

The Real Marketing Curriculum



What's Inside

The Real Marketing Curriculum is the result of a unique crowd-sourcing initiative between Storyblok and global marketing thought-leaders.

The idea was simple: marketing's most valuable insights come from practitioners who've done the work, failed, learned, and tried again. Yet these lessons rarely get shared beyond individual teams.

Storyblok's approach has always been about breaking down barriers between teams that should be working together, so we asked: what if we could connect marketers across different contexts to share their real experiences?

We partnered with established marketing voices to help crowd-source these insights. They shared the call with their audiences, asking fellow marketers to contribute their hard-won lessons - the kind of unfiltered wisdom you'd only get from a trusted colleague.

The result is this collection of authentic stories organized by core marketing disciplines. Each insight preserves the contributor's original voice and context.

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Your Customer**

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Understanding Your Customer

Lesson 1: Customer-First Content Strategy

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Context:

Content teams create materials they think are brilliant, only to see low engagement because the content doesn't connect with the actual audience.

Lesson Learnt:

"Even the most wonderful content will never be consumed if you haven't started with the customer in mind. If you're not meeting them where they are, you'll never get a chance to take them where you want them to be."



Chief Data Scientist

Christopher Penn

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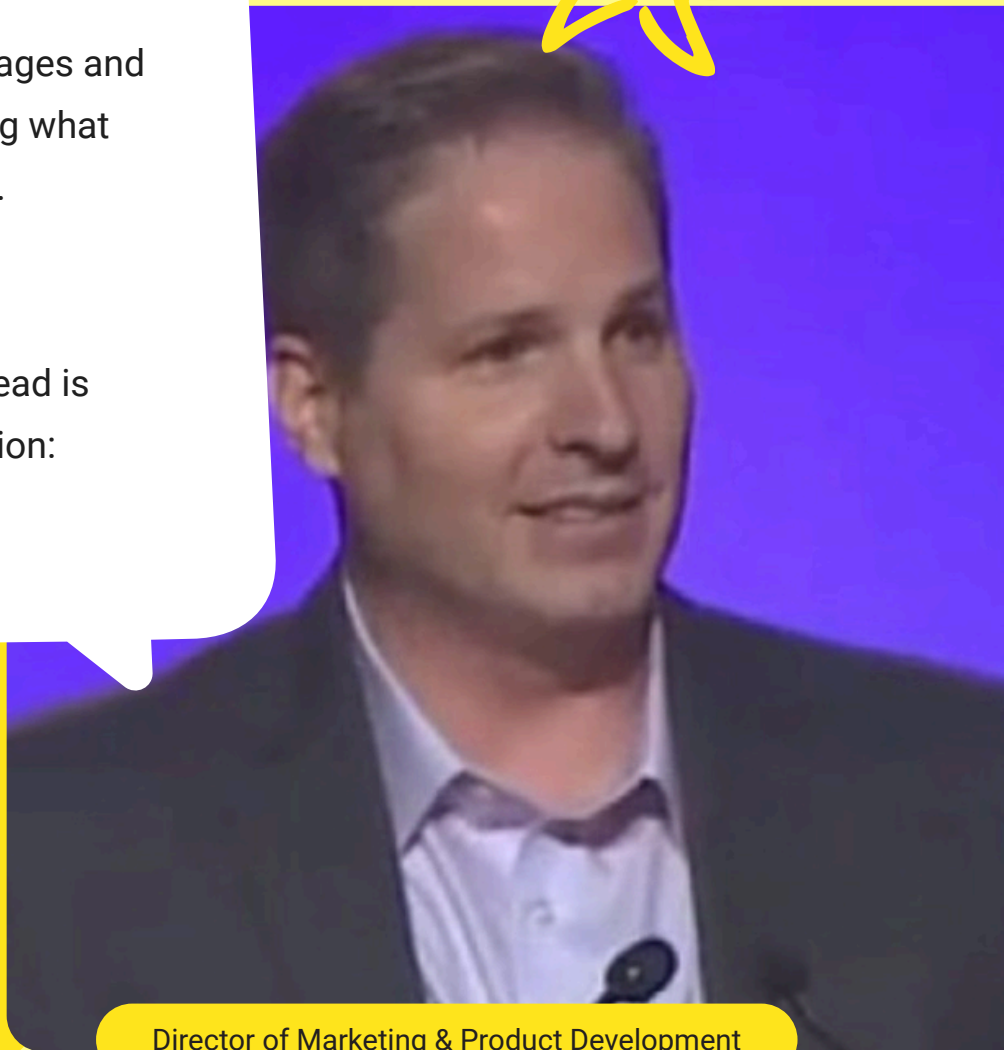
Lesson 2: The WIIFM Principle

Context:

Marketing teams create messages and campaigns without considering what truly matters to their audience.


Lesson Learnt:

"The radio in the customer's head is permanently tuned to one station: WII FM (What's In It For Me)"



Director of Marketing & Product Development

Brian Stout

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Lesson 3:

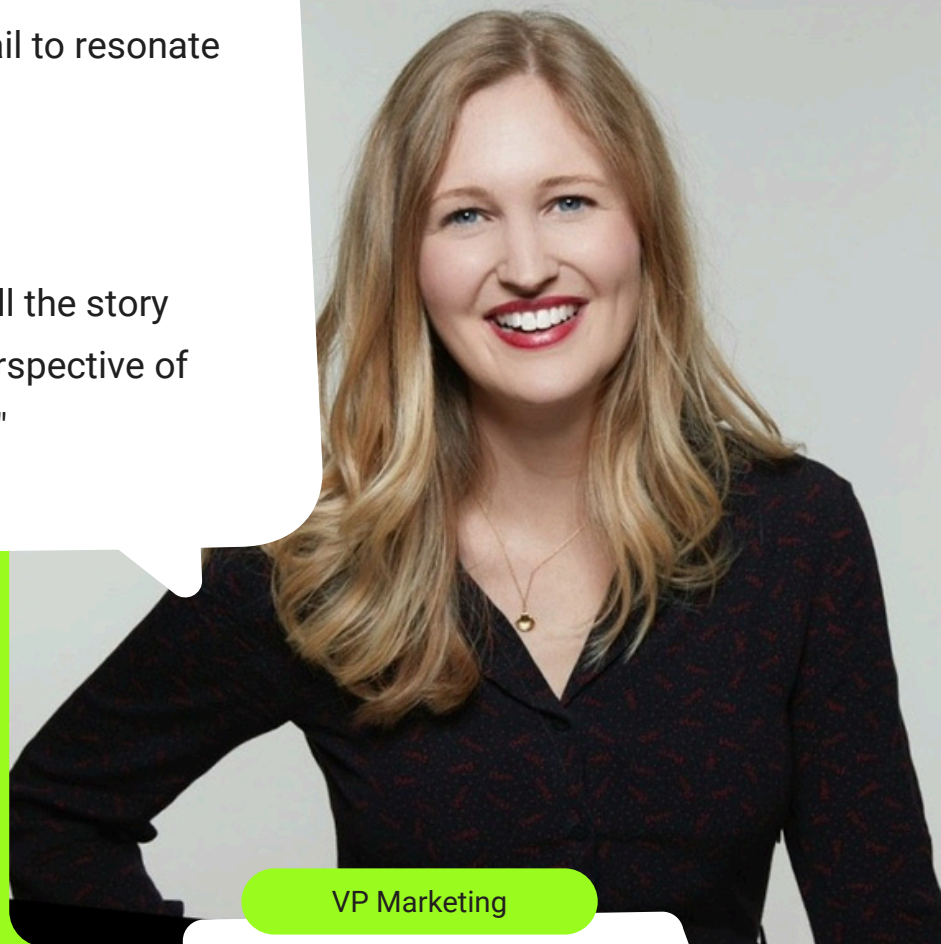
Customer-Centric Messaging

Context:

Marketing teams create messages that sound impressive to them internally but fail to resonate with their actual customers.

Lesson Learnt:

"You are not the customer. Don't tell the story you want to hear, tell it from the perspective of what your customers want to hear."



VP Marketing

Kitty Poole

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Lesson 4: Learning from Market Research

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Context:

A product launch campaign was perfectly executed internally but completely missed the mark with the target audience.

Lesson Learnt:

"We spent months perfecting product launch messaging, got amazing internal buy-in across all teams, but completely missed market fit. So we had to quickly pivot and run customer insight campaigns to understand their actual pain points and language - turned out we have been talking to ourselves the whole time whereas the real connection was missing."



Product Marketing Strategist

Ankit Ukey

[!\[\]\(3cb60d42b10e53f9522bb0b392c1c4cd_img.jpg\) Click here for profile](#)

Lesson 5: Customer Discovery Through Sales Conversations

Lesson Learnt:

"My best-performing content comes from a single question I ask on sales calls: 'What was going on in your business before you decided to reach out?' That's when people drop the truth. They tell you the circumstances that pushed them into the problem, the bigger outcome they're chasing, the blockers that keep them stuck. These are Category Entry Points (CEPs) - the exact situations where buyers start feeling the tension between wanting something and being blocked from it. If your content speaks directly to those moments, you're wiring your audience to think of your brand first when the tension hits."

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A black and white portrait of Justyna Ciecierska, a woman with shoulder-length blonde hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a dark top with a patterned scarf.

Justyna Ciecierska

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Lesson 6:

Marketing as Business Translation, Not Content Production

Context:

Marketing teams get caught up in producing content assets - decks, graphics, posts - without connecting their company's expertise to what actually matters in the market.

Lesson Learnt:

"Nobody wakes up thinking 'I need a content strategy'. What B2B brands really care about is being known, trusted, and remembered. The real challenge? Connecting their own stories, insights, and expertise to what's relevant in the market. Marketing is a core GTM function. It's not about producing decks, graphics or posts, it's all about translating business knowledge into market impact. That's the difference between simply making content and actually driving results."



B2B Marketing Advisor

Sara Stella Lattanzio

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Lesson 7:

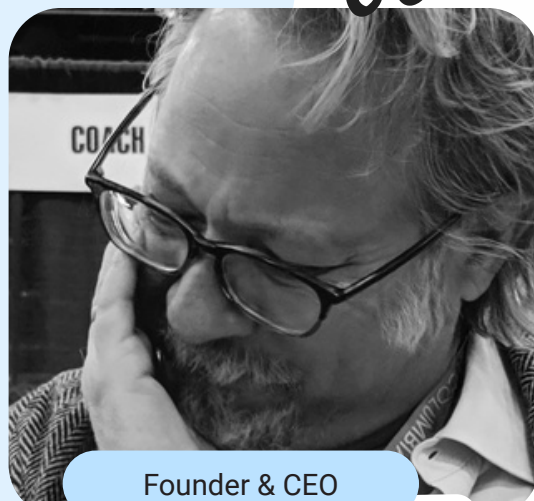
Marketing as Discovery

Context:

Marketing teams focus on pushing their predetermined messages rather than understanding what resonates with their audience.

Lesson Learnt:

"Listen to others, to the people who use your product or service, when deciding how you want to talk about yourself. Marketing, to me, is discovering, not persuading. Discover what it is that you really mean to people, and then just remind them what you mean to them."



Founder & CEO

Richard Nash

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Proving Your Impact

Lesson 8:

Attribution vs. Brand Building

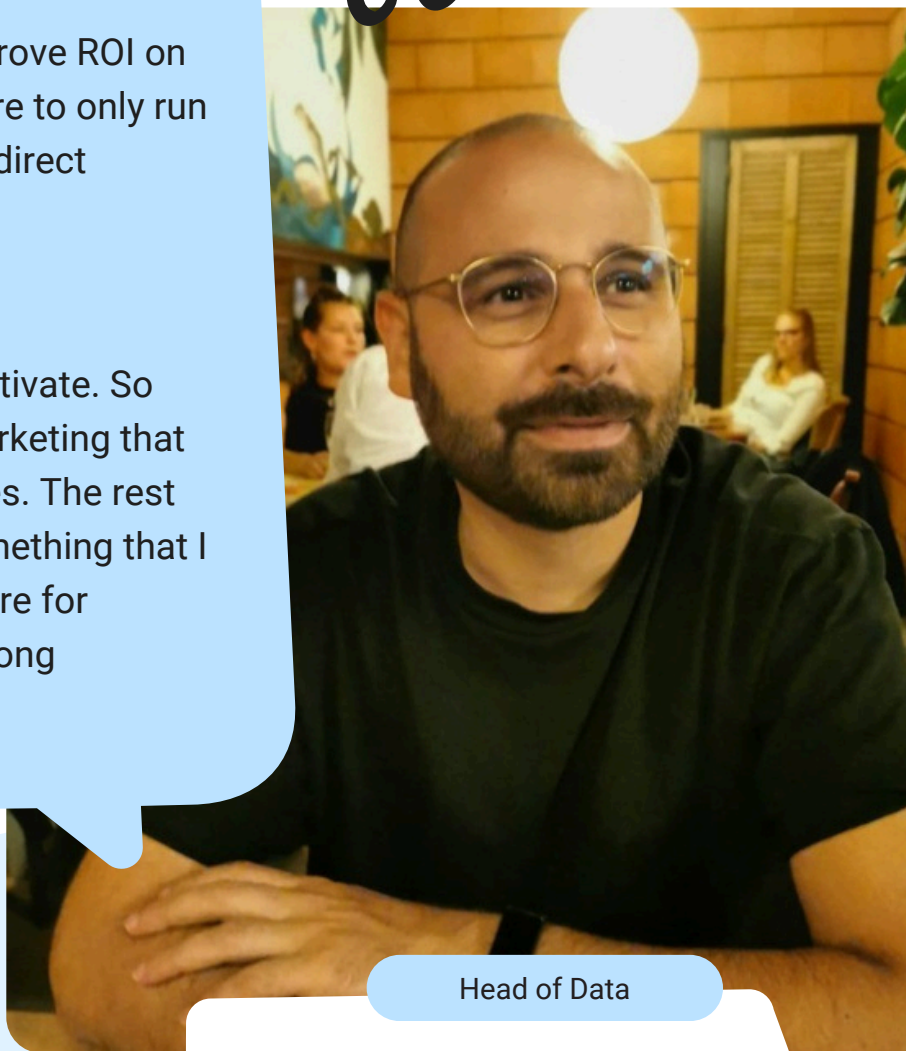
Context:

Marketing teams often struggle to prove ROI on brand campaigns, leading to pressure to only run performance marketing that shows direct attribution.

Lesson Learnt:

"Not all marketing is supposed to activate. So attribution only makes sense for marketing that you intentionally use to activate sales. The rest should be measured differently. Something that I think a lot of companies simply ignore for simplicity. Leading to all kinds of wrong conclusions."

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Head of Data

Levon Goceryan

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Lesson 9: Brand Awareness KPI Alignment

Context:

Launching brand campaigns without clear success metrics.

Lesson Learnt:

"Starting with the end in mind is crucial - even in brand awareness campaigns, where success means setting and aligning on KPIs like reach, recall, or share of voice before launch. In a past brand launch, this clarity was what kept stakeholders on board until the longer-term impact on pipeline became visible."



Marketing Leader

Verena Kunz-Gehrmann

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Lesson 10: Channel Selection Based on ICP Behavior

Lesson Learnt:

"The fastest way to waste a quarter? Chase the shiny new channel instead of mastering where your customers actually live. Channels don't create demand - audience fit does. Lead with the platform? You get activity. Lead with ICP behavior? You get intent. Before scaling any channel, ask: Is your ICP actually active there? Does their intent match your job-to-be-done? Can you create content that fits the format naturally? Will you see meaningful results within 8 weeks? Do the numbers hold past vanity metrics? If it's not 4/5 or better, don't scale. Your job isn't to drag customers to your preferred channel - it's to show up where they're already paying attention".



VP Marketing

Richard King

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Lesson 11: Marketing ROI and Expectations

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Context:

A new CMO was under pressure to show immediate results, leading to unrealistic expectations about marketing timelines and impact measurement.

Lesson Learnt:

"Marketing requires spend, but not everything we do delivers immediate ROI. First, never assume trust - align expectations early and make your value visible. Second, define clear KPIs from the start. Success isn't always about revenue; sometimes it's about building brand strength. Third, don't commit to unrealistic goals. Push back early, and bring stakeholders along with your reasoning".

A portrait of Catherine Mak, a woman with dark hair, smiling, wearing a white top. The background is a blurred office setting with windows.

Head of Marketing

Catherine Mak

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Lesson 12: Measure and Demonstrate Marketing Value

Context:

I once believed a beautiful campaign that everyone loved would speak for itself. But when it ended, the commercial results were impossible to attribute.

Lesson Learnt:

"The lesson? If you can't prove the value of your work, people will always question whether it was worth it. So now I put as much focus on measuring and demonstrating results as I do on delivering them."

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A black and white portrait of a man with glasses and a beard, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background is a plain, light color.

Jeremy Laight

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Lesson 13:

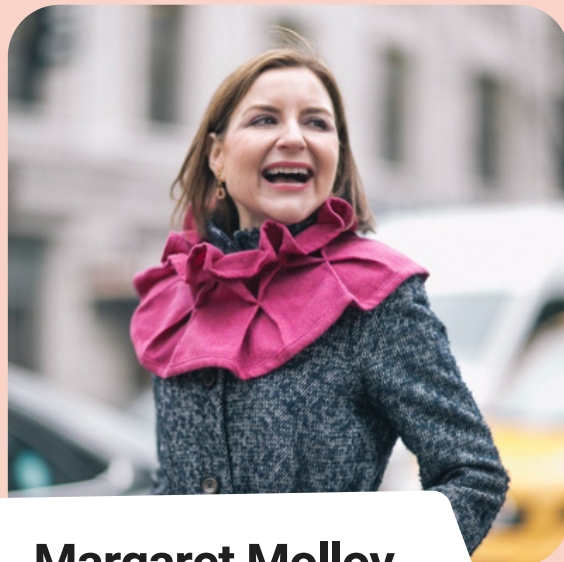
Performance vs Brand Marketing Balance

Context:

Marketing teams confuse quick wins with sustainable momentum, focusing heavily on performance marketing tactics like sales promos, click-through ads, and email blasts for immediate ROI.

Lesson Learnt:

"You can't 'performance-market' your way into long-term growth. Performance marketing won't cut through when your buyers aren't in the market for your products or services. Conversely, brand-building programs build emotional connections with buyers. Connections make you memorable and discoverable. The payoff? When your buyer is ready, you're the first name they think of. Resist the lure of short-termism. The best business growth comes when brand and performance marketing move in sync."



Margaret Molloy

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Lesson 14:

Copywriter Attribution Challenge

Context:

As a copywriter, it's often difficult to prove that it was your words that transformed the 'maybe' into a 'yes', or that they drove the reader to make contact with sales, which then resulted in a big contract.

Lesson Learnt:

"So, we need to ensure, as much as we can, that we or our clients are measuring as much as possible, right from the start."



Financial Copywriter

Daniel Krimholtz

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Building Systems That Work



Lesson 15: Data as Core Marketing Advantage

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Context:

Marketing teams treat customer data as a compliance requirement rather than a strategic asset for decision-making.

Lesson Learnt:

"The big lesson I learned is to treat your customer data as a core advantage. Keep it clean, integrated and the single source of truth. With that foundation, every program, campaign, signal and decision gets sharper. I know it's not the most glamorous side of marketing, but I feel is the most critical. Especially in today's world."



Former CMO

Chadd Thompson,

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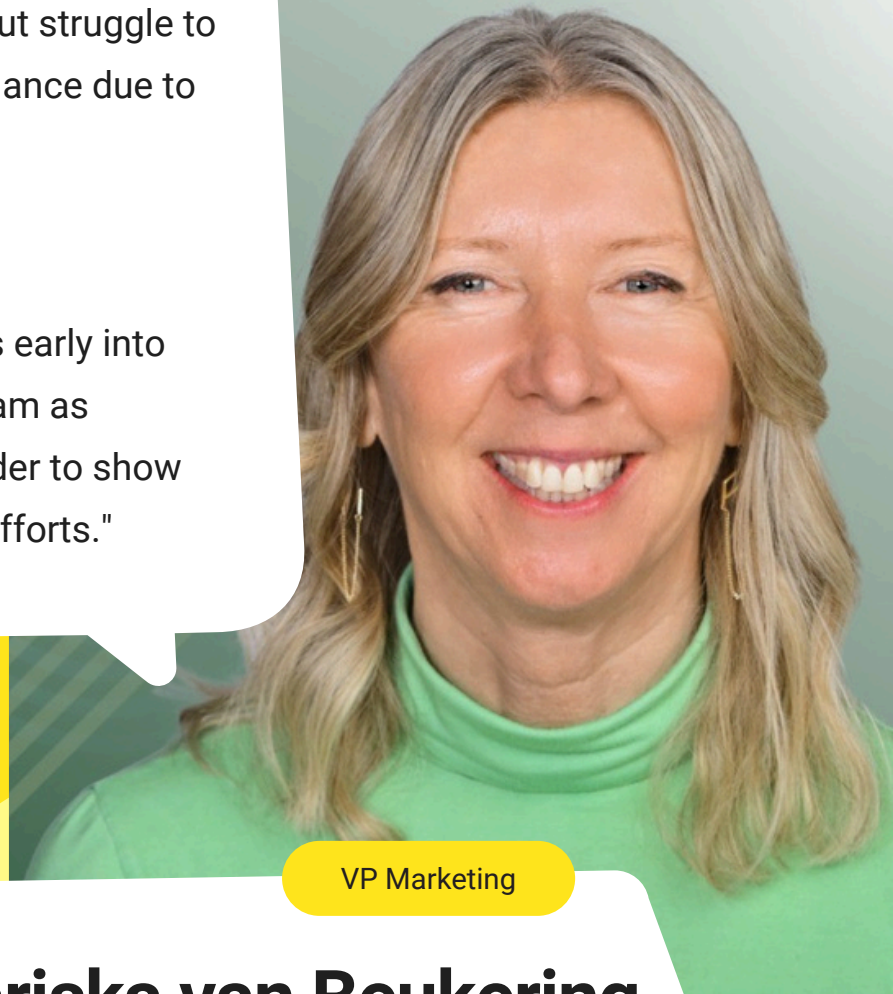
Lesson 16: Marketing Operations Resource

Context:

Marketing teams launch campaigns but struggle to measure success or optimize performance due to lack of operational infrastructure.

Lesson Learnt:

"Fight for a marketing ops resource as early into the journey of building a marketing team as possible to help you as marketing leader to show results and analyse to optimise your efforts."



VP Marketing

Mariska van Beukering

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Lesson 17: Channel Selection Based on ICP Behavior

Context:

Creative campaigns launch without proper measurement infrastructure, making it impossible to prove impact or optimize for better results.

Lesson Learnt:

"Great creative work isn't enough - if you don't set up clear tracking and attribution from day one, it's impossible to prove impact or optimize for growth. Measuring results isn't just a checkbox; it's part of the creative process."



Copywriting Specialist

Malik Saqib Shahzad

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Lesson 18: Content Systems Over Content Pieces

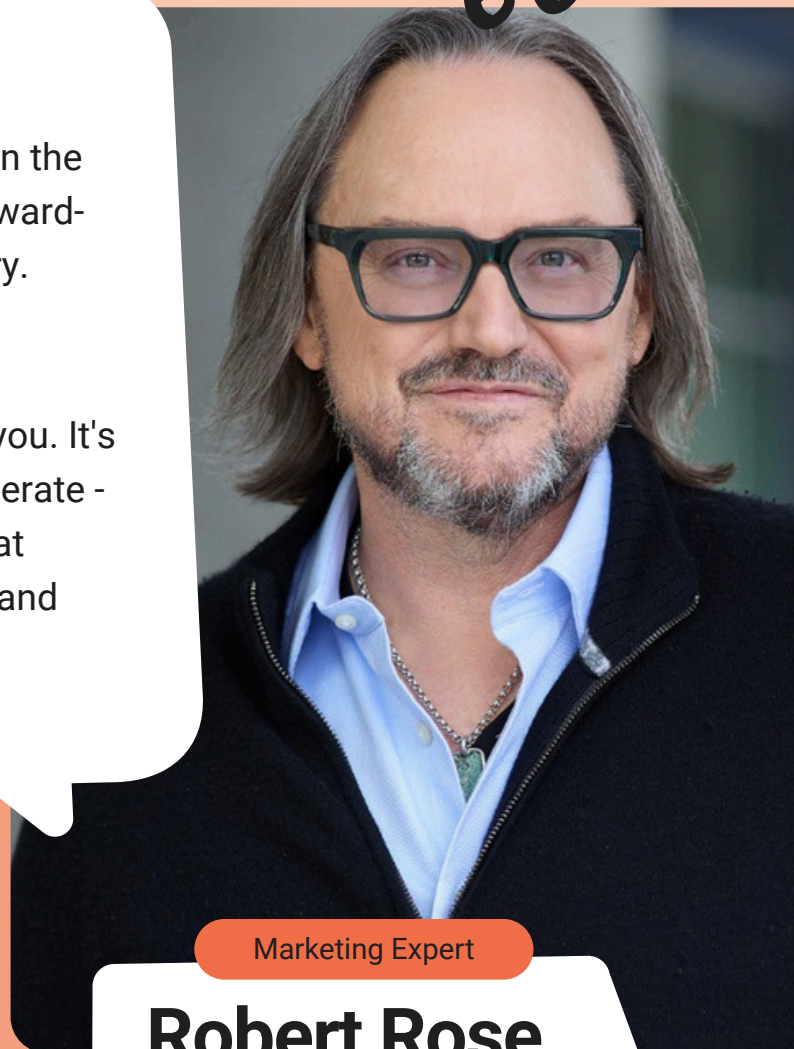
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Context:

Early in my career, I thought the magic was in the content itself — the clever whitepaper, the award-winning campaign, the perfectly crafted story.

Lesson Learnt:

"The reality is, content doesn't differentiate you. It's how you do it. The activities. It's how you operate - and create, design, organize, and content that enables the business to be good at content and creates the real advantage."



Marketing Expert

Robert Rose

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Lesson 19: Deep Context Creates Better Outsourced Content

Context:

Back when I was Head of Content in-house, I tried working with an agency. I sent them the brief, the positioning, the strategy. Everything they needed - or so I thought. And the drafts that were coming back made me think: 'Seriously? This is what they came up with?' I'm not even a writer - but I knew I could do better.

Lesson Learnt:

"That's when I realized outsourced content only works if writers think like they're in-house, working with deep context, real ownership, and no fluff. Writers are trained on product demos, we built a custom GPT with ICPs and battle cards, clients review briefs before writing starts, we study sales calls - that's where the gold is. Every client has a 'voice file,' feedback is logged across pieces, writers can push back on vague briefs, and final drafts are gut-checked against the GTM strategy."



Romana Kuts

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Lesson 20: Design Collaboration and Guidance

Context:

Marketing teams hand over briefs to designers, then get frustrated when the creative doesn't match their vision or requires endless revisions.

Lesson Learnt:

"I promise the designer is grateful for you giving them some guidance rather than having to rename the file 'FINAL-27.' Include design guidance and recommendations in the brief upfront. It helps design the content in a way that fits the framework and ensure the 2 things are working in tandem. In heavier text content pieces I love inserting comments on ideas for specific areas or sections that we really want to stand out."



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Content Strategist & Marketing Consultant

Melissa Meredith

Getting Teams Aligned



Lesson 21: Clear Communication Creates Momentum

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Context:

Marketing strategies and campaigns fail to gain traction because team members and stakeholders can't clearly communicate the core message.

Lesson Learnt:

"Clarity creates momentum: if people can't repeat it, they can't rally around it. And belief starts inside - if employees don't buy it, customers never will."



Brand Strategy Leader

Matt Egan

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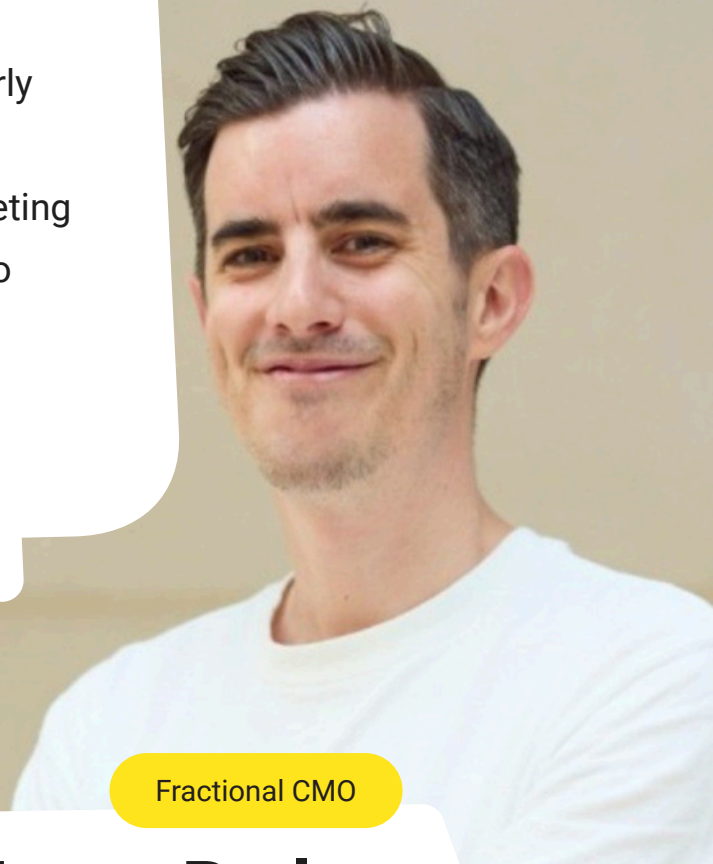
Lesson 22: Internal Marketing Education

Context:

Marketing teams struggle to get support and resources because other departments don't understand marketing's role and contribution.

Lesson Learnt:

"The importance of 'internal marketing', particularly as you move into leadership positions. It's so important to educate internally about what marketing does, why, how much work goes into, and then do this repeatedly. Otherwise so few people in the organisation will have any idea what marketing's doing or how it contributes."



Fractional CMO

Jonny Butler

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Lesson 23: Detailed Brief Importance

Context:

Marketing teams get frustrated when external partners or agencies don't deliver what they expected from seemingly clear instructions.

Lesson Learnt:

"A detailed brief can make all the difference. I always include deep keyword and question research, relevant links to style and brand guidelines, and most importantly the overall goal of the piece. Just because something is clear to me as the brief creator doesn't mean it's immediately clear to the freelancer or agency. Context is key!"



Online Marketing Manager

Tamy Gunz

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Lesson 24: Enable Your Team for Data Visualization


Lesson Learnt:

"I used to think good data was enough to make clients happy. When I first started offering research reports as a service, I was obsessed with getting the insights right. The copy had to be perfect. The data had to be bulletproof. But then I'd hand over basic Excel charts to my clients' graphic designers and just hope they'd magically know what to do with them. The designers were talented, but they weren't data visualization experts! They needed guidance. Context. Ideas. Now I share my 'Chart Ideas' deck upfront, and we plan the visual story TOGETHER. Turns out, enabling your team (even external partners) is just as important as writing great copy."

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A portrait of Erin Balsa, a woman with dark hair, smiling, wearing a white turtleneck and large orange earrings. The portrait is partially obscured by a white speech bubble containing text.

Erin Balsa

 [Click here for profile](#)



Executing With Purpose

Lesson 25: Problem-First Innovation

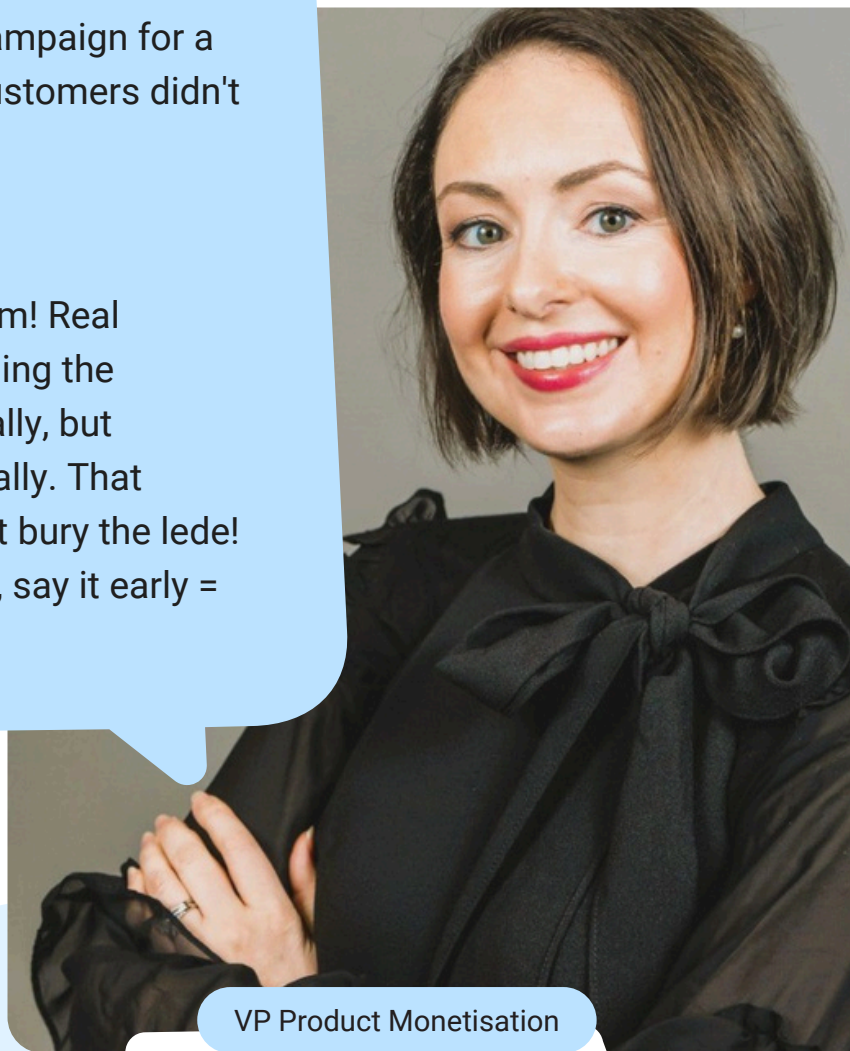
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Context:

A startup built an elaborate marketing campaign for a product feature that solved a problem customers didn't actually have.

Lesson Learnt:

"Don't be a solution in search of a problem! Real innovation starts with deeply understanding the problem you're solving - not just technically, but emotionally, contextually, and economically. That clarity becomes the compass. Also, don't bury the lede! If you've got something important to say, say it early = and say it well."



VP Product Monetisation

Amy Coghlan

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Lesson 26:

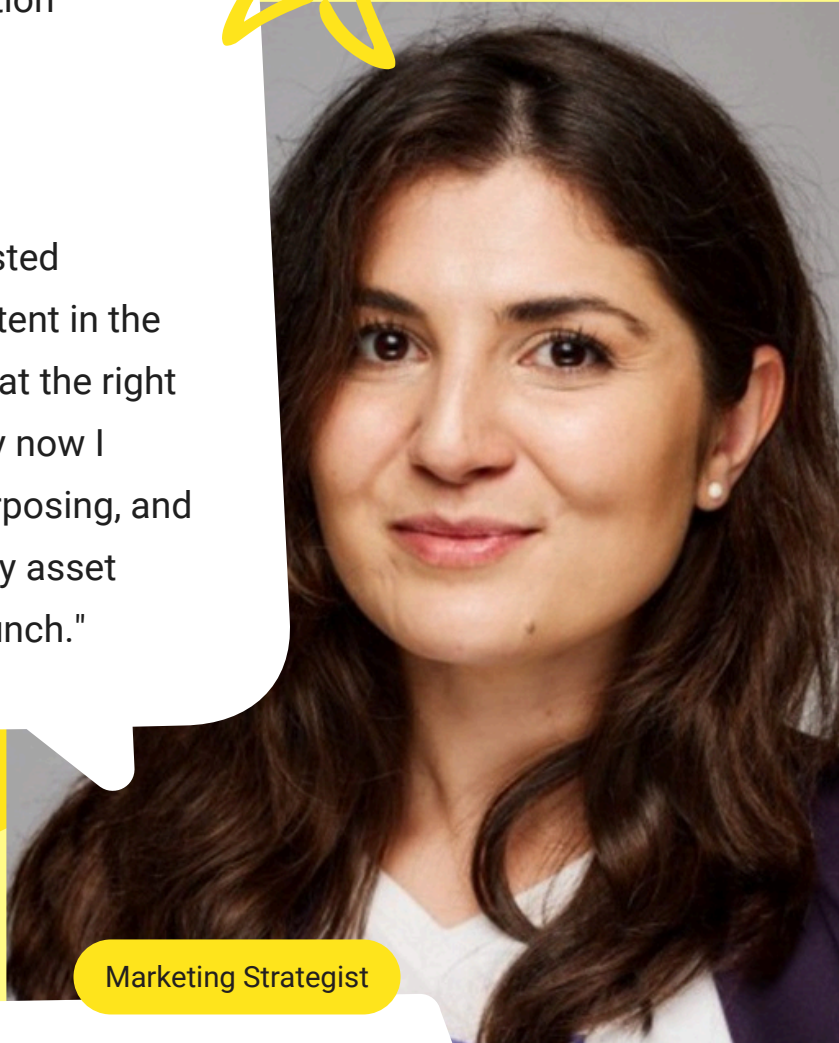
Distribution-First Campaign Design

Context:

Teams spend months perfecting creative assets only to realize they have no clear distribution strategy once the work is complete.


Lesson Learnt:

"Great creative without distribution is wasted potential. You can have the smartest content in the world, but if it doesn't reach the right ICP at the right time, it won't move the needle. That's why now I design campaigns with distribution, repurposing, and advocacy baked in from the start, so every asset delivers measurable impact long after launch."



Marketing Strategist

Ani Petrova

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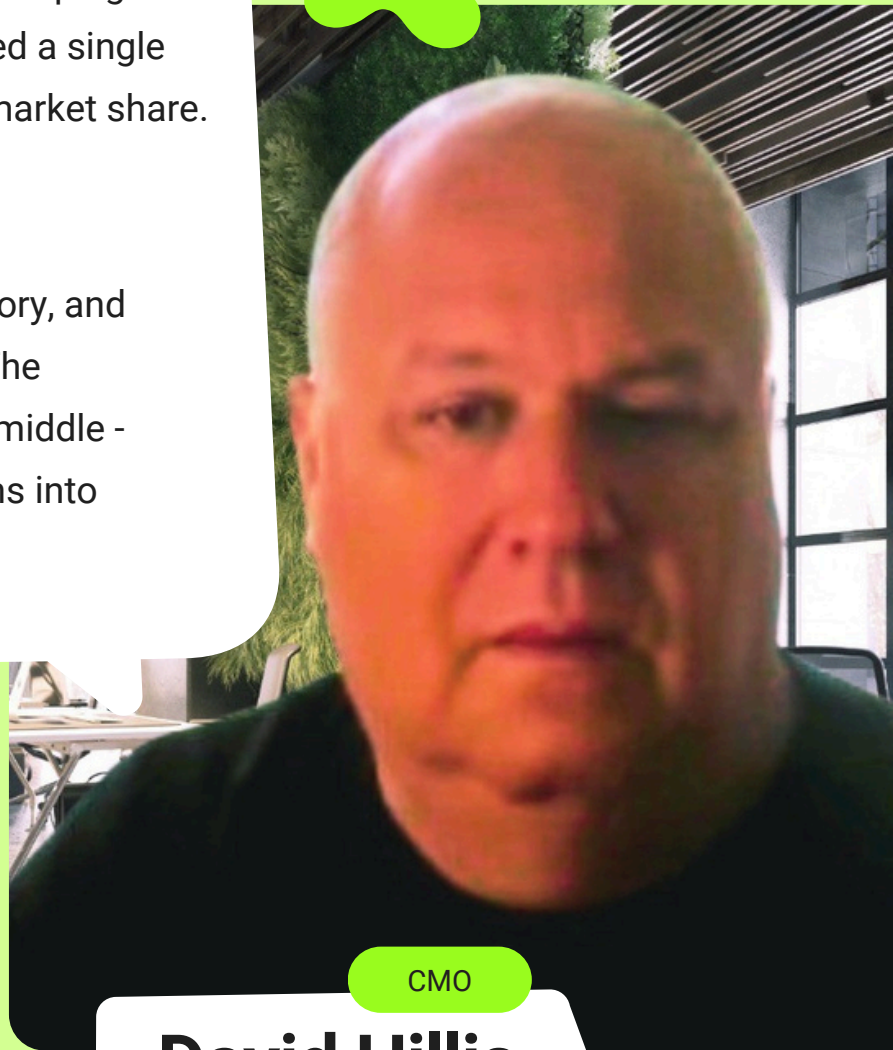
Lesson 27: Strategy and Execution Balance

Context:

A marketing team spent 6 months developing strategy documents but never launched a single campaign, while competitors gained market share.

Lesson Learnt:

"Strategy without execution is just theory, and execution without strategy is chaos. The differentiator is mastering the messy middle - where content evolves from campaigns into experiences that create real value."



CMO

David Hillis

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Lesson 28: Core Brand Messaging Foundation

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Context:

A brand diluted their core message by constantly chasing viral trends, leaving customers confused about what the company actually offered.

Lesson Learnt:

"Before executing on any advertising or marketing, make sure you've clearly articulated the substantive, lasting way your brand/product benefits your audience, practically and emotionally. That substantive messaging and emotion must always be at core of your execution. If you want to occasionally jump on a trend, pop culture moment or meme for short term gain feel free, but don't confuse those short term opportunities with your larger goals."



CEO

Michael Rose

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Lesson 29: Campaign Replicability Reality

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Context:

Marketing teams try to copy successful campaigns from other companies without adapting for their unique context and constraints.

Lesson Learnt:

"For me it's that you can't always replicate the same successful work for every business as there are so many variables in play, the product, the competition, the timing..."

A portrait of Madeleine Herbert, a woman with long brown hair, smiling, wearing a green top and a colorful patterned scarf. The background is a solid green color.

Marketing Lead

Madeleine Herbert

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