



EPISODE 15

Driving audience engagement with the magic of Disney: Insights from Andrew Messina, senior vice president of Disney Advertising

Host: Alan Hart, leader in marketing and customer strategy, Deloitte Consulting LLP

Guests: Andrew Messina, senior vice president of Disney Advertising

Alan Hart: Are you ready to go beyond the basics of marketing? I'm Alan Hart and this is marketing beyond where we talk about the questions that spark change and share ideas that challenge the status quo. Join us as we explore the future of marketing and its endless potential.

Today on the show, I've got Andrew Messina. He's the senior vice president for Disney Advertising. Disney Advertising includes linear, programmatic, and addressable. Many brands that we know: Disney, Disney Plus, Hulu, FX, and many more, as well as ESPN. On the show today, we'll talk about integrations, sponsorships, and advertising and the evolution of advertising. We'll also talk about the changing landscape of advertising and the explosion of women's sports and how they're taking advantage of that opportunity. That and much more with Andrew Messina.

Well, Andrew, welcome to the show.

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Andrew: Thanks. Appreciate it.

Alan Hart: I'd love to know how you ended up in media?

Andrew Messina: Well, I'm not the traditional way like kids these days. I was a history major at Tulane. And my interesting story of how I got in the business is not traditional like it was in the past—or currently, with kids logging on to LinkedIn. I started looking for a job in New York City and I saw a classified ad in *The New York Times*, and I sent my résumé into this small advertising agency. And this woman responded to me, after I sent it in two weeks prior, and I go, "Oh, thanks for meeting with me. How did you decide to pick me of all these résumés?" She goes, "My boyfriend saw your résumé on the kitchen table and you went to Tulane and he went to Tulane. So I decided to interview you." And she gave me the job at that small agency.

Alan Hart: That's amazing. That's the power of networks. [laughs]

Andrew Messina: Well, it's not how it's done today!

Alan Hart: No!

Andrew Messina: Which we can get into later.

Alan Hart: Yeah, that's awesome. What was—from that very early job to now being senior vice president at Disney Advertising—what was the path? What were some of the big stops along the way?

Andrew Messina: So for me, I started at a small agency, then I went to McCann Erickson. I worked on some big brands like Nestlé and Coke, and I realized I really wanted to get into the sales side of things. So I started as a daytime planner in 1994 at ABC. So that's prior to Disney; we were Capital Cities/ABC. So I worked in the heyday of when daytime television had some big ratings in *General Hospital*, *All My Children*, *One Life to Live*—and then we had the OJ Simpson trial, which basically destroyed daytime television because all they ran was the trial.

Alan Hart: Right, yeah.

Andrew Messina: And then what happened there is the loyal viewers on daytime couldn't watch their show for six or eight months. So they lost interest, and the daytime ratings from then on kind of just disintegrated. And then I moved into prime time because it's the natural progression of promotion. And then there was an opportunity for me to move to Los Angeles as a senior account executive, actually selling. Did that for five years during the dot-com boom, had three of my four kids, loved LA, no plans to move. I was going to be an LA person. And then got promoted to VP in New York. So that changed my life a little bit. And then for the last 17 years, I've been a senior vice president at Disney because we were bought by Cap City—or we were bought by Disney in 1996. But in the last seven years, we've had a lot of different—you know, the media landscape has changed. Up until 2017, I was just selling ABC. After that, now, under our umbrella, we sell Disney Channel, ABC, Freeform, ESPN, FX, Nat Geo. Disney+ is massive now. Five years ago, there was no advertising. So a lot has changed.

Alan Hart: Yeah, well, you've seen a lot. What is the scope? I mean, besides those properties you just listed off, what's the scope of the role that you have right now?

Andrew Messina: So, right now, my most recent role is I oversee all the brand partnerships—the client partnerships—under the team. We have an investment team that handles the agencies, and I handle all the brand partnerships. So all of the clients under those major holding companies, I work with all those companies. My primary responsibility is to develop the relationships with the senior C-suite people like the CMOs, CFOs, and CEOs.

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So I've been doing that for the last seven years across categories, across agencies, but in the last year really more so, I am focused across all the entire brand team. So we have an entire brand team under myself.

Alan Hart: OK. Well, if we just pick out sports for a minute, how have you seen consumer brands, I guess, and integrations and advertising shape the sports landscape and the consumer engagement for sports?

Andrew Messina: I mean, right now, when you talk about Disney Advertising sales, we have the best in class, across all properties; we're very fortunate. But when you talk about the main priorities for us, it's streaming and it's sports. And live sports right now, if you talk about the NBA, we just renewed our rights deal with them. We have Monday Night Football. We have 70% of the rating points in college football because we picked up the SEC Network. We have all the college football championships. So we have a massive, massive reach in that aspect. And when you talk about sports, a lot of our major, major clients, we probably five years ago had multi-year deals, which is a 2-, 3-, 4-, 5-year deal with certain clients. We probably had 5 to 10 of those a handful of years ago. Now we have probably upwards of 70-plus multi-year deals. Because even though there's a lot of sports, there's not a lot of real estate, so the demand on live sports right now is better—hotter than ever. And you know, I don't know if you were going to touch on women's sports, but women's sports right now—we've been in that business for 30 years, but over the last couple of years, women's sports specifically has just blown up. The WNBA, the women's NCAA Tournament, which we had a couple of years ago—which we still have—but with Caitlin Clark, those numbers for the NCAA women's were higher than the men's.

Alan Hart: Yeah, hopefully that's creating more real estate for you and brands to try to figure out how to make it work.

Andrew Messina: It is. I think brands come to us because—whether they're a legacy brand or a new brand—they come to us because they're trying to launch a product. And we have our first Super Bowl in 20 years in 2027, which is very exciting. The last time we had it was in Detroit in 2006. Now we'll have it in LA in 2027. And you probably saw the Super Bowl sells out pretty quickly. If you're launching a major automotive brand right now, you want to be in the Super Bowl, you want to be in the national championship, you want to be in the NBA Finals. We have Game 6 [of the NBA Finals] tonight, Oklahoma [Thunder versus Indiana] Pacers on ABC, and the demand for NBA has been spectacular.

Alan Hart: Well, Andrew, you've got, under your remit and under Disney Advertising, so much variety of properties and types of opportunities to connect with consumers. If I'm a brand, how do you manage that? How do you bring that power of everything to brands?

Andrew Messina: Well, it goes back to what I was saying earlier. We have, as you said, the portfolio is massive, and it allows us to reach every single audience across every single demo. And when I look at our cultural calendar for the entire year, you start in January with *New Year's Rockin' Eve* and then you end with college football and NFL. So, throughout the year, we have touch points for marketers. So there's really not a time of year we're not really making an impact, whether it's streaming sports or entertainment.

Alan Hart: Awesome. Well, a lot of brands are trying to experiment with co-creation with consumers. I'm curious if you've experienced or have any thoughts on how that might shift or change or augment the advertising landscape for you at Disney?

Andrew Messina: Yeah. I mean, I think it will evolve. But at the same time, live sports—what we're able to do onsite during the national championship games, whether it's an auto or QSR—those experiences? For instance, College GameDay: If you're a college football fan, you are watching college football all week long, and we cover it. The best

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thing about it for us is, you've got ESPN.com, which covers seven days a week, and then we've got lead-up on ESPN Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and then Saturday [is] College GameDay. You would think that the ratings (because you look at linear ratings) have kind of plateaued. On College GameDay, they were up 16%, which is a significant number. So that makes our sponsors very happy, and also quite frankly it just creates more demand. So if somebody pulls out of College GameDay, it's pretty easy for us to replace them. So, high demand.

Alan Hart: Well, you mentioned auto before, especially as getting in those big marquee moments. If you think about auto and retail, how do you see the different strategies playing out? Is there a leaning towards one versus the other in terms of how you think about packaging the right approach for them?

Andrew Messina: I think they have their own approach. And what we do is, they give us their brief—what they're trying to accomplish, whether they're launching a new product in a restaurant or whether they're launching a new auto, or it just depends—we'll customize it to their needs.

Alan Hart: Meet them what they are. OK. Are there any standout moments for you in terms of what retail is doing or what auto is doing today?

Andrew Messina: I think retail, the gold standard on retail is College GameDay built by Home Depot. They've been with us for 23 years, it's their gold standard, and we build all these things—these are built by our entire—we have a sports brand solutions team, which handles sports integrations. We have an entertainment brand solution that handles our entertainment, like the Oscars, the Country Music Awards. My role is to work very, very closely with the CMOs and make sure that they're happy with it. So I'm on the road a lot talking to these clients, going down to Atlanta to meet Home Depot, going to Detroit to meet the autos. So we want to make sure because, you look at Cannes right now and you see how many people are here. Relationships really, really still matter, and the only way some of these things are going to get done is through making sure you're connected.

Alan Hart: Well, you've been in the business for a long time, both on the agency side and on the media side. What's one big transformation you've seen over the course of your career?

Andrew Messina: I would go back to relationship. Back when I started in the business, you had a lot of internal relationships, but we weren't out early in my career on the street. When I moved to LA and during the dot-com boom, I was on the road every week in LA, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland meeting with all the different clients there and developing those relationships. Earlier on it was, I think, more transactional. The relationships really, really matter, and I know a lot of things have been automated and we're moving fast and furious towards 75% of our inventory on automation. But at the same time, like I said, look at Cannes: All these people are here, and they're all building relationships.

Alan Hart: What is it—I mean, you've been in various types of sales and general management roles—that notion of relationships? And can you put your finger on what it is that makes it so unique and special?

Andrew Messina: Well, I mean, I think the main factor is trust. Just like you have good friends for a long time, and when I meet young kids who are coming out of college, one of the things that I didn't have, you know, I got my first start off a coffee table. Now I have so many kids come to me, college graduates, because I have four kids and everybody's like, "Oh, you work at the Walt Disney Company. Can I come meet with you?" and I'm happy to meet because I want those kids, when they move up the ladder, to do what I'm doing and meet with them. So I think that the biggest difference right now is the relationships. I think they matter much more than they did 20, 25 years ago.

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Alan Hart: Well, one of the things we like to do on the show is to get to know you a little bit better. We know you got that early start in your career, responding to the “old ads,” if you will. Has there been an experience of your past that defines and makes up who you are today?

Andrew Messina: Yeah, I would say, I go back to LA again, somebody gave me an opportunity. I was first of all given the opportunity at ABC, but then three years into my career, I was on the prime planning side at ABC and somebody—there was a person who was running the LA office, and I didn’t have direct sales experience. I wasn’t a salesperson yet. And he gave me the opportunity and the opportunity, like I said, was right before the dot-com boom. So I was forced to then, with him, go out to see all these clients and explain what we were doing at ABC. And then we were meeting with the e-trades, the e-toys, you know, all those e-companies, and we were just having fun. And we were making money. And then that changed the trajectory of my career because that really got me deeper into sales, and I really broadened. That’s how I really started honing my skills from a relationship standpoint.

Alan Hart: That investment by him to you; show you the ropes.

Andrew Messina: Yeah. That’s kind of what I’m doing now with a lot of people. At Disney, we have a great mentor program. Over the years, I still have a lot of ex-mentees, but once you have a mentee, they’re your mentee for life. So I still mentor a lot of kids when they’re starting work, but I also have a lot of internals. And I think it’s probably one of the most rewarding things because I didn’t really have that mentor. But I did have people along the way in my career. Nobody does it on their own. I even tell my own kids, when you’re starting off in your 20s, that’s the beginning of your story. The rest of your career... Because in your 20s, you’re pretty stressed out if you don’t have direction. But I think a lot of kids now—there’s a lot of pressure on these kids coming out of college—so I think if you just explain to them, it’s easier for me to say, “Don’t stress out about it,” but if you give them the advice of, “Alright, just keep your legs moving, keep your head down, and work hard.” It’s not easy, but it’s also not that difficult.

Alan Hart: I love it. Well, if you were thinking back, that younger self, looking for that first job or after that first job, where you going to go next? What advice would you give your younger self?

Andrew Messina: Just that! I would say to myself try not to stress. And make sure if you can outwork everyone and open every single door that you can. This has been a tough or an interesting last five years for this generation because they were at home for a handful of years and, quite frankly, we’re in the office four days a week. We’re not in on Fridays, working from home; but, I mean, there was a long time that we were—a year plus—that we were at home five days a week. And I think that hurt the relationship building for some of the younger generation coming out of college. So, I think my advice to my kids and everybody out there is get out there and develop the relationship. You never know where your next opportunity is going to come from. And if you’re not having those conversations and you’re not having those in-person meetings, it’s not going to fall in your lap.

Alan Hart: Is there a topic either you’re trying to learn more about or you think marketers need to be learning more about today?

Andrew Messina: Well, I mean if we’re in Cannes, you don’t say AI, you’re in trouble. So I am reading Mark Britton’s book on AI right now. And I just think the more I can learn about AI, the better off I think everybody’s going to be. Because it’s not going away. I think over the next three, four, or five years, it’s going to drastically change every single business. But I think in a lot of ways it’s going to change in some good ways.

Alan Hart: Are there any trends or subcultures that you’re following you think other people should take notice of? Basically what I’m most interested in, like what are you curious about in the world right now?

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Andrew Messina: I mean it goes back to the younger audience again. We need to cultivate the younger audience, and marketers are very focused on the younger audience because you may not be wanting to buy a luxury car when you're in your 20s, but the luxury carmakers they want to target you because once you're able to afford that, they want you to subconsciously know "I want that car when I'm older." So I think, in this fragmented world, you really, really need to focus on the young kids, because they have a lot of choices, and there's not just a handful of retailers out there. There's not just a handful of consumers. There's constantly new products going out there that one would have thought that, in the retail world, there was a handful of retailers. Now we all know. With the advent of you can just go online and buy what you want, there's a lot of different choices from apparel to sneakers or wherever you have it. So I think focusing on the younger audience and making sure that you're attracting them and you're reaching them, that's critical for the marketers.

Alan Hart: Well, last question for you, what do you think is the largest opportunity or threat facing marketers today?

Andrew Messina: I think being complacent. Just thinking and coming from Disney, we have a pretty good position because there's the upper funnel and there's the lower funnel. We pretty much cover that entire funnel. And I think the big threat for some of these marketers is they need to make sure that they're reaching that entire funnel. So to me, they need to make sure that's covered; otherwise, it could be an issue.

Alan Hart: Well, thank you for coming on the show.

Andrew Messina: Thank you very much.

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