

Dana Marineau Transcript

Dana: I always say people will ask me brand versus performance or art versus science, and I will say no. The way I talk about it is meaningful and measurable, right? You have to have meaningful storytelling, meaningful inspiration, and you have the people whose job is to find those nuggets and those insights of truth and tell inspirational stories. And then you have to measure the impact of that.

Matt: To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape. Brands must move at an ever increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, Founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, why it matters now and how you can keep up. Welcome to the Speed of Culture. Today we're going to be speaking with Dana Marineau, Chief Marketing Officer at Rakuten. Dana was recently recognized as one of Forbes top entrepreneurial CMOs of her achievements also include 11 Cannes Lions, 13 Effies, and 11 Clips. Dana, so great to see you. Thanks so much for joining us.

Dana: I am so happy to be here, Matt. Thank you for having me. I'm a big fan.

Matt: As am I. And in doing our homework for today's interview, I saw that very early on, before you jumped into this career of marketing, you actually wanted to be a news anchor. And just chatting to you, you have that news anchor vibe. So tell us about why you wanted to be a news anchor early on.

Dana: Thank you. Yes, I was a child of the 80's, completely obsessed with the news anchors of that time. So Barbara Walters and Katie Couric and Connie Chung. And back then, all you could do was actually watch the news on live television. And so I would watch the news with my parents every night, the 6 o'clock, if they would let me stay up for the 10 o'clock, I would. I just loved it. I was so fascinated by those women bringing the news to Americans. And I wanted to do that. I did go to Duke University and I intended to be a journalist, a broadcast journalist. I went to college thinking I was going to be a journalism major and then a journalist. And then I took my first journalist class and I had to be on camera and I hated it. I was like, wait, I have to be on camera? I hated it. I did not want to do that. So, what I loved was the storytelling and the inspiring people. And I realized that actually that is what marketing is. So I intended to be a news anchor, but really it was the inspiration and the storytelling that really got me into how my juice is flowing. And so that is how I ended up introducing myself to marketing is that crazy route, but no broadcaster journalism for me.

Matt: Yeah. And you started off your career right out of school at a software company at a time when software was not sort of the thing that everyone wanted to gravitate towards software was still in early days. How did that come about?

Dana: You know, at Duke, there were essentially three careers that they trained us to want to have. Investment banking, not for me. Consulting, not for me. Or law school, med school. There was no other path for us liberal arts people. And to your point, it's 1997, 1998 this Dot-Com boom thing is happening in Silicon Valley and in Austin, Texas and places like that. And sort of the one thing that I was interested in was this startup technology concept. And there was this tiny little startup in Austin, Texas called Trilogy. And they were recruiting a bunch of liberal arts majors with this idea of, we're going to give you a marketing boot camp. Come learn it real time in Austin, Texas. Cool place to live in 1997, 98.

Matt: Yeah. Still is.

Dana: Yeah. That's why I went there. Because my only other choices were ones that were not interesting to me, like banking and consulting. So.

Matt: Right. And so you're there for a couple of years and then you move on to Electronic Arts, where you would spend the next 15 years. I'm a massive fan of Madden, play with my son all the time, as well as FIFA. I have a lot of heart for EA. Tell us about that experience because you were there during the meteoric rise of Electronic Arts. You must have witnessed so much in terms of how companies can effectively scale in a very competitive, but huge category.

Dana: Yes, I was there 16 years, loved every minute of it. And people ask me all the time, because it's different these days, how could you have stayed there so long? 16 years is a long time. And that is different from this generation of how they think of jobs. And the way I always answer that question is, when you're at a gaming company for 15 years, it's almost as if you changed jobs every 4 to 7 years because of the console cycle. So when you think about when I first got there, you had to go to a store and buy a disc, from a package inside a store. And that was the only way, right? And the only way to market to those people was two ways, television and print, that is it. Then fast forward, the console cycle comes around, PlayStation2 now there's a little bit of this digital marketing thing. And I honestly remember the first time our ad agency was widening in Kennedy at the time, they came to us and said, we're gonna advertise on the internet, here's what it looks like. I will never forget it. It was an NBA street ad, like a banner this big. And I was like, what, we can do that? And I remember when they said, and we can retarget people, what? It's gonna follow me around and you can search on Google. What? But I remember that, right? So you go from packaged goods to a very slow digital download to then a quick digital download to casual gaming, social gaming, mobile gaming to subscription. So I lived that life at Electronic Arts across the sports games, Madden and FIFA, across the Entertainment Games, Need for Speed and Star Wars, against the mobile games, Bejeweled and others. So I lived a life of years and it was like I changed jobs, not only in my own skill set, the teams that I needed were different, the way we targeted audiences, it's men to for Madden and FIFA and then it's women to for Bejeweled. So it's like I had five or six different jobs while I was there.

Matt: Yeah, for sure. I remember the first time I was with my son and we bought Madden in the digital version. I tried to download it and it said it was going to be like 19 hours or something. And I'm like, let's just go to GameStop and pick it up. So I paid for it twice. But that's basically where we were. And to think now that's a distant memory. So innovation is happening in this space at the pace of almost any other digital industry. Yeah.

Dana: Yeah. So just an amazing experience within one company for me to go across those business models and those audiences and different kinds of marketing. I really had to learn along the way all kinds of new marketing to your point about technology. Started at print and TV and then all of a sudden you flip to the other side of search marketing and Facebook. Right. Totally different.

Matt: So at your role at EA, you were largely sitting on top of global advertising, design and creative for their own video game brands. And that obviously demands a lot of leadership from you in terms of how to direct the creative strategy, how to find the right type of talent, how to measure. What are some of the lessons you've taken away from being in marketing leadership? Because it's different from being in financial leadership or maybe some other verticals because there is that creative piece to it. And it is changing so fast, as you've mentioned.

Dana: Yeah, you know, I would say managing and developing creative teams and creative people is something distinctive to marketing that is different from your point, finance and other places. It is a different beast, one that I love, but I would say a unique talent to manage. And marketing has many sides. I always say people will ask me brand versus performance or art versus science, and I will say no. The way I talk about it is meaningful and measurable, right? You have to have meaningful storytelling, meaningful inspiration, and you have the people whose job is to find those nuggets and those insights of truth and tell inspirational stories. And then you have to measure the impact of that. And one of the things I always talk about is, you know, I built an in-house team here at Rakuten, and you have to have people who respect both sides. You have to have storytellers who want to understand the impact. And you have to have performance marketers who understand the power of creative and storytelling. So that's a great lesson over my many years of learning of hiring talent and understanding what gets them going and what you need to do to be successful. Definitely unique to marketing. I agree with you.

Matt: Absolutely. And in terms of just wrapping up your chapter in EA here, I'm sure you still very much follow the video game industry just given how much of your career you spent at EA. Where do you see the Video game industry headed? Massive Industry bigger than Hollywood, which most people don't even know exists in a world of AI and the Metaverse and the HoloLens and all this Where do you see the biggest opportunities in the Video Game Sector?

Dana: I still think eSports is Untapped.

Matt: There's a big buzzword for a while and then people kind of stop talking about it.

Dana: Yeah, League of Legends. I mean, it's a crowd. I mean League of Legends sold out the Chase Center recently, right? I mean, it's big but I think not everyone to your point takes it quite as seriously yet It is bigger than Hollywood So I do think there's a lot to be done there I mean if you recently have looked at FIFA or Madden it is indistinguishable between a real game I mean you can almost not tell the difference he does when I got there was still that you know Janky pixelated, I have fond memories of just looking at the difference between when I got there in and then now I'm pretty amazing So I do think AI and how people are bringing the real world into the video gaming It is almost impossible to tell the difference sometimes I mean my son was playing FIFA the other day and I honestly thought it was a Manchester United game So it's untapped there. I don't spend as much time gaming as I used to and my sons mostly play on their iPad. They play Fortnite and you mean they'll play FIFA and Madden, but they want to play Mobile because they love the Microtransactions Which totally different now.

Matt: Yeah. Yes, absolutely. So before heading to Rakuten you spent some time at Credit Karma. Which was really a late stage startup that has already been in business for 10 years and achieved scale and work there for Three to four years up until when they were acquired by Intuit. What was that like because you know I'm the CEO of a later stage startup. I know the growing pains that come with scaling a business and I'm sure that's something that you experienced firsthand leading up to a very successful exit for that company.

Dana: Yeah You know the reason I went to Credit Karma after spending 15 years at EA is my DNA is in brand and creative and storytelling and as I told you I was learning very so slightly, you know come 2007, 2008 some of that what we then called performance marketing, right? search and Facebook and you know some of that but it was just the very beginning of that and I recognized that

I would never be able to be a CMO one day if I didn't really Understand the performance and growth side and it was really shifting on the pendulum in that zone And so I thought okay I've been at a big company for 15 years. Publicly traded company and all the awesome and not awesome that comes with that and brand building company I mean EA has built some absolutely extraordinary brands and so I wanted to go learn the other side I went to a startup know and a very performance marketing oriented startup to teach myself and I will tell you Matt It was hard. It was not in my DNA, it was not something I loved and had like a true passion for the way I did for sports and gaming and brand building. But I had to learn it, so it's just one of those hard lessons and I did and in order to have the job I have now at Rakuten, I have to be dangerous enough in performance and growth and marketing analytics. I have to be-

Matt: Yeah of course.

Dana: Right? So is it in my DNA and in my soul? No, am I smart and good enough at it to talk to our Founder and our CEO about what's going on in our forecast? Yes, right So I went there with a purpose and you know, you go to a startup you do one of two things you sell it or you take it public and we sold it to Intuit and that was my exit out and thankfully Rakuten came a call in

Matt: Yeah, and also I should say that not every startup is lucky enough to either be sold or go public. A lot of startups don't work out, but a lot of the risk is off the table given how successful credit card money was when you joined.

Dana: I live in Silicon Valley.

Matt: Yeah, you know firsthand. So after your stint there, you joined Rakuten in 2020. 2020 was obviously a landmark year for all of us in business. What precipitated that decision? Why Rakuten? And tell us about your role there as Chief Marketing Officer.

Dana: Thank you for asking that. I feel very lucky to be here. You're right though, I started in May of 2020, maybe the worst time ever to start a new job. I am a people person, and you can probably tell I'm highly extroverted. So starting a new job over Zoom is not my jam. Definitely one of the hardest moments of my career, for sure. Starting a company, meeting new people, not knowing anyone, building a team, learning a new industry, hard. But why I came here though, right when I arrived, Rakuten had been rebranded from what was then called Ebates. So you may remember Ebates, a coupon and discount company, millions of consumers, very much towards that coupon cutter shopper. And Rakuten comes, a very large Japanese company, comes and acquires, and Ebates sort of remains its name for a bit. And then the Founder said, okay, it's time to be Rakuten. So what's funny about that is, by the moment, 2020 arrives, Rakuten has 8% awareness in the US. And I was like, okay, if I'm ever going to take on a challenge, this is it. How amazing to be able to take on brand transformation, brand evolution. This is what I'm good at. This is the thing I love. So I talked to the CEO and he says, well, there's 8% awareness of our name. And I was like, what? Oh my God. So I say, okay, let's go. So they had just changed the name right then. And here I come and say, okay, we're gonna build a new team. We're gonna rebuild our identity. We're gonna do a redesign. We're gonna invent a voice and personality that's never existed before. Let's go. And by the way, we're gonna try to do this all on Zoom.

Matt: Right.

Dana: Nuts.

Matt: Can you also tell us a little bit about the product for those who don't know? Many have heard of Rakuten, but maybe don't know exactly what the product does.

Dana: So you just named the thing. And what we go after, informed awareness, as opposed to just general awareness. Because a lot of people have heard of Rakuten, whether it's because we're a very large public Japanese company or from the Warriors relationship.

Matt: Yeah.

Dana: People have heard of Rakuten. And to answer your question, Rakuten is a shopping destination. We have about 5,000 stores, everything from Nike to Old Navy to Neiman Marcus to Uber. And any time you make a purchase on Rakuten, you go directly to that store, but you get cashback every time. Your sneakers, your sunglasses, the AirPods you're wearing, anything you buy, you get cashback. It is amazing.

Matt: Cashback for that store or cash back across the Rakuten network?

Dana: Cash back on that store on Rakuten. So you go to Apple on Rakuten and you get cashback when you buy those AirPods.

Matt: Right, so it's like why shop anywhere else if you can get cash back there and you don't in other places? .

Dana: Correct, yes. Why would you buy anything? Whether it's the Uber you're gonna take somewhere, whether it's the takeout delivery at a pizza place, whether it's jeans from Levi's or a nice Gucci bag at Neiman Marcus, why would you buy it anywhere else if you get it through Rakuten, you get cash back every time?

Matt: So fairly simple story to convey, but obviously you're fighting for attention and you're competing with the likes of Amazon. When you talk about informed awareness, I certainly first heard of Rakuten through the Warriors because I'm a big sports fan. I imagine you hear that a lot, but that's not exactly informed awareness because it's just the brand. You can't communicate a story through a jersey and a logo. What has worked in terms of informed awareness and platforms for you to be able to tell your story?

Dana: Great question. So yes, one of the things that we do related to the Warriors is inside the Arena, by the way, if you haven't come to a Warriors game, please do, inside the Arena, we do a lot of what I would call educating, right? So inside the Arena, we have the LEDs and all kinds of things to help at least the people in that Arena understand why and what it means to have the players wearing our name above their hearts. So that at least those people understand. Outside of the stadium, we do a lot of work as it relates to making sure people can see that badge and then understand what it means. So it could be as simple as a television commercial that is airing during the Rakuten game. That's a very simple thing. As well as, of course, all the very targeted emails and social media that we do related to educating. We have, as all great marketing departments, full funnel marketing. So there's the brand awareness and then the consideration middle funnel part, whether it's we call it education or we call it informed awareness. We spend a lot of time in that part of the funnel. And then of course, conversion. But we really do work hard across all of our

campaigns, whether it's a Super Bowl campaign, something related to the Warriors or just our holiday campaign. We have full funnel marketing across every possible platform.

Matt: Yeah, I was actually going to ask you about the Super Bowl, because that's obviously always such a fascinating case study when it comes to a brand and marketing. It's a major bet that you're making, and you're hoping that it pays off, obviously, with the pre-buzz before the game, and the creative has to hit home, and then how do you follow up and land the plane down the funnel, so to speak. What is that process like to make the decision to activate during the Super Bowl and then going through to finally getting a campaign that you can feel good about pushing live?

Dana: So I love this question. I'm always happy to talk about this because you have to be ready for the Super Bowl. That is marketing's biggest stage. So I started in May 2020 and you can't just do the Super Bowl the next year. You have to prepare your brand. You have to prepare your members. You have to prepare your marketing and your product. It all has to be the right moment. So we took those two years, as I said, a rescaled voice and personality, new copywriting, elevated Design, brand identity, all the basic fundamentals, we needed to be ready. And we had to have certain features baked into our product to make it a better experience for our members before we felt ready to say, all right, now we're gonna do the case study and the business justification for why the Super Bowl is gonna be meaningful for us. And so we went through that process. Thankfully, our CEO and our Founder agreed that it was time to make that kind of investment. And I feel really proud. That's not an easy process, by the way. I mean, it's not just, oh, sure, yeah, great idea. Let's invest that kind of money. I mean, you really need to do the business justification and be clear with expectations, right? We had to be clear of what it means to move brand awareness metrics. What expectations do we have of signups and purchases that day versus over time, right? You have to be clear about that stuff because otherwise people get disappointed. So we really go out of our way to say, here's what we expect. Here's what long-term brand awareness points mean. Here's how we can do our best to tie it to revenue. Not easy, obviously, but we really worked hard to convince everyone that it is a long-term halo effect across the entire year. And by the way, Matt, since we've now done the Super Bowl twice, I can tell you our 2022 Super Bowl, the metrics are amazing, which is how we easily justified doing 2023. Right? Because over that year, I'll just tell you February to February, right? We had four and a half points indexed up in brand awareness. That is insane. Four and a half points, right? We had a 10% lift in buyers, and we had a 20% lift in what we call reactivated buyers, someone who did not shop at Rakuten the year before coming back to shop with us. So pretty amazing business Metrics. Now, again, it's over a year, right? So if someone were to say to me, what about the day of the Super Bowl? Yeah, okay, yeah, we had more searches than usual. We had a lot of press coverage. We had more signups than usual, the point is not that day, it's the long-term effect.

Matt: Yeah, and crafting a campaign that has that long-term effect, it's really where I think it separates the good strategies from the great ones. This past year, I was just fascinated with you guys tapped into 1990's pop culture and nostalgia by featuring Alicia Silverstone from Clueless. A lot of people obviously have a lot of heart for that movie, as I'm sure you know, because I'm sure you've consumed a lot of research for making that decision. What was that process like to land on that across anything else? Talk to us about the audience, inside the audience, that was most important for that activation.

Dana: I'd love to. So we determined about a year ago with some very important consumer research that our growth audience was millennial women. Our core audience now, as I told you, because eBay's acquisition was slightly older women. So our growth audience, of course, is that young

millennia. So let's call it that young 30's into early 40's. That was really the core of our growth audience.

Matt: Who really is the CFO of the household right now, making a lot of the big household buying decisions. A lot of people don't understand that millennials are now the people who are deciding what car to buy, what laundry detergent, and they actually go up in the internet household. They're a different consumer than the Gen Xers.

Dana: Exactly. Totally different group of people. And people say millennial and people somehow hear young. They're not young anymore. They're and so you're exactly right. It's a CFO and they have money to spend on shopping. And so we did a lot of research on millennial women. We have a lot of interesting insights. First of all, the nostalgia of the 90's. Millennials had returned. So we're talking sort of like last summer right now. By the way, if you had logged out of Netflix and just logged in to see the number one movies, they were Mean Girls, Things I Hate About You, and Clueless. And even things like bootcut jeans returning and kids wanting polaroids for Christmas. Like the 90's returned.

Matt: Yeah, my daughter is a teenager and she watches all those movies. Not even through nostalgia, but just because nostalgia has an impact on people who didn't even live through it, even for Gen Z.

Dana: Kind of result. So that was the sort of culture we were tapping into. Okay, then an important piece that we all know about millennials is they are inspired by influencers. Now I'm going to ask you who is the original shopping influencer, Cher Horowitz from Poulos?

Matt: Right, right.

Dana: Right, she's the OG shopping influencer. So that's where that came from. And this concept of well, obviously in 2023. Cher Horowitz would shop and get cash back at Rakuten, obviously. So that's where that insight came from, is this concept of harkening back to the 90's nostalgia and influence having such a major influence and inspiration on this generation. Share Horowitz is the obvious choice.

Matt: Did you look at Legally Blonde and Reese Witherspoon as well? Like did you look at other movies or did you just always know it was Clueless?

Dana: No, because here's why. Clueless has a center for shopping.

Matt: Yeah, you're right. It does.

Dana: Part of the center storyline is around shopping. And we felt it was important. And we didn't do this in the first Super Bowl that we did, which of course I love, which used Hannah Waddingham from Ted Lasso, another show I quite love. And that campaign was not centered around shopping. So it's just an extra leap for consumers to have to make about what is and who is Rakuten. We felt that Clueless instantly telegraphed shopping. And so that was why. So we didn't actually look at any other 90's movies like that. We certainly can say other 90's stars and whatever, but that was the one. And as always, you present multiple pieces of creative and you obviously have a recommendation, but my boss, the CEO was like, nope, that's the one, go get her. We were like, we'll try.

Matt: That's fascinating. So in terms of your role, obviously, you're talking about these big campaigns, whether it's the NBA sponsorship for the Golden State Warriors or the Super Bowl. These are mass market campaigns that most digital only brands don't have the luxury to do besides the massive players like the Amazons of the world. But at the same time, I would imagine you also are, as you mentioned earlier, spending a lot of time thinking about things like SEO and Social Media Marketing and all these sort of digital direct campaigns that do track acquisition, etc. And there've been so many changes in that realm with the Apple privacy changes and what we're seeing right now with AI and mobile adoption. What are some of the strategies that you're deploying now here in the digital world that you're finding effective at driving the metrics of the business?

Dana: I love that question because so many people ask me about our in-house team and they tend to focus on the creative side of our in-house team, but we have a full growth performance and analytics team as well. And to answer your question, data really fuels so much of our decision making, whether it's media planning, our investments, our targeting capabilities and audience generation. It really is an important piece to how we make decisions about our campaigns. And having an in-house team allows us to be really nimble, really quick. Some of our automation, people ask about it and I will say it's human-made, machine-delivered. That is something we talk about, which is the collaboration of creative writers and designers inputting into a machine for dynamic creative and subject testing and copywriting testing. We learn a lot, but we don't let machines do all the work. It's human-made, machine-delivered. And that's something I'm very passionate about, to understand again, both sides, the meaningful and measurable. We have been using AI, of course, before it was a buzzword. We've been doing that kind of stuff. But truly, the most important part and the magic of it is using both and being smart how you use both.

Matt: Yeah, you need to put a heart inside the robot, so to speak. When everyone's saying right now, AI is going to take over the world and you're not going to need creative people, et cetera, you still need to know what to put into AI. It has to come from a core insight or an idea or a distinct knowledge piece about the consumer that will spit out something that's valuable on the other side. Otherwise, it's garbage in, garbage out, right?

Dana: Which comes from insightful humans.

Matt: Yep, exactly. Insightful humans that understand their consumer, understand the pain points that they're solving on behalf of their consumer and how to effectively communicate that. So let's shift gears a little bit, Dana, to your everyday role at Rakuten, because you've talked about so many different things that you have to oversee and be responsible for. It's a heavy lift for a brand that obviously has a lot of potential, but it's not something that you can host by any means. You have a hugely competitive environment. When I say why shop anywhere else, it sounds that simple, but we all know it's not and you're fighting every day for consumers' attention. What does that mean for how you spend your time?

Dana: Yeah, it does sound obvious to me when I say, why would you shop anywhere else? But you know that moment when you find a bill in your jacket pocket? That's what it should feel like when you shop around, right? That joyfulness. And by the way, if I hadn't mentioned this before, the Japanese name Rakuten means optimism. So answering your question, we really try to create an optimistic and joyful environment. And you're right, it is hard. We are competing for mind share and wallet share and brain space. And there are a lot of places you can buy things online, right? So, I do spend my time, of course, doing my best to mentor and develop and harness this very exceptionally talented team that we have and help unblock and support and get out of their way. I once had this

mentor, she was my boss at EA, her name's Carolyn Feinstein for many years at EA. And she once said something that landed with me and I will never forget, which is, you don't work for me, I work for you. My entire job is to unblock, support and empower you. And that is how I spend my day unblocking for these exceptional creatives and performance marketers that we have to get out of their way, to allow them, to your point, to be able to do the Super Bowl, to be able to do the Warriors relationship, to be able to test and try new things and take risks with influencer campaigns we've never done before. That is how I spend my time. Just setting them up for success.

Matt: And what are you looking for in individuals who work for you? Because in order for you to get out of their way, you need to trust them. You need to trust their skill set and their intuition that they're going to be able to deliver the overarching mandate that you set and your leadership has set for the brand. So what are you looking for in people who you feel confident enough to empower?

Dana: So exceptional talent wants to be with other exceptional talent. And my job is to figure out how to assemble them together and create an environment for them, whether they're on the meaningful side or the measurable side, so that they feel safe. That is it. And there are all kinds of things that we do to build that trust and build that camaraderie. By the way, one of them is getting them into this office, which is a whole other piece, but to create those shared experiences and that trust. And one of the things that I do is we have a monthly marketing meeting. It's a couple hundred people. And I ask every single meeting for one presentation that we call a goldfish presentation. And it is in reference to the Ted Lasso Be a Goldfish idea, which simply has a short memory. When a mistake happens, when a failure happens, when something does not go as well as is planned, you need to embrace it. You need to say it out loud. You're going to present to the entire team, if not the company, about what happened and what we learned for it, and we move on. There is an expectation that every single marketing meeting, someone is going to get up there, that vulnerability, and say, this thing that I told you about last time did not go very well. Let me tell you about that. That does create a safety and a trust back to the exceptional talent. They want to be with each other. We get them here together, and they learn from that. And it does work.

Matt: Absolutely. And you'd mentioned very briefly getting people back into the office. That's obviously a continual hot topic in the business world today. Why is it important for you to get people back in the office and talk to us about that journey post pandemic?

Dana: So I think COVID taught us that it is possible to get work done. Right. I think that was the question in the beginning. It is possible to get things done, to make deliverables, to collaborate over Zoom. That is possible. Is it the best possible collaboration and work? Is it the best possible innovation? Is it the best possible inspiration? No, that is my opinion. And I have a strong opinion about that. And others absolutely disagree with me. And I do understand the love and desire for flexibility. I get it. But, I think when it comes to the work environment, the work is better, the collaboration is better, the inspiration is better, the innovation is better together in person. So you can debate whether that's five days, three days, four days, whatever. It is better in person. That is my opinion. I feel very strongly about it. And I have seen it is better. Like, are we able to make an email with designers and writers and technology people and get it out? Yes. Is it as good? It is not. Right. And all kinds of stories, Matt, about the nimbleness that we've had to have that only works in person. Like, I will tell you, our very first Super Bowl ad that we greenlit, we found out about a month before we were going to shoot it that another company had a concept that was very similar. We had already gotten it approved through all the people you get it approved through. We were already in production with going to do it. And guess what? We decided to scrap it at the last minute

and get in a room here altogether in the San Francisco office over a 24 hour period and redo it. That would not have happened in that way successfully on Zoom. A hundred percent.

Matt: Right. And I mean, has it been hard to get everyone to buy into that? Did you have pushback? What does that look like?

Dana: I think people don't like to be told what to do. So I actually don't think the issue is that I don't want to come to work. I think the issue is I want to come to work when I want to come to work. It's slightly different. And, you know, I'll say we have done all kinds of things to make work fun and remind people why it's great to come to work. All the traditional things, happy hours and scavenger hunts or Warriors games or whatever it is to create a fun work environment. We do that and people love to be here. I just think people don't want to be told what to do. You know, especially, by the way, the younger generation, like we came to work every day for 30 years. It was not a thing. You know, it's the younger generation. So, yeah, it's been a challenge. There's been pushback. But we're getting there.

Matt: Yeah, I see a lot of people walking behind you in your offices. So it seems like you're making some progress.

Dana: We're here. Yeah.

Matt: So looking ahead, as you look at Rakuten's business and some of the opportunities ahead for and beyond, what are some of the new things that you're focused on, whether it's tactics or ideas, to continue to drive the growth of the business?

Dana: So we continue to focus on this growth audience, this millennial woman, because part of our research has shown us that we just don't show up on their radar. So we need to continue to grow both that awareness and that informed awareness with this audience. So we need to do tactics and campaigns that address this. One of the things that we are looking at is Fashion Week, just as an idea. And we dabbled in it last February as related to our Super Bowl campaign. So I don't know if you know this, but Alicia Silverstone is very close friends with designer Christian Siriano. So we were featured in his runway show as just part of a partnership that we had as an extension of our Super Bowl campaign.

Matt: Very cool.

Dana: That was awesome. So we were like, hmm, we got a lot of attention, press attention, social attention in fashion weekend. By the way, we're a shopping platform. Fashion is our business. So we thought, you know what, we're going to investigate that more. So I'll come back to your show and tell you how that goes. But we're working on that.

Matt: Okay, awesome. Yeah, it makes a lot of sense, especially given your audience. So to shift gears here, as we wrap up, Dana, I mean, you obviously strike me as someone who has a really firm command on her role, on her purpose, and brings a lot of energy to the table along the way. When you look at your career journey, which is by no means at the end, it sounds like you're just getting started. But from what you've been able to achieve so far, what are some of the things that you can look back at besides deciding not to be a news anchor, which I actually think you do great on camera, by the way, you're on camera right now. But that's a distant memory. But what are some of

the other decisions that you think that were the right ones that put you in the position to end up in your role right now as CMO?

Dana: I would say a couple things. I really learned a lot from my mentors at Electronic Arts. When you're at a place for 15 years.

Matt: Yeah, that's a lifetime. We've only been running Suzy for five years and it seems like five lifetimes. I can't imagine what 15 looks like.

Dana: It's a lot to learn from and it's some to unlearn, right? So, I would say there are people that I modeled my behavior, my leadership style around and people I thought, hmm, I'm not gonna do that, right? So I'm a listener, I'm an observer. So I think I did well for myself in that way. I also think I had a mentor who gave a lot of feedback. I give a lot of feedback. I subscribe to this concept of radical candor. It is a way to build trust and back to this safe space and trust, you build trust when you give feedback. And I am a person who will give feedback all day, every day, positive, affirmative feedback, until I have some other kind of opportunistic feedback. And by the way, because I'm giving feedback all the time, no one freaks out when I say, hey, you know what? Let's talk about how that went. We could do that a little bit. People don't freak out when I do that because they're used to me saying, hey, that was great, I love that. Hey, the way you presented that was amazing. Hey, you know what? I really loved when you said this, you know, I do that all day.

Matt: They don't think just the negative thing you say is the only thing you think about them. along the way.

Dana: Exactly. That has been a pillar of my leadership that I think has served me quite well, that I'm very proud of. And you know, I also think a hard decision I made was the decision to leave EA and go to Credit Karma, a place that wasn't in my soul, something I didn't know what I was doing. People, I mean, when you spend years at a company, and by the way, a lot of lifers at EA, I mean, there was a group of probably of us that were there to years together, going to a place where I didn't know anyone, I didn't understand the business, the industry, and the soul of that company was not brand marketing. So I'm proud of myself, though it was hard. I'm glad I did that because it allowed me to be intelligent enough to see the entire scope of what marketing could be to have this job, which I have to say, I feel very fortunate to be where I am today.

Matt: Yeah, absolutely. And to close out here, Dana, with all that, is there sort of a mantra or a saying that you can think of that kind of embodies your career journey that you like to live by every day?

Dana: You know, this goldfish concept is one that I use in my personal life and in my professional life. So, you know, I have two boys, they are and they play sports, they go to school. And at night, every night we talk about, you know, the rose and thorn of the day. And we do talk about, hey, I didn't play well in basketball. Hey, I didn't, I missed that free throw. Hey, I don't think I did, you know, as great as I had won on that math test. Like we talk about this at home, this idea of not letting, whether it's a mistake, a failure, something not going well, rising above and finding your way through, you know, it would say swim on, right? It's like, I do live that myself. And it's really important at work and our department that we embrace this concept of it is okay to take risks. It is okay to try something new. And if it doesn't go well, it's okay. I use that in my personal life, in my professional life, because I think it's really important to move through adversity in whatever it is.

Matt: I think it's a great point. I think in this world, especially for younger kids who are exposed to this world of social media and FoMO and comparing and thinking everyone else's life is glamorous and it just appeared that way for them. It's something that we didn't have to go through when we were growing up. And it creates undue pressure on kids and sometimes has the adverse effect of dissuading them from taking risks and having them have a fear of failure, which really can hold them back as they grow and go throughout their careers.

Dana: That's true for a 10 year old as it is for a 47 year old, 100%.

Matt: Right on. Well, Dana, I just wanna thank you for joining today. I knew this was gonna be a great episode and you did not disappoint. And I think your story is gonna be one that's gonna be both inspiring and educational to our audience. So thank you so much for taking the time and can't wait to stay in touch and see what's next for you at Rakuten.

Dana: Thanks for having me. I'd like you to talk to you in an hour.

Matt: Likewise. So on behalf of the Suzy Adweek team, thanks again to Dana Marineau, CMO of Rakuten for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate and review The Speed of Culture Podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Till next time, see you soon everyone. Take care. The Speed of Culture is brought to you by Suzy as part of the AdWeek Podcast Network and a guest creator network. You can listen and subscribe to all AdWeek's podcasts by visiting adweek.com/podcasts. To find out more about Suzy, head to suzy.com. And make sure to search for The Speed of Culture at Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts, or anywhere else podcasts are found. Click follow so you don't miss out on any future episodes. On behalf of the team here at Suzy, thanks for listening. Bye!