Gap Quietly Names New CMO, and Rolls Out Her First Campaign

Key Insights

- Gap is leaning into the idea of ‘modern American optimism’ in its first campaign under its new CMO.
- Gap has brought the entire consumer experience in-house, with all elements created by Alderete’s team.

Gap has a new marketing chief.

Mary Alderete, a veteran of Gap Inc., has taken on the role Alegra O’Hare departed earlier this year. Alderete moved into the role with little fanfare in February, after serving as the CMO for Gap’s Banana Republic brand for three years. Her history with the company dates back to the mid-aughts, when she held a vp role for Old Navy. Between those jobs, she held top marketing roles at other fashion brands, including True Religion, Levi’s and Modcloth.

Though she’s been in the job for six months now, it’s today that Alderete is rolling out the first major campaign of her tenure as CMO. The campaign, called “Stand United,” is focused not on product or even, really, the Gap brand, but instead on civic engagement. It will promote voter registration as well as voting-themed products. Gap will also host live talks with When We All Vote ambassadors and youth activists to encourage people to vote on Sept. 22, National Voter Registration Day.

Given the upcoming election, the campaign is certainly relevant to the current moment, but Alderete said it’s been in the works since February—prior to the pandemic—and since then, the idea of standing together and engaging with your community has becoming even more poignant.

“The brand positioning of Gap that we really honed in on this idea of culturally relevant expressions of modern American optimism,” Alderete told Adweek. She said the action-oriented aspects of the campaign are a “a step forward for the Gap brand, to actually go out and put messaging and resources in our Instagram to help people understand their role in bridging that gap.”

Alderete is moving into the role at a difficult time for the retailer. Like most retailers, it was hit hard by the pandemic—especially since the chain still has such a large brick-and-mortar footprint. Revenue during the second quarter slumped 18%, despite a boost from ecommerce. But Gap’s issues are not all pandemic-induced: The company has struggled for years now, and though there have been attempts to chart a new course, they’ve yet to bear fruit.

Case in point: Art Peck, Gap’s CEO of 15 years, abruptly left the company at the end of 2019, and plans to spin off Old Navy were scrapped earlier this year. The retailer is also closing three of its stores, including its flagship, in its hometown of San Francisco.

In marketing, in particular, there’s been upheaval in recent months. O’Hare’s departure from the post Alderete now occupies came after less than a year on the job, and Gap-owned Athleta’s longtime CMO, Sheila Shekar Pollak, left earlier this year. (Last month, Tom Herbst was appointed as Athleta’s interim CMO.)

Gap’s Stand United campaign encourages consumers to vote and use their voice.

And more change is coming, Alderete said, particularly in how Gap’s marketing department operates. Gap has now “combined the integrated consumer experience under the CMO” and brought

those operations in-house. The decision was made, Alderete said, “so that we could create that seamless experience across channels, across all the touch points.”

Now, “the creation of every single asset goes through my team,” she said—that included the “Stand United” campaign.

It’s all part of an effort to make Gap come out on the other side of the pandemic in a stronger position than it was in before. It hasn’t been all bad for the brand. Alderete pointed to Gap’s history in certain categories, like denim, activewear and fleece, that’s been a boost in the current crisis. She believes having already earned consumers’ trust in those segments will continue to aid the brand in the “new normal,” where comfortable clothing is more of a priority than office or formal wear.

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