

THE CMO INTERVIEW

KYLE LACY OF DOCEBO

Kyle Lacy, CMO at Docebo, believes marketing is storytelling. In this interview with Winning by Design's COO Shari Johnston, he draws on a career that spans Salesforce, Lessonly, Jellyfish, and Seismic. He shares insights on process discipline, customer perspective, team alignment, and how Docebo is leveraging AI to drive growth.

Shari: “Kyle, as a CMO you’ve always treated marketing as part of a larger growth architecture. It’s been a real pleasure collaborating with you over the years, and I’m thrilled to have a chance to learn more about what drives your strategy.”

Kyle: “Thank you, Shari; I’m flattered to be a part of this. There’s definitely a method to my madness, but also a lot of heart. Hopefully we’ll get to explore both today!”

Oh, I’m sure we will, Kyle! Let’s start by rewinding a bit. Today, you’re the CMO of a public company, but you’ve also built an amazing career at ExactTarget, Salesforce, Lessonly, Seismic, and Jellyfish. Looking back, is there a particular experience you feel shaped you and your philosophy on marketing the most?

I think what drew me to marketing came even earlier than the jobs you listed. I had the luxury of growing up with a father who is very entrepre-

neurial, and who kind of pulled me into marketing at an early age.

When I was a teenager, he put me in charge of printing hundreds of thousands of postcards with fun quotes on them, trying to market his business, a fractional CFO consultant for small businesses. I grew up in the Dan Kennedy era of direct mail, just straight up thousands upon thousands of direct mail pieces, like an analog version of a modern email campaign.

Dad was also involved in the music business. I spent quite a bit of time at record labels and fell in love with the idea of storytelling and selling through music. Those experiences led to my love of marketing. It built my philosophy, very early on, that marketing is storytelling. Whether the message is written, musical, or verbal, what truly matters is how people perceive you and your company.

All of this applies to personal branding as well as company

branding. I remember picking up my first true marketing book—*Emotional Branding* by Marc Gobé—and it completely changed the way I thought about marketing, about bottle design, and about how you market through experiences. That set the stage for me, as I launched my own agency, then moved to my first software marketing gig at ExactTarget, and finally evolved into the work I’m doing today.

Okay—so storytelling as the “heart” of marketing. We’ll get to the mechanics and architecture in a second, but I’d love to hear more about storytelling. How does that work practically in B2B markets that are more... I don’t know how to say it... boring?

I kind of follow the philosophy of Rory Sutherland. He has a great book (*Alchemy: The Surprising Power of Ideas That Don't Make Sense*), talking about why being rational makes you lose in the market and why irrational





thinking, which I believe is creative thinking, pulls people to win.

I'm with you. If you can surprise someone, or knock them off balance, you have their attention...

Yes! I saw the need for truly creative and unexpected thinking at the very beginning of my career. I studied music, but realized pretty quickly that I didn't actually want to make music—I wanted to make money off of people who are good at music. And I was entering the music business right when Napster, Myspace Music, and Apple Music were completely rewriting the existing revenue models in the space. It was my first market disruption, not unlike the AI shift we're experiencing today. Most legacy companies failed to adapt to new technology or provide an innovative value proposition to their customers. It was a different industry, but I learned that embracing the unexpected and leaning in can provide breakthrough opportunities.

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Similarly, as we adapt to the world of AI and robots become more central to the selling process and buyer journey, your ability to tell a story that people remember is even more important than in “normal” times. Look, you're never going to differentiate off of a feature set—not even with use cases, not even with customer stories. All the things we previously used in our marketing arsenal will become just another input for AI to surface during a search. In my opinion, the only way you're going to win in the future is by telling a story to the customer,

in a creative way that moves them emotionally.

But a quick caveat: that doesn't mean you ignore data. It doesn't mean you ignore experimentation. It doesn't mean you ignore measurement and process. It just means you have to be more creative than you have been in the past. The old process is table stakes; now we're building on top of it in a creative way.

Love that segue, my friend! And I don't know about “old process being table stakes...” In some cases, people don't have that solid

foundation of process and they still have to build it. I remember when you were CMO at Jellyfish—you did a lot of work establishing structured go-to-market processes.

Well just because it's table stakes doesn't mean it's always in place! You're right; at Jellyfish we worked hard with Winning by Design to build systems across the entire go-to-market model. Early on, we hadn't been thinking of marketing that way. There was some structure in place, a reporting cadence, and some modeling—but it wasn't really a system.

The tools that Winning by Design brought to the table—like the SPICED framework, revenue architecture, and the Bowtie—helped the organization as a whole think in a broader way. We were able to focus on how the customer or prospect experienced the process and not just our own internal milestones like which sales stage we were at.

It seems obvious, but we should design our sales process around how the customer thinks, not how reps log data in Salesforce! That customer-centric mindset is foundational, and it is probably the most impactful thing that came out of our work together at Jellyfish. That combination of process and structure with emotional impact is what we want our customers to remember.

This is something I still think about and bring with me today.

It seems like a small mindset shift at first, but once you start thinking that way, your whole vision of how to architect systems is different. I've noticed across many companies that when they develop a system with themselves in mind, it creates silos. But when they take the customer's point of view, silos naturally break down. The goal shifts to creating the very best experience for the customer, which is seamless.

Absolutely! Defining the process with that perspective gives you a system

to follow, and it's surprising how many people don't have one.

I often say the most important alignment in any company is across the go-to-market functions: Product, Sales, Marketing, and Customer Success. That's exactly what we worked on together at Jellyfish—bringing everyone into one system. And at the core of that system was a shared language, the SPICED framework (Situation, Pain, Impact, Critical Event, Decision), that connected all the customer-facing teams. Without it, scaling past \$50 million or \$100 million in revenue becomes nearly impossible.

Without a common language, it's like having to translate the same instructions over and over for each department—and then doing it all again at every new revenue milestone. On the other hand, a shared language enables foundational things like onboarding reps consistently, arbitrating issues internally, and making joint decisions such as “Are we going to do X or not?”

If you have a room full of people, each speaking a different language, it's nearly impossible to make progress. A shared language—like SPICED—becomes the universal translation that lets everyone understand and act together.

That also leads to AI and “machine readability.” We're finding now that SPICED helps facilitate human-to-machine handoffs too. The consistent framework just speeds everything up and makes translation so much more reliable.

Great point! Everybody is taking the stance of “AI this” and “AI that,” but we have to figure out how to get humans and robots working together effectively. I like the concept of building AI into our processes and experimenting with automation. But the reality is that when everyone has AI tooling, the only competitive advantage that any business has is their humans.

There might be fewer of us in the future, but people are our only competitive advantage and differentiator, and learning is central to that vision, which is why I joined Docebo! Having the right tools to upskill people today is foundational to the success of companies tomorrow. And I love the insight that humans and robots can and should be working within the same process and speaking the same language. See? I knew I'd get something out of this conversation!

There's a lot to like about Docebo, your market position, and your performance. What are you most excited about?

True—I'm really excited about Docebo. Our growing presence in the market, with thousands of customers and our unique data set, allows us to influence how people use AI tools and how they're learning and developing in this new world.

This is a once-in-a-generation shift. You and I both know we're not going to experience this again in our lifetime.

How is Docebo adjusting internally to the AI shift?

Along with helping others with AI, we're also rethinking our own go-to-market. Mark Kosoglow, our CRO, and I are taking a pretty aggressive stance on reinventing what it means to market and sell in this new world. And Docebo is the perfect place to do it, because our CIO Nitin Chopra is the most forward-thinking chief information officer I have ever worked with on AI and AI tooling.

We're experimenting with our support for teams. The building blocks are ready and everything we need in order to succeed in the future is here.

We use agents across a wide range of activities—from call analysis to product launches to product marketing. At Docebo, we're in the middle of building a lot of this.

Let's get into that! I'd love to hear what you're doing specifically. Agents are critical to how we manage ICP data—testing, surveying, and continuously updating information. With them in place, when a product launch is coming up, we can simply plug the details into an agent and instantly generate the assets we need to edit for content creation.

There's also major work happening on the data analysis side. We're building systems where you can chat with an agent to get real-time feedback on pipeline performance. For example, how are BDRs performing in France versus the UK? If I wake up at 3 a.m. worried about how things are going in a region, I want to be able to log in, chat with a bot, and get instant, reliable insights.

In short, agents are becoming central to both content creation and data-driven decision-making across the business.

Fascinating—thank you for that, Kyle! We recently reported on AI tools in both those spaces, and it's exciting to hear about real-life, on-the-ground case studies of AI content generation and AI pipeline management actually making a difference. And it's not just in Marketing. Nitin has this remarkable system—I'll probably butcher the explanation because he says it better—but essentially, he has sales engineers on the IT team whose only job is to jump into different groups, analyze their workflows, and then build agents tailored to those workflows. Once they've solved the problem, they move on to the next team and repeat the cycle. The system he's built internally is unlike anything I've seen.

So you're proactively looking for things to automate? Yes, exactly! For us, the question is: where are the workflows that feel overly complicated or just clunky?



Where do we have fifty Google Sheets when what we really need is a single agent? And how do we connect all of those agents so it's seamless, allowing us to pull data quickly and make faster, smarter decisions?

I love how you're starting with problems first rather than solutions first. One of the biggest issues we see in AI adoption is that companies often see an amazing AI "solution" and then go looking for a problem it can solve. This is going to sound simplistic, but I think the main challenge is that it's just hard to adopt something new.

Tell me more...

We have an interesting process for this on the marketing team. Our VP of Revenue Marketing, Silvia Valencia, has built a system where we regularly test AI tools through POCs, while also surveying the market to understand what others are working on and how we can best help our customers. Ultimately, it's about experimenting as much as possible, but with clear guardrails in place.

A lot of companies will just throw GPT into the business and say, "Go use this," without any idea of what's actually happening. Maybe the team is just editing content with it, or maybe not, but there's no visibility. That's why we focus on specific POCs designed to test clear

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hypotheses. For example, we recently ran a 90-day POC with a chatbot on our website. The goal wasn't just to prove ROI upfront, but to validate our hypothesis about how it could improve buyer experience and engagement. The results confirmed our assumptions, so we're moving forward with implementation.

The key is building a system around testing, with a defined hypothesis, rather than just handing out a bunch of licenses and hoping it works.

You're hitting all the points we're discovering too while working with clients. I love the way you framed it: "Building a system around testing, with a defined hypothesis." That discipline is so important. We actually just released a book called FREEMIUM, describing how this is done in PLG, and now you're outlining how the same methods apply to AI. It's cool to see the commonalities! In our world, that testing framework revolves around a common Bowtie Data Model. Great point! I'm not sure we've done the work to tie it all the way back to the Bowtie Data Model—our experiments

have more discrete objectives—but yes, they could all connect into a full view of the Bowtie. Another insight I can bring back to the team!

Kyle, thank you so much for this conversation. Clearly you, Mark, Nitin, and the team are leading the charge into the future. I'm excited to see what Docebo continues to do with systems thinking, revenue architecture, and AI-powered growth. What I'll especially watch is how you bring that to market with heart, storytelling, and a delightful customer experience. I believe whoever gets that right takes their market—and I'm betting on Docebo!

On that note, I have one last question for you: what's your vision for Docebo, and what do you see in the next 12 months? In terms of our customer-facing AI roadmap, search functionality such as neural search may seem basic, but the ability to find information instantly is hugely important. We also believe having an AI companion to support is critical. Virtual coaching is another key area:

imagine thousands of reps working with virtual coaches that give live feedback as they're doing pitches. That's just one use case, and there are plenty more.

This all comes back to how we create content at scale. How are we helping our customers do that? How are we coaching at scale? How are we searching at scale? How are we learning at scale? That's a big part of how AI fits into what we're building. It really is an AI-first approach to our product roadmap.

On the internal side, my vision is a connected engine where Marketing, Sales, Customer Success, and Sales Engineering all share data in real time. We're very good at tracking lagging indicators today. What I want is AI that can predict the next six to twelve months of pipeline risk. To me, that means answering the questions we already have, but also surfacing answers before we even know what to ask.

I think we're still a long way off from outsourcing creativity and storytelling to AI. Who knows, with the pace of innovation, maybe a "long way off" ends up being only twelve months. But for now, I believe there's something essential about a person's ability to tell a story that resonates with another human being.

Looking ahead, I see the role of the marketer shifting. Marketers shouldn't have to spend their days buried in spreadsheets. Instead, AI should take on the heavy lifting of delivering the data they need in real time. That frees marketers to do what they do best: use creativity to build real human connections with customers. [↗](#)



Shari Johnston – Interviewer

Shari Johnston is the COO of Winning by Design and the founder of Women in Revenue, a nonprofit that has grown to more than 9,000 members worldwide. She built Winning by Design's account-based practice and previously held senior marketing roles at Demandbase, OpenDNS, Radius, and Casextext.

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