

A Future-proof Media Plan



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From shrinking attention spans to an endless stream of mass-scale channels, today's brands must maneuver through an ever-evolving media landscape.

A Brandweek 2025 session co-hosted with dentsu brought together Mike Law, North America CEO of Carat (a dentsu company), and Shivram Vaideeswaran, SVP of brand marketing for Papa Johns, to discuss media's uncertain but exciting future.

Navigating media option overload

The discussion began with Law acknowledging today's vast media opportunities as a growth driver. "I think in the last year what's changed is you have so many scaled options, so many ways to reach consumers."

In Vaideeswaran's view, the choices fall into four buckets: paid media, creator media, aggregator media, and owned organic social. "You have to start looking at multiple different avenues as you're starting to build out your media strategy,"

he encouraged.

Vaideeswaran's philosophy on ad dollars is simple: Don't wait for someone to think about your product—meet them where their attention already is.

He explained that people aren't thinking about pizza all day (even if he wishes they were). What they are thinking about: new sneaker drops, celebrity updates, their favorite teams, whatever is happening in culture at that moment.

From there, the strategy is to show up in those moments through creators who already have credibility in those spaces.

"Finding amazing content creators who are working in those spaces, and being able to integrate your brand into those moments starts to put you into places where they might not have been thinking about your product, and hopefully, connecting you back to those cultural moments," shared Vaideeswaran. "Finding more of those moments where you can tap into their everyday life is so important."

Delivering to customers mid-journey and in real time

Law compared the consumer journey to a bowl of spaghetti: "It's just all kind of mixed together with different sauces and there's no start and end point like there used to be." In other words, brands must understand where a customer joins the journey and carry them through from that point. "It could be different for every impression that's served," he explained.

Timing also matters for optimizing real-time opportunities, said Vaideeswaran. He shared the example of Papa Johns jumping on Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce's engagement within 24 hours.

"We looked at our loyalty program and gave rewards out to anyone named Taylor or Travis. And our incredible PR team got the message out into the world and was able to create buzz

around a moment,” he said. “If we had waited another day or two, it would have been irrelevant. And I think that’s when you start looking like you’re a clout chaser.”

Enhancing your media strategy with creator collaborations

Vaideeswaran and Law next discussed the power of partnerships, including Shaq’s role as an ambassador for Papa Johns. “He’s also an investor. He’s a franchisee. He’s got his own pizza, the Shaq-a-Roni, that is on our menu and that is a beloved favorite,” explained Vaideeswaran. “The more we can integrate him, his voice, his humor, and his style into our work, that’s when we’ve actually seen the biggest success.”

Papa Johns plans to replicate that model with new partners—and they don’t necessarily need Shaq-level star power. “Depending on the moment, the consumer you’re targeting, and the relevancy of the product, you actually have the opportunity to look at both creators and celebrities in kind of the same vein,” Vaideeswaran said.

Just be sure the partnerships make sense for your brand and your audience, added Law. “Authenticity becomes of utmost importance. When you think about the creators who you work with, are they truly part of the brand story, the brand message, or do they just resonate with the consumer base? You have to find that right balance between the two,” he said.

One question to ask: Are they fans of the brand already? If so, you’ll have a bigger chance of success.

Serving up customized creative

Driving growth in the future of media requires new strategies. “You might start to have multiple versions of creative for the same product that each have a little bit of a different message and/or positioning to make sure that you’re targeted

to the right consumer,” said Vaideeswaran. “It’s a pretty big change for us to start thinking about moving away from having one ad that’s out there to now having multiple messages, but all towards the same goal.”

Following that theme, each leader chose one word to sum up the future of media to close out the session. Vaideeswaran chose “attention.” “It’s going to get harder and harder to get people’s attention, and that’s going to require us to be even more relevant with our creative and our messaging,” he said.

For Law, it was “change.” “I think that there’s just going to be an inordinate amount of change, and we have to be ready to take that on.”

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