



EPISODE 28

## Creating Gen Z FOMO in experiential marketing: Insights from Museum of Illusions Chief Marketing Officer, Andy Levey

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

**Guests:** Andy Levey, chief marketing officer at the Museum of Illusions

**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, we've got Andy Levey. He's the CMO of Museum of Illusions. He's got over 20 years of experience shaping conversation, driving brands across entertainment, hospitality, and lifestyle industries. Today, he's leading the charge for one of the world's fastest-growing experiential brands, captivating global audiences with interactive, perspective-shifting installations that blend science, art, and wonder. Before joining Museum of Illusions, he was a CMO at PlaySocial, where he spearheaded the launch of Playground in Las Vegas. Before that, he was CMO at Two Bit Circus, a new entertainment company reimagining the amusement park for a digital-savvy

## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

generation with immersive tech and social play. Earlier in his career, he spent several impactful years with Cirque du Soleil, where he led global marketing initiatives and strategic partnerships that brought the brand's legendary shows to millions across North America. We'll also talk about his background starting out as an investment banker and now into Illusions. So that and much more with Andy Levey.

Well, Andy, welcome to the show.

**Andy Levey:** Thanks for having me, Alan.

**Alan Hart:** Yeah, I can't wait to have this conversation, in part because investment banking, circus, and illusions, I don't think I've ever put into one sentence together, and yet they all live inside of you. So tell me, how do those three things—investment banking, circus, and illusions—all fit together for you?

**Andy Levey:** It's a long and winding road, Alan. I'm the sum of those parts today, but it was not always a clear journey. I got my background in finance, and the first couple of years of my career I worked in investment banking for a large mutual fund, doing all sorts of analysis and things like that. And to be fully honest, I did not enjoy any minute of it, but it was great. And I'll never forget really the impetus for all of this was working on a deep analysis, running all sorts of macros to do this report. And it was a Friday night and I had something due first thing on Monday, so I had to grind over the weekend. And my brother, who's younger than me, called me—this might have been before text messaging—but called me and was like, "Hey, what are you up to? It's Friday." "I'm working at the office." And at this time I was living in Colorado, and he was going to school at UNLV in Las Vegas. And I was like, "Oh, what are you doing?" He's like, "Oh, I'm going to this party with George Clooney and Randy Gerber and all these people. Cindy Crawford might be there." And I was like, "This just sucks! This just is lame. This is not for me." So kind of from that moment on, I decided I wanted to change my path.

I went to Tulane University in New Orleans. So, in college, I was used to going out and partying and being very social. And so it was that kind of mind shift where I wanted to really be involved in more social-facing, more consumer-facing elements. And so I set my sights to go back to school and move to Las Vegas. I ended up going to grad school at University of Las Vegas, got my master's in hotel and restaurant management because I had no true experience in that field, and then got my MBA with specialization in marketing. And as I was doing that, I also went back to work in the field and really learned and worked in the nightlife and hospitality scene for quite a few years and just rose in the ranks. And then I turned 30 and got married, and the nightlife industry—that's kind of ancient retirement age. And so I was trying to figure out what my next steps were, and I had the opportunity to go work for Cirque du Soleil in Las Vegas. And so, I was really at the verge of the first social and digital marketing space with Cirque in Vegas. In the nightclub days, we were writing—that's how I learned to write code—we were writing MySpace templates and updates and codes like that. And so at Cirque, we tried to be as social-first moving as possible because that was just the golden age of a brand social media where you could kind of stumble your way through it. Worked there for three years in Vegas, got promoted and actually moved to Montreal, oversaw basically the internal agency that supported both the resident shows and the touring shows, and then advising on all sorts of other different projects.

So that took me from kind of a Vegas base to a global base. And I was also in Montreal for three years and then had the opportunity to do a Cirque-style project in Dubai, which was a startup basically, and was in Dubai for three years. That was an amazing time. My family still wishes that we lived there. And so that was my second circus, working for the Dragone group there. And then after that, I moved to Los Angeles to start to work for a startup company called Two Bit Circus, which was more of an experiential digital circus, location-based amusement park, and was there for three years in LA. And then we had the opportunity to do a couple of other projects that were larger scale. We opened one in Dallas, and then we were experimenting with the hotel concept as well, and that

## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

unfortunately fell through. And so after that, I moved into consulting with location-based entertainment concepts, shows, touring, things like that, and then had the opportunity to come to Museum of Illusions about a year ago with some of my former colleagues that I've worked with in the past from Two Bit Circus and elsewhere. And it's just been amazing. It's a truly cool concept. I can talk a bit more about it, but just kind of the best of both worlds.

With investment banking, like I said, there's no emotional. But what I've learned throughout my career working with nightlife, entertainment, and experiential is these are emotional products. And whether or not you think of it like that, they truly are, because you're always going to remember "Hey, I met my spouse at this nightclub," or "I took my kid to this Cirque show," or "Oh my gosh, I brought my daughter's field trip group to Museum of Illusions." And so you cement these memories or tattoo these memories on your brain and just have these moments that you'll always remember. And so, for something like Museum of Illusions, it was a visual concept, really cool, really different. There's an educational component. There's an Instagram and social component to it. But yeah, just an amazing opportunity to come and join them, and they're on a rapid growth trajectory. So that kind of sums up where I've been and where I am today.

**Alan Hart:** Thanks for putting all the pieces together in terms of investment banking, moved into circus and the experiential component of the businesses you've done, and now Museum of Illusions. You talked about what brought you to Museum of Illusions, but maybe we can double click on what it is. I've never heard of them. How do I think about going to a Museum of Illusions?

**Andy Levey:** Yeah, I mean, I joke and obviously it's one of my mandates is to make sure it's on the tip of everybody's tongue and everyone knows what we are. But I tell people, they're like, "What is that place? I've never heard of it." So my joke is we're one of the biggest brands that you haven't heard of. We have over 70 locations worldwide and we're growing rapidly. Museum of Illusions started in Zagreb, Croatia, about 10 years ago by two gentlemen that were really entertained by *Brain Games*, if you remember that TV show.

**Alan Hart:** Oh, yeah.

**Andy Levey:** And so they wanted to create something where people could come and really test their brains, learn stuff, and have fun. And so they grew quickly in Europe, franchised it out, grew quickly in the US. And then about five years ago, we started to realize, "Hey, we should run these ourselves and operate them ourselves." And so we launched our first location in Charlotte and have grown substantially since then. Museum of Illusions, we like to say, "We're here to reimagine reality," but at every museum that you'll go to, there's 60-plus interactive exhibits and illusion rooms. And so that's anything from patterns on the wall that are 3D objects that will mess with your brain, to photo ops where it looks like you are smaller than someone else and they're taller than you—like, our big marquee exhibits are we have a reverse room, which is "something's askew here." It looks like you're riding a train, but you're hanging upside down. We just opened in Salt Lake City, so we have a dirty soda bar, so you can sit upside down at the bar. Other ones are building illusions like iconic buildings in each city, and you get to climb on them and look like Spider-Man and hang upside down. And so it's a fun concept. It's really cool.

Obviously, there's countless photo ops. Always kind of defying and challenging reality and really giving people that hook because experiential-wise, this is a FOMO business, right? People always want to imagine themselves going through whatever they see through someone's TikTok or Instagram. And obviously, this is one of the biggest places to do so. The other thing, too, is we have the name "museum" in our name. We are an attraction, but we're not just kind of one of those, "Hey, just show up and spend 40 minutes to 90 minutes with us and leave." There's a lot of science and education that goes into everything that we do. All exhibits are backed up through science and education. We have a partnership with STEM.org where we actually have curriculum that talks about each exhibit. So that can be used for field trips and things like that. So we are fun, but we're also serious about education and the

## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

environment that we provide. And obviously, as we grow and come into every community, it's really important that we become a member of the community and not just kind of a retail shop that pops up and you ribbon cut and say, "see you later." It's important for us to interact with the community.

**Alan Hart:** Yeah. I think in our last conversation, one of your top audiences was tapping into Gen Z and millennials. We also know, I think, from research that they're experiential, and experiences are key to those large demographics.

**Andy Levey:** Yeah.

**Alan Hart:** How are you tapping into that audience?

**Andy Levey:** Yeah, I mean, this is, the camera eats first, right? The camera experiences all of this first. And so for us, making sure that every exhibit, every opportunity becomes a photo op, a video op, a GIF op, a meme op for those audiences. And what we found is we work very closely with creators. We have creators that we work with in-house that we have on the team that travel to location from location and start to put together little cute shorts and videos and things like that. But in every market we go to, we actually do get an outpouring of creators and influencers who want to be able to showcase this because it's visually appealing, right? And it adds a nice aesthetic to whatever their theme or their brand is as that creator. And so we found really working closely with content creators and influencers has driven huge awareness. We've had stuff where we'll do ticket trade, or we've had stuff where we've had people come in, we've had stuff where we pay creators. And it's always funny to see where all of those land. And sometimes it's someone that you don't even talk to and haven't engaged with that ends up going viral and getting a million-plus views that you're like, "We've got to reach out to that person. We want to make them a brand ambassador and bring them into the fold." And other stuff, it's funny.

Obviously, I'm sure in other episodes, if you talk to their CMOs and you talk to other people in the marketing industry, everyone's like, "Oh, we want it to go viral." And obviously, there's no such thing as that. But the things that you think are going to work sometimes don't. And then the things you don't think about whatsoever all of a sudden get 20 million views. We have a TikTok and Instagram video that's been distributed on both platforms, and between the two of them, I think it has 35 million views. And it's just people hanging upside down. Normal shot on phone, not high production value, and it just clicks, right? And so I also think it's important we have an awesome team that... one of them is a Gen Z/millennial. They're designing the content and the marketing for that audience rather than old-man me trying to do it and trying to think what's hip and cool.

**Alan Hart:** Right, right. You mentioned social media influencers, creators. What's your approach to marketing this business? And, as you see it, the state of marketing?

**Andy Levey:** Yeah, I mean, this is a bit different, because experiential—you see it across the board in experiential. You always see these static images of people high-fiving and smiling, and it's so staged and fake and not real. And maybe I'm biased because I've spent a lot of time in this industry, but when I see it, I'm just like, "That poor marketing team," or "These guys..." Because that's the thing. Like I said, this is a FOMO industry. We have to be video-first. Everything that we do has to be video-centric. And whether that's a 30-second spot, a 60-second spot, or just a seven-second repeat boomerang type of thing, you have to show it, because otherwise it's hard for people to imagine it. And just a static image just doesn't convey the WTF of our experience. And so for us, we're heavy on digital, as far as our investment and really our marketing spend. So, heavy on digital. Obviously driving awareness through platforms like Meta, Instagram, Facebook, doing hyper-targeted stuff to certain markets and certain geofences with Snapchat, driving awareness with TikTok, and then catching all of that through search intent as well. But for us, it's just making sure that the visuals are good, they tell the story, and they give that hook for someone to

## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

be like, "Wait, what is that? I need to experience more." Or "I saw that cool family doing that thing. That needs to be us, and I want to be able to use that as social currency so I can share that with my audience as well."

**Alan Hart:** Right. Well, you've highlighted many elements of your marketing mix. So you've got digital-first it seems, and video is a large component of that. You're on the platforms, all the different social platforms. You've got creators, you've got customers, you've got people who are user-generating content around your properties, if you will.

**Andy Levey:** Yes.

**Alan Hart:** How do you, I mean... Are there other components of the marketing mix we haven't talked about, and then how do you amplify those efforts?

**Andy Levey:** Yeah. So those are obviously the flashy, right-in-front-of-everybody types of things. But what's really important for us, too, is we call it establishing the base. So whether it's a new market or existing market, the things that we have to do are we establish ourselves as a partner with whatever the tourism board or local visitor authority is, because obviously they're a big advocate for all activities going on in that DMA and that city, right? And so they'll expose us to opportunities. Obviously, conventions come in, you know, where group sales is a huge component of us. So making sure that we have a partnership with them as well. Working with boots on the ground as far as local PR agency and national PR agency, making sure that we're always represented when the timing is right, when the theming is right. We're a great place to visit during special occasions, especially because we do veer a bit younger in terms of demos. So summer was big for us because kids are out of school. Three-day weekends are big for us because we're something to do, especially when the weather's warm or when it's cold and stuck in the house all day. Making sure we're getting in front of people, whether it's through TV, radio, things like that, with our PR agency. So that's extremely important.

The other thing, too, is looking at what our local proximity looks like. Who are our neighbors? Who can we partner with? We are a relatively simple operation in the fact that there's no food and beverage. You're just going there and experiencing the illusions. So we're the perfect opportunity to do something pre-dinner or post-dinner, or pre-event or post-event. And so making sure that if there's a wine bar next to us, that we're partnering with them. If there's another event going on in town, that we're the best way to warm yourself up for that event. So those have been a component.

One of the big things for us as well is CRM as well. And that's something we've gone in and established is we've really started to do heavy-duty data collection and email and SMS collection as well. So every new market we go into, we'll do a landing page and a contest where you can win tickets to the museum. We partner with the local hotel partner, a local restaurant. We did this in a few markets and we got 10,000 to 15,000 emails in the span of two weeks. Then that becomes another marketing arm for us. The fact that if we're launching a promotion or we're doing a special or things like that, we can then SMS those people, we can email those people. Then it also becomes a tool for us as we go into various markets. We can say, "Hey, we have a database of 100,000 people in this market, do you want to advertise using our channels? Do you want to be a part of our newsletter?" And that becomes just another either revenue generator or partnership where we can trade data and things like that. So, like I said, high level, like, yeah, we're on TikTok and Instagram, but there's a huge data component and really partnership component that we work on. And then we also have an awesome group sales team as well who are going out and both closing inbound deals and hustling for outbound deals as well, because we're a great place to have a product launch. We're a great place to have a field trip, birthday parties, things like that.

**Alan Hart:** I love it. I mean, you've got a whole flywheel to go in there.

## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

**Andy Levey:** We're trying. We're trying.

**Alan Hart:** You've got the local PR. I could see that really playing a big role in launches, openings, etc. Not to say it doesn't have longer legs than that, but definitely see it there. And then you've got the email, data, CRM capture, and the flywheel that that creates potentially with the partners you're also trying to build next door.

**Andy Levey:** Yeah. Exactly. I call it the engine, and we've got to rev the engine and it's really important. And the PR things and having a schedule and having themes and having events that are extremely important as well, because that's, from my experience working in this industry, my team always tells me, "It's not this." But this is, what I say is, it's the easiest thing to launch concepts because, and when I say "easy" it's not easy. Any concept—it's hard to launch, right? You've got construction, you've got permitting, you've got all that stuff. But it's easy to throw a bunch of money at this stuff and be like, "Hey, PR! Hey, advertising! We've got flare guns! We're open!" That's the easy part, right? Once you're open, that's really when it becomes harder. Everyone forgets about you three months, six months, even a year later. So what are you doing to pop back up into those conversations? Depending on the market that you're in, you may be the only thing, or there may be four more concepts similar to yours or bigger or smaller that launch, or a market like Vegas where the population replaces itself every 48 to 72 hours. How do you get ahead of that? And so, it's really important for us, and I have an awesome team, and we're always trying to think like, how do we get ahead of these things? How do we plan? How do we plan for the holidays? What are opportunistic things that we can do? And so that's the thing. We're not a "set it and forget it" type of mindset where we view ourselves as always going to battle and always trying to fight for that additional ticket sale.

**Alan Hart:** Gotcha. Well, you've mentioned partnerships a couple of times and brand partnerships. I'd love to talk a little bit about them and how they help you expand your reach. You mentioned STEM.org and the curriculum that you built to try to reinforce, I'm guessing, field trips and school visits and things like that.

**Andy Levey:** I mean, partnerships are extremely important for us because it helps validate and legitimize us as a brand, or it helps validate and legitimize any other up-and-coming brands up there. But it's a good sync of audiences or trying to figure out how to get a different distribution channel that we haven't got before. With STEM.org, they've been an awesome partner, and they really help legitimize what we want to do because we're able to back that educational claim with actual facts, actual curriculum, actual science behind it. So we're not just your mom-and-pop place saying, "Hey, come and have your field trip here." And you don't know if it's educational or not. So that's been a big component for us. For Valentine's Day and for the first two quarters, we did a partnership with Match, where they did speed dating and meetups at our locations. And it was a great way, interesting way, to break the ice and just drive more people to our venues and museums than had been there before and also gives Match another outlet, rather than a bar or a restaurant, to hold your event at. There's other stuff. We've had opportunities at Comic-Con and then local partners like breweries in Denver and Charlotte that have done Museum of Illusion-style beer and things like that.

The way we view it is, how do you get more distribution and more reach? And then how do you talk to another audience that you may not be able to afford to talk to, or you may not even had to think that you needed to talk to them and then they drive in. And then—we talked about the CRM component—then it also becomes a great distribution tool for that partner as we amplify their launch, this partnership as well. So for us, we've only gotten started on this and obviously we've been successful. We just did in the month of July, for July 4th, we did a partnership with vettix.org and they provide tickets to veterans, and then we'll do another partnership with them during Veterans Day as well. So again, trying to be a community pillar, trying to give back, trying to figure out who can reach an audience that, like I said, we may not be able to afford or they just may not be in our wheelhouse, and how do we bring them in?

## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

**Alan Hart:** Yeah. I mean, as you talk about this, I'm thinking of how much other marketers, frankly, could learn from how to take a fixed asset and make it unique and interesting to multiple types of people at various times in the year and continuously keep it fresh, right? I work with many different types of companies from consumer products to financial services. Frankly, there are some boring products out there, right? It's almost more about how you talk about, how you encase the product. And you guys have a very interesting product, I should say. But how do you encase that in something that is contextually relevant at a point in time? This is kind of like a little bit of a masterclass on how you're doing that.

**Andy Levey:** Thanks. I mean, it's tough, right? Because I've done consulting before and I've worked on boring products, and it's tough when it's a boring product. I'm not going to lie.

**Alan Hart:** It's tough.

**Andy Levey:** You can only sell so many pieces of paper. No one wants to buy paper for Valentine's Day. There's nothing romantic about it, right? That's why I'm here. That's why I continue to want to work in this industry and be the person you go to when you want to open up one of these concepts or places like that. Because there is a science to it. There is an experience to it.

Most of the time, we're pretty good here at high-fiving when things go right. But I think people don't understand that, OK, sure, you can market your product, whether it's the paper, whether it's an experience or things like that, but you have to think of those beats throughout the year. You have to think of where are these overlaps? And you always have to say, OK, how can we drive it further? And I think there are a lot of people that just kind of either rest on their laurels or say, "Hey, we got a big billboard unit in Times Square. We did this thing." OK, so what? What's next? How can you take it further? And that's one of my favorite things is trying to figure out how to connect the dots and where to connect the dots. And sometimes we'll shoot for the moon. But then you have other, more opportunistic brands that want to say, "Hey, yeah, we'll take a chance on this, or this is something that we'd love to partner with. Let's see how it works." Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't work. But if you don't try, you're never going to find out.

**Alan Hart:** Yeah. I love it. Well, again, I do applaud—I mean, you've got holidays planning, you've got partnerships, you've got data strategies. You've got a lot cooking that I hadn't really thought about in terms of how it applies to the Museum of Illusions business. So it's pretty interesting what you've got in place. One of the things we love to do is get to know you a little bit better. We know you've got quite a varied background. Very interesting. But one of the questions I love to ask everyone that comes on the show is, has there been an experience of your past that defines or makes up who you are today?

**Andy Levey:** Yeah, I mean, I think this is kind of like advice, but the experience that I have is I lived abroad for two years. I lived in Paris when I was 20 and 21. And it really taught me how to be way more independent than anything else in figuring it out, and realizing that my mom and dad or no one else is going to solve these problems for me. And so ever since I did that, I realized I have to solve problems on my own and I have to figure these things out. And then when I moved to Dubai, working for the startup—so working for a startup within a foreign country, it's exponentially more difficult. But working for a startup was amazing because you had to play every role possible and do every role possible. You kind of figure out how everything works. And so, then as you move up, for me moving up to the C level, I have a general understanding of how every facet of my marketing team works because I've had that experience rather than being someone who just either specializes in social or PR or digital and has no idea how any other area works. So I think those kind of were two inflection points.

## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

The living abroad really inspired me to be quite nomadic in my lifestyle. Like I said, we've moved four or five times in the past 11 years. Not planning on moving anytime soon. But I think some people, in some countries, you have to join the military when you're 18 or 21; it's a requirement. So if I had my druthers, I think I would require people to go live abroad for two years when they're 18 or 20. And then I would say professionally as a marketer, I would require you, after maybe three years or five years, I would require you to go work at a startup. And I think those two things combined—listen, I'm not the end-all be-all of anything, but I think those two things combined really helped drive me forward and helped me understand how to be a driver of force and how to control and how to drive revenue, drive brand forward, and understand that I'm the only one who can push these things forward. And I can motivate my team to do it and empower my team to do it as well. And so, yeah, I mean, like I said, those two factors really helped identify and helped mold who I am today.

**Alan Hart:** Love it. I doubled down on the entrepreneurial experience. I mean, I've had my own as well, and it's great to have the title on the card, but when you're still taking the trash out, it's a humbling experience.

**Andy Levey:** Yeah, I mean, that's just it. Like, the startups component, and then I did consulting prior to Museum of Illusions, like... Someone's got to pay the bills, right? And just because you're a consultant doesn't mean they pay the bills for you. So you've got to go chase and ask. And I think that's it. The sooner you get used to asking uncomfortable questions or asking for uncomfortable things—being in that weird position—the easier your life will be and the easier you'll be able to take on more of these challenges. I say you won't get phased by it, but even to this day, I still get phased by certain things where I'm just like, "I thought I've seen everything, but OK, cool, all right, great."

**Alan Hart:** Yeah. Well, also, what advice would you give the younger Andy?

**Andy Levey:** I mean, the younger me? I think if I stuck in finance, I'd probably be a lot wealthier, but would I be happy and would I have lived all across the world? Probably not. It took me until I was in my 40s to really find my voice in terms of, like I said, I view myself as both a driver and someone who empowers their team. But I can also be really annoying, too, because I want to get stuff done, right? And I've learned that through prior bosses and mentors that I had. The reason why these people are so demanding and so successful is because they're demanding and they know what it takes to get the job done. And so for me, I wish I was like that probably a bit earlier in my career. I was a bit more vanilla than anything else. But listen, here I am today and I'm happy where I am. But yeah, I would just expedite or accelerate the path a bit earlier, but it's good.

**Alan Hart:** Love it. Awesome. Well, is there a topic either you're trying to learn more about or you think marketers need to be learning more about today?

**Andy Levey:** I mean, obviously the hot-button topic with everybody is AI, right? And what does it mean? Is it going to take your job? Is it going to automate? Is it going to replace your agency? Is it going to make microwave-y dinner? What is it going to do? I think you have to understand when it comes to that, like for us, we're trying to figure out LLMs and what it means for how people are discovering us in terms of search versus ChatGPTing it. So I think it's understanding the context of all that in terms of automations. We have a lot of good automations in place and it's just more how—at least I think—it's not going to replace people. It'll replace certain functions that you have and then you still need the people component to prompt and really understand and interpolate or interpret the data that you want. So for us, it's more, how do we move faster and how do we become more efficient using all these automations and things like that? Yeah, I mean, I'm curious about everything naturally, but honestly, what keeps me up at night jobwise is just how do we continue to sell more tickets? So I'm always curious into whether it's new technology, new platforms, things like that, and what will it do? How can we adapt it for us, and how can we test it fast and either fail fast or succeed fast with it?



## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

**Alan Hart:** Makes sense. Are there any trends or subcultures that you've noticed out in the world, things that make you think a little differently?

**Andy Levey:** I mean, my kids are nine and 12, so everything that they're telling me about internet culture makes me feel really old because I thought I used to be with it or understanding it, and there's stuff they tell me now. So for me, it's really understanding the speed at which all these kind of trends and cultural things go. And then also kind of filtering it like, OK, if my nine-year-old is saying this, how can I market to a nine-year-old, or how can I market to a 12-year-old to get them to convince their parents to make a purchase? So in a lot of ways, my kids are my lab. I say that in a very caring way. I love my kids. They're awesome. And I think that's the other thing, too, because working in experiential, I take my kids everywhere to all sorts of concepts to really understand what makes them tick and what makes them want to enjoy or value the experience. Because that's the thing with all this stuff. You may not be exposed to it, but your kids are going to be exposed to it. And then your kids are going to tell you, "Hey, dad, or hey, mom, I want to go see that place." And you're like, "What is this place?" Then go down the rabbit hole. So trying to understand how the younger generation consumes what we're putting out there or consumes things and how we can adapt from that.

**Alan Hart:** Yeah, it's super fascinating. You got me thinking, because my daughter is 17, so Instagram is a big part of what we look at together. And her giggling and laughing over on the couch, on the other end of the couch, I'm like, "What's going on over there? Tell me, show me." And it's some of the funniest stuff in the world some days. And other times, I'm like, "OK, I didn't get that one." [laughs]

**Andy Levey:** Well, it's crazy the difference in age and the algorithms. My kids don't have phones yet, and so they'll go on our phones to access their account, and occasionally, obviously, we'll check in on it. And I was just like, "Why are you getting—what's this stuff? What is this? What were you even looking at to get served these things?" And so it's a world of difference. Even though I work in this industry, it's so weird for me to be like how our interests are so different between our age range and obviously female versus male and things like that. It's crazy to me.

**Alan Hart:** Yeah, that is wild. All right, last question for you. What do you think is the largest opportunity or threat facing marketers today?

**Andy Levey:** Where do I start? I mean, listen, it's challenging times all around, right? There's macroeconomic conditions, there's things like that. But people, for us, people still want to be entertained, people still want to have a good time. And that's what we bank on. So I think... keeping in mind, obviously, depending on what you're marketing, what type of project you are, you're there as a form of entertainment or distraction or relief for someone. And so starting to lean into that, and contextually in the environment we're at, people need a laugh. People need to forget what's going on, not to make it topical, but people want to relax, right? So how can you lean into that more and bring that affinity closer between yourself and the brand and that person?

So I think obviously the biggest opportunity, probably the biggest opportunity and threat, double-edged sword, is how do you become a part of the cultural zeitgeist? But is that good enough? You can be part of the cultural zeitgeist, but are people actually going to buy that product or use that service? And then does the advertising, does the marketing, does the social content live up to the experience or the product itself? Or vice versa. You could have an excellent product and crappy marketing, and then you could have excellent marketing and a crappy product. And so, that's the thing—through my career, I've been on both sides. And so you get the reviews and it's stressful and it's tough. And so I think, how do you make sure you align, whether it's a single-owned business, whether it's a large corporation, whether it's a startup, how do you make sure that the experience and the product is what the people want and you're getting those NPS scores or you're getting those great Yelp reviews or Google reviews or things like that. So really matching that up and listening to the people.

## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

Yeah, I mean, other threats to marketers: I think it's just, it's easy to say, "Hey, these are good ideas" or—yeah, this is where I was going with this. YouTube, Instagram, they're all wonderful platforms, but you start to get people who are like us right now—talking heads who are experts on things. But you really have to make sure if you're following these people's advice that you're not just following at the surface level; you're actually living and breathing it and doing it. For your listeners, feel free to check in with me and touch base if you want to learn about experiential. But it's one thing just to listen to the experts; it's another to kind of go down that rabbit hole. Just because I say, "Hey, it should be like this," or someone else says, "Hey, you should be doing TikTok or whatever," is it a fit for what your product or your brand is? And then what can you learn from it? I think that's the thing for me. Now I'm rambling, but that's the thing for me.

I also look at other industries because I don't believe the experiential industry has the best marketing out there. I think there's a lot of basic stuff that's done. So I try to look at other industries to be like, "OK, cool. How can we apply that to us?" This is something different or this is something unique. Or because we sell tickets, a lot of times we'll look at what festivals do or what concerts do, and "Oh, that's an interesting thing. They're doing an upsell with this. Can we do that?" So I think it's important and also step outside of whatever your industry is or your role and see what inspires you.

**Alan Hart:** Yeah, I love that. I think it's great advice. And it goes back to the concept you talked about. In my mind, as you describe this, making sure it fits your business, not just adapting to whatever's being talked about in the internet sphere today. But it's the engine block that you talked about, getting the engine right. It's not just about being a part of culture, but is it part of culture that drives people to buy? Because otherwise the engine started, but it didn't get a couple cycles in, right?

**Andy Levey:** Right.

**Alan Hart:** How do I constantly improve the engine? And you're looking at other businesses and trying to figure out what might work for your engine? Testing, learning, applying it. See if it works, see if it optimizes, see if you can get a little bit more horsepower out of it or not.

**Andy Levey:** Yeah, exactly. And that's the thing too. Sometimes you might get more horsepower, i.e., exposure, but people aren't going to buy. Is it your price? Is it a product that people don't want? Or you're a SaaS platform that the public's not going to care about? So yeah, I think it's those things and really understanding what makes it tick. And like I said earlier, I'm a curious person and I'm always trying to figure out what makes our business tick, and what that is today might not be the same thing tomorrow. And that's something also marketers shouldn't take for granted as well. Just because you're selling well today doesn't mean that three months from now you could be stressed out and panic-stricken and what's working for you isn't working. And so just know that you're always, you're plugging holes in the dam on a daily basis.

**Alan Hart:** Well, Andy, thank you for coming on the show. It's been fun to talk about your background, your career, but also take away some learnings from how you think about marketing.

**Andy Levey:** Awesome. Thanks for having me, Alan.

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## Marketing Beyond | Episode 28

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## **Marketing Beyond | Episode 28**

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