Marketing Leadership and Brand Evolution With Hilton CMO Mark Weinstein

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Welcome to this episode of the Marketing Vanguard podcast. Today, we have a special guest recorded live at Brandweek 2024 in Phoenix, Arizona: Mark Weinstein, CMO of Hilton.

Join host Jenny Rooney and Mark as they discuss his journey to becoming CMO, the evolution of Hilton's loyalty program, and the successful "For the Stay" platform. Mark shares insights on combining brand and performance marketing, the power of authentic partnerships, and Hilton's unique role in fostering human connection through hospitality.

"The challenge when you're a brand like us is we're 105 years old. … We command market premiums. We're performing commercially. And so you get complacent about the need to build the brand," he said on the podcast.

As CMO of Hilton, Mark Weinstein oversees both marketing and customer functions, bringing together brand-building and loyalty programs. Prior to becoming CMO in June 2020, Mark spent several years running Hilton Honors, growing it from 25 million members driving 45% of business to 200 million members driving 65% of business. Before joining Hilton 14 years ago,

he worked in consulting at Pricewaterhouse and a small sales and marketing strategy firm.

Key takeaways:

[04:55] The Evolution of Loyalty Programs – Mark explains that successful loyalty programs must start with a strong brand foundation, using the analogy that "it wouldn't be advantageous to get the 13th bagel for free if the first 12 weren't good." He describes how Hilton Honors evolved from focusing solely on high-value customers to creating immediate value for all members through features like free Wi-Fi and room selection. The program now adds 83,000 new members daily, emphasizing the importance of making rewards accessible and exciting to use rather than just earn.

[08:29] The Integration of Brand and Performance Marketing – Mark discusses the critical decision to combine brand marketing and loyalty functions under the CMO role. He emphasizes that the brand versus performance marketing debate is shortsighted, as both elements are essential for success. The integration has enabled Hilton to better balance short-term results with long-term brand building, while also allowing for more cohesive storytelling through partnerships, influencers, and creators.

[10:35] The "For the Stay" Platform – Mark shares how the pandemic provided an opportunity to reimagine Hilton's brand positioning. Rather than following industry clichés about travel, they focused on Hilton's unique role in the customer journey – the stay itself. The platform extends beyond literal hotel stays to encompass Hilton's long-term presence in communities, environmental commitment, and relationship with team members and guests.

[11:04] Understanding Today's Consumer – Mark observes that post-pandemic consumers have shifted from having bucket lists to "to-do lists," with people more eager to travel without

waiting for traditional scheduling constraints. He also discusses Hilton’s competitive advantage over home-sharing services through the combination of three elements: great physical space, service culture, and technological enablement.

[13:26] Legacy and Leadership – Mark reflects on his dual ambitions as CMO: advancing the brand from being loved to truly beloved, and creating a legacy through mentoring and developing talent. He emphasizes the importance of both brand advancement and people development in his leadership approach.

[14:03] Authentic Celebrity Partnerships – Mark discusses Hilton’s partnership with Paris Hilton, highlighting the authenticity of the relationship given her family connection to the brand. He explains how her personal history with Hilton hotels and genuine connection to the brand make her an ideal partner, while also noting the importance of balancing different generational appeal through various influencer partnerships.

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