



## **“The Research Insider” Podcast Interview Series**

**Guest: Lauren Weinberg, VP, Strategic Insights & Research, Yahoo!**

**Q: Tell us about your current role and responsibilities.**

LW: I head up Yahoo’s strategic insights and research team, which is part of our marketing organization. I think the easiest way to think about my job and what I do is that I have a pretty big team and we focus on providing research and insights starting at the industry level. So, what do we know about the audiences that Yahoo cares about? That our advertisers care about? What do we know about the categories? What do we know about what’s happening in the financial space or the automotive space? And then we dig down a little bit deeper into how can we help tell stories for clients like Fidelity and Ford and what do they need to know so that they can feel that Yahoo is a good fit for them. And then, finally, we go all the way down to the campaign level to really help our clients understand how their campaigns perform on Yahoo’s media network.

**Lauren, how has the organization that you manage evolved since you took charge?**

LW: Yahoo is a company that is constantly evolving. But one of the big things that has changed since I took charge is that we used to think about research at Yahoo as client-specific, which we called “one-to-one,” which meant that if you were working with Yahoo and you needed insights to prove that Yahoo was a good fit for your buy, you would work with one insights team. And then my team that I used to run was the “one-to-many” team and those were all of the primary research studies. That was the more industry-level research. So, those used to be two very separate parts of the organization. Now we’ve blended them together and the idea is that we want to be able to tell our clients really comprehensive stories using what we know that’s really unique from our primary research, still using syndicated tools that are available to us, as well as really taking our fantastic internal data. Just to weave all of those together into really great,

compelling stories that help clients really understand the industry and also why Yahoo will work for them.

**Can you give us an idea, more specifically, of who your clients and customers are by type?**

LW: Sure. We have internal and external clients. Our internal clients would be our marketing partners on both the B-to-B and the B-to-C side. We work really closely with our marketing solutions team and they are the team that puts together really customized programs for our advertising partners. We work very closely with our sales team and they give us a lot of good insight about what we need to be saying at the category level. So, what do financial advertisers care about and what's the role that Yahoo will play? And what are the types of insights that are missing that we need to provide?

And then, externally, we work with agencies and we work with clients directly. Those are really our two main constituents externally.

**When you are working with external constituents, do you ever work with, for instance, an advertiser's research department? Or are you typically interfacing with other functions in the organization?**

LW: We do work with the agency research teams. We actually do a lot of partnerships at Yahoo with their agency teams. So, we've done five or so big studies in the last year where we work really closely with the research departments at an agency and go out to market jointly with findings.

**No secret to anyone listening, the media landscape has and continues to really change and evolve in a lot of different directions and in some fairly radical ways. How have expectations changed on the part of your clients with regard to what a media publishing property like Yahoo should provide in the way of research and analytics?**

LW: I think the biggest thing we see is that everyone just wants more data. I think there's an expectation that a company like Yahoo has access to a lot of data, which we do. I think one of the challenging things is that sometimes it can be difficult to access some of that really great internal data.

We see the agencies spending a lot of time really digging into campaign analytics. So, I think there's an expectation that Yahoo can really help more with the

industry research front because a lot of the researchers that we speak to tend to be really busy because there are so many metrics that are available, especially in the digital space looking at all of their campaigns, really trying to understand what works. They rely on us a little bit more to help get them insights about what's happening with mobile and tablet and video.

**When I speak to people at Fortune-class CPGs, for example, I'll frequently hear people talk about data overload and deluge and really trying to make sense of it. Your department has the term "insights" in its title. Do you find yourself in the position of ever having to help clients make sense of all of the data that is available?**

LW: I think that we definitely try. There are so many metrics that are available, so we do a lot of our own research just to try to figure out what the different metrics mean. We did a study earlier this year that looked at whether or not you can use behavioral metrics like site visitation and searches as proxies for lift and brand metrics—the metrics that brands are really used to evaluating. There are so many metrics and I think it's hard to make sense of what they mean. We certainly don't want our clients to default to just using click-through rates. So, we do try to help them make sense of measurement and we work really closely with the IAB on that type of initiative, as well, to really try to figure out which metrics matter most and help our clients understand which metrics matter for their objectives.

**What keeps you awake at night? What do you believe is the greatest challenge that's facing your group from a functional/service provider perspective? And how are you overcoming it or addressing it?**

LW: I honestly think that the metric overload issue keeps me up a lot at night and, I think, just as an industry there is so much chatter about do we work on GRPs and how do we tie it to TV and what's the right way to measure online? I worry about that and then, more specifically, I think that our industry moves so quickly that when we are selling big programs we don't often put measurement in the forefront of that sales process. So, one of the things definitely keeps me up at night is hearing about amazing programs that are running on Yahoo and not knowing whether or not there is a proper measurement plan in place. So, I have definitely been working very hard with our sales leadership to encourage them that you can sell an amazing program, but if you cannot prove the value of that media, you will not renew. So, it has to be an essential part of the process. I think because things move really quickly, it sometimes is an afterthought.

**How receptive or how acculturated to metrics would you say they are at this point?**

LW: I think that, in theory, they are all 100% there. I think a lot of times what happens is there's an assumption that someone else is doing it. So, fundamentally, everyone who gets it completely agrees. I think sometimes there's just a little bit of confusion about who's responsible for that. And yeah, of course, we're going to measure it. But, if the person that's leading the charge on really putting that program out in front of the client isn't talking about it, then I think we can't assume that somebody else is.

**I want to step back. We were touching on the concept of the changing media landscape and media publishing properties like Yahoo changing, as well, along with that. From a research analytics and insights perspective, what kind of skill sets will be in highest demand in your organization, do you think, moving forward? Do you think it's difficult to find or recruit the right talent to meet those needs as you look to the future?**

LW: My answer may be surprising because I think there are a lot of great people who can manipulate data and can understand data. The think that what I really look for is: "Can the people that understand the data actually tell a story using that data?" So, that's really important for us because I think there's definitely data overload right now and we don't want to ever deliver to clients just data. We always want to be delivering insights. I think that the way to make insights come to life for clients, whether they are internal or external, is to tell a good story using the data so that they understand what it means for them.

The second thing that's really important to me is just relationships. People need to be able to have good relationships with the people that they work with because I think that there's definitely fear, sometimes, about how to use the data and the research and you want to work with someone that you trust. Relationships, I have found, have been one of the keys for whether or not someone will be successful in their role.

**Do you have any tips or ways that you shepherd your own team into helping them build those kinds of relationships?**

LW: I encourage them to think of themselves as an extension of the sales teams that they work with. So, go to their meetings all the time. Go out to lunch with

them. Get to know them as people. I want them to call you because they have a question and they trust you. I think it's also, initially, for us to be a little bit aggressive about it: "Take me on a meeting. Let's talk about some research together and you'll see the kinds of results that you can get." So, I think that sometimes once you break through that initial ice you'll really see results, but it's sometimes just constantly getting in there, being in front of them, understanding their business and then just knowing that you're there for them.

**For those listening, Lauren Weinberg delivered a presentation at The Market Research Event titled "US Consumer's Ethnic Identity Influences Media Choice and Purchase Habits," and the deck is available to TMRE 2011 attendees.**

**For information about that presentation, please visit The Market Research Event website at [www.themarketresearchevent.com](http://www.themarketresearchevent.com)**

**Until next time, this is Marc Dresner and you have just heard the *insight* scoop.**