EPISODE 6

Powering commerce from text to checkout: Insights from Mike Manheimer, CCO at Postscript

Host: *Alan Hart, leader in marketing and customer strategy, Deloitte Consulting LLP*
Guests: *Mike Manheimer, CCO at Postscript*

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.

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.

Mike Manheimer, who's the chief customer officer at Postscript. He leads both marketing and customer teams. Postscript, as we'll talk about, is an advanced SMS marketing platform powered by AI, designed to help businesses build personalized connections with their customers through the use of things like SMS. Mike's also led marketing at prior companies in the technology space and on today's show, we'll talk about SMS, social commerce, how SMS plays a role in social commerce, how we should think about best of breed versus the consolidation across martech

platforms and where the application of AI is entering the SMS world of channels that we use today as marketers. That and much more with Mike Manheimer.

Well Mike, welcome to the show.

Mike Manheimer:
Thank you for having me, Alan. I'm excited to be here.

Alan Hart:
I'm excited to talk to you. I guess before we get talking about business, I should say congratulations on your pending fatherhood or new addition. How are you feeling? I think you're only a few, a number of weeks away, right?

Mike Manheimer:
We're four weeks out. So I've started my leave doc for my team. We're at that stage. I feel great. I am so excited. I really love learning new things and taking on new challenges and I think this is the ultimate challenge and so we are very prepared but also recognizing that there is an unbelievable amount of things that we don't know and I'm excited for the journey. Yeah, I'm super pumped.

Alan Hart:
That's awesome. That's awesome. I mean, I'm a dad only of one, but have done the early childhood thing. It's something to savor, and I'm not sure everyone tells you this, but it does go by really fast. So just really soak it in as much as you can. Don't worry too much about the sleep.

Mike Manheimer:
I'm very, very excited and Postscript is a fully remote company, so it's nice to be able to have the opportunity to balance and work out of the home. So I'm hopeful that that'll be an extra hack on top of all the other preparations that we've done.

Alan Hart:
I love it. I love it. Well, let's get into it. Let's talk a little bit about your career path. You are the chief customer officer at Postscript, but where did you get your start in your career and kind of what were some of the chapters along the way?

Mike Manheimer:
Yeah, when I was graduating from college, it was right around the time that we were in the Great Recession, and there was almost no work for new grads. Many of my most trusted professors implored me to go to grad school. They're like, don't go into the market. It's bad out there. You're not going to like what you see, stay in college for a minute. But I was ready to go into the real world, and at the time I was looking for growth industries.

I found an early stage bootstrapped SaaS company that was starting in Phoenix, Arizona, where I live. And I responded to a Craigslist advertisement actually, and joined this company as one of the first 10 employees and learned what software was, learned the SaaS business from scratch. And I've been in B2B SaaS ever since.

It was one of the luckiest, most like serendipitous things that's ever happened to me, and got the opportunity at that company to touch a bunch of parts of the business that I had no business being involved in, but that's the nature of a start-up, and through those learnings was able to, you know, grow my career from there. I ended up going into marketing and led the marketing team there.

Slowly sort of continued to find new B2B SaaS environments to grow my skill set. It is not traditional for a CMO to transition into chief customer officer role. But at Postscript the reason that makes sense is twofold, one is our main

customer that we sell to is a CMO, is a marketer at our customer accounts. And so, obviously having deep understanding and empathy for what our customers go through is really important to being able to serve them effectively. And then two, one step along my career trajectory was, I worked at a company called Gainsight, which I think now has exited to Vista as part of the Vista P/E portfolio, but that company was a customer success software company. I worked there for about five years, and what we did while I was there was we defined what customer success was as a profession, and we were at the very, very tip of the spear there on that movement.

And so, while I have never been a CSM myself, I definitely have been living in the CSM world for a long time. And so, as a result of that trajectory I was on when it came time to find leadership for our customer-facing org at Postscript, it made a little bit of sense. And so, a lot of times I talk to other CMOs, they're like, tell me about the CCO move, was that your choice or theirs? I'm like, no, actually it's a great thing. I still maintain leadership of the marketing org and I've added the customer org to it, and there's actually lot of really cool unexpected synergistic benefits to being a marketer and servicing software that sells to marketers, that makes it all makes sense. And so, it's been a crazy journey and becoming CCO at Postscript, kind of, feels like the end of like a full circle moment for me.

Alan Hart:
That's awesome. That's awesome. I love the full circle moment. Let's talk a little bit about Postscript. Like what is the scope of the business? What do you guys do?

Mike Manheimer:
Postscript is a revenue platform that's focused on SMS for the Shopify ecosystem. So, the TLDR is we use messaging tools to make Shopify merchants much more money through sales. And so, the business is about six years old now. We have over 300 employees. We have over 20,000 customers on the Shopify platform using Postscript to communicate with their customers, and it's been a crazy journey. It's been lots and lots of fun. I think Postscript had started as kind of, like a product led, sort of anyone can use it, install from the App Store and upgrade type of business, and over time we've added lots of enterprise features to serve the enterprise in Shopify as well. And we have customers that are people just getting started selling their first goods on Shopify, as well as the nine- and 10-figure brands that sell on Shopify as well, like Brooklyn, Thrive Cosmetics, HexClad, etc., True Classic Tees, the list goes on. And so, it's been a really crazy journey and lots of fun, and I have learned a ton over the last four years that I've been at Postscript.

Alan Hart:
Awesome. Well, we've been hearing about, I think for some time now this idea of conversational commerce. And it seems like with the combination of messaging and commerce platforms like Shopify, you guys are at the epicenter of this, but tell me a little bit about how you think about conversational commerce and what should we be thinking about.

Mike Manheimer:
Conversational commerce is a funny thing, it seems obvious to people that it's worth pursuing. That's why it's been a hot topic for over a decade at this point. It's above my pay grade to understand, like, why all of the other attempts at conversational commerce haven't worked. I think people often wonder like, why don't we have a super app like they have in other parts of the world, or why aren't most transactions in the United States being done on mobile? Cash doesn't even exist in other parts of the world. And there's I think a bunch of reasons for that to just get down to the way that Americans shop and our behavior online. But we have not had like the product market fit of the right software with the right channel to facilitate conversational commerce experience that makes sense and actually reduces the friction associated with shopping and makes it more enjoyable for the person to shop.

And when I joined Postscript, part of my thesis outside of the fact that I loved the customers and the people who were working on the problem, is it just really felt like two mega trends were intersecting and they're not going to stop intersecting. One being more transactions are going to be done online over time, digital commerce growing. All you have to do is look at Shopify's stock chart to know that's true. And then messaging as a major component of the way that people spend their time online, especially on their mobile device. Messaging in a bunch of forms, but especially text messaging dominates the time that people are using their mobile phones.

And so Postscript exists at the intersection of both of those things.

And when I think about conversational commerce, people have tried it with apps, but those are really hard to get people to download and keep on their phone. People have tried it like native to the platforms, but, you know, all of the social networks people are there to engage with their friends or be entertained and shopping is kind of tangential to that. So it's always kind of felt like round pegs, square hole type of situation. And we really think that SMS is kind of a dark horse channel in this environment, mostly because it has one thing that makes it incredibly special, that people tend to underestimate, which is SMS is the only channel that exists for marketers that is fundamentally two-way from the get-go. You could look at marketers' emails, they send them from a no reply at email address. And when you're doing an ad, you're not trying to get people to engage with the ad necessarily, although that helps ad performance, but you're trying to drive them to a site to have a singular sort of journey-based experience. And SMS is automatically two way from the jump. And that surface area we think is why it's best suited to nail the conversational part of conversational commerce. And we're really excited to experiment with that especially as it relates to what capabilities are being unlocked as a result of Generative AI, which I know we'll talk about at some point in this conversation.

Alan Hart:
I mean this notion of SMS is naturally two way, that totally makes sense. What should marketers be thinking about that we're not thinking about or maybe misconceptions with SMS?

Mike Manheimer:
The biggest one is, I think marketers always struggle with this. They always have struggled with assuming that their customers are going to behave the way that they personally will behave. And as a result of that, a lot of people, especially folks who haven't started trying to text message their customers, they assume that it's going to be incredibly intrusive, their customers will be annoyed. There's no way a good customer experience could come from this channel, because that's where I text with my significant other, my family, etc. So I don't want brands to be in there. The idea of, like, annoying my audience is a really big deal, it's big impediment to a lot of marketers exploring the channel.

And that's just not what we see at. Text for marketing use cases is not that way. You can only text people if they double opt in to receiving your messages. And so, from the beginning any single person that you're going to do an SMS campaign to has agreed to get that message. There's nobody who should be getting a message that they didn't opt into. And if you are messaging people that way then you should come talk to us because whatever your providers allowing you to do might put you in hot water. It's not allowed on the carrier pipes. So first off, the entire ecosystem should be 100% double opt in.

Two, when you look at unsubscribe rates globally, they're incredibly low, because of that. It's just like any other marketing channel, if you're adding lots of value to people who agreed to get your marketing, guess what, they like it. And that's worth pursuing for most brands, is finding out what that means for you and it's not the same for every single brand. But when you nail that—you know, the voice, the value add, and the consent—then what you end up with is a very highly engaged, high-earning channel. And a lot of people are finding that they're actually making

more money off of a SMS list that ends up being only one-fifth of the size as the email list that they've been cultivating over the last few years, because of the integration with the phone, the immediacy of the channel, and the engagement that you're able to generate via the messaging inbox as opposed to the email inbox.

And so, I just think people assume that nobody wants a text. And what we see is that people not only like to get texts, they stay subscribed for a very long time. They buy a lot from brands that are texting them, and shockingly, they will text you back. And I think a lot of brands are really, really surprised to see their customers engage back over the text channel. But that's probably the best signaling you can get that it's a highly engaged audience who wants to deepen their relationship with your brand, which ultimately as a marketer always trying to find ways to get their relationship to be more connected. And I can't think of a better way than learning how to be engaged in your customers' most intimate channel, which is in their text inbox.

Alan Hart:
I really like the notion of they'll text you back. I mean, to your point earlier you were making, like you got to get the voice right, you got to use the channel in the appropriate way. I think, as marketers I think, we really need to make sure that we step back from all of our other channels because this channel is unique in that regard. How do you text your friends, you know, I text my friends very conversational, shorthand, back and forth. It's not the traditional email that we might be used to.

Mike Manheimer:
The conversational opportunity is completely untapped, especially in North America. Some of the data that we see, which surprises folks is that, but in some ways it's kind of obvious when you think about what would it take for someone to jump over the hurdle of texting a brand. But what we see across our data, which we send billions of texts a year, so we have a great global dataset, is that people who text a brand back buy four times as much from that brand than someone who does not.

And so, hurdling, finding out how to create enough value over this channel to get someone to engage in a conversational relationship with your company is worth it, not just from a customer experience point of view, but actually it affects the top-line and bottom-line results of your business. And so, we talk to our customers about that all the time that cracking the code on conversational for your brand not just makes you feel good, it's a financial imperative.

Alan Hart:
I love it. All the big martech providers out there, they're pushing to add more channels, you know, those include SMS in some cases. As you think about like best of breed versus consolidation of providers like how do you think about it? What are you seeing in the marketplace?

Mike Manheimer:
Yeah. There's a couple dynamics here. First, at Postscript we only do SMS. We've been focused on SMS only from the get-go, and that is not a common, at least today, approach to being a martech vendor. But there's some really good reasons for why we do that. One is, we just believe that focus is going to drive innovation on the channel, and we don't believe that email and SMS are the same thing. And so, I think those two core ideas have been, you know, baked into the values of the company. The results that we see are that we generate significantly better results not only because of our technology, but also because of the strategy that our team is able to put into the channel in partnership with our customers. So it's not just about the tech, although we do believe via our focus we've developed the most innovative technology portfolio, but as marketers on any channel know, if you put bad marketing into a highly effective channel it's not going to automatically be incredibly effective.

So the strategic advice that we're able to offer to get brands to actually maximize what's happening on a two-way channel that's mobile first, which is totally unique, allows us to unlock a ton of incremental results.

The other thing that I think people overlook when it comes to SMS is, SMS is technically a usage-based, and it's a metered-usage type of product. And what I mean by that is, every time you send a text, you have to pay. There are fees associated with the carriers. There are fees associated with the telecom infrastructure. And so, I think when people think of email, for example, as like a free channel where they are like, well, if my numbers are down, we'll just send another email blast and it won't cost us anything except my team's time. When you send an incremental SMS, it does cost money. And the result of that, which I think is really interesting, is a lot of people have a larger SMS bill than they do an email bill.

And when you consolidate with the vendor and you have, you know, your one or two hours of strategy calls with them a month and they're spending 90%–95% of their time talking to you about email performance, when actually the spend that's going into the channel is significantly weighted toward SMS, and you're getting what five minutes a month of advice on how to make this channel really sing. I think the merchants that are maximizing their total cost of ownership, maximizing their ROI and the dollars that they're putting on all their incremental channels, are finding specialists to be able to deliver those results. That's really what we kind of hang our hat on is via our focus on the technology and our focus on the strategy, we'll make an SMS dollar go a lot f(urther) on Postscript then you will on a, kind of, jack of all trades, master of none type platform.

And the other thing I'll add to that is, the tools that we all use to integrate our technology together are battle tested. They've been around for a very, very long time, and I think the integrations, as long as they're built effectively, are super robust. They're two way. They're real time. They don't leave, almost nothing was left to be desired from an orchestration point of view. The entire software industry has been deeply integrated, especially in B2B software for many, many years now. And so, the gap between does this channel live inside of the platform or is this channel simply integrated into the platform, that gap today is incredibly narrow; and I would say that it doesn't leave anything to be desired from an orchestration point of view. And so, you kind of get the best of both worlds with you know our focused approach versus consolidation.

Look, you've been in tech for a long time, so have I, we all know these are cycles unbundling and bundling, that is how all the money is made.

It's obvious that we've been in a consolidation cycle for the last couple of years as software markets have been more difficult and folks have been pressured to reduce their overall spend on tools. That's fine. I expect that as the winds kind of change, consumer sentiment seems to be strong and stabilizing that we'll see an unbundling cycle, especially as AI unlocks all sorts of new capabilities on a bunch of tools. I think people, yeah, they want efficiency. They want savings. But I think what people want more than anything is growth. And growth comes from innovative strategies, innovative technology. And those innovative strategies and innovative technologies are more likely to exist on best-of-breed tools out there. And that's why we developed the strategy we've developed, and what I expect to see in the software market over the next few years.

Alan Hart:
Awesome. Well, you mentioned AI earlier. You just mentioned it again. Let's talk a little bit about AI and how it's working its way into use cases for SMS. What are you seeing?

Mike Manheimer:
So, there's two sides to it. What we're developing is, I guess, I'll take a step back. The thing that's really important to Postscript is to develop technology and innovation that actually drives dollars for our customers.

We don't want to just do innovation for innovation sake. That can be cool and the shiny new object, but ultimately, our customers are entrepreneurs, they're building the next great set of brands, American brands, and we want to make sure that we're always driving their results up into the right. So that drives everything that we do. How do we make people more money.

We've developed AI in two areas. One is, we rolled out a tool set that we call Infinity testing. It basically changes the standard structure of an A/B test, it instead allows you to test hundreds of variations of messages against your control, proven by a holdout test, so that you can see the incrementality of what AI is doing. And that scale allows marketers to 1) do something that they've never been able to do before, which is run statistically significant tests in the background, using thousands of variations as opposed to doing a slow and cumbersome standard A/B test, to unlock new results and learnings about their campaigns and automations. And our goal there is to increase earnings per message for our customers, proven in the holdout. And the results have been amazing. We have an automations product and a campaigns product as well, but ultimately once that's set up and you're running it in the background, we are driving upwards of 35% lift on earnings per message on Postscript. So literally, if you take a campaign that you're going to run and you run it on some SMS platforms' pipes versus putting it on Postscript's pipes and activating our AI product, our AI product will earn you 35% more earnings from that same campaign than it will anywhere else. And that's not as a result of our pipes are faster or our team is smarter. This is actually the AI is going to find variants that are going to drive meaningful lift, and those compound overtime.

And so, that's less of a conversational use case. It's more of a generative to testing use case, but we find that to be really valuable because marketers are spending all of their time trying to run experiments to find new insights, and that process can be very slow and also result in lots of tests that are either inconclusive or don't show any lift. And so, this is a way to find lift quickly and scale the lift quickly. And so that's the testing products that we've developed for AI. And SMS makes that easy because the medium is simply a short text message. If it was a full email or a full website or landing page or something like that, those things can be done but they're a lot more complicated, especially to do on the fly, and you probably have way more brand controls that you want to put into place. But with texting we can do this quickly, we can verify that it's on brand in a much more narrow surface area and that allows us to move a lot faster.

The other direction that we're building in with AI, which I think is kind of obvious and we're super, super excited about is, the conversational aspects, being able to help people shop and help people handle their challenges while they're shopping.

Some of that can be as a result of them having questions, some of it can be as a result of them not being able to decide between two items, there's educational components, etc., but ultimately the if the AI is on brand and it understands the skus and it can understand the voice and needs of your customers, then providing a conversational experience over text to aid in the digital shopping experience is incredibly exciting for us.

The way we think about it is when you go to the mall or a store and you think of a very consultative in-store shopping experience, the question would be how, what is the best version of that for online shopping? That really hasn't been delivered. I've had some really great in-store shopping experiences, especially for very consultative things like, you know, think ... you go in and are looking for like new golf clubs. It's like you're engaging with a sales associate on a whole range of variants that are personal, that they need to understand about you to be able to make good recommendation, and the tool sets that are available to do that online are pretty rigid comparatively. And a conversational interface that understands your customers and your brand, I think, go very far in not only helping to create a good customer experience, but drive meaningful conversion.

And so, Postscript is very focused on how to bring conversational into the center of the digital shopping experience. We have some very cool things coming out later this year that'll make that easy and scalable for most of Postscript's customer base. So we're really excited.

I think the conversational part of AI is you can see it all over the place. I mean, there was a conversational AI company that ran a Super Bowl ad this year. So, conversational being applied to all of these different use cases is obviously a growth area, our goal is to develop the most on-brand, most effective conversational AI possible for SMS and e-commerce use cases, and that's what we are really focused on delivering this year.

Alan Hart:
Awesome. Well, I mean, it was super interesting to hear you talk about AI and the testing use case as well. I mean that's a unique use case, that AI is uniquely situated to help solve, but I don't hear a lot of people actually using it for that purpose. So thanks for highlighting that, too. I mean the conversational makes sense, so I was tracking and I understand that as well, but hadn't heard that one before. That's pretty awesome.

Mike Manheimer:
The testing use case is like a steppingstone to eventually getting to that one-to-one marketing world that everyone wants, right? Every marketer in the world, everyone who is listening to this, we all know that getting a perfect message to an individual person is the Holy Grail. That's what we all want to do. It's really difficult to make it there to find the exact highest performing message for every single person. And our Infinity testing product is one step in that direction, which is find the themes that create better performance, and we're going to continue down that path to find the themes, words, topics that create better performance, and will continue to narrow it down on an individual basis. The goal being eventually we can automatically craft a high-performing text message for every single person automatically inside of Postscript. And so, that's where we're going with it and we think that the Infinity testing product set that we rolled out is a very meaningful step in getting to that real one-to-one marketing world that we all know is worth going toward.

Alan Hart:
Awesome. Well, one of the things I like to do on the show is get to know you a little bit better. And my favorite question to ask everybody that comes on the show is, has there been an experience of your past that makes up who you are today?

Mike Manheimer:
Yeah—when I think about an experience that has really defined who I am, this is probably a common one, but when I was a kid, I moved a lot. Both of my parents worked in the federal government, and if you know anything about the federal government, if you want to get promoted, you typically have to move and you're moving all over the country and eventually you get to DC and then you move away from DC. That's just the way it works. And my family was no different.

And so, I moved a lot when I was a kid, and especially at some very formative points in my life. And so, very quickly when I was young, I had to learn how to adapt and handle what I would consider to be, you know, a challenging situation every time it happened. It was just a completely new environment where I had to kind of figure out where I fit in and what I wanted to be, who I wanted to be, and those experiences, I think, were really formative, and some of the things that I think are really important to me from a values point of view, in work and in personal life about being open, adaptable, being curious. I found that to be, you know, something that's really important to me. And I think that was kind of honed when I was being put into these environments where it was a whole new set of variables, every single time. I had to really understand my surroundings, use not just IQ but EQ to figure out how to navigate in the world. And those experiences I think gave me a lot of tools that I use today, not just at work, but

definitely in my personal relationships and how I experience life. And so, I think moving a bunch when I was a kid really had a big effect on me.

There's no good times to move when you're a kid, especially if you're building a life. The one that was the craziest was, my parents moved us to Arizona, where I live now, right when I was in my junior year of high school, right about to be a senior. That one was particularly challenging at that time. That was just one of many, but I think, like most things in life, you can, you know you have some agency in how you perceive some of those challenges. Are you going to take it as a, you know, 100% of negative, are you going to find a way to turn it into a positive, sort of, experience. And that one was no different. It's been a been a journey, and while those scenarios were not easy in the moment, I definitely wouldn't go back and change anything about them.

Alan Hart:
Well, thanks for sharing. I mean definitely those moves, especially as a teenager, can be exceptionally tough with social circles, etc. I appreciate you sharing.

If you're starting this career trajectory all over again, is there any advice you give your younger self?

Mike Manheimer:
Yes, definitely. When I was starting my career, I was very self-conscious about what I didn't know. I think like in general people would call that, you know, like imposter syndrome. That's a common thing people deal with even when you move up in your career and have a bunch of experience, you get in with a different level of folks who have different backgrounds, different pedigrees, you can easily doubt yourself. And one of the things that I would tell my younger self that I learned along the way, that I found to be really helpful, is just the idea that you're like, telling yourself a story about what's going on or what people particularly think about you. But the truth is that nobody's thinking about you at all. They're way too busy thinking about themselves. So this idea that you're being judged or scrutinized all the time, or I bet somebody saw me make this little mistake and they're wondering if I'm the right person for the job as a result of that. That's all just in your head. And the truth is that no one thinks about you at all. And that I found—when I eventually got to the point where I realized that was true—that felt really freeing to me. It felt like, okay, like, if no one's really thinking about me all the time and analyzing what I'm doing the way I'm analyzing it to myself, then that gives me the freedom to try to make an impact that will resonate or will create sort of the attention that I want. So yeah, if I could go back in time, I would tell young Mike, hey, don't worry about the people talking about you, they're not talking about you at all. Don't worry about it.

Alan Hart:
I love it. I feel like that's a good lesson for marketers too, like no one's talking about our brands. Like very few of our brands are they really talking about. We got to own our message, get it out there. Well, is there a topic you think marketers need to be learning more about or maybe it's something you're trying to learn more about yourself right now?

Mike Manheimer:
Yeah, I think there's a level of statistics and analytics that I definitely didn't see until I was in e-commerce. So before I was at Postscript, which sells to e-commerce marketers, I've just been in general enterprise B2B SaaS environments mostly. And there's so much of a focus on attribution and analytics and media buying in e-com, that's kind of what makes the industry go round. When I started getting into e-commerce, I realized there was a level of understanding of effectiveness of these channels from a marketing point of view that in my prior companies we just weren't at that level of maturity.

And as I started to dig into it more, I realized that a lot of the folks who are leading in analytics or incrementality or now what's coming down into that world is causal AI. So AI paired with some of these hardcore statistical models to create models for marketing effectiveness. The people who are running those companies now are like full-on scientists.

And so, I think that the world is going toward AI handling a lot more of that for us, but I think the interpretation of those results and being able to understand what you're looking at is going to be, as it scales up in sophistication, it's going to be really difficult for marketers, I think, to understand what really the AI is telling them in this new world. And so, I think, I could have paid a lot more attention to my stats class in college. I'm sure everyone probably could have. But what I'm seeing on the bleeding edge of attribution, incrementality, AI, where that world's going for marketing use cases, it's pretty scientific, it's pretty sophisticated. And I think everyone in marketing to prepare for that could do a little bit of a brush up on how to think about their, you know, dust off their old statistics textbooks and get reacquainted with that world. Because I think a new level of sophistication in measurement is coming to marketing, as it's being enabled by AI. And so that's something that's like on my mind and I'm seeing a lot of the bleeding-edge stuff affecting the e-commerce world right now, not only with companies, but also just with people who are at our customers, who are incredibly sophisticated with the way that they think about measurement.

Alan Hart:
I agree. I think that's really good advice. Folks that work with me know I geek out. I used to manage market research for companies and yeah, I believe everyone needs to have some base level understanding of stats and how to apply them, how to interpret them, etc. I totally agree with you. It's a great, great suggestion. As you think about like any trends or subcultures that you follow, you think other people should take notice of anything come to mind?

Mike Manheimer:
Like trend wise, one of the things I'm paying attention to is I think in general there's a move toward analog IRL-sort-of experiences and goods. Like, we've been in this digital wave for a long time now, and I think what I see is, you know, you can see it in a bunch of different areas. There's a renewed interest in, you know, aesthetics that show up in clothing and interior design. There's a renewed interest in more analog things. You could see it in car design. It's like people are doing more like retro-styled cars, that people want like less technology and more of an experience. You can see it like in events and experiences are, you know, the reaction to everything being digital a few years ago is very much like get out in the world in person. You can see it in people's like music consumption, like vinyl is the number one growing medium for listening to music. So, in general, I think I'm just paying attention to the way that culture reacts to the prevailing media methods at any given time. And I think we're at a point now where everyone's been living in a technology-enabled sort-of digital world for enough time now that I think we'll start to see a lot more, the other end of the cycle, which is how can I get more offline? How can I get more analog experiences? How can I connect with things that are less digital? And I see that as a, you know, it's not an emerging trend, it's been a trend, but I see it continuing to drive really interesting opportunities for marketers and definitely a different sort of like consumption style for, you know, the younger consumers that are influencing more and more of our culture and ecosystem. And so, that's definitely something that I'm paying close attention to.

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

Mike Manheimer:
I think it'd be impossible to answer this question without talking about AI in this particular moment.

But I do not think that marketers are in danger of losing their jobs or their professions. I really subscribe to the idea that AI is not going to take your job, somebody who's really good at AI is going to take your job. And so, I think the

biggest threat to marketers is full-on throwing out the baby with the bathwater and rejecting what's coming with AI. I think there's lots of creative ways to use it. Ithink the off the shelf tools are not good enough, and I think the marketers that will really end up succeeding in this new world are figuring out how to take the off-the-shelf tools and build something with AI that will uniquely help their companies do whatever job they're trying to do. And that's going to require you to be as a marketer, like an AI-first thinker and understand what capabilities you have in your tool chest to be able to deliver a good marketing outcome.

So the big threat would be you can't, you can't put your head in the sand. This is coming. There's no way around it. The question is just how you respond. And I think that if you're open and excited to experiment with what's out there, you'll find that there's tons of ways where what's coming with AI—what's here with AI today can make you a more effective, more creative marketer, as opposed to responding in fear and being worried about it removing the profession entirely. I don't think that's ever going to happen. So, I would say this is a moment to really, really lean in.

Alan Hart:
Well that notion of human plus machine, I think, is the right notion. Mike, thanks for coming on the show, congratulations again, and I wish you luck in the coming weeks as you prepare for that new addition.

Mike Manheimer:
Yeah, super excited and I appreciate you bringing me on the show.

Alan Hart:
Awesome.

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