



Marketo presents: **Ask the CMO**

Why Cisco CMO Blair Christie embraces the Internet of Things



It's easy to get overwhelmed by the unprecedented amount of data modern marketers have at their fingertips, but Cisco CMO Blair Christie has managed not only to stay afloat, but to thrive in this new era of marketing.

Before taking on her CMO role in 2011, Christie was senior vice president of global corporate communications and investor relations at Cisco. Armed with data, Christie embraced the Internet of Things as she led Cisco's award-winning "Tomorrow Starts Here" brand campaign. The campaign leveraged innovative digital and social technologies as Cisco created "the Internet of Everything for connected cities."

We talked to Christie about the evolving marketing landscape, some of Cisco's most innovative campaigns and the role of technology in marketing strategy.

What are some of the unique challenges of marketing a B2B company?

One of the unique challenges is understanding who your business decision makers are in a particular business. In the B2B technology world, our buyers and budgets have shifted. For example, the CIO and C-suite are taking on an increasingly leading role in the technology-buying process as opposed to traditional technical buyers. All of these new buyers come to the table with different needs and each of them probably has higher expectations than ever before. B2B marketers need to shift their mindset and truly understand what keeps these new buyers up at night to better execute marketing campaigns and messages that create an emotional connection to the brand.

Q&A with Blair Christie, Senior VP and CMO, Cisco



Describe how marketing is changing and transforming in your industry?

Marketing is definitely shifting to a B2Me approach and the customer journey has changed tremendously. According to the Corporate Executive Board, 57% of the purchase decision is done before a customer ever reaches out to a company. It's now a marketer's responsibility to engage with their customer at every point along the journey, and the majority of that will happen before they even contact a company. With the influence of digital and the data and analytics now available to us, we can target and serve our customers in a way that wasn't previously possible.

Marketers have wanted to get to the holy grail of marketing — 1-to-1 — for the better part of 30 years. Are we there yet?

We are definitely closer than we have ever been. The next frontier is really market sensing — not just anticipating where the customer will be, but accurately predicting what the right content, the right offer and the right conversation is to move that customer to a sale.

As marketing transitions away from “mass marketing” and becomes more focused on engagement and creating a connection — how do you build that ongoing conversation?

Content is more critical now than ever and it is definitely quality over quantity. We discovered that content generates 3x the leads [compared to] traditional marketing activities. However, it is not a one-size-fits-all strategy and customization of content for specific audiences — by region, industry, technology, Line of Business (LoB), etc. is key.

What are the most innovative ways Cisco has found to connect with businesses — both online and offline — and utilize these relationships in its marketing efforts?

We actually want to connect with people who work at businesses — not just the businesses. We sell to people, so our focus is on the individuals in a business — not the logos. The ways we connect is through engagement — customized offers, content that is focused on their business challenges and outcomes and opportunities to partner with them for their success.

What are some of the unique ways the Internet of Things is changing the game for marketers? Is Cisco employing any of these tactics or approaches based on “connected”/real-time marketing?

Marketing is definitely shifting to a B2Me approach and the customer journey has changed tremendously.

Some of the biggest ways IoT is changing the game for marketers is getting the right content to the right customer and, conversely, the desire from the customer for that personalized experience from a brand. One example of how Cisco employed real time and connected marketing tactics is through our connected billboard we placed on highway 101 last year in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Connected Billboard showcased the power of IoT by connecting a static marketing image to the Internet and having it respond to real time traffic by displaying content that changed based on traffic conditions and speeds. Through a connection to the Internet, the billboard monitored and received API traffic data, and the result was delivering either longer or shorter messages to drivers based on how fast they were going.

There’s this huge to-do today about “big data” — but there seems to be confusion as to how brands and marketers are actually using it. So how are you using big data in marketing efforts?

We are looking at data to better understand our customer — their appetite for content, where they go for information, how they want to renew software, etc.

Do you feel like your team is organized to handle and exploit these changing taking place in marketing?

A 21st century marketing and communications organization is required to drive the new customer journey. We have been transforming our organization over the past two years and will continue to do so. As mentioned, the customer is in charge and part of this transformation will be to engage with our customers on all aspects of the journey and build that deeper, emotional connection to them through our marketing efforts.

What role does technology play in your marketing strategy — from data and analytics to outreach and engagement?

Technology is huge for our organizations. Like all other Fortune 1000 CMOs, technology is a significant portion of my budget as it drives the framework for our function.

Can you name a couple recent marketing initiatives that you're particularly proud of? Perhaps an activation, event or unconventional approach that took a chance — and paid off? Why?

I am incredibly proud of our work on the Internet of Everything and how we have evolved our brand. We began to transform the brand with a new story and positioning, focused on Cisco's customers and their opportunity for business transformation through the Internet of Everything. We established a new tag-line, "Tomorrow Starts Here," representing our brand promise — amazing things can happen when you connect the previously unconnected. The results have been phenomenal, and I am so proud of global team for shifting the industry conversation and transforming our brand.

Content is more critical now than ever and it is definitely quality over quantity.

Where do you see marketing headed in the next 3 to 5 years?

This is the most exciting time to be in marketing and we are driving to a predictive marketing focus. This idea of being "market sensing" is truly the beginning where we are going to be able to deliver customized content when the customer wants it, where the customer wants it and how the customer wants it. The customer is in control. I often take liberties with a John Steinbeck quote about marriage: "A customer journey is like a marriage. The certain way to be wrong is to think you control it."