Brandweek 2026: Democratized Marketing Won’t Differentiate Your Brand. ft. Cheryl Guerin of Mastercard

AI gives every marketer access to similar tools. So, how’s that going to help your brand stand out?

Live from the Marketing Vanguard stage at Brandweek 2026, Jenny Rooney sits down with Mastercard’s EVP of global brand strategy and innovation, Cheryl Guerin, to talk about how brands can differentiate themselves when technology becomes table stakes.

Cheryl gets into how Mastercard uses AI to eliminate routine brand work and free its people for higher-order thinking, why Priceless has survived nearly three decades of cultural change, and why real agility sometimes looks like saying no.

What you’ll learn:

- How Mastercard uses automation to free brand experts for higher-order creative work

- Why Priceless has remained relevant across nearly three decades of cultural change
- Why saying no is becoming a critical part of brand agility
- How “passions experts” help Mastercard identify cultural opportunities earlier
- Why emerging talent can create different economics and stronger relationships than obvious superstar bets
- Why purpose-driven work has to connect brand ethos, constituent needs and business impact

This episode is part of a special vidcast series that was recorded live during Brandweek 2026 and presented in partnership with Tatari.

[embedded content]

About our guest:

Cheryl Guerin has spent nearly 26 years at Mastercard across a wide range of roles, including regional marketing leadership, products and services, P&L responsibility and global credit before returning to the area she describes as her heart: marketing.

Over that time, Cheryl has helped evolve the Priceless platform through major shifts in culture, technology and the business itself, leading initiatives such as the True Name card and Touch Card. Her perspective is grounded in a simple challenge: keep the brand relevant as the world changes without losing the human truth that made it matter in the first place.

Episode Highlights:

[02:03] AI Cannot Differentiate Your Brand – Cheryl’s Brandweek 2026 AI take cuts straight through the hype. If everyone eventually has access to similar technology, the tool itself cannot become the advantage. Mastercard is already

using AI to absorb routine brand questions, with its brand assistant handling roughly 75% of work that used to be answered manually. But the win is not simply efficiency. It is giving experienced brand people more time to think about harder questions around creativity, trust and the future of the brand.

[04:16] Why Priceless Still Works Nearly 30 Years Later — Mastercard has had to flex Priceless through culture shifts, technology shifts and major changes in the business. What has not changed is the human idea underneath it. Cheryl traces the platform back to a move away from material signs of success toward intangible experiences. Nearly three decades later, she points to Gen Z's desire for belonging and in-person experiences as evidence that the underlying truth has become more relevant, not less.

[10:07] What Is Still Worth an Agency Premium? — Mastercard's relationship with McCann has lasted nearly as long as Priceless itself. Cheryl sees that creative partnership as essential, but she is equally clear that not every piece of work needs premium agency resources. As daily content, B2B marketing and full-funnel execution increase, Mastercard has expanded its own internal capabilities. The split is increasingly deliberate: keep agencies close to the big creative thinking, while building internal muscle for the volume and speed modern marketing demands.

[13:27] Why MasterCard Hires "Passions Experts" — Mastercard does not rely only on generalist marketers to understand music, sports, esports or motorsports. Cheryl describes specialists who deeply understand those communities and know how to connect cultural knowledge back to business outcomes. That expertise helps the brand identify talent before everyone else does, balance globally recognizable names like Lady Gaga with emerging bets and compete without necessarily being the biggest spender in the category.

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