EVP, Chief Marketing and Data Officer at Meredith

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Chief Brand Officer at AT&T

DAVID DANCER
CMO at Inspire

NORMAN DEGREVE
CMO at CVS Health

MATHILDE DELHOUME
Global Brand Officer at LVMH

MORGAN FLATLEY
U.S. CMO at McDonald's

RICK GOMEZ
EVP and CMO at Target

GEORGE HAMMER
Chief Content Officer at IBM

RAND HARBERT
CMO at State Farm

JODI HARRIS
Global VP, Marketing Culture and Capabilities at AB InBev

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Global CMO, Deloitte Digital

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CHRIS HOLLANDER
SVP, Marketing at Panera Bread

ADRIENNE INGOLDT
SVP, Chief Brand and Experience Officer at Jack in the Box

AMARDEEP KHALON
CMO, US at GSK

SY LAU
SEVP, Chairman of Group Marketing and Global Branding at Tencent

ALISON LEWIS
Chief Growth Officer at Kimberly-Clark

GREG LYONS
CMO Beverages, North America at PepsiCo

ANTONIO LUCIO
Global CMO at Facebook

RAHUL MALHOTRA
Head of Brand Strategy and Stewardship at Shell

MARCEL MARCONDES
U.S. CMO at Anheuser-Busch

KIRK MCDONALD
Chief Business Officer at Xander

CHRIS MOLONEY
CMO and SVP at Brinks Home Security

MICHELLE PELUSO
SVP, Digital Sales and CMO at IBM

RAJA RAJAMANNAR
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer and President, Healthcare Business at Mastercard

TAMARA ROGERS
Global CMO at GSK

PEGGY FANG ROWE
Global Officer, Customer Experience at Marriott

MEREDITH VERDONE
CMO at Bank of America

DEBORAH WAHL
Global CMO at General Motors

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Director, Corporate Marketing and Public Relations at Tencent

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CMO, iHeartMedia

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CMO at Google



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4. How are you thinking about marketing in new ways now that you haven't before COVID-19?

We are all going through tough times. But we must embrace the change. Think about all the innovations and new ways of working that came out of difficult times like these. We can't get bogged down in managing the day-to-day. On the publishing side, we need to be ready for when marketers and brands come out of this. We need to think ahead and have the services they need as their needs have changed. Some of the ways that we continue to adjust and innovate during these times include:

- Content creation is happening faster and in new ways. For instance, *PEOPLE* magazine is produced remotely. We are creating more content and video than we did in the office. We have increased live streaming and virtual experiences.
- We are launching new products. We are rolling out our new voice skills and click-to-cart consumer experiences. We launched a new magazine called *SWEET JULY* with Ayesha Curry. And we launched a new financial brand, *Millie*, targeted at women.
- We launched a new performance guarantee for our magazines: Meredith Audience Action Guarantee. We guarantee a certain number of audience actions for each advertisement.

5. What consumer attitudes or behaviors have changed? What do you think will persist in the "new normal"? How will you adapt your products and services to accommodate?

MARKETERS: We have shifted to focus more on real-time consumer insights for our internal teams to quickly create new content/products but also for our marketing partners. Our investment in centralized, deep data capture and predictive trending is being showcased right now. We are sharing a minimum of two insight newsletters each week to a broad distribution list and have also developed more than 20 category-level insights that reflect changing behavior over the last four to six weeks. While we regularly predict trends for the year, we are now updating our predictions for a post-coronavirus world. Across all our insights, the focus is on how our brands and our marketing partners will use this information. Our last insight newsletter summarizes our recent guidance to brands:

- Be humble, clear, and reassuring.
- Be action-driven, practical, and brief.
- Be present to position for the future.
- Stay authentic to your brand — don't go outside your lane.

CONSUMERS: Consumer engagement has been astounding. From print to digital, engagement has been amazing. Consumers want to reconnect with trusted premium brands. They want the trusted brands in their lives which can help them cope, help them escape from what's happening in the news.

- We have seen food-related engagement in videos growing 40 percent week over week.
- We have seen massive spikes in virtual museum tours, stress management, beauty, and experiential travel.

6. What advice do you have for chief marketers?

CMOs know this is a great time to be engaged, but they don't have the budget. We are working to maintain a two-way dialogue with partners as we all figure things out. We are participating in open forums with other publishers and industry leaders. It is a good time to collaborate.

TO VIEW MEREDITH'S COMPLETE ARCHIVE OF REAL-TIME INSIGHT NEWSLETTERS, [CLICK HERE.](#)

Meredith Predictive Intelligence

LOOK FOR ADDITIONAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS FROM TOP CMOs

The Global CMO Leadership Coalition was developed by ANA in partnership with Cannes Lions and WARC New York.

Stay tuned for more one-on-one interviews from leading CMOs representing global brands like AB InBev, CVS, General Motors, McDonald's, Shell, Bank of America, and Tencent as they respond to the health crisis. To learn more about how the Global CMO Leadership Coalition on COVID-19 is supporting chief marketers around the world, [click here](#).