

ANA Masters of Marketing: A Master Class in Contemporary Marketing

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One of my favorite annual events is the ANA Masters of Marketing conference. The speakers are best in class, drawing from the organization's deep membership of Fortune 500 company chief marketing officers. Attending the conference is always a great way to keep updated on the latest and most pervasive trends in marketing. The nearly 3,000 attendees were treated to nearly three full days of general session presentations and top entertainment during the evening activities.

While recent ANA conferences have focused heavily on technology, this year's program presented a refreshing twist. The universal theme discussed by most presenters was the importance of creativity in today's marketing profession. While art and science are both important in advertising, the presenters seemed to agree, content is still king.

The keynote address by Procter & Gamble Chief Brand Officer Marc Pritchard set the stage by declaring, "The creative challenge is to distinguish craft from crap." His point was that too many brands push mediocre content into the marketplace rather than working harder to produce the right messages. Pritchard remarked how P&G had made the wrong choices by pouring too much money into online channels to simply add more "noise" into the marketplace.

He asked marketers to think about branding as a "creative canvass" and offered four imperatives:

1. Express the brand as a masterpiece
2. Elevate the craft to resonate with people
3. Understand creativity as a human endeavor
4. Realized data doesn't matter if people don't pay attention to the message

Vayner Media founder Gary Vaynerchuk was perhaps the most unexpected speaker, presenting from the agency perspective. He opened by stating, "Creativity is the variable of success." He went on to explain how important it is for markets to truly understand where consumer engagement is most pervasive for any particular brand.

McDonald's US Chief Marketing Officer Deborah Wahl said, "Transformation is a journey" and explained how the fast-food leader has dealt with 30,000 new competitor locations opened since 2009. The company constructs strategic briefs at all levels of consumer touchpoint: mega briefs, macro briefs, and micro briefs. Every marketing tactic at McDonald's has a brief so everyone in the organization understands the necessary steps to achieve success and to ensure the organization can move swiftly when reacting to market conditions.

MasterCard understands that today's consumers want experiences more than things. That's why the company infuses creative thinking into all its marketing campaigns. Chief Marketing Officer Raja Rajamannar explained how the company considers logic, data, emotions, and connections when developing marketing



strategies. This approach ensures customers are better informed, constantly rewarded, and validated with each purchase.

Mattel's Global Core Brands Officer Juliana Chugg echoed many of these points. To stop the decline in Barbie sales, the toymaker went back to its 1945 roots to refocus the brand on the attributes that made the company successful in the beginning. These things were defined as: understanding the power of purpose, taking risks for reward, and shifting product focus to remain culturally relevant.

Johnson & Johnson Chief Marketing Officer Alison Lewis offered some of the most original ideas at this year's Masters of Marketing. She discussed the concept of ambidextrous marketing. The idea recognizes the duality of today's consumers who live in the physical world but interact in the digital world. They are "phygital" consumers. She went on to explain five platforms of phygital marketing, requiring a dual need for:

1. Scale and personalization
2. Global efficiency and local cultural nuance
3. Offline and online connections
4. Extensive experiences and fresh experimental prescriptives
5. Grounded beliefs and visionary aspirations

Finally, the importance of creativity within the marketing profession was synthesized by Georgia-Pacific Chief Marketing Officer Douwe Bergsam, who said, "Today, marketing is less about storytelling and more about story making." He talked about how framing a story is critical for communicating the right messages to the right consumers and identified three pieces for story crafting: defining the human truth, establishing purpose, and demonstrating conflict in a story.

Brawny paper towels was used to illustrate the point. The human truth is that everyone needs help occasionally. The purpose Brawny supports is helping people overcome life's little challenges, one spill at a time. The conflict is that Brawny is both tough and gentle. This simple construct can apply to any brand.

Masters of Marketing is a crash course in deeper thinking about today's biggest marketing challenges, amplified through compelling stories told by major brands seeking better ways to connect with customers.