

Why B2B Tech Marketing Is Outpacing Consumer Brands With Cisco CMO Carrie Palin

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On this episode of the Marketing Vanguard podcast, host Jenny Rooney she sits down with Carrie Palin, CMO of communications technology firm Cisco, for an illuminating discussion on the evolution of B2B tech marketing and authentic leadership.

From transforming Cisco's digital presence to leveraging AI for enhanced customer experiences, Palin shares how she's redefining what it means to be a tech CMO.

The conversation takes an inspiring turn as she candidly discusses navigating executive leadership while being present as a parent, offering valuable insights for professionals seeking to balance career ambitions with personal priorities.

"These days, because the world is so intensely digital and because B2C companies have made that consumer relationship so instantaneous and gratifying, we have had to catch up in B2B. And yet, now we are producing a lot of the tech in B2B that is enabling all of this AI revolution," she says on the podcast.

With over 30 years in tech marketing at Dell, IBM, Box, SendGrid, and Splunk, Palin is a pioneer in B2B marketing. At Cisco, she has modernized the brand, overhauled the website, and leveraged AI for customer engagement. A champion of work-life integration, she has helped position Cisco as a leader in digital resilience and cybersecurity while driving business growth.

Whether you're a marketing leader looking to drive innovation or an aspiring executive seeking to chart your path, this episode delivers actionable wisdom for modern business leadership.

Key takeaways:

[11:51] Transforming legacy brands and customer experience – Carrie shares how her team transformed Cisco's brand from "the company that built the Internet" to a leader in digital resilience. Upon joining Cisco, she identified a critical opportunity with their 17-year-old website that had an 80% bounce rate. By securing executive buy-in and making customer experience the priority, her team replatformed the entire site and implemented a customer-first approach to all digital touchpoints, winning numerous awards for their work.

[16:31] AI framework: enhancing human connections – Carrie emphasizes Cisco's thoughtful, intentional approach to AI implementation, focusing on safety, security, and enhancing human connections. She explains that AI should be used to fill gaps in customer experience that would be impossible to address with human resources alone, while preserving the human touch where it adds the most value. Her team uses this framework to evaluate every AI initiative, ensuring technology serves humanity rather than replacing it.

[07:21] B2B tech driving innovative customer experiences – Carrie challenges the conventional wisdom that B2C marketing is more innovative than B2B. She explains that B2B tech

companies are now at the forefront of marketing innovation because they both develop and implement the technologies transforming customer experiences. The digital transformation has allowed B2B marketers to understand customer behavior with unprecedented depth, potentially surpassing their B2C counterparts in customer insights and elevating marketing's role from simply owning the brand to being true business leaders.

[09:11] Customer-first digital transformation – Carrie outlines the key elements of successful digital transformation at enterprise scale: identifying critical pain points in the customer journey, securing executive support for significant investment, measuring impact through clear metrics like bounce rate reduction, and prioritizing customer experience over internal organizational silos. This framework guided Cisco's website re-platforming and broader digital transformation efforts, demonstrating how large organizations can successfully evolve their digital presence with the customer at the center.

[13:03] Brand modernization through creative partnerships – Carrie details how her team updated Cisco's brand perception by partnering with agencies that typically served luxury brands to bring fresh perspectives to B2B tech marketing. She describes their award-nominated security ad featuring a stylish young executive confidently handling a cyber incident, set to original music without dialogue—a brand language specifically designed to resonate with millennials and Gen Z. This approach demonstrates how traditional B2B brands can successfully modernize their image through unexpected creative partners.

[18:45] AI for global scale with personal touch – Carrie provides a practical example of using AI to scale customer service globally while enhancing personalization. Her team implemented AI to provide real-time, multi-language support for incoming leads across all time zones and

languages—something impossible to staff with humans alone. This approach ensures customers receive immediate attention in their native language, demonstrating how AI can actually make interactions more human by meeting customers where they are, rather than forcing them to wait for business hours or communicate in a non-native language.

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