



EPISODE 5

Using 'fan truths' to drive a fast-food renaissance:
Insights from Tariq Hassan, chief marketing and CX
officer at McDonald's USA

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

Guests: Tariq Hassan, chief marketing and customer experience officer at McDonald's USA

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.

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 a special treat. I've got Tariq Hassan, a friend of mine. He's the chief marketing and customer experience officer at McDonald's. In that role, his efforts include digital, media, CRM, branded content engagement,

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

consumer insights, menu strategy, all to create a holistic, compelling brand experience for the customers of nearly 14,000 McDonald's restaurants in the US.

Obviously, it's an iconic brand. We talk about that, how the brand is now injected into culture. And some of my favorite experiences of characters coming back, etc., like the Hamburglar and Grimace. You'll hear that and much more with this conversation with Tariq Hassan.

Tariq, welcome to the show.

Tariq Hassan:

Hey, Alan, it's great to see you.

Alan Hart:

Yeah, you too, you too. I can't wait to this conversation. And so, before we get into the business of this, I have to ask, I am a girl dad, I know you are too. I think you're a year ahead of me in this college search situation. So one, how's dad doing? And then I would love any tips you have.

Tariq Hassan:

Well, Alan what'd I'd tell you is, first and foremost the easy part, I love being a girl dad. And I would tell you it's a lot different than when we went to school, the process, and this is our one and only. So I have no reference point. And as challenging, as crazy the process is because so much about it, like everything in our life, is about business. I've chosen to step back and really enjoy watching this amazing kid who's now becoming an amazing young woman, discover kind of who she is through the process. And I've sort of decided, I'm going to focus my energy on watching her have that experience in between the nerves and the what ifs and the what if not, kind of, moments, and just really enjoy watching this amazing woman moving into the next phase of her life. And so, I'll be able to tell you what this looks like in about three weeks, as the rest of the decisions come in, as I say, as we wait for the acceptances that she wants to come in. But either way, I know she's going to end up in a great place and move to that next phase of her life and go have the great experiences that I hope, you know, all of us had.

Alan Hart:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I appreciate it. I know we're just starting the visits and the tours. Applications will come next fall in her senior year, but yeah, it's quite exhilarating just to be able to watch, to your point. Like, you know, I don't have the stress I'm sure that she does going through the process and thinking about, like, life choices and things like that. But should be fun, should be fun. So, I may come and calling asking for tips as we get to acceptances, where you are, next year.

Tariq Hassan:

I wish you well and good luck, and I'm here if you need me.

Alan Hart:

All right, well, let's talk about business. You know you are the chief marketing and customer experience officer at McDonald's USA. Like, where did you get your start in your career? How did you end up at McDonald's?

Tariq Hassan:

So I will tell you my pathway to becoming a CMO is anything but a straight line, and in many ways not traditional. I'd love to tell you that the eclectic nature of it was by design. But I think it is by experiences that it brought me to this point. I spent the first half of my career in the advertising world. I was a strategic planner in that space, which gave me tremendous opportunity to work across a variety of categories. It gave me great experiences to work on a number of amazing huge brands, both domestically and globally. And to have that opportunity to work is significant on global business, which had a major impact on how I think about things.

But it's also redeveloped relationships, and it was through those relationships, frankly, that I made the move from the advertising world to the corporate world. And a client who had their, you know, major, major promotion for them to get

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

take on being the global CMO of HP, asked me to follow him over the corporate side, and join him as VP of global marketing for HP's printing group.

And so, the first half of my career with the advertising world, I sort of define as my customer empathy or really customer centricity. Figuring out how to take business and apply it to great creative expression. Moving over to HP, a lot of these things you make moves, but the context of your life and what's happening in the world around you, and you make them also influence them. So, I joined HP in 2008. I think about Facebook was two years earlier. First, iPhone was a year earlier. And I was working on at that time things that you know, they were calling them apps and we wondered what we could do with these things, right? But that was a technology and digital aspect of my career that even at the moment I didn't understand really the sort of beginning of Internet of Things that I was starting to play around with and allow me to have exposure to.

From there I ended up working with Bank of America, both at the enterprise side from strategy, insights, analytics and creative content, and then eventually running marketing for the wealth business for Merrill Lynch and US Trust. And again, the context of the time plays a major influence on the experiences I got from it. Because and this is my big data chapter, right? At the time, B of A, one of every other household had a B of A product in it. The wealth business was starting to consider self-directed trades. And so, you were in the era of human versus the beginning of platforms, and how do those work. And then to move on and move into the retail space with Petco, where I was able to start to bring all of these together to work on a business that was private at the time. What started out as a consulting assignment with a former boss turned into a 3 1/2 year tenure as CMO and eventually taking Petco public in what would turn out to be one of the most successful retail IPOs.

And so, those things ironically, you know, you think about customer centricity and creativity and really converting business into creative expression into the data and technology world, and then into big data and then applying them all to now being at McDonald's, where really the challenge when I joined was all about help take the organization into a digital future and be successful in digital economy. Think about how to build up the data to be able to do that, and modernize marketing, which on its face value you don't realize the steps that you've gone through until you have to start to apply them. And so, that's how I got here and again, if I have someone draw those back to, ironically, I was going to law school once upon a time, so it's just how you end up where you end up.

Alan Hart:

Yeah, I mean, the interesting thing to me, I mean, it's a great career first and foremost, but also the notion that you've, what's the word I guess, gone from industry to industry, right?, applying this kind of customer thinking, this customer lens to whatever industry you might be in at the time from technology to banking to now retail and now I guess restaurants, if you will, quick-serve restaurants. And it's interesting, I mean, I don't know if you've ever thought about it. Like, how does this translate to the next industry or if it's just natural in terms of how you view the world and the types of problems you're trying to solve.

Tariq Hassan:

I think for me Alan, it's more of a reflection and I do believe that this was something that probably sparked in my agency life. I've always been much more interested in the problem than a category per se. And in many ways I've been much more interested in the question, and the next best question than frankly the answer per se. I just think that's my, like, my mom would even go back and tell you I was that annoying kid who just, you know, the next question, the next question. Tell me why, tell me why. And so, when your view is through the lens of problem solving, then for me the next thing is about what is the next opportunity to, you know, go challenge, go look for a problem. And then I love transformation. I've come to realize that, you know, being transformational leader is part of who I am, and part of where my value comes from and part of where my excitement and challenge comes from, is the enjoyment of looking to the opportunity to transform things.

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

Alan Hart:

Well, McDonald's, I mean, you can't get much more iconic than the McDonald's brand. When you came in, like, where did you even think about starting?

Tariq Hassan:

Look, I came in and I had a great foundation. My predecessor, Morgan Flatley, who's now the global CMO, you know, had established a lot of elements around the core business that gave me a great foundation to start from. You know, her and the leadership had already gone through a transformation of our stores and the experience changes that had to take place that the customers had in our stores.

And I came in on the heels of us coming out of COVID, and looking for ways to unlock the brand through what has now become our famous orders campaign through Travis Scott. That campaign served to do a couple of things. It woke up the marketplace to remind them what they loved about the brand and the connection with the brand. But frankly, it woke up the company to get back on its front foot and remember this amazing connection we have with customers and a reminder that nearly 90% of the country walks through our doors at least once a year. And so when I joined, the question was "how do you take this beginning and the spark and its momentum and turning it into something that you could actually maintain?" And the simple way that I talked about that with my team was, you have unlocked this moment, you've connected in culture, you've called culture and now culture is calling you back. What are you going to do? Because if you don't answer and keep them on the line, you get canceled as quickly as you got there. And so we set out a real true north for the business to think about, how do we leverage this cultural iconic nature that we have as a brand but haven't leveraged?

And everyone was starting to talk culture. Big canvas, means a lot of things to a lot of people. And so, we had to define what that meant for McDonald's and for us there were four areas we focused in on.

The first was we are a food company. So how do you impact the taste of culture? How do think of the changing nature and the changing taste buds of the country, and run those through in a way they are still true to the brand. And so you saw us having fun with our dipping sauces or playing around with Dulce de leche frappe. Playing around with unique filters, but ensuring it through the familiarity of the McDonald's that they love.

Second area was just going deep into our fans' lives, and understanding the culture where they hang out, where they are. You know, we're talking about multicultural youth, a TikTok culture. We didn't invent the food hack, but we sure could play with one, right?

And then the third one was really at the heart of something we knew we need to do foundationally, to change the business, which was start to drive the role of data. So we want to say, well, how does data play into culture. When you're talking about a GenZ market, who are, you know, digital natives. It's all they've ever known. Data's a currency. It's a language. It's a form of way of connecting with them, and if you do it the right way and provide value, then they return that value with a deeper relationship.

And then lastly, using our scale. It's great we are participating in culture, but we're McDonald's, we're a brand where 1 in 8 Americans has worked at a McDonald's. We need to create culture and that became as much an external rally cry as it did an internal rally cry. Because if you're going to become a creator of culture, you must have to reflect that culture in your hallways. And it becomes a reflection of who's in the marketing organization? And how are you staying connected to it? Are you thinking about the pulse that makes culture move across the country and how you associate with it?

And we've just stayed on those four pillars, very consistent, because we get bored of our things a lot faster than our customers do. And so, just staying consistent, staying on the beat has been the magic that's allowed us to keep doing what we're doing.

Alan Hart:

I mean, you guys are doing it well. You're doing it well my friend. I mean one of the things that I noticed in the recent

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

history of you guys is, I guess first and foremost, I, like many kids growing up in the US, had my birthday party, I think in elementary school, I can't even remember, I was probably somewhere in like second or third grade, at a McDonald's. I can still tell you where it is in North Carolina. But I remember, you know, the character element of the brand. Ronald McDonald, Grimace, Hamburglar, and they were a lot of fun to me back then, and I was so excited when I saw one, the Hamburglar come back, it was my favorite. Grimace was also very cool. Like, Hamburglar in particular was one that I just really sparked to as a kid. I don't know, maybe it was the mischievous element of it, but I want to know like where did that come from? Like, how did that manifest itself, if you will?

Tariq Hassan:

Look, I think for us, and I love that you're telling your birthday story because that's articulation of an example of what we're guided by. We call them fan truths. It's truly understanding those unique moments, those connections, that our fans have. Everyone's got their story, everyone's got their birthday story, everyone's got their first date story, everyone's got their ... the championship we lost, everyone's got the championship we won story. That's the essence of the way we make decisions.

And the example you're bringing up are the characters, and I have a lot of people ask about our nostalgia strategy. We don't have a nostalgia strategy. What we have is we've discovered fan truths that have led us to executional ideas. That have unlocked the recall and memory of things like our characters. In the case of the characters that actually started with the adult happy meal.

And that was where we were trading on this sort of lost childhood joy that we were starting to see inside of adults' reactions to it. Came out of a simple tweet. One day you wake up and realize you had your last happy meal. And you know what was the evocative reaction to that? Why can't we give that joy back to an adult. So let's give them a happy meal that they recall. The collaborator we worked with is an urban fashion designer, so we worked with Cactus Plant Flea Market. And we gave the brief. They came back and said, "look, we want the theme to be our friendship because my memory of McDonald's was hanging out at McDonald's with my friends. The icon to our brand, Cactus Buddy, he doesn't have a friend group." We want to bring the McDonald's characters back as his friend group." Now, Alan, we did this at a time when the average 17-year-old, my kid included, didn't know any of these characters because we weren't marketing them to kids anymore. We weren't able to, given the changes in the industry.

Alan Hart:

Right.

Tariq Hassan:

But we created a new connection with them. And it was the following year that we said, "this insight around tapping into that childhood memories, those childhood joys, you have an adult, we all need that right? Birthdays was the obvious one. You know, you were a cool kid. You actually had a birthday party there. I was... I got invited to a couple, but I was never cool enough to actually have mine there. And we said "OK, how do we bring that to life? And Grimace is just the embodiment of the ultimate kid."

Alan Hart: Oh yeah.

Tariq Hassan: And so we decided to celebrate his birthday. Now, what happened after that? We had no clue that it would take place on TikTok, it would go the direction it did. But we do know that when you show a connection and empathy with your fans that relatability understanding of who they are, the odds of them reaching into your brand and using different assets and elements of your brand as expression, 'cause we'd seen that kind of creator mindset starting to take place, go way up. And so the reintroduction of the love affair of Hamburglar and of Grimace and of the characters has just been an absolute blast to those who remember them and a real, real pleasant surprise for a new generation we've introduced them to.

Alan Hart:

Yeah, I mean, you couldn't get a Grimace shake when they came out, so I imagine results were great.

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

Tariq Hassan:

Yeah, I'll tell you a funny story. My kid was away at a summer program and thought it would be very cool to go off campus with some of her friends and and go get this Grimace shake that her dad's group you know the team developed and I got this text with a picture of the McDonald's and a upside down frown face saying "they're sold out." Great for culture, but not the answer you want for business long term. You can get away with ... You don't run out of burger, you know, Big Macs, but running out of a Grimace shake a couple days early is not a bad thing. It's a great sign of success.

Alan Hart:

Yeah. Awesome. Awesome. Well, I know you talked about data and I know digital transformation is something that you've kind of marked, if you will, your time at McDonald's. Talk to me a little bit about that. What was your digital transformation journey? Like, how did you, how are you going about it in terms of leveraging that data and creating more personalized engaging experiences?

Tariq Hassan:

Yeah, I mean, to me, was the most exciting part about taking the job in first place. Was to be able to take a business with roughly you know an average \$9 check and think about how do we think about it in the same way you think about a direct-to-customer business and start to gain scale of first-party data. To get smarter to action on that data, to provide greater value to your customer, to get a better understanding of every aspect of the business, including operationally and experience, that was exciting.

And we had just launched loyalty when I came in. That was part of the remit for me to come in, for how do we scale that capability. Today we end the year 2024, you know just north of 85, you know roughly 85 million users on that platform, of which north of 45 million were 90-day actives. And so that ability to start to understand customer behavior, to start to understand how we can engage that customer, continue to drive success the business through that data in a way that we can actually measure in the ways that we now can. It's been just an amazing journey.

We knew it would be difficult because that's a transformational component for franchisees who've grown up in an amazing system that's done incredibly well for them, based on a daily operating model. And here come these crazy marketers that want to start that conversations about 30-, 60-, 90-, 120-day views of things. And then along with wacky finance guys that are saying, "If we do this guys, I know you're not seeing the dollar you made today, but here's what the return on it will be for X later." That's both exciting, but that comes with accountability to help the organization understand that these aren't just magic tricks. That this is actually gonna be a profitable approach to how we've done it—and that's what we're excited about. Because when I look at the scale we've been able to do four years later, we know that customer is profitable. We know they come more often. And we know at the end of the day they spend more. They are about four and a half times the value of a nondigital customer.

We also know there's tremendous benefits of the digital behavior that comes with that customer because I've now got a customer who's ordering for themselves, paying for themselves, and you now get to reallocate resources to other parts of the restaurant to create a better experience for your customer.

And so that's just the tip of it. The real value of the data and the real value of things like AI will be about the impact they have on the total restaurant operation. As a restaurant becomes smarter, as the restaurant attaches to the cloud and we start to gain a view to not only the role of the data on the customer, but the implication on the operating model for the restaurant itself. That's pretty exciting stuff.

Alan Hart: Yeah, yeah. I mean just the scale at which you guys operate is mind blowing. You know? You talk about one of the 45 million 90-day active users, 85 million users in total, I mean that's a massive business just by itself.

Tariq Hassan:

Our delivery business is a \$5 billion business by itself. When I left Petco we were barely a \$5 billion retail business. The future of that scale, the goal is by 2027 we have nearly 65 million 90-day actives. You are now entering the scale of the most significant customer platforms, irrespective of the QSR category. And that's a really exciting opportunity to build a

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

platform on a business that then allows you engage your customers and provide unique value, allow that data to do really, really meaningful things for them as individuals, but ultimately for the employees as well as for the communities that you serve.

Alan Hart:

Well, not to turn the conversation, but turning it a little bit. You're a brand leader, you're ... you know, a pillar, if you will, within culture because so many people have an experience with McDonald's. That also means that you're in the macro-environment. Whether you want to be or not. And as you think about how brands respond to events, whether they're social, health-related or otherwise, what advice would you give to brand leaders kinda faced with headwinds from time to time or shifts in the marketplace?

Tariq Hassan:

Look, I think there's things we've always known, but the realities of them, have never been more evident as a result of digital saliency and access to your brand by our customers. So if you didn't need to reminder, you'd say every day now that you are not in total control of the conversation. And so your ability both to listen, understand when to engage and frankly poorly understand when not to engage has never been more important. Depending on the category you're in, I mean, I think one of the greatest things that ties back to we were just talking about the power of actually having the data is critical not only in driving the business, but it's also critical in understanding your customers.

And so what I think about the challenge we went through at the end of last year with our food safety issue, that data proved to be completely invaluable for us to understand the mindset, the understanding, the nervousness ... and the clarity we were starting to create for customers as we explained and help them navigate that with us. And we were able to navigate that situation as quickly as we were because we held to our values, which goes back to the real point of what you're asking us brand leaders.

You drive clarity of your values, you are transparent with those, and then you leave with actions. And I think it sounds really simple and it should be really, really simple. But we get in our own way sometimes on these things. And I have a tremendous appreciation for the consistency, the value of the McDonald's brand and the leadership to not waver from those values, to not waver from the character, to be unified on how we show up. And that'll help you both when things are fantastic, but it really comes to bear when you're facing a challenge for certain.

Alan Hart:

Well, I know we were in a quick communication when that was breaking and I remember, one, hoping things were going to go well for you guys, but also just watching the, the within a couple of days, weeks, I mean it was the speed at which the brand and the company, I think responded and to your point, maybe it was the data component as well as how you guys track your business, etcetera. It was quite the case study in my opinion. In terms of like how to do it, how to do it well, how to do it right down the center if you will, to make sure you're addressing the challenge at hand.

Tariq Hassan:

The first part of it starts with a clear demonstration of the power of our amazing supply chain and our partners, supply partners. And the willingness and the ability to have that kind of clarity in order to help be part of the solution, to lean in, to identify the specificity of the problem and then take the right actions and to take those actions with one focus and one focus only. Transparency for protecting and doing the right things for your customers. And then ensuring that those things that you're doing are in service to the communities you serve, but also those who are employed by you, your crew and your franchisees.

Alan Hart:

Well, not to turn this into a sad moment, but you've announced that you're leaving and so we gotta talk about it. Like, you know, in terms of, like, are there any leadership principles you'd like to leave folks as you depart McDonald's or as you think about this time you've had at McDonald's.

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

Tariq Hassan:

I, look, I don't view it as a sad moment at all. So, I am thrilled that you brought it up. I'm excited. I think that to be able to get to a place in your career where you can have the agenda defined so clearly about what to come in and add value to an organization. And to work for a great leader like I did with the (McDonald's) US president and be able to look at that and say like you delivered against those things and to know yourself well enough to be able to do that work and recognize that like "I'm a transformation leader. It's what I enjoy doing," and so to be in a position where I can look at what the ask was to come in and can confidently feel good about the results that we put in, and then think about what's next and feel confident about knowing you left the organization in a better place, then that's when you can be in a position to think about the things that work for you.

And then on a personal front, I've been living through the last 7 1/2 years in a bi-city, professional-personal life—whether that was with Petco in San Diego / New York or in the last 3 1/2 years, almost four years Chicago / New York. And with my ... as you put it, my one and only getting ready to head off to college, it was a combination of really considering what I had set out to do with the organization, and you don't get these windows of time back frankly, on the personal front.

And so that made the decision never easy, but one that I can feel really great about: the great leadership that will remain, that has a vision for what they're doing. I've never worked on a executive leadership team like the one that I did with the US team. I mean just world-class tremendous leaders, not only from a business perspective, but from a character and a human level, of what we achieved together. My own team, you know who's ready and as I said to them, the greatest opportunity for leaders is to know their leaders don't need them any longer. And that's how I feel about the capabilities of the team that I put in place. And then to know that you've got a great successor, like Alyssa Buetikofer who will take the reins. And not just that they will take care of the team and the development of what you've done, but you can feel confident that they'll accelerate it, which is what Alyssa will do.

That's the formula that allows you as leader to say, "OK, what's next?" And I'm excited about what's next, which no, I'm not telling you yet. Before you ask me, I know that look, Alan.

Alan Hart:

Yeah, I know. I know you knew it was coming. I'll watch with bated breath. But I'm excited, I'm excited for you.

Tariq Hassan:

Thank you.

Alan Hart:

Because I do know you've had a grueling seven, seven-plus years, just with that bi-city piece. Well, I'd love to ask you a series of questions I ask everyone who comes on the show.

Tariq Hassan:

Sure.

Alan Hart:

First one is kind of trying to get to know you even a little bit better and it's my favorite question to ask frankly. Has there been an experience of your past that defines or makes up who you are today?

Tariq Hassan:

Yeah. You know, you and I had a chance to chat a little bit before this, and I was asked this question recently. It's actually not a business experience. My daughter is a 13-year cancer survivor. And it's not just that she's now healthy and well and she is thankfully. But when I look back at the experience of navigating that with her: Both what you learn from empathy and understanding from, you know, the whole the reality is babies bounce and they actually are resilient. And what we learn from them, right?, we constantly say out of the mouths of babes is a reason. Just a great reminder of where the choices are that we have, on the things we can control, the things we can't control and the things that you can in a moment like that. This kid was just an amazing, and stays with me, an amazing reminder of how to navigate that.

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

But it was also interesting to just think about the way navigated her treatment plan and the disease, and understanding how to approach the problem. And I recall the oncologist looking at us and saying what do you guys do for a living? Because the questions you're asking and the way you're attacking this challenge. And I think that state has stayed with me to understand that the reality is that in a world where we have so much data, we have so much access to information we think can give us the answer, I think back to that experience because there's that moment when you're sitting with the doctor thinking like, all the things we're doing here are they working? Remember saying to one of the oncologists like I don't understand how this is working. And he looked at me and he said "we're guessing. Educated guessing. We're guessing because we're using data sets that are the closest thing to your kid, but your kid is still a unique data set."

And that has held with me because I've always believed even with data, you have to work within the intimacy of data, because your kid maybe the exception data set. And so that has influenced the way I think about attacking problems, the empathy I bring towards them, the usage of data and the way I challenge data when I think about those kind of things. So probably not the business experience you were looking for it, but it's something that has stayed very much part of and shaped how I think about things.

Alan Hart:

No, I think it's those personal moments that shape us even more, even more than the business, to your point. Well, if you were starting this journey all over again, what advice would you give your younger self?

Tariq Hassan:

Oh ... I think I would have told myself to a couple things. I would have told myself to start trusting my gut a lot earlier. I would have told myself to find mentors much earlier and really find those folks, you know that that personal board of directors who were going to give you the insights. I would have told myself, probably the same thing I'm telling myself still today a little bit, which is, you know, know when not to sit necessarily, take it all too seriously, and actually take a step away and give yourself a moment which is part of what was also behind my decisioning. It is just giving yourself a minute to oscillate literally as an individual and refine and rebalance. I didn't do it enough throughout my career. And I probably would have told myself "take a beat every now and then." Not to get overconfident. But to step back and allow yourself to soak in the moment when it's gone right. At least a beat if you would. Because Lord knows we stay on way too many beats when it doesn't get right. Right?

Alan Hart:

Right.

Tariq Hassan:

And again, not that I would have ever wanted to stay there, but I think there were moments I probably should have taken a moment, just, you know, take a breath and remind myself of that, like I think they could have shortened the timing on the moments that didn't go quite as well.

Alan Hart:

A wise advice. Is there a topic that either you're to learn more about or you think marketers need to be learning more about right now?.

Tariq Hassan:

Yeah. OK. Is there any conversation you're having these day void of having a discussion around AI?

Alan Hart:

No.

Tariq Hassan:

I find it exciting. I find it exhausting and exhilarating all at the same time to speed up which we're having to try and keep up with things. The unlocking of opportunities that come with it. But I'm also incredibly intrigued on the interrelationship between the human elements that tie to this as well and I've got my own little made-up theory on some of these things

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

around like for example why there are AI hallucinations? And I think those hallucinations are actually, ironically, elements of humanity showing up. Where assumptions are being made about data that are wrong. But what makes them wrong is the unpredictability of humanity. And so, it's a big sort of thought ...

Alan Hart:

I like thought. I like that, yeah.

Tariq Hassan:

... but it's something that I think a lot of us try and think about how do we stop the tide—we're not going to. How do we leverage it? We all have accountability and responsibility to market and leverage it for the good. But then how do we also ensure that we think about the continued role of humanity. Because the one thing that's constant is we've always evolved and innovated and continued to move forward. And the things that have kept us on the rails—humanity and relationships and communication and transparency and the goodness of things—in the world where that's feeling at times much harder the way the technology and the access to things that can help us make it easier. And so the role we all play in that.

Alan Hart:

It makes a lot of sense to me. And this notion of the human and the machine keeps coming out when we talk about AI on this show in particular.

Tariq Hassan:

Yeah, yeah.

Alan Hart:

I think you're right. I mean the humanity's not going anywhere. How we evolve to work with the machines and the machines evolve time, that's going to be the interesting nuggets, I think. But we're gonna still co-exist.

Tariq Hassan:

As I said to the university class I was just talking to before I came on with you, I'm excited by it, but I'd be lying if I didn't say I'm going to be enjoying the fact that I'll be able to watch a lot of this from my retirement. But I think it is interesting. I think it's exciting and I think every time we come across these moments, it just leads to the most innovative, incredible opportunities. And so I'm going to choose to stay on the side of optimism. And I have no idea whether this notion of sort of the human in the machine is real or not—maybe, it's what I just need to believe, but I think it keeps a good reminder for us and our responsibilities as we play this out.

Alan Hart:

I got two last questions for you.

Tariq Hassan:

Sure.

Alan Hart:

Are there any trends or subcultures that you follow, anything that you're just curious about today that you're tracking?

Tariq Hassan:

Ironically, before I joined McDonald's, I was already a foodie and I just love not just I love to cook, but I love food culture. And I love watching what's taking place around some of these food trends and the extension of food into experiences, and I continue to watch those kind of things and I'm excited, and it's everything from the functionality to the health and wellness aspects of things to actually us allowing ourselves to actually enjoy things and indulge things in a different way. So I'll continue to continue to watch those things. I don't think I will ever stop the love of food whether I am under the arches or not, the ketchup courses through the veins for certain.

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5

Alan Hart:

Yeah, I'm a foodie as well, and all I have to do is to remind myself to work out so that I can still consume the food that I want, as I pat the belly here.

Tariq Hassan:

Well, I'm just even fascinated around like, what's taking place in your cultural environment? The innovation environment, the way that you're seeing, you know, things start to ..., some wacky stuff. But it's all really fascinating to me as we continue to think about how these things converge with our desire to have convenience but yet be able to try things and experience things. So again, fascinating time.

Alan Hart:

Awesome. Well, last question for you, as a marketer, what do you feel like is the largest opportunity or threat facing us right now?

Tariq Hassan:

I think the opportunity or threat is what we've been talking a fair bit about, they are one of the same to me, which is how do you continue to move forward with the power of the access to the data and move that data around, but do it in a way that maintains trust and value for your customers.

You said you were fascinated about what we've been doing from the QSR industry. I would dare tell you, the first indicator players you won't see in the future will be those that don't figure out how to adapt into the space, but equally will be those who don't then also use that data responsibly and provide value for their customers in a way that enhances the experience and puts them at the center of it. That's both the hugest opportunity we think about it. We're making decisions by the second using data on what is an average \$9 check. That is just a wild place to be, and that's exciting. And I think that's true across a lot of categories. We are all going to be working our way through that.

Alan Hart:

Well, it's always a pleasure to talk to you, Tariq. Thanks for coming on the show and I wish you well and I'm going to be waiting to be able to ask you that question. What are you doing next?

Tariq Hassan:

Listen, we'll get together, we'll have all these conversations over the next one, but I look forward to it. Always so great to talk to you, Alan.

Alan Hart:

You too. You too.

Alan Hart: The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed are the speaker's own and do not represent the views, thoughts, and opinions of Deloitte. The material and information presented here is for general information purposes only and does not imply endorsement or opposition to any specific company, product, or service.

Hi, it's Alan again. Marketing beyond is a Deloitte Digital podcast. It's created and produced by me with post-production support from Sam Robertson. If you're new to Marketing Beyond, please feel free to write us a review and subscribe on your favorite listening platform. I also invite you to explore the other Deloitte Digital podcasts at deloitte.digital.com/us/podcasts and share the show with your friends and colleagues. I love hearing from listeners. You can contact me at marketingbeyond@deloitte.com. You'll also find complete show notes and links to what we discussed in the episode today, and you can search our archives.

I'm Alan Hart and this is Marketing Beyond.

Learn more

Marketing Beyond | Episode 5



Visit the Marketing Beyond library:

www.deloittedigital.com/us/marketingbeyond

This podcast contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this podcast, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This podcast is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor. Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this podcast.

About Deloitte

Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee (“DTTL”), its network of member firms, and their related entities. DTTL and each of its member firms are legally separate and independent entities. DTTL (also referred to as “Deloitte Global”) does not provide services to clients. In the United States, Deloitte refers to one or more of the US member firms of DTTL, their related entities that operate using the “Deloitte” name in the United States, and their respective affiliates. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting. Please see www.deloitte.com/about to learn more about our global network of member firms.

Copyright © 2025 Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved.