



**ONE-ON-ONE  
WITH GREG REVELLE**  
Chief Marketing Officer, Kohl's

**KOHL'S**

**IN-DEPTH LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW SERIES**

Greg Revelle is CMO at Kohl's, a major U.S. retailer with 1,100 stores in 49 states. He is a member of the ANA's Global Leadership Coalition on COVID-19, in partnership with WARC and Cannes Lions. He spoke to the ANA and WARC about the company's COVID-19 media mix, adapting creative production to map to quickening changes in consumer trends, and other issues during this unusual time.

**1. Kohl's shifted budget entirely from traditional media and very heavily into digital as retail locations closed. Could you walk us through that decision?**

We looked at digital specifically, because that was going to be our business for the foreseeable future, and it was apparent that to drive digital, we really needed to concentrate our spend digitally as well. Then we increased our frequency, particularly in social. That was a channel we saw customers gravitating to as part of the COVID crisis. We saw search activity increase quite a bit and digital media consumption going up dramatically, so it made sense to shift our mix in that way. It wasn't easy to do because we had a lot of commitments with broadcast partners and print partners, but they have been tremendously helpful through that process.

**2. How did you need to change your messaging?**

One of the things we did to really understand the customer was partnering with Pinterest and Facebook in particular to understand what customers were talking about and searching for. We quickly discovered it was changing dramatically from day to day — more so than we've ever seen. We've always done social listening, but the cycles were generally pretty long, maybe a month or two. The trending topics accelerated to changing in a day or two, so that required us to change the way we thought about creative.

Our traditional process didn't accommodate the lead times necessary to work in that environment. We shortened our creative process pipeline pretty dramatically. We have two kinds of ways we produce creative. We have one called the Omni process, which is where we create a standard library of imagery that's used across every channel, including traditional print and television. And then we have a production capacity where we take all that imagery and produce creative on a channel-by-channel basis. We had to increase the throughput of our channel-specific advertising. We changed our process to go from about two weeks to about two days, so we could identify a trend and then have media in market in about 48 hours.

**3. Is that setting the stage for how quickly you'll be able to work in the future?**

That's one of the things we want to keep as part of our process. As we looked at everything we do, getting out of print is helpful for the time being because there are particularly long lead times with print. So that's enabled us to be faster. Then we are inventing new processes that really distribute decision-making down in the organization. We want to keep a lot of those practices going forward.

**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
- FIONA CARTER**  
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. Chief Marketing and Digital Customer Experience Officer 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
- ALICIA HATCH**  
Global CMO at Deloitte Digital
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SVP, CMO, Americas at Avis Budget Group
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- CHRIS HOLLANDER**  
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Head of Brand Strategy and Stewardship at Shell
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Chief Business Officer at Xander
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Chief Marketing and Communications Officer and President, Healthcare Business at Mastercard
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- TAMARA ROGERS**  
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Global Officer, Customer Experience at Marriott
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CMO, iHeartMedia



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#### 4. Is your pivoting back to more traditional media timed to when stores open?

That's exactly right. We're thinking about our media as aligning it with customer demand. Our customer demand is going to be obviously associated with digital, but because about 75 percent of our sales are typically in stores, we anticipate our demand really revving as our stores reopen. And in fact, that's what we're seeing. As those openings complete, we expect to be back into a lot of the media we had exited.

#### 5. Back-to-school is a big occasion for Kohl's. How are you doing scenario planning for an occasion that might be different if distance learning is still common?

That's another really fast-changing area. There are two elements to what we're thinking about. One: Are we still going to have demand for back-to-school products? And we think the answer is yes, because kids grow. A lot of customers have been holding off on apparel purchases in particular, but it applies to footwear and a lot of what we sell. There's just a natural replenishment cycle, and that shouldn't change too much.

Two: The messaging itself has to be much more flexible, and so it's not going to be as centered on the actual school. We have to be able to accommodate this idea that whether you're back to school or back to schooling at home, we want to be relevant for you.

#### 6. How has your e-commerce strategy been bolstered or changed, to reflect that e-commerce is going to be a much bigger deal going forward?

We've had a very strong e-commerce business since our stores closed across the country, and we do anticipate that continuing for a while.

In terms of things we've done, I point to a couple of things. The first is what I just described: all the content we're producing and our product priorities have changed dramatically, to be relevant to what customers are experiencing today. For example, the home business has been incredibly strong for us.

Customers are spending more time there, and they're spending time cooking with their families, spending time working out at home, spending time working from home. The Omni process needs to be incredibly nimble so that the content we're serving up and the products we're promoting are highly relevant.

And then on the back end, we've also made really important changes. We've done a lot of work, for example, in our call centers, to increase capacity and be sure we can handle all the orders that come through there. We introduced the drive-up service, and we're incredibly proud of how the team essentially took what was a pilot that we had done in just a couple of stores and scaled it across the country in only two weeks. That's reflective of the flexibility that has been required of us and something we want to keep going forward as well.

#### 7. Drive-up service may be with us for a while, but it misses some of the serendipity that happens when a customer is in-store. How do you compensate for that?

That's a great point. Every sector is a little bit different. We've learned from groceries, for example, that customers don't necessarily need to touch and feel all their produce like we might have thought they did. In apparel, there probably will be some customers who are perfectly comfortable buying sight unseen. But we do think it is a category where you want to try it on, you want to touch and feel the fabric, you want to see how it fits you, so we think it's highly likely the customers will go back to shopping in stores much as the way that they did before. We'll be ready no matter what.

#### 8. What type of trend or behavior have you seen during the pandemic that really surprised you?

Just how consumer behavior has changed so dramatically. We had never seen that before. I think that the companies that are able to understand and process that, and the marketers who are able to increase their flexibility for that, will have even more success.

#### 9. Marketing's role within organizations seems to have changed during the pandemic. Can you share any insights of how this has changed at Kohl's?

The function itself has certain core capabilities that have always been important, but I'd say some of them are even more important than they've ever been. One concerns the stewardship of resources. Marketers have always had the onus on them to prove their ROI, and I'd say that is even more important now.

The second is about having the pulse of the customer. The best marketers are always able to understand customers in deep and unique ways. Through this crisis, we've really increased that capability within our organization. We have executive team meetings every week now, where we are going through customer data and social listening data, and we had not done that with that degree of frequency and intensity before.

I'd also say the interconnectivity of marketing with the other functions is more important than ever. When it comes to things like health and safety, marketing is there to make sure we understand what customers need to feel safe, so that's influenced our HR processes. And merchandising: what products should we buy? That's been a collaboration for a long time, but our merchants are looking at marketing even more to understand their assortments of products.



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## 10. Are there any other processes that you've refined that you want to continue when this is over?

We've had unexpectedly great success with working from home. We've done is allowed our call center agents to work from home, which we've never done before, and that's a huge operational change for us and one we think is going to be helpful in attracting agents in the future, as well as allowing us to serve our customers more consistently. In regards to the marketing organization, we're thinking about what work from home means over the long term.

## 11. What type of information do you find most lacking right now that would help you do your job more effectively?

By far the hardest thing is demand forecasting. We use this data to understand what our media mixes should be, among other things. We have the U.S. upfront TV market coming up, and many of us are having to make some very big decisions with shifter data than we've ever had.

The other thing is just any source of consumer buying and interest data. The social networks and Google have really stepped up here. The more we know where the consumer mindset is, the better.

Concerning the upfront, you obviously don't want to go wrong by buying either too little or too much, and with regards to the immediate term, we're tending to drive more of our media into things that can be increased or decreased more quickly. The big question we're looking at is holiday right now, and obviously we have the elections coming up. It's a critically important selling season for all of retail and that's where TV is a very important part of our mix. We know we'll be in TV, like we are every year. The question is what's the right amount? And so we're working through those decisions right now.

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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](#).

**ANA** GLOBAL CMO LEADERSHIP COALITION  
In Partnership With Cannes Lions and WARC

### The new leadership agenda

The impact of COVID-19, racial injustice, and a global recession underscores the need for chief marketers to work together in the face of transformative global change.

To participate in the Coalition, please contact Nick Primola, EVP, Head of Industry Leadership and CMO Practice, ANA, at [nprimola@ana.net](mailto:nprimola@ana.net)