



ONE-ON-ONE WITH DEB WAHL Global CMO at General Motors



IN-DEPTH LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW SERIES

General Motors was one of the first major brands to respond to the coronavirus crisis with its plan to launch a sweeping program aimed at keeping Chevrolet, Buick, GMC, and Cadillac owners safe and connected and to help offset the economic impact of the outbreak. Recently, Deborah Wahl, the global CMO at GM and a member of the CMO Leadership Coalition on COVID-19, spoke with the ANA about the company's response to COVID-19.

1. What is the most pressing issue to you and your organization right now?

Everything we're doing at GM to fight the spread of this disease is focused on three primary concerns:

- **Safety:** Taking measures to ensure that all our people, teams, and their families are safe.
- **Helping:** Working to identify ways that GM can continue to help in any way we can, from making ventilators to adapting our financing.
- **Operations:** We cannot lose sight of the fact that GM is a business. We need to preserve revenue so that we can survive — and continue to focus on the first two points of safety and helping.

2. What is marketing's role today vs. pre-coronavirus, in your organization and externally?

We have identified five phases of customer behavior during this crisis that is helping to guide our planning:

1. **Panic:** In this initial phase, customers have an urgent need to search for solutions.
2. **Reassurance:** In the next phase, customers develop a desire to help one another and look to brands for reassurance that they can help too.
3. **Engagement:** What is role of brand now that we are all sequestered or quarantined? People are going stir-crazy at home. How can we engage them in meaningful, relevant ways during the crisis? One way we did this for Buick was through a promotion called, "Take a picture of your car at home." This had the highest engagement that Buick has ever had on anything.
4. **Recovery:** How can we cautiously get back to "normal"?
5. **Discovery:** What is the new normal? How can we rebuild for a new frontier, post-COVID?

GM marketing today has taken an active role in demonstrating to customers that we are there for them. For instance, our initial financing offers are a way to reinvigorate people. Our digital retail tool, "Shop-Click-Drive," also has an optional home-delivery component for participating dealers that helps minimize physical risk. GM adjusts messaging every week to ensure that it is reflecting the moods and attitudes of customers, based on the phases identified.

The insight we gain now is used to help the company understand what is happening in the marketplace. For instance, we have identified that customers are scared that something will happen to their current vehicles. So we are working with our dealers to develop programs that reinforce how GM is still here for people when they need help.

We are now actively engaged in helping to prevent the spread of the virus by converting our facilities into producing ventilators and masks.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

ZAID AL-QASSAB
CMO at Channel 4

DEAN ARAGON
CEO Shell Brands
International and
Global VP at Shell

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. 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

ALICIA HATCH
Global CMO,
Deloitte Digital

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

MARCEL MARCONDES
U.S. CMO at
Anheuser-Busch

KIRK MCDONALD
Chief Business
Officer at Xander

RAHUL MALHOTRA
Head of Brand
Strategy and
Stewardship at Shell

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

HUNTER ZHANG
Director, Corporate
Marketing and
Public Relations at
Tencent

ANA EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT

BOB LIODICE
CEO at ANA

NICK PRIMOLA
EVP at ANA

MEG WUBBENHORST
VP at ANA

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

JEREMY KEES
Director, Center
for Marketing and
Consumer Insights at
Villanova University

FIORENZA PLINIO
Head of Creative
Excellence at Cannes
Lions International

CATHY TAYLOR
U.S. Commissioning
Editor at WARC
New York

INDUSTRY LEADERS

RITA FERRO
President,
Advertising Sales and
Partnerships at The
Walt Disney Company

JANN SCHWARTZ
Global Director,
The B2B Institute
at LinkedIn



ONE-ON-ONE WITH DEB WAHL

Global CMO at General Motors



3. How has your role of chief marketer changed?

First, I give enormous credit to our public relations and communications teams. They are on the front line.

Marketing is prioritizing messages right now, to our customers and internally, to make sure people are aware of how we are helping and can help them.

GM was one of the first brands in the market with coronavirus-specific messaging. We shut down on a Tuesday. By the weekend we were on air with new creative addressing panic and moving into the reassurance phase.

- Chevy Cares. We've got your back.
- Cadillac Free OnStar access.
- General Motors Financing reassuring financing for people.

4. What advice do you have for other CMOs?

To achieve the new goals that all of us face during this crisis, my advice is to think of this as a "20 Mile March." That means that we need to plan for everything. Every day. We need a goal for each day. And we overcome obstacles. Be mindful not to wear your teams out. Be overly organized.

5. What does recovery look like?

Customer behavior is changing drastically. It is hard to predict now.

- We need to accelerate to more people-based experiences.
- We anticipate that the future of electric vehicles will only be accelerated by all of this.
- The entire event world has been completely changed. Large gatherings of people will not happen.
- What can we learn from children? They already have robust communities through gaming. They are staying connected.
- Online shopping is becoming increasingly prevalent. How can we leverage our physical dealerships and online behavioral shift?
- We anticipate budget cutting measures to preserve cash flow and protect the business.

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 what the Global CMO Leadership Coalition on COVID-19 is doing to support chief marketers around the world, [click here](#).

