

Road to Brandweek: Walmart's Janey Whiteside on Adapting to a Pandemic and Connecting With Consumers

When the pandemic hit the U.S. in March, Walmart was one of the essential retailers that had to quickly pivot to meet customer needs. That meant not only leaning into existing services like curbside pickup, but adding a two-hour Express Delivery service and a Walmart+ membership program, along with community-focused initiatives like drive-in movie theaters and a virtual summer camp.

Janey Whiteside, Walmart's first-ever chief customer officer, will speak at Brandweek Master Live on Sept. 16 about the retailer's position as a changemaker. Leading up to the event, we talked about Walmart's response to the pandemic, as well as one aspect that hasn't actually changed this year: the retailer's intent to forge emotional connections with consumers and help them get to know the real Walmart.

This interview has been edited for clarity.

This year has brought unprecedented challenges for marketers. What's been the hardest lift for you, and how are you getting through it?

We moved quickly at the beginning of the pandemic to ensure we were talking to our customers about services and items that they could take advantage of and that would be helpful in the moment. We also needed to make sure that we were able to turn on a dime to let customers know that we are working day in day out to ensure they, and our associates, stay safe. That means we're communicating more than ever with them through new and innovative tactics. Speed and agility have been an absolute

must, and I am so proud of the way the team has responded.

What lessons do you think the marketing and advertising industry will come away from this time with? What changes has the pandemic accelerated?

More than ever, companies are moving with speed. Life as we knew it changed in a matter of weeks, and that means our marketing and business plans changed in that same time period as we put the customer at the center of everything we do at Walmart. I am excited to see that continue.

What about your sector in particular? What changes have come, and how has that impacted your marketing?

We keep saying that customers' shopping habits fast-forwarded five years in five weeks.

We moved quickly across our business to launch, and market, services that really matter to our customers in their current situation. For example, customers are using pickup and delivery at an unprecedented rate. We rallied to create some small wins—like a how-to video for our pickup and delivery services, which was the No. 2 video on YouTube the weekend after it launched.

We also created super impactful solutions for customers like Express delivery, which gets customers' orders to them in less than two hours, and Walmart+, our membership option that brings customers unprecedented value. When we're moving this quickly to launch new services, TV and super-produced creative isn't always an option but fun, savvy content is, like our work on TikTok with Jason Derulo.

What have been the wins for the marketing industry this year? What excites you about the next 12 months?

I love that companies are talking more about who they are and how they are benefitting communities. It's been a huge focus for us at Walmart. We know we have an amazing story to tell—we want everyone to know the Walmart we know, and we're putting a

bigger emphasis on that this year and will continue to.

Connecting with consumers is more important than ever. How are you doing that in the current climate?

It's about meeting customers where they are. We're working really hard to know where customers are consuming their media ... and be there with fun, innovative content.

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