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How Adobe is embracing the future of creative work

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

Guests: Stacy Martinet, Chief Content & Creative Officer, Adobe.

Alan Hart: Today on the show is Stacy Martinet. She's Adobe's chief content and creative officer. Before joining Adobe, Stacy was the CMO of Mashable. Prior to Mashable, she spent nearly a decade at *The New York Times* during the company's transition to digital, including the transformation of its journalism approach and introduction of digital subscription model.

On the show today, we talk about the work that she's doing at Adobe and how agentic is agentifying their workflow and making life a little easier, especially around creative briefs.

That and much more with Stacy Martinet.

Alan Hart: 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.

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Alan Hart: Well, Stacy, welcome to the show.

Stacy Martinet: Thank you, Alan. I'm so happy to be here.

Alan Hart: I know it's so nice to be here. And we're on the Adobe Summit floor doing this interview. So it's nice to be here. Nice to be in your house, I guess.

Stacy Martinet: Thank you for being here. It's a pretty big house this year.

Alan Hart: It is!

Stacy Martinet: It is exciting.

Alan Hart: It's a full house. Well, before we get started talking about business, I hear you find inspiration—or oftentimes find inspiration—outside of work and bring it into work. Tell me a little bit about that.

Stacy Martinet: I just love going out in the world and talking to people. And simple interactions and asking them what they're excited about or what's driving their passions or creativity. So, yesterday my taxi cab driver from the airport found out I worked at Adobe, and he started telling me about how he started using Photoshop 30 years ago, and he just designed his 50-year high school reunion logo.

I asked, well, what'd you do, and how'd you do it? And he told me, well, I actually used Photoshop and it was just such a lovely conversation that gave me a lot of ideas to bring back to my team.

Also just spending time around my kids. I have young kids and their friends and what they're doing, what they're sharing. They like to give creative opinions and that brings me joy and gets my juices going.

Alan Hart: Well, you are the chief creative and content officer at Adobe.

Where'd you get your start in your career? How'd you end up at Adobe?

Stacy Martinet: I studied journalism, halfway through, I was having a hard time picking a beat. Back then, you needed to pick a beat. You were a *beat* reporter, right? You covered law or you covered politics. You covered business. And I was so curious about everything. And I had this incredible communications professor who encouraged me to go deeper on communications, marketing, public relations. So I did. I started looking around for internships. I was faxing my résumé, while also emailing it—to give you a sense of time and space—to any communications job in every city in the country. I just, I wanted to go to a big city and I ended up getting an internship at The New York Times Company in the corporate communications department, which was this perfect blend of communications for journalism, which is a really interesting place to be. Working alongside and working for and with journalists. Certainly made my writing better. They're also a very interesting employee base to have to be able to communicate to and update and have quarterly meetings and town halls.

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Alan Hart: So there's a lot of questions. [laughs]

Stacy Martinet: There's a lot of questions, a lot of questions. So it was an incredible time, too, because it was just the beginning of what now we call the digital transformation. It was the early signs of what would become the digital business for the company. At the time, I remember the website and the paper were different. They were different business units. They were in different buildings. And so I was there during the time of integrating that.

I was also there during the advent of social media, so I was one of the early employees who raised their hand and said, let's play around with this. And I became part of the company's social media committee. In that work and working with the digital team, I got a real passion for people who build digital products, people who design them, product managers. I got to do a lot of communications launches, like the first iPhone app. Early in APIs. So I got this taste for building, and from there, I got to know folks who were at Mashable.

And the founder and CEO of that, Pete Cashmore, wanted to build it into a media company from his blog. So I joined as employee number 30 and I scaled that up, became chief marketing officer. We grew the brand, we grew verticals, we drew traffic. We took a few rounds of funding. And really proud of all the work we did, especially around social good and helping people use the technology to drive their passion or their nonprofits forward.

But I realized I really wanted to, in my next gig, I wanted to try outside of media, go to a brand. I worked very adjacent to technology when you're in media, but I really wanted to go somewhere that I could believe in the mission and get behind, and I also wanted to go deep on operations.

And around that time, the prior CMO of Adobe recruited me to lead strategy and operations and be chief of staff at Adobe, which I did. It was a great job because I was there for the people, process, technology of the last digital transformation and setting up the MarTech stack and digital marketing.

And it's a great way to learn about all the products, different lines of business, talent, the regions. But I did miss making things, and so then I took a role as chief communications officer for several years, where I led communications during the building of the digital marketing category, which became customer experience management, which is now customer orchestration.

Alan Hart: What is the scope of the role that you have now?

Stacy Martinet: Yeah, so it's leading our global creative and how that comes to life. It is our content, it is our brand partnerships, and our sports marketing. I see the opportunity as twofold. One is building a creative system using AI. And two is defining what it means to have creative, have taste, and stand out in this next chapter of marketing and creativity.

Alan Hart: Right. Well, I hear creators are becoming a bigger part of what you guys are focused on, how you're going to build your content. What does that look like?

Stacy Martinet: We've worked with creators for a while now, and partly that's because they're our customers. And we have a role in making sure our customers are successful not just using our products, but finding ways to grow

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their livelihood. And so bringing creators in to co-create and, in some cases, make our marketing materials was a natural thing for us to do. We've really accelerated that over the last few years—to bring them in to early product launches, to bring them in behind the scenes, to help us make the products better, to give real-time customer feedback. And so that's continuing to grow. But creators are also, I mean, they're a big focus of the audiences we serve, and they're increasingly turning into media companies in their own right. So, we want to be there to support them with the products, but also we want to be there to market and create alongside them.

Alan Hart: And to your point, the creator economy has changed so much recently. How are you thinking about the relationships that you have to have with them and how does Adobe play a role, both with them but also in the ecosystem?

Stacy Martinet: Yes. First is all about letting them do what they do.

Alan Hart: Yeah.

Stacy Martinet: Right? I think that's the hardest part for—

Alan Hart: For a brand—

Stacy Martinet: For brands is understanding this isn't a scripted—this isn't, you know, a campaign you really, really have full say on the end to end.

But, because of that, there is so much creativity that happens, and they're able to drive a different kind of connection with their audience and your brand than you could ever do on your own.

Alan Hart: Right.

Stacy Martinet: Which is a real power. We work with them on all sorts of projects, whether that's a product launch and we want to give them early access and they share their experience or what the workflow's unlocking. We have a new Firefly brand campaign that spotlights for creators who use AI in different aspects in their workflows. And it's all about their idea, what it unlocks for them, it's their workflow, and the end product is them. So that was a way to put them at the center of this campaign that is a product that's made for creators. And it was interesting doing that because they're not actors or actresses.

Alan Hart: Right.

Stacy Martinet: Right! [laughs]

Alan Hart: People and brands of their own.

Stacy Martinet: Yeah! People with brands of their own. And so you have to have a real direct but collaborative conversation on what matters to you and what matters to them, and can you meet in the middle to get that done,

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which we have. So I'm really excited about that work and just powering the creator economy, right? Whether it is having them and sponsoring them, or showing up at the events where they are, or getting their feedback to make the products better so that they can work faster and smarter, is really important to what we do at Adobe.

Alan Hart: I'm piecing it together, but if I think about your background, it didn't dawn on me until you were talking about you working with the creator community, but... you've been doing this since *Times*, right? Like, you working with byliners.

Stacy Martinet: Yes.

Alan Hart: Right?

Stacy Martinet: They were—

Alan Hart: They were the original, the OG creators.

Stacy Martinet: That's right. They're the OG—the OG journalists, the OG creator. I mean, we had, you know, visual journalists, we had multimedia journalists, then we had bloggers.

Right.

Stacy Martinet: Now we have creators. And so, once publishing was more democratized, there was the opportunity to have more voices. And now it's happening more and more, not just in the written word, but first in visual and now in video mediums. So we can only expect that to grow, which is exciting. I think what I've learned in my time is the power of video as a medium. Everyone finds power in motion and inspiration, but also visuals are more of a global language.

And now with subcaption technology, it's incredible. And so, that can transcend more than perhaps the written word would. So I think there's a real power in that for how we think about culture and how we think about globalization.

Alan Hart: Well, you're at one of the most innovative companies in the world—by Fortune's naming you in their listings.

Stacy Martinet: Yeah.

Alan Hart: We're at the beginning of the agentic AI era. How are you thinking about what that means in terms of how you think about creativity and the teams that you lead? What's shifting for you?

Stacy Martinet: Well, thanks for mentioning the Fortune honor. You know, it's something that we, and I, take very seriously. It's not a given. And this technology's moving so fast that you really have—we have people working hard, all of us, to continue to innovate, and it's not slowing down. So the last two years were about Generative AI, and

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then it was about chatbots and now it's about agents. What's an agent? It's pretty incredible how fast that's happened, even in just the year. When we were here at Summit, we started talking about what could be possible, and now we are shipping different agents that our customers can leverage.

Alan Hart: Yeah.

Stacy Martinet: I've been playing around with a lot of different tools that we have, and certainly there are areas where agentic can make things faster, more streamlined, and I would say connect what right now are disconnected workflows or workflows that just take a lot of grind to get connected or get going or close out on. And I think that's very powerful from a productivity and a creative aspect.

It can distill a lot of information quickly. So when you think about a creative team, so much time is spent on the brief. Because if you don't have a clear brief. Then evaluating the work, approving the work, is very subjective. And everyone fancies themselves to have taste, right? [laughs]

Alan Hart: Yes.

Stacy Martinet: So getting that brief right is really fast, but that takes a lot of time, a lot of time. You need the right business insights. You need the right customer insights. You need to be written in a certain way. So one thing we're demoing here is the ability to have this agentic process where it can make the brief tight. So something that we did, which would've taken three weeks with a lot of back and forth, and "could I have this one more document?" and "where does this document live?" took seven minutes.

Alan Hart: Wow.

Stacy Martinet: And it's pretty good.

Alan Hart: Yeah.

Stacy Martinet: So now you have that, and you think, OK, you can have a creative agent go and look at your past assets and decompose them. So the fonts, the colors, the languages. You can take that brief and you can suggest a new hero asset.

Now, this is a creator in the loop. You're going to want changes, you're going to want variation, you're going [to want] a new spin. But you have now that time—more time for concepting and then more time for creative to go into production.

Where a lot of time right now is not as efficient. A lot of time, a lot of money—from the brief to the concept, from the concept to actual production.

And so what that means for creative teams is they're going to change the things they think about, but the craft never goes away, right? We will have new tools. We will have different chisels. But they're going to think a lot about

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creativity at the highest level upstream, and what are the design systems, and how does that feed into then your intelligent framework, and you train on that, right?

They're going to think about the brand guidelines that go down that employees can use tools for to share on their own channels or for their own projects, right?

They're not going to be able to control every single piece of content that's ever made in the building. But they'll be spending time on the concept and how it ties to culture and how do you make this campaign that's impactful, which is different. So you'll see the role of the creative director of evolve. And you'll see people who are hands on keyboard making a lot more stuff. But you're still going to have animators, motion graphic specialists, designers. You will still have these incredibly talented folks. Producers. Filmmakers. Photographers. None of that goes away. Just the processes and the systems around it will work better, and they will be able to think about different things. You won't be able to control everything, but you will be able to focus on the highest-order pieces that will really drive your brand, your marketing, and your business.

Alan Hart: I love what you're describing, and I can't wait to see some of the new stuff that's coming.

Well, one of the things we love to do on the show is get to know you a little bit better.

Stacy Martinet: OK.

Alan Hart: My favorite question to ask everyone that comes on is, has there been an experience of your past that defines or makes up who you are today?

Stacy Martinet: Recently I have been reflecting on my ancestry, and I've gone deep into researching that. And so, I've been thinking a lot about family and how we got here, and my mom started as a secretary at a very, very local phone company and worked her way up to be a director through a series of acquisitions. I've been reflecting on watching her go to work every day, watching her dress for work. And it's just staying with me that what she taught me was you've got to go out there every day and you've got to just put in the work and try and learn something new from it. So I think that's what I've always carried with me. Certainly starting my career at *The New York Times* fed my infinite curiosity, and I found there that there's someone somewhere who was an expert at something who was so willing to talk about it for hours.

And I think right now, not just in technology and AI, like the world seems to be changing and shifting every day. I'm hearkening back to that and trying to just learn from as many people as possible and connect with as many people as possible.

Alan Hart: I love it. Well, if you were starting your journey all over again, what advice would you give young Stacy?

Stacy Martinet: I would say every experience is going to build on the one before it.

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And so in retrospect, you see that, but at the time it can feel like maybe you're not moving fast enough or getting the right opportunity, or maybe you feel like you're done doing this certain type of work. But when you look back at it, every experience big and small, every task, it builds on itself.

Alan Hart: Is there a topic that you're trying to learn more about today?

Stacy Martinet: I am trying to learn about—I talked about ancestry—more about the history of Italian cooking.

Alan Hart: Oh, wow.

Stacy Martinet: Yeah.

Alan Hart: OK.

Stacy Martinet: Yeah. I enjoy cooking, and I'm learning more about my heritage and just the different regions of the country, and it's, I think, like a meditative way to go deep on history and deep on culture and deep on design and things that connect us.

Alan Hart: I love that. And this may be the same answer, but what are you curious about in the world today? Things that catch your eye?

Stacy Martinet: I am very curious about how much we will look back at this period of time, and when it will be the beginning of what's next, for how we learn and how we communicate and how much will actually change. I mean, when you look back on history, some things change and some things don't.

Alan Hart: Yeah.

Stacy Martinet: So I'm curious where we are on that spectrum and...

Alan Hart: And only time will tell.

Stacy Martinet: Only time will tell!

Alan Hart: So we have to kind of like wait till we get there.

Stacy Martinet: We have to keep going! Yeah. We have to keep going.

Alan Hart: Well, as you think about it, what is the largest opportunity or potential threat facing marketers today, in your mind?

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Stacy Martinet: Not keeping up. And we're at this period—and it happened. It happened with dot-com, and then it happened with social and it happened with mobile. And at that point, you could afford to have some early adopters and some people who wait and see. The AI technology builds on all of that. I think it gets all the blame for change, and maybe it's not well deserved. Because you had this explosion of channels, this explosion of content, this democratization of voices with social and mobile and the cloud. But AI is accelerating all of that, and so you have to just start trying things. You have to start having hypotheses and playing them out, because the technology's building on itself. And so you want to build with it as opposed to waiting and being left behind.

Alan Hart: As marketers, we always have more on our plate.

Stacy Martinet: Yes.

Alan Hart: Not less.

Stacy Martinet: It seems to be the case.

Alan Hart: It does, right? And it feels like to make time, we just really have to get better at ruthless prioritization.

Stacy Martinet: Yes, ruthless prioritization.

Alan Hart: To make that space so we can learn these new—

Stacy Martinet: Right. And it is a time of great change, which can be a moment to stop doing certain things.

Alan Hart: That's right.

Stacy Martinet: That's not innate in our nature as marketers, but it is an opening to do so.

But I really think making the time, and if you're a marketing leader, you have to create the culture for doing, trying, making. So people start to personally and viscerally see what's possible with the technology and what's not.

Because that also removes some of the existential dread to it as well.

Alan Hart: All right. Well, Stacy, thank you for coming on the show. I really appreciate it.

Stacy Martinet: Thank you so much for having me, Alan. This was fun.

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