

Being a Radio CMO in the Era of Digital Audio: An Interview With iHeartMedia's Gayle Troberman

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As part of our upcoming report on “The Future of the CMO,” we spoke with Gayle Troberman, executive vice president and CMO of iHeartMedia. The company, formerly known as Clear Channel Communications, is a terrestrial broadcaster that owns and operates 858 stations on US airwaves. It also has a successful radio streaming app, iHeartRadio, which is currently the second-largest podcast publisher in terms of monthly listeners, according to podcast analytics firm Podtrac.

Top 10 US Podcast Publishers, Ranked by Unique Audience, June 2019

	US monthly unique audience (millions)	Worldwide unique streams and downloads (millions)	Active shows
1. NPR	20.4	144.0	58
2. iHeartRadio	19.1	130.0	252
3. PRX	9.3	64.8	70
4. Wondery	8.5	45.0	75
5. The New York Times	7.8	51.5	9
6. Barstool Sports	6.4	30.5	29
7. ESPN	5.8	44.0	62
8. WNYC Studios	5.5	26.4	51
9. This American Life/Serial	5.1	18.0	2
10. Daily Wire	3.7	22.0	5

Note: represents activity tracked by Podtrac, broader industry metrics may vary; includes desktop and mobile audience

Source: Podtrac, "Podcast Industry Audience Rankings: June 2019," July 8, 2019

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As the CMO, Troberman focuses on marketing iHeart's platform to consumers, as well as growing iHeartMedia's ad business. Given the company's stakes in terrestrial radio and digital audio, she hopes to attract traditional broadcast advertisers with the targeting and cross-platform measurement tools available in the digital realm.

Below is an excerpted conversation with Troberman on what she thinks is needed in a CMO today and why iHeartMedia is investing in data tools.

As CMO, what have been your main priorities this year?

[iHeart is] a mass-reach consumer platform. We have listener data that includes where they're listening and if they cross from broadcast into digital. We have a huge opportunity to apply that data to help brands find the right target consumers and reach them via a mix of broadcast and digital marketing. I've learned the art of audio marketing here at iHeart, and now I get to sit down with clients, agencies and the CMOs of other companies, and actually help them figure out how to make audio their secret weapon.

How are you leading iHeartMedia's digital transformation?

We're continuing to invest in new tools, new data mining and the ability to digitize more and more of our marketing both with consumers and with our B2B audiences. We launched a platform called

SmartAudio a couple of years ago, and it really is an important lever to our digital transformation because it's a programmatic broadcast radio platform that enables marketers to plan, buy and optimize their broadcast radio against specific target cohorts.

How has the CMO role evolved in the age of digital marketing?

We've watched the CMO role evolve from magician to mathematician. I spend a lot of time sitting with CMOs of various companies and industries, and I really do think it's a blend of art and science that the most successful CMOs learn to balance. You need to have a deep understanding of the underlying mathematics and the data that's going to fuel success, but you also need a good dose of vision, risk-taking and a willingness to challenge the status quo.

What is top of mind for CMOs?

The changing media landscape is first and foremost top of mind for every CMO, and how to adapt their marketing mix and find new growth drivers. So many large companies, even household staples, just haven't been seeing the growth that they need, and a lot of marketers are looking for new ways to drive growth. I think brand trust and connection with the consumer is another huge challenge, which we spend a lot of time trying to help our clients with.

What's the most valuable skill as CMO today?

As a CMO, you've got to be creative, you've got to be curious and you've got to constantly ask and answer questions. That's how you're going to learn marketing; there's no textbook that's going to teach it to you. The media and marketing landscape is changing every day. Being curious, listening to your consumers, being able to apply data and having a willingness to go against the tide and try things, even if they may not be the most popular, are valuable skills. We've never had more data in the history of marketing, and yet, we've been making more and more gut decisions than I've ever seen before. It all comes back to finding the right balance.

For more interviews with CMOs, make sure to read our report when it publishes in October.