

Pinterest CMO on Marrying Aggressive Growth with the Company's Brand Image

Article

In the beginning of her tenure as Pinterest's first-ever CMO, Andréa Mallard established the company's mission and core brand principles, reorganizing her team prior to the

successful IPO. Now she's focused on an aggressive global growth plan.

We spoke with the marketing veteran—previously at Athleta, Omada Health and IDEO—about the unique challenges of being a company's first CMO, what she prioritized in year one, and how Pinterest can implement an aggressive growth strategy that remains true to the brand.

To establish yourself as the company's first CMO, what did you prioritize when you stepped into the role?

My biggest priority [in 2019] was to properly identify the key brand principles we were going to live by as a company. This meant I was thinking about how we amplify our points of difference in the world in a way that is unique, relevant and that's defensible over time. Then, I had to come up with a list of brand projects and ideas to help illustrate those principles in the real world.

For example, we're building an in-house content studio, where we'll be able to produce, edit and create our own content every single week. This is because there's no shortage of great stories; we needed a way to get them out into the world more quickly.

I'm also focused on de-risking the business along the way. Because I'm the first CMO, I have to make sure that we are responsibly growing the business as we aggressively grow the business. That requires getting really deep into the data, understanding which kinds of advertisers and Pinners we want to attract to the platform, and doing so in a way that's efficient and gets as much earned reach as possible.

How are you approaching growth aggressively while also remaining conscientious about Pinterest's brand image?

I actually don't feel that I need to protect the core brand, in the sense that it feels extremely intrinsic to this building and to the people who work here. But now we're trying to grow suddenly at a global scale, and I need to be really thoughtful about how we test, learn and earn the right to grow.

In the past, I think CMOs felt like they had to come up with a big, splashy global campaign, cross their fingers and hope it worked. We have a much more sophisticated ability now to build something in-house, test it, show it to some Pinners, show it to some advertisers, get feedback, adapt it without ever losing our point of view—all while making sure we're taking a very human-centric approach and data-led strategy to pushing it out in the world.

We're doing a lot of work now testing things in-market with controls and rigor. This is to ensure that whatever we want to put out at scale is going to be our absolute best foot forward, so that we can earn the right to do even more breakthrough marketing initiatives in the coming years.

How are you focused on becoming a global brand?

As we scale, as we become even more popular, as we become even more integrated into people's daily lives, we're very unapologetic about the need to ensure that we are always adding to someone's real-life experience and not keeping them tethered to their phone.

We never, ever talk about time on the app. We never talk about getting people to stay on Pinterest. We always talk about getting them off Pinterest as quickly as possible to live a more inspired life. For me, I want to make sure I don't have any doubt that we'll continue to do that, but it's going to take vigilance.

It's going to take us continuing to ask ourselves whether the decisions we make for design, storytelling and business are continually enabling people to create a life they love.

What advice do you have for other first-ever CMOs or those who wish to be CMOs in the future?

In the past, CMOs grew up through two tracks: creative or operations. The modern-day CMO needs to be deeply whole-brained, meaning she needs to have a really strong sense of creative, story and brand-building.

But she also needs to be deeply data-literate, technologically savvy, and on the cutting edge of all the marketing tools at her disposal. My advice to young people is to make sure they're getting the education along the way—that both the left and right sides of the brain are being challenged.

And because the landscape is changing so quickly and so dynamically, I often tell people there's no marketer in the world with more than three years' experience. I'm constantly teaching myself and learning things, talking to colleagues and getting best practices. There's no room to sit on your laurels or to do what you've been doing for the past 20 years. Because the world around you is changing so quickly, and you have to be willing to change with it.