



CANNES LIONS 2026

The Ideas Shaping Marketing's Next Chapter
PrettyGreen's Key Takeaways from Cannes Lions 2026



If Cannes Lions 2025 was the year marketers asked what AI could do, Cannes Lions 2026 was the year the industry started asking what only humans can do.

Across the Palais, Google Beach, TikTok, Reddit, Empower Cafe, LBB, Brands & Culture Villa, Semrush, UTA and countless fringe stages, one thing became clear: marketing is entering its next chapter.

The conversation has moved beyond AI adoption and productivity gains. Instead, the focus has shifted towards trust, creativity, community, cultural relevance and discoverability in an increasingly algorithmic world.

While the technologies dominating discussion were new, many of the conclusions were surprisingly timeless. Distinctive creativity still outperforms average content. Communities matter more than audiences. Brand building still wins over short-term optimisation. And as AI becomes more accessible, human judgement, curiosity and originality become even more valuable.



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Rather than attempting to summarise everything discussed across the festival, this report captures the talks we attended and the ideas we believe will have the biggest impact on brands over the next 12 months.

THE FOLLOWING REPORT SHARES OUR KEY TAKEAWAYS

ACROSS THE SESSIONS WE ATTENDED, SEVERAL KEY THEMES EMERGED:

- AI should amplify human creativity, not replace it.
- Authority and trust are becoming the new drivers of discoverability.
- Community is replacing attention as marketing's most valuable asset.
- Distinctive brands are becoming even more valuable as content becomes more abundant.
- Culture cannot be manufactured; it has to be earned.



20 QUESTIONS OUR CLIENTS ARE ASKING RIGHT NOW AND...

**THE INSIGHTS, EVIDENCE AND
CONVERSATIONS FROM CANNES LIONS
2026 THAT WILL HELP ANSWER THEM**





1. HOW IS AI CHANGING HOW CONSUMERS DISCOVER AND CHOOSE BRANDS?

[The Visibility Playbook](#) / [Future of AI Search](#) / [AI as Gatekeeper](#) / [Amazon AI & Shopping Trends](#) / [Contrarian Talks](#)

2. HOW DO WE MAKE SURE AI RECOMMENDS OUR BRAND INSTEAD OF OUR COMPETITORS?

[The Visibility Playbook](#) / [Amazon AI & Shopping Trends](#) / [AI as Gatekeeper](#) / [Future of AI Search](#)

3. IS SEO DEAD? WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING INSTEAD?

[The Future Of AI Search](#) / [The Visibility Playbook](#)

4. HOW SHOULD WE ACTUALLY BE USING AI INSIDE OUR MARKETING TEAM?

[Creative Meets The Algorithm](#) / [Anti Slop vs. Pro Humanity](#) / [Contrarian Talks](#) / [The Future Of Culture Is IRL](#)

5. IF AI CAN CREATE ENDLESS CONTENT, WHAT ACTUALLY MAKES BRANDS STAND OUT?

[Short Form: TikTok](#) / [World Of Weird](#) / [Anti Slop vs. Pro Humanity](#) / [The Business Of Storytelling](#)



6. HOW DO WE STAY CULTURALLY RELEVANT WITHOUT CHASING EVERY TREND?

[What In The World Is Happening](#) / [Building Brands](#) / [Culturally Disruptive By Nature](#)

7. SHOULD OUR BRAND GET INVOLVED IN SOCIAL OR POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS?

[What In The World Is Happening](#) / [Culturally Disruptive By Nature](#)

8. HOW DO WE BUILD BRAND FAME RATHER THAN JUST CAMPAIGN REACH?

[Short Form: TikTok](#) / [World Of Weird](#) / [The Business Of Storytelling](#) / [Building Brands](#)

9. WHY ISN'T OUR CONTENT CUTTING THROUGH ANYMORE?

[Short Form: TikTok](#) / [World Of Weird](#) / [The Business Of Storytelling](#) / [Anti Slop vs. Pro Humanity](#)

10. HOW DO WE BUILD GENUINE COMMUNITIES INSTEAD OF JUST FOLLOWERS?

[Reddit – Fangirl](#) / [Creative Talent Management x UTA](#) / [Contrarian Talks](#)



11. ARE INFLUENCERS STILL ENOUGH, OR DO WE NEED COMMUNITIES?

[Creative Talent Management x UTA](#) / [Reddit – Fangirl](#) / [Building Brands](#)

12. HOW DO WE MEASURE MARKETING SUCCESS NOW?

[Creative Meets The Algorithm](#) / [The Future Of AI Search](#)

13. HOW CAN HERITAGE BRANDS STAY RELEVANT?

[Building Brands](#) / [Culturally Disruptive By Nature](#) / [Age of Reinvention](#)

14. WHAT DOES 'PREMIUM' ACTUALLY MEAN TODAY?

[Age of Reinvention](#)

15. HOW SHOULD BRANDS THINK ABOUT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN AN AI WORLD?

[The Future Of Culture Is IRL](#) / [Age Of Reinvention](#) / [Creative Meets The Algorithm](#)



16. HOW CAN WE CREATE MARKETING PEOPLE ACTUALLY REMEMBER?

[Short Form: TikTok](#) / [World Of Weird](#) / [The Business of Storytelling](#)

17. ARE WE ORGANISED FOR THE FUTURE OF MARKETING?

[Contrarian Talks](#) / [Creative Meets The Algorithm](#)

18. HOW DO WE MAKE OUR ORGANISATION MORE CREATIVE?

[Who Gets Heard](#) / [Anti Slop vs. Pro Humanity](#) / [Building Brands](#)

19. WHAT DOES INCLUSIVE MARKETING ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?

[Who Gets Heard](#)

20. HOW DO WE WIN IN A WORLD WHERE TRUST MATTERS MORE THAN ADVERTISING?

[The AI Visibility Playbook](#) / [Amazon AI & Shopping Trends](#) / [Reddit – Fangirl](#) / [AI As Gatekeeper](#)



SESSION No.1

SHORT FORM ISN'T SHORT ON IMPACT: TIKTOK

Mark Ritson (*Marketing Professor & Founder, Marketing Week Mini MBA*)



Despite speaking on TikTok's stage, Mark Ritson's message was refreshingly traditional: the fundamentals of effective marketing haven't changed.

Drawing on decades of research and System1 effectiveness data, he argued that brands often mistake the speed of modern media for a need to reinvent marketing itself. Instead, the strongest short-form campaigns still rely on emotional storytelling, distinctive brand assets, consistency and integration with wider channels.

He challenged marketers to stop treating TikTok as a standalone tactic and instead see it as one component of a broader brand-building system.

One of the session's biggest provocations was that marketers become bored with campaigns far sooner than consumers do, often replacing successful creative before it has had time to build memory. As AI makes content creation easier and cheaper, the brands that stand out won't be those producing the most content—they'll be those creating the most distinctive and emotionally memorable work.





EMOTION STILL DRIVES EFFECTIVENESS

The strongest marketing makes people feel something before asking them to do something.

CONSISTENCY BEATS CONSTANT REINVENTION

Consumers don't tire of campaigns as quickly as marketers do.

GREAT CAMPAIGNS NEED TIME

Brand-building campaigns should run for weeks, not days, to maximise effectiveness.

As AI accelerates content production, creativity becomes an even greater competitive advantage. Rather than chasing endless content, brands should focus on creating distinctive creative platforms that can evolve over time, building familiarity, emotional connection and long-term brand memory.

KEY LEARNINGS:

INTEGRATION MULTIPLIES IMPACT

TikTok works hardest when it's part of a broader media ecosystem rather than operating in isolation.

DISTINCTIVE ASSETS BUILD MEMORY

Brand characters, sonic branding and recognisable creative devices improve recall across every channel.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.2

CONTRARIAN TALKS: ONE THING YOU SHOULD START TOMORROW

Rita Cidre x Semrush

Featuring: Mirjam Schuele (*Karl Lagerfeld*), Maxime Guernion (*Havas*), Kevin Indig (*Growth Advisor*)
& Chris Long (*Nectiv*)



This series of short talks provided some of the most practical advice of the week, focusing on the organisational changes brands should make to prepare for an AI-first marketing landscape. Rather than discussing the latest tools, speakers concentrated on capability, structure and authority.

The message was clear: competitive advantage won't come from experimenting with AI—it will come from building organisations that know how to use it effectively.

Topics ranged from educating teams and creating dedicated AI search capabilities to

understanding how large language models retrieve information and why YouTube has become one of the internet's strongest trust signals. Another recurring theme was the growing importance of community. Whether through local events, niche audiences or creator ecosystems, brands that invest in genuine relationships will be better positioned than those relying solely on paid distribution.





EDUCATE BEFORE YOU AUTOMATE

AI success starts with building organisational understanding, not simply adopting new tools.

STRUCTURE MATTERS

Dedicated teams and clear ownership are becoming essential for AI search and discoverability.

TRUST IS BUILT BEYOND YOUR WEBSITE

YouTube, creators and community conversations increasingly shape how AI understands brands.

AI is changing how brands are discovered, but the organisations that succeed won't necessarily be those with the newest technology. They'll be the ones that invest early in capability, authority and community, creating strong foundations before competitors catch up.

KEY LEARNINGS:

COMMUNITY COMPOUNDS OVER TIME

Local events and genuine communities create stronger advocacy than short-term campaigns.

THINK BEYOND TRADITIONAL SEARCH

Understanding how AI retrieves and interprets information will become a core marketing capability.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.3

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS HAPPENING? SHOULD BRANDS GET INVOLVED OR STAY SCHTUM?

Suhayl Limbada (*CMO, KFC India*), Burçak Simsek (*Global Marketing Lead, Women's Health, Bayer*), Charles Besson (*Global Entertainment & Content Creative Acceleration Director, L'Oréal*)

Moderator: Thomas Bunn (*Global Chief Client Impact Officer, Zeno Group*)



One of the week's most strategically relevant discussions challenged the industry's obsession with reactive marketing. Rather than asking whether brands should participate in culture, the panel explored how they could contribute in ways that genuinely add value.

Speakers argued that too many organisations chase visibility by jumping on trends, when the real opportunity lies in understanding what consumers care about and finding an authentic role within those conversations.

Bayer's *It's Not Normal* campaign was highlighted as a powerful example of using consumer insight to challenge cultural norms and create

meaningful change, while KFC reframed culture not as social media trends but as "the collective expression of what people care about." Throughout the discussion, one principle stood out: brands earn the right to participate through consistency, credibility and contribution—not simply because a topic is trending.





CONSUMERS COME FIRST

The strongest brands prioritise audience needs over internal stakeholder pressures.

CULTURE IS BIGGER THAN TRENDS

Understanding people's values and behaviours is more important than reacting to viral moments.

INSIGHTS SHOULDN'T LEAD CREATIVITY

Social listening isn't just for monitoring campaigns; it's where the best briefs often begin.

Cultural relevance isn't built through opportunistic marketing. It's earned through long-term trust, consistent behaviour and a deep understanding of the communities a brand serves. As consumers become more discerning, meaningful contribution will become a far stronger differentiator than momentary visibility.

KEY LEARNINGS:

PERMISSION IS EVERYTHING

Consumers increasingly question why a brand is participating in a conversation - and expect a clear answer.

EARN YOUR PLACE IN CULTURE

Brands should only join conversations where they have genuine credibility and something meaningful to contribute.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.4

WHEN CREATIVE MEETS THE ALGORITHM: WHO'S REALLY DRIVING PERFORMANCE?

Cliona Hayes (Senior Director of Brand Marketing, Indeed), Will Double (Executive Director, Global Client Lead, WPP), Paul Frampton-Calero (CEO, Goodway Group), Danielle Kramer (SVP of Sales, GroundTruth), Dawn Williamson (CRO, Comcast Advertising), & Alexa Ritacco Raff (CMO, goop)

Moderator: *Don Sklenka (Senior Vice President of AI Optimization at Claritas)*



This panel explored how AI is reshaping the relationship between creativity, media and performance marketing. Representatives from Comcast, Goop, Indeed, WPP Media, Ground Truth, and Goodway Group agreed that AI has evolved from an experimental technology into an operational tool capable of improving targeting, testing and optimisation at scale.

Rather than replacing creative thinking, the discussion focused on how AI can remove fragmentation between disciplines, enabling strategists, creatives, analysts and media planners to work from the same data and optimise campaigns in real time.

One of the strongest themes was the industry's shift away from media metrics towards genuine business outcomes, with success increasingly measured through revenue, incrementality and customer value rather than clicks or impressions alone.





AI IS BECOMING OPERATIONAL

The conversation has shifted from experimentation to practical application at scale.

BUSINESS OUTCOMES MATTER MOST

Brands are increasingly measuring revenue and growth, not just media performance.

DATA WORKS HARDER TOGETHER

AI is helping reconnect creative, media, analytics and strategy into a single workflow.

The future of AI in marketing isn't about replacing creativity—it's about creating smarter, more connected ways of working. Brands that successfully integrate data, technology and human insight will be better placed to deliver meaningful business growth rather than simply more efficient campaigns.

KEY LEARNINGS:

TESTING IS BECOMING CONTINUOUS

Synthetic audiences and predictive modelling are enabling faster creative optimisation.

HUMAN JUDGEMENT REMAINS ESSENTIAL

AI improves execution, but strategic thinking still depends on people.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.5

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Rachel Huff (Victoire & Co, Deirdre Findlay, Apex Strategic Advisory), Tina Fegent (Independent Procurement Consultant)



Offering a candid look behind the agency-client relationship, this session explored what really influences business development success in today's increasingly competitive landscape.

Rather than focusing on pitch theatre or presentation polish, the discussion centred on the importance of curiosity, chemistry and commercial understanding. Panellists argued that agencies often spend too much time perfecting creative responses and not enough time understanding the client's business challenge.

Procurement was reframed not as a barrier to creativity, but as an important strategic stakeholder, while transparency and honest

conversations were highlighted as the foundations of long-term partnerships. The discussion reinforced that winning new business is rarely about delivering the "perfect pitch"—it's about building trust long before the presentation begins.





CURIOSITY BEATS CREDENTIALS

The best agencies ask better questions before proposing solutions.

PROCUREMENT IS A PARTNER

Building strong commercial relationships creates better outcomes for both agencies and clients.

CHEMISTRY STILL MATTERS

Clients increasingly buy into people and ways of working, not just ideas.

As AI accelerates proposal writing and pitch development, the human side of business development becomes even more valuable. Agencies that demonstrate commercial understanding, curiosity and genuine partnership will continue to stand out in increasingly competitive markets.

KEY LEARNINGS:

TRANSPARENCY BUILDS TRUST

Open conversations create stronger, longer-lasting partnerships.

DIVERSITY STRENGTHENS DECISION-MAKING

Broader perspectives lead to better strategic thinking and more effective client relationships.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.6

WHO GETS HEARD: REPRESENTATION, INFLUENCE & THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Frank Starling (Chief DE&I & Impact Officer at LIONS), & Koray Camgoz (CEO Taylor Bennett Foundation)



This thought-provoking discussion explored how representation influences not only the stories brands tell, but also who gets to shape them. Speakers challenged the industry to think beyond diversity in front of the camera and instead consider diversity throughout the creative process, from leadership and strategy to talent pipelines and decision-making.

The explored the unintended consequences of AI, warning that automation could widen existing inequalities if organisations fail to build inclusive systems from the outset. Rather than positioning inclusion as a social initiative, the discussion framed it as a commercial advantage, arguing that brands with broader perspectives create more relevant work, stronger ideas and deeper audience connections.





REPRESENTATION SHAPES CREATIVITY

The people making decisions influence the stories brands choose to tell.

AI NEEDS DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Inclusive development is essential to prevent bias becoming embedded in future technologies.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY UNLOCKS IDEAS

Teams produce stronger work when individuals feel confident contributing different perspectives.

Representation is no longer simply about reflecting society—it has become a competitive advantage. As audiences expect brands to understand their realities, diverse thinking across teams and leadership becomes essential to producing work that genuinely resonates.

KEY LEARNINGS:

INCLUSION DRIVES RELEVANCE

Brands that reflect the diversity of their audiences build greater trust and engagement.

DIVERSE TEAMS OUTPERFORM

A wider range of experiences leads to better strategic and creative outcomes.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.7

CREATIVE TALENT MANAGEMENT x UTA



As the creator economy continues to mature, this session explored how creators are evolving from influencers into long-term businesses. Rather than chasing platform growth alone, speakers argued that sustainable success comes from building communities, diversifying income streams and developing intellectual property beyond social media.

The discussion highlighted the growing importance of in-person experiences, local communities and digital-first events that strengthen audience relationships in the real world.

Speakers also warned against becoming overly dependent on individual platforms, encouraging

creators and brands alike to diversify their presence as algorithms and platforms continue to evolve. Throughout the discussion, one message stood out clearly: community—not content—is becoming the strongest predictor of long-term growth.





COMMUNITY OUTLASTS CONTENT

The strongest brands build loyal communities rather than simply growing followers.

EXPERIENCES DEEPEN RELATIONSHIPS

Digital-first brands should create meaningful opportunities for audiences to connect in real life.

DIVERSIFY YOUR PLATFORMS

Building across multiple channels reduces dependency on changing algorithms.

As social platforms become increasingly fragmented, brands should think less about maximising reach and more about creating communities people genuinely want to belong to. Advocacy built through participation is becoming more valuable than attention purchased through media.

KEY LEARNINGS:

LOCAL CREATES LOYALTY

Community events generate advocacy that scales through word of mouth.

DISTRIBUTION IS EVOLVING

Short-form clips and community sharing are becoming the dominant discovery model.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.8

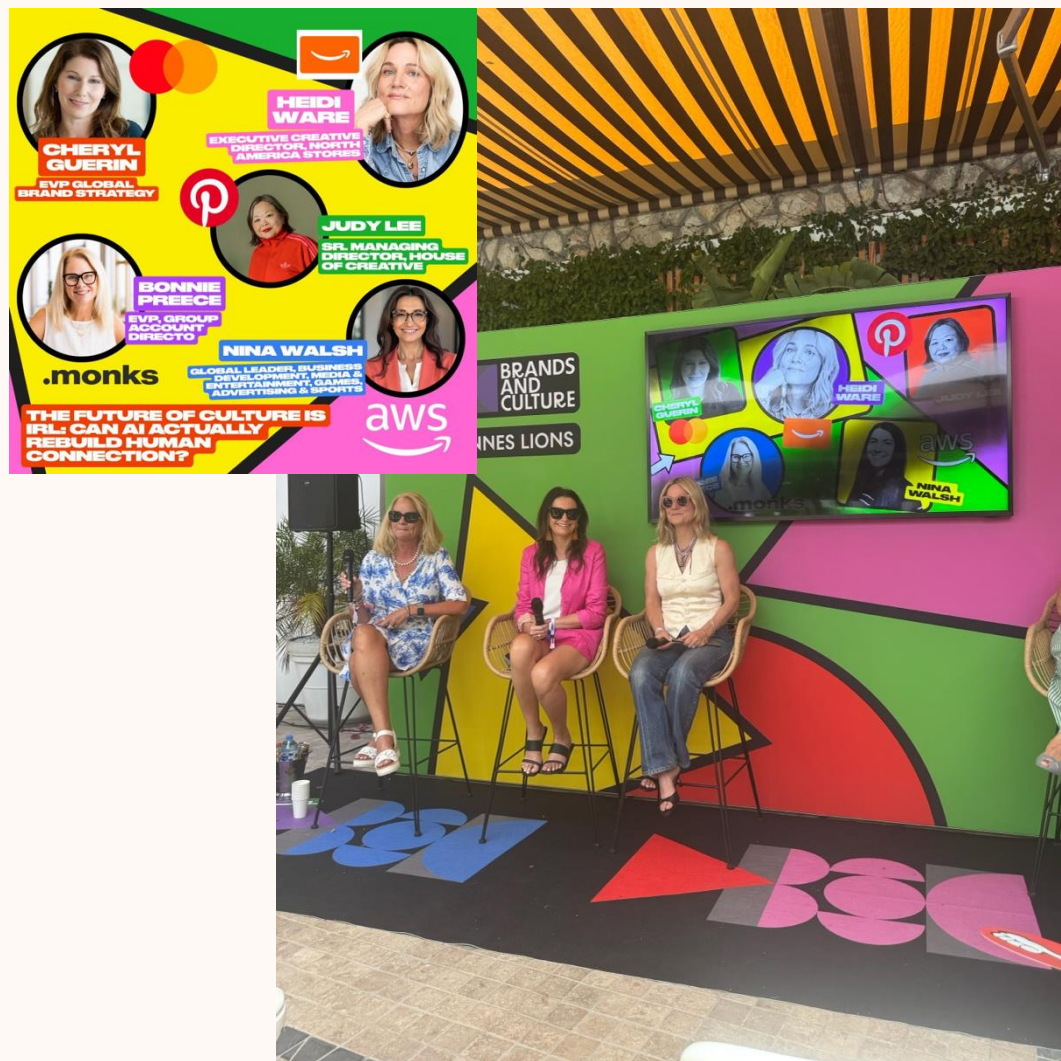
THE FUTURE OF CULTURE IS IRL: CAN AI ACTUALLY REBUILD HUMAN CONNECTION?

Cheryl Guerin (*EVP Global Brand Strategy, Mastercard*), Heidi Ware (*Executive Creative Director, North America Stores, Amazon*), Judy Lee (*Sr. Managing Director, House of Creative, Pinterest*), Nina Walsh (*Business Development Leader for Media & Entertainment, Games and Sport, AWS*)
Bonnie Preece (*EVP, Group Account Director, Monks*)



This session explored how AI is transforming personalisation by helping brands better understand customer preferences while preserving creativity and human judgement. Speakers argued that AI should remove complexity rather than create it, enabling marketers to deliver more relevant experiences without sacrificing originality. Rather than simply recommending products or automating decisions, AI has the potential to help consumers discover their own interests, tastes and identities.

Throughout the discussion, the panel stressed that technology should quietly enhance experiences while leaving emotion, storytelling, and creativity firmly in human hands.





AI SHOULD ENABLE CREATIVITY

Technology works best when it frees people to focus on ideas rather than administration.

PERSONALISATION SHOULD FEEL HUMAN

Consumers value experiences that reflect their individuality, not just their previous behaviour.

DISCOVERY IS BECOMING MORE PERSONAL

AI should help people explore their interests rather than simply reinforce existing habits.

Personalisation is no longer about serving increasingly targeted adverts. The opportunity is to create richer, more meaningful experiences that feel tailored to individuals while remaining emotionally engaging and unmistakably human.

KEY LEARNINGS:

SIMPLICITY CREATES BETTER EXPERIENCES

The best technology often disappears into the background.

HUMAN JUDGEMENT REMAINS ESSENTIAL

AI supports creativity—it doesn't replace it.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.9

CULTURALLY DISRUPTIVE BY NATURE - THE BRANDS THAT ARE BUILT TO MOVE CULTURE FORWARD

Sona Iliffe-Moon (*Chief Communications Officer, Yahoo*) Catherine Ferdon (*CMO, Coinbase*), Alex Weller (*Global VP of Creative, Patagonia*), Lia Haberman (*Founder, ICYMI*)



Bringing together perspectives from brands operating at the intersection of technology, culture and society, this session explored how organisations can remain relevant in an increasingly complex world. Speakers argued that disruption isn't created by reacting to every cultural moment, but by having the confidence to stand for something consistently over time.

Authenticity, curiosity and long-term purpose repeatedly emerged as stronger drivers of relevance than speed or novelty. Brands that continually reinvent themselves without abandoning their values were highlighted as those most likely to maintain cultural significance.





AUTHENTICITY CREATES RESILIENCE

Consistent values build stronger brands than reactive marketing.

CURIOSITY DRIVES INNOVATION

Understanding changing consumer behaviour should remain a constant priority.

CULTURE REWARDS CONSISTENCY

Long-term commitment creates greater credibility than short-term participation.

In an era of constant change, brands don't need to reinvent themselves every year—they need the ability to evolve continuously without losing sight of their purpose. Organisations that balance innovation with consistency will remain culturally relevant long after individual trends have passed.

KEY LEARNINGS:

PURPOSE PROVIDES DIRECTION

Strong brand values make difficult decisions easier.

REINVENTION SHOULD FEEL NATURAL

The best brands evolve continuously while remaining true to who they are.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.10

WORLD OF WEIRD

Panellists: Taylor Erin (*Head of Creative, Instacart*), Tomás Ostiglia (*ECD, LOLA Madrid*), Peter Khoury (*Asia CCO, Omnicom Advertising*), Luis Madruga Enrique (*CCO, VML Mexico*), Manuel Borde (*CCO, VML Mexico*)



One of the most entertaining sessions of the week explored why "weird" advertising is becoming one of the most effective ways to cut through increasingly crowded media environments.

Drawing on behavioural science and campaign examples from brands including Oreo and Instacart, speakers argued that unexpected creativity works because it disrupts established mental patterns, making brands more memorable.

However, the panel was clear that weirdness alone isn't enough. Successful campaigns use humour and absurdity to reinforce simple brand messages rather than distract from them.

The session also challenged marketers to embrace creative bravery, arguing that memorable work often feels uncomfortable during development but delivers disproportionate impact once released.





SURPRISE CREATES MEMORIES

Unexpected ideas are more likely to capture attention and remain memorable.

WEIRD WORKS WITH PURPOSE

Creativity should strengthen the brand message rather than overshadow it.

SIMPLICITY AMPLIFIES IMPACT

The strongest campaigns pair bold ideas with clear messaging.

As AI-generated content becomes increasingly polished and predictable, distinctive creativity becomes an even greater competitive advantage. The brands people remember will be those willing to surprise them, not simply optimise for them.

KEY LEARNINGS:

CREATIVE BRAVERY MATTERS

The most memorable campaigns often require confidence from both agencies and clients.

HUMOUR BUILD CONNECTION

Making people smile remains one of advertising's most effective tools.

WHY IT MATTERS:



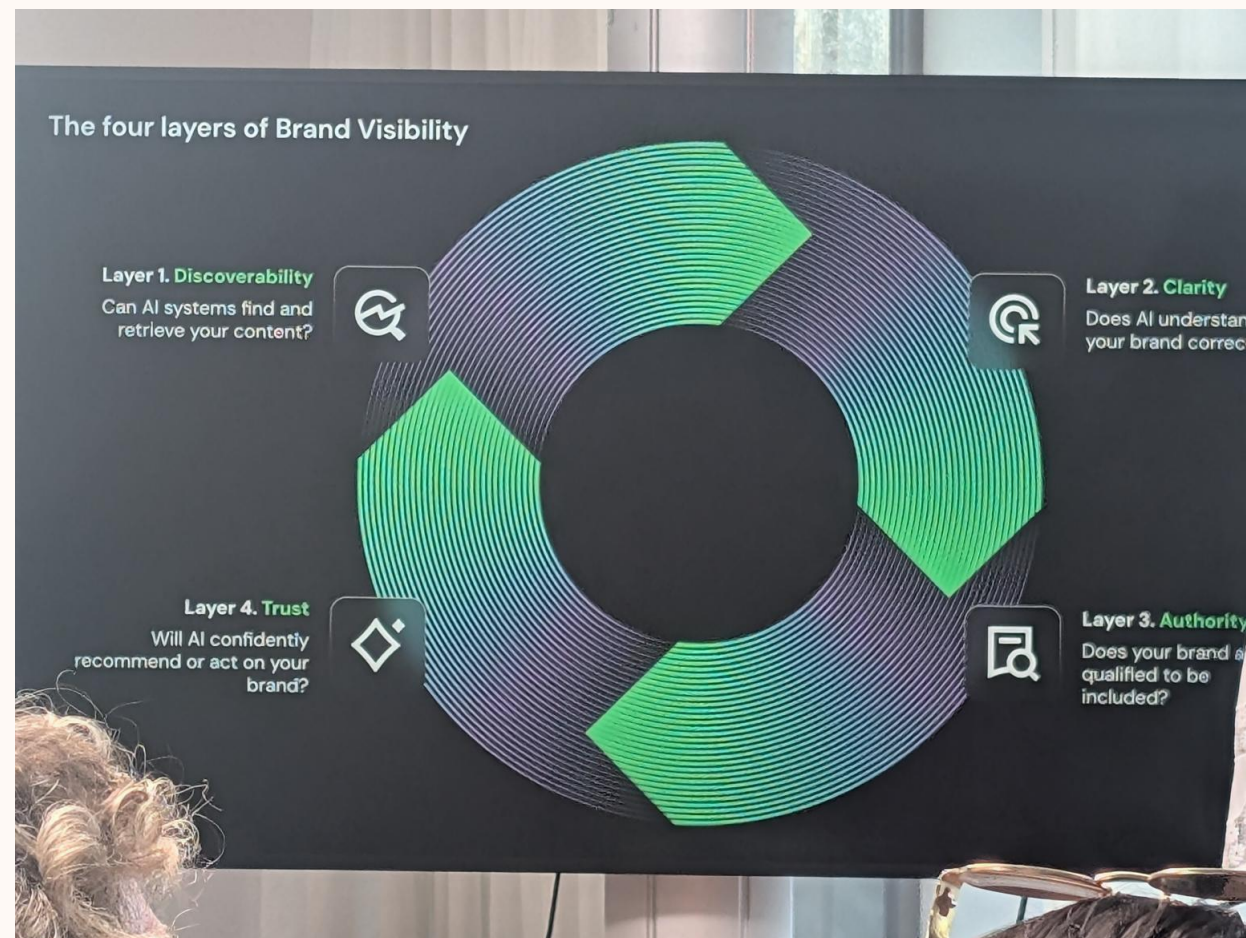
SESSION No.11

THE AI VISIBILITY PLAYBOOK

Semrush

One of the week's most practical sessions focused on how brands can improve their visibility in AI-powered search. Speakers argued that traditional SEO is no longer enough as large language models increasingly rely on authority, trust and third-party validation to recommend brands. Rather than asking how to rank higher, marketers should ask what AI already "knows" about their business.

The discussion introduced practical frameworks for auditing AI perception, creating proprietary research that earns citations and building authority through digital PR, reviews and customer advocacy. Patagonia was highlighted as a standout example of a brand whose reputation has been built organically through loyal communities rather than optimisation tactics alone.





AUTHORITY BEATS KEYWORDS

AI prioritises trusted brands over keyword optimisation alone.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH CREATES VISIBILITY

Exclusive data and fresh insights make brands more valuable sources for AI.

TRUST OUTRANKS EVERYTHING

Reviews, customer advocacy and earned media increasingly influence AI recommendations.

Search is evolving from an indexing challenge into a reputation challenge. Brands that invest in authority, trust and original thinking today will be significantly better positioned as AI increasingly shapes how consumers discover information.

KEY LEARNINGS:

MENTIONS MATTER MORE THAN LINKS

Being cited in trusted contexts is becoming more valuable than backlinks alone.

AUDIT YOUR AI REPUTATION

Regularly test how AI describes your brand and identify gaps in understanding.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.12

BUILDING BRANDS AT THE SPEED OF CULTURE

Sally Barton (Director, Marketing Growth Strategy, US, Mondelēz International), Paige Grossman (VP of Global Brand and Creative Marketing, Ancestry), Lola Bakare (CMO Advisor & Inclusive Marketing Strategist), Spencer Fox (Founder, FOX Creative Excellence Advisory)

This session explored how brands can stay culturally relevant without becoming reactive. Through examples ranging from Nutter Butter and Ryanair to Ancestry and Jet2, speakers argued that successful cultural marketing isn't built on speed alone—it's built on preparation.

The best brands operate like newsrooms, with clear strategic principles, empowered teams and deep cultural understanding that allow them to respond confidently when the right opportunities arise.

Another recurring theme was the importance of creating psychological safety within organisations, giving teams permission to test ideas, learn quickly and occasionally fail.

Heritage brands were also challenged to rethink their history, using nostalgia and long-standing brand equity as creative assets rather than limitations. Ultimately, the discussion positioned culture not as a marketing tactic, but as an organisational capability built through curiosity, listening and long-term commitment.





HERITAGE IS A STRENGTH

Long-established brands can use nostalgia to create fresh cultural relevance.

BUILD WITH COMMUNITIES

Cultural relevance comes from participation, not observation.

EMBRACE EXPERIMENTATION

Creating space to test and learn leads to stronger creative ideas.

Culture moves quickly, but successful brands don't rely on speed alone. They invest in understanding their audiences, empowering teams and creating clear strategic foundations that allow creativity to flourish. The result isn't just better campaigns -it's stronger, more resilient brands that feel naturally connected to the communities they serve.

KEY LEARNINGS:

THINK LIKE A NEWSROOM

Brands need the structure and confidence to respond quickly when relevant opportunities emerge.

STRATEGY ENABLES AGILITY

The best reactive marketing is built on strong planning, not spontaneous decision-making.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.13

ANTI SLOP. PRO HUMANITY

Brandon Lentino (*Chief Creative Officer, Viral Nation*), Yasmin O'Neal (*Global Brand Senior Director, DECIEM*), Elizabeth Preis (*Chief Marketing & Customer Officer, Victoria's Secret & Co.*), Christine Cruz-Clarke (*General Manager, Beauty & Wellbeing, Unilever*)



Although brief, this session delivered one of the clearest messages of the week. As AI becomes increasingly capable of generating content at scale, marketers must resist the temptation to prioritise speed over substance. Speakers argued that AI should be used to improve productivity, streamline processes and remove repetitive tasks - not replace human creativity or meaningful relationships.

Throughout the discussion, there was strong consensus that the brands succeeding in the AI era will be those using technology to create more space for imagination, collaboration and emotional connection rather than simply producing more content.





AI SHOULD AMPLIFY PEOPLE

Technology should strengthen human creativity rather than replace it.

PRODUCTIVITY CREATES POSSIBILITY

Automation gives teams more time to think strategically.

CREATIVITY REMAINS IRREPLACEABLE

Original ideas still come from human insight and experience.

KEY LEARNINGS:

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER MOST

Technology should enhance human connection, not diminish it.

BETTER BEATS FASTER

Efficiency only matters if it improves the quality of the work.

WHY IT MATTERS:

As AI becomes more accessible, competitive advantage shifts towards imagination, empathy and cultural understanding. Brands that use AI to create better work - not simply more work - will continue to stand apart.



SESSION No.14

AI AS GATEKEEPER & THE NEW RULES OF BRAND VISIBILITY

Kamal Ahmed (Fortune), Andrew Warden (Semrush/Adobe), Adam Collins (Reddit), Carmen True (HP)



This breakfast panel explored how AI is reshaping the way consumers discover brands, with particular focus on Reddit's growing influence in AI-powered search. Speakers argued that while search behaviour itself won't disappear, the sources consumers trust are changing. Reddit has become one of the internet's most valuable repositories of authentic human conversation, making it an increasingly important source for AI-generated recommendations.

The panel also explored how CMOs must become more cross-functional, balancing technical SEO, reputation, community management and broader business objectives to ensure brands remain visible across both human and AI-driven journeys.





SEARCH BEHAVIOUR IS EVOLVING

People will always seek information—the channels they trust are changing.

BRAND CONSISTENCY MATTERS

AI relies on cohesive messaging across owned, earned and third-party channels.

HUMAN JUDGEMENT REMAINS ESSENTIAL

AI complements strategic thinking but cannot replace it.

AI is rewarding authenticity over optimisation. Brands that invest in trust, community and consistent storytelling will be more likely to become trusted recommendations rather than simply search results.

KEY LEARNINGS:

COLLABORATION CREATES VISIBILITY

Marketing, PR, SEO and product teams must work together to strengthen discoverability.

AUTHENTIC CONVERSATION BUILDS TRUST

Platforms like Reddit are becoming increasingly influential because they reflect genuine human experiences.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.15

THE FUTURE OF AI SEARCH

Google Beach



Google shared how AI is fundamentally changing the search experience, with conversational queries, multimodal search and AI-powered assistance reshaping how consumers discover products and information. Search queries in AI Mode are now significantly longer, while voice, image and conversational interactions are becoming increasingly common. Speakers from Google, IKEA and DoorDash demonstrated how brands are adapting by focusing less on individual keywords and more on creating useful, authoritative content that supports consumers throughout complex decision-making journeys. The session reinforced that SEO, AEO and broader brand authority are no longer separate disciplines—they are becoming part of the same growth strategy.





SEARCH IS BECOMING CONVERSATIONAL

Consumers are asking longer, more complex questions than ever before.

DISCOVERY IS INCREASINGLY MULTIMODAL

Voice, images and AI assistants are transforming search behaviour.

SEO AND AEO WORK TOGETHER

Technical optimisation and authoritative content are equally important.

Search is becoming less about being found and more about being genuinely useful. Brands that invest in authoritative content and seamless customer experiences will be best placed to succeed as AI reshapes discoverability.

KEY LEARNINGS:

MEASURE MEANINGFUL OUTCOMES

Growth, incrementality and customer value matter more than clicks alone.

COLLABORATION DRIVES SUCCESS

Search increasingly requires alignment across marketing, content, product and technology teams.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.16

THE BUSINESS OF STORYTELLING: A CONVERSATION WITH MEL ROBBINS

Mel Robbins



Mel Robbins closed the week with an inspiring discussion on building meaningful content in an increasingly crowded media landscape. Rather than focusing on growth hacks or publishing at greater volume, she argued that lasting success comes from clarity, intentionality and serving one person exceptionally well before trying to reach millions.

Introducing her "You. One. Many." framework, Robbins encouraged creators and brands to become crystal clear about who they are trying to help and why. She also shared insights into the meticulous research and production process behind her podcast, emphasising that quality, empathy and consistency continue to outperform volume.

At a time when AI makes content easier to produce than ever before, her message was refreshingly human: meaningful impact comes from creating work that genuinely improves someone's life.





CLARITY COMES FIRST

Know exactly who you're creating for before thinking about scale.

SERVE ONE TO REACH MANY

Deep impact with one person ultimately creates broader influence.

QUALITY BEATS QUANTITY

Publishing more isn't the answer - creating greater value is.

In a world where content creation is becoming increasingly automated, the brands that stand out won't be those producing the most—they'll be those creating work with the greatest purpose. Mel Robbins' approach was a timely reminder that meaningful communication begins with empathy, not algorithms.

KEY LEARNINGS:

CONSISTENCY BUILDS TRUST

Long-term relationships are built through reliable, meaningful content.

PURPOSE DRIVES GROWTH

The most successful creators remain focused on the impact they want to have.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.17

AI & SHOPPING TRENDS x AMAZON PORT

Charlotte Maines (*Vice President, Devices, Content & Advertising, Amazon Ads*)
& Elav Horwitz (*Chief Innovation Officer, WPP*), Bethenny Frankel (*Entrepreneur, Founder of Skinnygirl*)



This session explored how AI is fundamentally reshaping the consumer purchase journey—not by replacing brand building, but by changing how purchase decisions are made. As conversational AI becomes a trusted advisor, consumers are increasingly asking platforms like ChatGPT, Alexa and Gemini not just to find products, but to recommend them.

The panel argued that discovery will still be driven by creativity, culture, creators and advertising, but AI is rapidly becoming the place where consumers validate those decisions before purchasing. This shift places greater emphasis on trust, reputation and the quality of information available across the internet.

Brands are no longer competing solely for visibility; they are competing to become the recommendation AI gives first.





AI IS RESHAPING THE PURCHASE JOURNEY

Consumers are increasingly using AI to validate decisions before they buy.

TRUST DRIVES RECOMMENDATION

Reviews, earned media and creator content are becoming the signals AI trusts most.

CREATIVITY STILL CREATES DEMAND

Advertising and cultural relevance remain the spark that inspires discovery.

This session reinforced that the future of brand building extends beyond awareness into recommendation. As AI increasingly mediates purchase decisions, earned media, creator advocacy, customer reviews and authoritative content become strategic growth drivers rather than supporting tactics. For brands, the challenge is no longer simply to be seen - it is to be trusted enough to be recommended.

KEY LEARNINGS:

RECOMMENDATION IS THE NEW BATTLEGROUND

Brands are competing to be the answer AI recommends, not just the one consumers find.

EVERY DIGITAL ASSET MATTERS

Product pages, FAQs, imagery and reviews all help shape how AI understands and recommends brands.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.18

GET FLUENT IN FANGIRL x REDDIT

Rachel Karten (*Social Strategist, Creator and "Professional Fangirl"*)
& Sarah Wilson (*Community Strategist and Marketing Advisor*)



One of the standout sessions of Cannes Lions 2026, *Get Fluent in Fangirl* challenged marketers to rethink how they view fandom. Rather than seeing fangirls as passionate consumers, Rachel Karten and Sarah Wilson argued they are the architects of modern culture—building communities, influencing purchasing decisions and shaping what becomes mainstream.

The session explored why brands should stop chasing attention and instead create spaces where people genuinely want to belong. Through examples ranging from Taylor Swift fan communities to Dove's award-winning *Real Reviews* campaign, the speakers demonstrated that the most successful brands don't simply

speak to audiences—they listen, participate and empower communities to become part of the story.





SPECIFICITY CREATES LOYALTY

The strongest communities become indispensable to a clearly defined audience.

LISTEN BEFORE YOU LEAD

The richest cultural insights come from immersing yourself in communities, not just analysing data.

PARTICIPATION BUILDS ADVOCACY

The best campaigns give people something to contribute to, creating stronger engagement.

As traditional reach becomes harder to achieve, community is emerging as one of marketing's greatest competitive advantages. This session reinforced that earned success isn't driven by broadcasting louder—it's driven by creating ideas that people actively choose to join, shape and share. For brands, the opportunity is to move beyond building audiences and instead cultivate genuine belonging, where advocacy becomes a natural outcome of participation rather than something that needs to be bought.

KEY LEARNINGS:

COMMUNITIES CREATE CULTURE

Fandom is more than enthusiasm—it's a powerful force that shapes trends, behaviours and brand relevance.

BELONGING BEATS ATTENTION

Long-term brand growth comes from creating communities people want to be part of, not simply campaigns people notice.

WHY IT MATTERS:



SESSION No.19

THE AGE OF REINVENTION: SHAPING BRANDS THAT NEVER STOP MOVING

Karlie Kloss (*Entrepreneur, Philanthropist and Founder, Kode With Klossy*)
& Lia Dean (*President of Banking & Premium Products, Capital One*)

This session explored how the world's most successful brands are redefining what it means to stay relevant.

Drawing on experiences across fashion, finance, entrepreneurship and media, Karlie Kloss and Lia Dean argued that reinvention isn't about constantly changing direction—it's about evolving how consumers experience your brand while staying true to its core purpose. The discussion challenged traditional ideas of premium, suggesting that today's consumers value time, convenience, personalisation and meaningful experiences over status or exclusivity.

From Capital One's investment in travel lounges and cafés to Karlie Kloss's work

reinventing iconic media brands, the speakers demonstrated that the brands thriving today are those that continually adapt to changing consumer expectations without losing sight of who they are.





PREMIUM HAS BEEN REDEFINED

Today's consumers increasingly value time, convenience and personalised experiences.

AI SHOULD ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Technology delivers its greatest value when it removes friction focuses on what matters most.

EXPERIENCES SHAPE BRAND PERCEPTION

People remember how a brand makes them feel, not just the products or services it sells.

This session reinforced that reinvention is no longer an occasional exercise—it's an ongoing capability. As consumer expectations continue to evolve, brands must continually adapt how they deliver value while remaining true to their purpose. For marketers, the opportunity lies in creating experiences that save people time, feel deeply personal and build lasting emotional connections, with technology acting as an enabler rather than the headline.

KEY LEARNINGS:

REINVENTION STARTS WITH PURPOSE

The strongest brands evolve their execution while remaining anchored to a clear and consistent mission.

PARTNERSHIPS SHOULD CREATE VALUE

The most effective collaborations build new experiences and communities rather than simply increasing visibility.

WHY IT MATTERS: