



EPISODE 35

## Marketing as entertainment, built to perform: Insights from Chime Chief Growth and Marketing Officer, Vineet Mehra

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

**Guests:** Vineet Mehra, Chief Growth and Marketing Officer, Chime

**Alan Hart:** On today's show, I've got Vineet Mehra. He's the chief marketing officer at Chime. We talk about how he got his start in his career in CPG, how that led to other jobs in retail, technology, and back in the financial services technology space with Chime. We talk about Chime becoming the number one bank brand by Time Magazine. How JD Powers has also recently recognized them as the number one brand that people are switching to within the bank space. We talk about how he's approaching marketing, how they're punching above their weight, the types of things that they think about, how attention and the attention economy plays into the type of content that they're building. We talk a lot about AI and how they're approaching it and how they're actually driving meaningful and real results across a whole host of jobs to be done inside the company and how that impacts talent.

That and much more with Vineet Mehra.

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**Alan Hart (voice-over):** Are you ready to go beyond the basics of marketing? I'm Alan Hart and this is Marketing Beyond, where I chat with the world's leading chief marketing officers and business innovators to share ideas that spark change and inspire you to challenge the status quo. Join us as we explore the future of marketing and its endless potential.

**Alan Hart:** Well, Vineet, welcome to the show.

**Vineet Mehra:** Thanks for having me, Alan. We've been wanting to do this for a while.

**Alan Hart:** I know. It took a little longer than normal, but we're here! We're going to make the best of it. Before we get into the business side of the conversation and talking about your career, what is this that I hear about you being a professionally trained pizza maker?

**Vineet Mehra:** All right, you did your research! I'm a CMO by day, but I'm actually a pretty simple dude by night. Things that make me happy are things like a really good cup of coffee—like a nice grind, a nice brew—and, of course, pizza. So, at one point in my career, I lived in Switzerland and took some pretty serious pizza-making courses and it was life changing for me. I think, in the end, if you ask me, one day I'm just going to start a pizzeria on a beach and chill out—that would be like be my dream kind of endpoint here in my career.

**Alan Hart:** I love you've already got your second career figured out. [laughs]

**Vineet Mehra:** Or maybe this is my second career, and that's my first career, I'm not sure.

**Alan Hart:** Maybe, maybe. But those are good skills to be able to fall back on. I mean, you can always feed yourself, right? So. [laughs]

**Vineet Mehra:** Yeah, exactly. I love it. I just have this appreciation for anyone who perfects their craft. I think that's what it's all about. Getting into the details, making things great. And really, if you love something, get really focused on it and be great at it.

**Alan Hart:** I love it. When you're not making pizza... How did you get into marketing and you're now the chief marketing officer at Chime. Where'd you get your start, and what was the path along the way for you?

**Vineet Mehra:** Yeah, you know, without going into the whole life story, I'm just a kid who grew up in a small town in Canada, which is a town called Oshawa. It's like a blue-collar, General Motors town. Didn't even know what marketing was. I was born in India. I was a first-generation immigrant. I don't think my parents knew what marketing was. Really never got exposed to Silicon Valley or any of the world that I'm in now. But as life goes on, know, luck plays a big role, and you have mentors that sort of enter your life, and if you're willing to listen and be open-minded, interesting things happen in your life. So, I happened to have a grade 11 school teacher. Funnily enough, my little high school had a marketing class, which is really weird for a small town school like I went to. And he was actually an ex-P&G guy, my teacher.

After the course, he thought I had something in me. I really seemed to enjoy the content. And he essentially told me all about this company called P&G. I started reading books and learning more about it. And long story short, I picked my university based on the school that P&G most recruits from, this small school in Canada called Wilfrid Laurier, and I happened to find my way into P&G as an intern, and the rest is history. I started at P&G. They moved me all around the world, and that began the first chapter of my career, which was a CPG chapter. I think back in the late '90s—now I'm dating myself—when you started your career, that was where you went. That was the school of marketing. And I'm really thankful for that start.

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**Alan Hart:** You've had a couple CMO jobs along the way, as well—in various industries, like retail now, fintech financial services, and banking. Any takeaways from switching industries across the spectrum?

**Vineet Mehra:** Well, you know, I tend to look at careers in chapters, and I tend to chase experiences. There's nothing wrong with folks who want to get really deep in one industry and do that really well. What gets me going is a constant state of curiosity and learning. So, you know, my first chapter was really a CPG career. I was in CPG up until about maybe 12, 13 years ago. I think I was like a president at the age of 29 or 30 at J&J Consumer, which is now Kenvue, and I ran worldwide marketing there. I had a \$4 billion budget I was managing at around 30 years old, and I started to realize the world was changing. And that's when I moved to Silicon Valley and had my first sort of private equity-backed job, my first exit. I learned the power of how this world was sort of totally transforming, and chasing the change was something that I was really fascinated by.

So, the chapters were CPG, then onto Silicon Valley. We brought consumer genetics and genomics into the world. I don't know if you remember that whole big push around consumer DNA—created a movement around that, which I thought was fascinating. And yeah, from there, moved to Walgreens Boots for just over three years, and it was my first experience in retail, but I also thought that—I didn't know COVID would be hitting us. So I ended up running that business during COVID—going to the office every day, even in the scariest days, as our pharmacists in the UK and the US were out supporting their communities. And then back to the Valley here at Chime. So, it's been a really fun set of chapters, but I've always wanted to chase the learning, the disruption, try something really hard and go for it. And that's really how I've kind of built my career.

**Alan Hart:** Awesome. Chime was recently named No. 1 banking brand by *Time Magazine*. So you are disrupting a legacy industry. How has Chime been so successful in that?

**Vineet Mehra:** Yeah, well, actually what's interesting, No. 1 banking brand and actually a couple of weeks ago, JD Power released data that more people are switching their bank account to Chime than any bank in America. So we're actually No. 1 on that front as well, and we're really proud of that. To know Chime, maybe it's worth going back just into why we were created and where Chime came from.

So, let's start by sharing what Chime is and who we serve. So at its very core, we're not a bank. Chime is a financial technology company that's focused on delivering easy-to-use products that meet the needs of everyday Americans. Two hundred million people in America live paycheck to paycheck, which doesn't mean you're unbanked or that you're poor. It means you're making probably \$70,000, \$80,000, \$90,000, \$100,000, and as we know, that can be paycheck to paycheck in a lot of America nowadays. And the truth is that most banks are not built to serve these 200 million people, the vast majority of Americans. Most banks are built to serve customers with large deposits and high credit scores—so, basically those that they can lend to profitably and make money off that net interest margin. But the truth is three-fourths of Americans are in our sort of demographic, making up to \$100,000 a year, and most of those people don't carry large account balances. So what happens is people like you and I, and many of your listeners, I'm sure, get their free rewards cards and pay no minimum balance fees on their accounts, while the vast majority of Americans, if they can't keep a minimum balance, they're paying a fee. If they have a tough week because their air conditioner broke, they're paying overdraft fees, right? If they need their credit card to just cover something and they can't quite get that payment through, they're paying interest.

So what we did at Chime is we built a fee-free model. We do fee-free banking. There's no minimum balance requirements. Then we moved into fee-free overdraft, and we really transformed the industry on that. We've taken out tens of billions of dollars in overdraft fees over the years. We then launched something called Credit Builder, which essentially builds your credit like a credit card, but with zero risk of getting into trouble with credit. I don't know if you know this, but the vast majority of Americans still pay with a debit card, not a credit card, because of the

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fear they have of these debit cards. And then we continued to launch innovations. We launched MyPay a couple of years ago, which was essentially a way to get your paycheck when you want—like, you did the work. Why wait two to four weeks for your pay? If you need the money, just pull it for free from Chime, and we'll pay you two days early or you can use MyPay and get paid when you say. So we are innovating on core elements—liquidity, credit building, and also fee-free banking for everyday Americans—and it's resonated amazingly well. It's a product that's clearly been a need. Over the last four years, we've built a brand that is loved, has very high awareness, and is now the No. 1 place for everyday Americans to switch their bank accounts.

**Alan Hart:** All of those product features in the core fundamentals, they're moving the industry because many of the people in the industry are now adopting those types of features into their core banking platforms themselves. You're also, in my opinion, the marketing that you guys are doing is really punching above your weight in terms of like what I'm assuming you spend versus what maybe the competition is spending. So how do you think about layering on top of a great product marketing? And what does marketing need to accomplish at that point in time?

**Vineet Mehra:** Yeah, well, you said it. First and foremost, it starts with a great product, right? The days of putting sort of "lipstick on a pig" are over in marketing. I think we've all—many of your listeners, I have too—worked on brands and products where the marketing can add sort of the "vibe" to the product, but the product may not be quite as differentiated or as superior as one may like.

So yeah, Chime has been about we built this brand essentially through social media. That was the beginnings of us telling our story. We started to use social media to talk to everyday Americans, the mainstream of America, in ways that they could really understand and relate to financial concepts. And so, we started to talk to America in memes. We talked to America in episodic programming franchises and social, like "Mama, I Made It," which is stories of moms and their celebrity kids talking about how they started to get their financial footing in order after they found some success.

We have episodic series like "Ball on a Budget," which is sort of like you take NBA tunnel fit and you essentially show everyday Americans how they can get that look, but on a budget, you know? So we started to just work social media to tell our story. We worked in these deep subcultures like fashion or sports or gaming, and we started to tell stories of how to make financial progress, how to get more literate on your financial goals and the outcomes you're looking for, and that really started to resonate. We have a bigger social following than the three big banks combined, and they've been around a hundred years, which is pretty amazing. And that really started to get us the traction.

We track things like brand love, where we're loved just like a Liquid Death or a Reddit. We're a bank brand that's right in that cultural zeitgeist, and that's really how we cut through. That's how we made our first mark. Social media is where a lot of our brand storytelling happens, and then, of course, we have direct response and other elements of our engine that we have honed and are very, very good at. But ultimately, social media is where we've told our story and related to everyday Americans and cut through in a channel that the traditional [banks] and the incumbents were not able to really take advantage of.

**Alan Hart:** The things you're talking about, too, they're "edutainment." Their branded entertainment. They're not necessarily ads; they're something else. How are you thinking about the content that you're creating? I'm just curious about your approach to it. What do you hope that it's trying to achieve? Because it's working, obviously, but I'm curious what the objective is.

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**Vineet Mehra:** I think advertising and direct response and all those things play a role, right? It's not that TV ads are going to go away, but they play a very specific role. But the honest truth is, is that everyday Americans, most people in America are not sitting there waiting for that 30-second ad break, you know? It's not something that cuts through. Now, if you put enough impressions behind it and can be super clear with your messaging, it can create an understanding of the functional and emotional benefits of your product. But ultimately the way to cut through and the ultimate currency today is attention, right? To get that attention, it's entertainment-based. And I like to think of brand-building and brand managers, or anyone who's owning the storytelling of a brand: You're essentially like the owner of a streaming platform. You're essentially an editor of a magazine. Think of it that way. And your job is to constantly put hits out in the world, entertainment out in the world. And so we created—about three, four years ago—something called In the Green Studios, which is a Chime-branded entertainment studio area. And we create episodic series, and these series have really captured the attention of America. They're a big part of what our social feeds are.

We're also working more and more with Hollywood and film studios on kind of creating entertainment content around financial services and financial progress that everyday Americans want to consume. Modern marketing really is this sort of mosaic of many different capabilities that you need to have in an organization and branded entertainment and this appointment-based viewing. And if brands can get into that habit, it's absolutely a huge part of how any brand needs to tell their story nowadays. Advertising alone is just not going to do it.

**Alan Hart:** I know I've heard you talk about your unique way you think about this isn't just storytelling; it's storytelling that performs. I think you call it something like performance storytelling when you mash up the brand and the performance itself.

On the outside, if you think about performance storytelling, what advice would you give other CMOs that are thinking about trying to do something in the direction you're talking about but obviously they're going to face that resistance of "it sounds like it's just brand."

**Vineet Mehra:** Well, let's get into the genesis of performance storytelling and where that came from. And the whole theory of that was if you go back 10, 15 years into the evolution of modern marketing—and we're going through another platform shift now that I'm sure we'll get to in a second with AI—but CPG essentially built the whole practice of brand management and brand marketing, and essentially, it was very hard to break into consumer brand territory for a long time because you had these up-front media costs that were barriers to entry. You had retail distribution that was a barrier to entry for many small brands. And essentially you would have this up-front "set it and forget it" sort of media model that was building brands.

Then about 10, 12, 13 years ago, which is when I just stopped CPG and moved to Silicon Valley, you had the rise of performance marketing. And I hate that term because I think all marketing performs, and I call it "direct response"—and I'll probably call it that from now on in this conversation. But you had this rise of direct response marketing, which is essentially pay-per-click marketing that companies like Meta (then Facebook) and Google invented, which is, you only pay for the advertising if you get the click or a reaction from the ads.

Which then gave rise to direct-to-consumer brands because you essentially took out the up-front barriers to entry on media and essentially created a pay-per-click model where little startup brands could start going into the media world, getting a ton of impressions, but only paying when there was an outcome that they wanted. Well, that also gave rise to the venture capital world and the venture capital world operates in series A, B, C, D, E, F. You can go all the way to the end of the alphabet these days as companies stay private longer. And essentially what happened was that these VCs came in and started funding these direct-to-consumer brands, and you could literally spend money

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and get customer acquisition costs—like direct CAC-based outcomes—that then led you to your next fundraiser and your next fundraiser.

So essentially, in this sort of transformation iteration marketing, you had the rise of direct response. So, what happened was there was a West Coast–East Coast thing going on in marketing where you had West Coast marketers, which were like sort of direct response, and you had East Coast marketers, or CPG marketers, which were much more like brand-building. And if you tried to cross that, if you brought up brand-building in most tech companies in the Valley 12, 13, 14 years ago, especially kind of privately backed tech companies? I mean, it was like you'd be thrown out of the room. And on the flip side, the CPG brands had a really hard time with direct response because they didn't have a direct relationship with the consumer. They were gated by retailers. And so then that gave rise to retail media and all these media networks where consumers can kind of operate like direct response marketers. The direct response marketing gave rise to the Adobes and the Salesforces of the world because once you acquire them, you want to have CRM and lifetime value to make that payback work, right? This is a brief history of marketing that we're going through right now! [laughs]

**Alan Hart:** Yeah, no, I love it!

**Vineet Mehra:** But you had that happen. So I started to realize, man, the big advertisers know something that these direct-to-consumer marketers don't, which is that brand-building and building future customers is really important.

But at the same time, the DR advertisers understand that there's a lot of intent in the market right now that you can sweep up with direct response marketing. The problem with these smaller advertisers was—I call it the "CAC value of death."

The industry is littered with direct-to-consumer companies that did great on the direct response side and were capturing intent, but if they weren't building brand storytelling and future interests, eventually, the number of people you can bid on that have current intent starts to go down and those costs start to go up. And essentially, your CAC gets to an unsustainable place, you start pulling down marketing, and these companies stall out. I can talk to you about 15, 20 direct-to-consumer brands that had a really hot moment and then died—because they weren't building future intent. So my vision was with performance storytelling was bring the best of East and West together.

The most modern CMOs and the most modern marketing organizations now understand that you need to build brand, differentiate, tell your story. None of that has changed. You need to build future intent and future customers. And then you need a really powerful direct response engine to then capture that intent and pull it in as efficiently as humanly possible. And then, the really good marketers and organizations know that once you capture them, you want to increase the lifetime value of that customer, which was the rise of recurring revenue and SaaS businesses—subscription businesses—so that you can justify the payback of that up-front acquisition cost.

So performance storytelling sort of blends brand-building with direct response, with building lifetime value of a customer—puts that all together and kind of creates an organization around a strategy that recognizes performance marketing and brand, or brand and direct response, belong together. And that's what I call a performance storytelling approach to marketing.

**Alan Hart:** Makes perfect sense. You've got to have both. You've got to have both. That's the story of performance storytelling too. I know you mentioned AI a little bit ago. You almost can't have a conversation anymore with a marketing leader and not talk about AI. But the thing that stands out to me, in terms of what you're doing at Chime, is that it feels like you're one of the actual companies that's driving real systemic change inside the organization. I'd love to unpack how you started that AI journey and where you guys are today.

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**Vineet Mehra:** Yeah, well, look, for 40, 50 years, marketing was done the same way. Then you had the rise of direct response, and then you had the rise of the CRM and the LCM, life cycle companies, right? All the market-cap growth of companies like Amazon and their media network, which is a huge part of the market-cap growth; Salesforce, Meta, Google. Guess who the buyer was? The buyers were CMOs, and CMOs became the folks, the team, the C-suite leaders that leaned into this technology shift more than anyone else in the C-suite.

It's actually a pretty amazing thing, from enterprise CIO-driven valuations in old companies like Oracle—you know, you remember all these companies, all the Oracles now making a comeback—with companies like the next evolution of stock market and valuation growth came from CMOs. And I think something very similar is going to happen with AI. I think AI is going to make that old shift feel like nothing compared to what we're about to see, in my personal opinion.

The key with AI is not to get lost by the shiny objects and the tooling and all of that. The answer is not, hey, I need to try out a tool. Nothing has really changed in that core modern marketing functions have certain jobs to be done internally, whether that's creating content to feed that attention economy that's out there that is so content hungry. Whether it's driving conversion on your website when people are coming and you need to drive that purchase conversion. It can be all the way through to personalization and the actual experience of your app, and it can be all the way to customer service. So the key is to map AI to the biggest jobs to be done for your marketing. And that's really how we looked at it.

So we didn't start with the tools. We actually started with, well, what are the horizontal solution sets that we want to come up with to help all the work we need to do get done faster, cheaper, and better, not just equivalent? So we started to map tools into these use cases, and it's been a huge evolution for us. On the customer service side, we have, you know, obviously being a bank, we're dealing with people's money. A lot of people are calling us to ask, hey, did my paycheck come in? It was supposed to come two days early, did it come in? Or a fraudulent transaction or something like that.

We now have 70%—all of our customer service calls and chats are coming in through an AI agent now. So we literally have AI agents handling 70% of our calls. We've reduced costs by 60% and increased NPS scores. So an example of cheaper and better at the same time, really reinventing a workflow that we used to have.

On the creative side, we no longer have a creative agency on retainer. We actually eliminated that about 12 months ago, and our in-house team is now getting staffed up and is getting filled with tools that are unbelievable. The storyboards these teams are showing me for advertising. The AI-generated soundtracks from companies like ElevenLabs. You know, my head of creative who is doing some great work right now is geeking out on these tools, and we're about to launch our first fully AI-enabled piece of classic 30-second advertising, probably in the first quarter of next year. It has been an unbelievable transformation going from creative agencies to an in-house agency that pretty much, in six months, has the same capabilities without adding all the headcount that the creative agency has had.

We can keep geeking out even further onto the e-commerce side, like conversion funnels. The biggest barrier to running experiments for growth teams was A/B testing because you can only run so much traffic through experiments. So things like reinforcement learning, which is an AI concept where the machine is learning at the micro level on every conversion event and optimizing based on what they know about the person, is changing conversion funnel-based experimentation. And it's even now getting all the way to things like consumer research. I'm sure starting to hear about the rise of synthetic panels, synthetic consumer research, where the AI is actually

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trained on decades of consumer research that any brand has done: quantitative studies, qualitative studies, segmentation studies, usage and attitude studies. And it essentially responds like your consumer.

You're chatting with a synthetic version of your consumer with tools like Simile, etc. We're breaking down all the jobs that we have and we're applying AI applications to these. And the key is it's hard to pick a winner. The industry is moving so fast that you have to allow people to take lots of shots on goals with the different tools. Because just when you think a tool is great, two weeks later, a new tool comes out and you're like, that's even better. So you have to allow your teams to first not get attracted by the shiny object or the name of the tool, but by the jobs; map what you think are the best application layers of this AI against those jobs; shoot lots of shots on goals with tools; be very open-minded about what's going on out there; and lastly, don't settle on one tool. Try to create some internal, some competition, between vendors for each of those jobs. I want two or three of the vendors in at the same time, because then you get influence on their product roadmaps, the product's getting better constantly, and you don't get stuck with just one company's product roadmap in a world that is still in its very first innings of innovation and applications.

So, there's a lot of a playbook here, but we are just taking lots of shots and goals, we've mapped the jobs to be done, and we're creating a tremendous amount of AI literacy internally through training and hands-on application with our marketers.

### **Alan Hart:**

You just mentioned it there at the end—the training that you're doing with talent. How are you preparing, and how does this impact the talent, both who you choose to work and bring into Chime internally, but also who you're working with externally? How do you think about balancing the talent impact and unleashing, if you will, the talent?

**Vineet Mehra:** Well, as you know, any good leader will tell you that 80% of development of anyone happens with on-the-job sort of work. And so the No. 1 thing we need to do is to get these tools into the hands of marketers and get them really trying the applications in a way that really changes their jobs. And it starts from the top. It comes from me and my leadership team in every meeting, "hey, what tool did he use to get that done?" And constantly asking that question to ensure that we're not just doing things the old way because of comfort, but that we're comfortably uncomfortable with some of the new tools that we want to do. And so it starts by just allowing the tools to get into the hands of the teams. That's how folks are really going to not just learn, but also become evangelizers of this platform shift. And that's ultimately what you need. You want your own team and your talent to become the evangelists of this platform shift. Because, as you know, from the top, we can set the tone, we can ask the right questions, but no one wants to do something just because their boss said to do that, right? So, secondarily, then, it's also—and at much less than the 80%, I think—is application.

Underneath that, though, is tools like Reforge, or these online learning sessions where you can literally go on and self-directed learning can take over. There are plenty of platforms that are offering some of the best courses in the world. They're very cheap to implement inside companies, and it's self-directed learning. So you're really curious folks can go in and do it anytime they want.

So we've given our marketing team open access to two or three of these platforms. And then lastly, it's inspiration. We're bringing in founders of AI companies regularly to do lunch-and-learns and talk to people about where the world's headed so that it doesn't feel scary but more optimistic from the minds of founders. So it's a very intentional

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plan we have. We have a whole AI sort of transformational task force and strategic plan. But importantly, it doesn't start with the AI; it starts with the jobs, and then the application and those layers all get built underneath that framework.

**Alan Hart:** Well, you're driving a lot of success at Chime. We talked about how you're doing all these change initiatives, transformations—AI being the latest thing to enter the fray. If I step back from this a little bit, I know you've also had board experience (public, private, etc.). How do we get more marketing experience on boards, and what should they be thinking about marketing experience on the board and its contribution to the conversations that happen in the boardroom?

**Vineet Mehra:** Well, look, I think to some degree, our industry has done it to ourselves that we were excluded from the boardroom for so many years. All these articles that you get reading about CMO tenure and the death of brand-building or the rise of performance marketing, we tend to bifurcate ourselves in our own industry. When an industry does not stand together and united, it becomes very hard to be in the center stage, and sometimes we become like victims, you know? And so, I think it's really important, first and foremost, to transform the narrative of the role of a CMO, of a marketer, in any company. I think that's going to come as marketers embrace true full-stack marketing. This idea of performance storytelling, getting very tech literate, getting commercially literate. I always say the No. 1 job of a CMO is to allocate capital for efficient growth. That is a CMO's job. And the more you talk the language of business and commercial outcomes, and the less we bifurcate ourselves between things like brand and performance, the more I think our industry will stand strong.

But look, I think it's changing. You're seeing more and more of my colleagues. I have lots of good friends that are CMOs that are on boards now. And I think what's happening is I think boards are starting to realize that not only does a CMO bring this customer obsession into the boardroom, but more and more CMOs, like I said, in the 2000s technology platform shift—the late 2000s, 2010s platform shift—CMOs actually led that technology investment and platform shift. I think AI is going to be very similar.

I think more and more boardrooms are starting to realize that the CMOs are becoming the change agents in a lot of their companies. In many ways, CMOs are holding a huge bag of capital in many companies that needs to be deployed in more efficient ways. And the more boards have CMO representation on them, the more that capital gets guided by a board member's oversight and kind of strong hand, the more CMOs go on boards, the more customer focus gets on those boards. And more and more, CMOs are stepping into lots of the subcommittees. You know, I myself am on an audit committee. I'm on a compensation committee. More and more, I think CMOs are being seen as broader business leaders as well.

I think we're in the first innings of this, but I've never seen momentum like I've seen in the last couple of years, and I think marketing is finally taking its narrative back. You know, I always used to say marketing needs a marketing campaign, which is sort of ironic. And I think CMOs and the industry, thanks to podcasts like this and so many other publications, we're finally taking our narrative back and getting that place in the boardroom and the C-suite that we've always wanted. But it's on us to talk the language of CFO, be commercial, and talk about capital allocation as efficiently as possible.

**Alan Hart:** I really appreciate—I do think we're starting to take the narrative back, and I think that's going to fuel this "first innings" and hopefully gets us to a place where it's a little bit better balanced at the board level.

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Well, I want to switch gears. We'd love to get to know you a little bit better. We know you like to make a pizza here or there. But my favorite question to ask everybody that comes on the show is, has there been an experience of your past that defines or makes up who you are today?

**Vineet Mehra:** Yeah, for me, it's got to be this first-generation immigrant experience that I grew up with. I was born in India but raised in this, like I said, blue-collar town in Canada. I always had to live with this dual identity. You're at home trying to be that good, Indian, first-generation son, whose parents—when my parents left India, a lot of that generation, India sort of froze in time. So that's still—and even though India's moved forward a lot—it's sort of frozen in time. So, in some ways, you go home and you're trying to fit into that ideal, but then you head out into the world, especially not a lot of people look like me in this blue-collar town. Then you're trying to fit into that world.

I think what that drove in me was this sort of notion of just curiosity and introspection and reflection. I'm always thinking about who's around me, who are my stakeholders, what am I trying to fit into here versus there? It's something that I think has had a deep, deep impact on me if I go into my past. And I'm very thankful for it. Obviously it came with challenges, but I think those challenges are what sort of set you up for the future. And it's one thing I think a lot about with my son. It's like, oh man, am I giving him enough? Is he in a little bubble? Is he in too much of a bubble? Or is he actually getting experiences that teach him grit, resilience, and managing adversity to the same degree that I did? But that's really shaped me and really allowed me to become who I am today.

**Alan Hart:** What advice would you give younger Vineet if you were starting this journey all over again?

**Vineet Mehra:** It's advice that I learned probably late in my career, just trying to make it, really hustling. And I think sometimes I forgot this thought that I now say to everyone, which is, "bloom where you're planted." It's this idea of although you'll get to know me and I'm super curious and I'm chasing experiences, what people don't realize is that those opportunities—and a lot of that is luck by the way! Anyone who says that it's not half-luck is probably not being real with you. But to really take advantage of luck and really chase these experiences, you first have to absolutely dominate or kill what you're doing today, right? So my younger self, I would say, if I was in that first-year analytical job that I thought was sort of, I don't know, I should already be the CMO of the company or something because...young hotshot kid? I would have said to myself, hey, just bloom where you're planted. First kill this, and all the other opportunities will come your way. Do the next thing. All the other opportunities will come your way.

I think being younger and ambitious, sometimes impatience gets in the way. But bloom where you're planted, deliver the results, and I promise you the opportunities will come your way. Those opportunities for lucky sort of encounters will grow, and you'll be ready to jump into those experiences when you're ready. I think I did the "say yes to new things" really well. I think I thought of my career as a chess game versus checkers. I thought I did that pretty well, but I could have been more patient along the way, and "bloom where you're planted," I think, would be the biggest advice I'd give myself.

**Alan Hart:** What are you trying to learn more about yourself right now?

**Vineet Mehra:** I'm obsessed with this platform shift. I mean, I know it's cheesy, but I am right from the top, playing with tools, digging into everything. I am like a kid in a candy store with the tools that we have. You know, I really believe we are in a new golden age of marketing. I think this will become, when the history books are written, the golden age of marketing. I mean, anyone with an idea can now create content.

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I couldn't draw if my life depended on it, but I can definitely use these tools and create unbelievable content. Anyone with an idea can use tools like Lovable and create an app and put it on the app store in a matter of weeks, if not days. And most importantly, today is the worst AI is ever going to be. Right now—today. It's only going to get better. So it is almost like an obsession for me right now. I'm deep into it. I am super curious. And I think this is going to be the most important shift for our industry that we've ever seen, and it's never been a better time, I think, to be a marketer.

**Alan Hart:** You may not have any more time to be curious about any other things, but I was curious if there's any trends or subcultures out there that you follow or you're taking notice of as well?

**Vineet Mehra:** Yeah, I think there are some real—you're marketing to mainstream America, right? Which is 200 million people. I'm really fascinated by how mainstream America is consuming content now. I think that is such an interesting trend. Your algorithm is not my algorithm. These algos are getting more and more hyper-personalized. And that makes brand-building really hard because there's no more monocultures. Everything is these super subcultures, and subcultures of subcultures. And I think a major trend is how much time consumers are spending on these platforms. That's not necessarily new, but just how specific these algorithms have gotten is truly unbelievable, and it's fascinating.

One day when you have time, go through some of your friends' feeds and you'll feel like you're on a different planet. It is an unbelievable place where content and branded entertainment and this whole world is heading to. And I think it's going to be multi-device, it's going to be multi-platform, and it's going to move to a super personalized kind of content feed for all of us across all platforms. And it's a really interesting trend that's going on, that I think has major implications for how we go to market and just how we consume content personally.

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

**Vineet Mehra:** You probably expect this, but the largest threat is ourselves. It's all here. It's all here for the taking, right? We can do things with our phones and with our tools that just 18 short months ago were not even possible. The biggest threat is that we stay stuck, that we try to protect the status quo, that we don't get comfortable with discomfort. And I think we have this moment right now to take back the narrative in a major way in the boardroom, in the executive suite, and really be at the forefront of this.

The biggest threat I see is that we hold onto old habits, try to protect institutions, and have the ultimate innovators' dilemma in our industry, and we can't let that happen.

**Alan Hart:** Well, Vineet, a conversation with you never disappoints. So thank you for coming on the show, sharing your wisdom, sharing what's working for you guys. I'm sure this will be one of those most listened to episodes going forward. So thank you for coming on.

**Vineet Mehra:** Really appreciate it, Alan. And thanks for everything you do for our industry. I really mean it. You're doing a lot to move us forward. So thanks for the time.

**Alan Hart:** Thank you.

**Alan Hart (voice-over):** 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

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