



NAVIGATE: NOW & NEXT 2026 LONDON

The Event Recap

Wednesday, 7 May Meta, King's Cross, London

The Big Ideas. The Real Conversations. The Future of Marketing in Motion.

Across thirteen sessions, Navigate: Now & Next London explored the tensions, opportunities, and transformations reshaping modern marketing. From AI-mediated commerce and the rise of autonomous agents to community-led growth, experimentation culture, heritage brand evolution, and the enduring commercial power of human connection, the conversations reflected an industry navigating significant and accelerating change. The sessions did not position technology as the answer to everything, but as a force that demands better leadership, clearer strategy, and more intentional marketing. The recurring theme across the day was clear: in a world of increasing automation, the brands that win will be the ones that combine speed with clarity, data with humanity, and performance thinking with long-term brand investment.

SESSION 1: THE GROWTH BLIND SPOT – UNLOCKING THE COMMERCIAL POWER OF DIVERSE CONSUMERS

Lydia Amoah, CEO, Backlight

Summary:

This opening session challenged the assumption that most organisations understand their full consumer base. Drawing on the UK's most comprehensive study of multicultural consumers, Lydia Amoah made the case that significant commercial growth sits in plain sight, hidden within underserved and misrepresented audiences. The conversation moved beyond diversity as a moral obligation and positioned it firmly as a strategic and commercial imperative, exploring why insight and planning frameworks built without diverse audiences in mind continue to cost brands both relevance and revenue.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. Significant growth is hiding in plain sight.

Many organisations believe they understand today's consumer, but underserved and misrepresented audiences represent major untapped commercial opportunity that existing planning frameworks routinely fail to capture.

2. Diverse consumers are not a niche segment.

Multicultural audiences are a mainstream commercial force. Brands that treat diversity as a peripheral consideration rather than a core planning assumption are leaving measurable revenue on the table.

3. The insight gap is structural, not intentional.

Most brands are not wilfully ignoring diverse audiences. Their research and planning tools simply were not built to see them. Fixing the blind spot requires changing the foundations of how insight is gathered.

4. Representation in data matters as much as representation in creative.

Diverse audiences are often absent from the data sets used to make strategic decisions, meaning brands optimise for a consumer base that does not reflect the full market opportunity available to them.

5. The business case is clear and quantifiable.

The session made a compelling commercial argument: brands that close the growth blind spot do not just become more inclusive, they become more profitable, with proprietary research demonstrating the scale of the opportunity.

Bottom Line:

The future of growth will not belong to the brands with the biggest budgets or the most sophisticated technology. It will belong to the brands that see the full picture of their consumer base and build strategies that reflect it. In a market where diverse audiences represent an increasingly significant share of purchasing power, the growth blind spot is not just an equity issue. It is a competitive one.

SESSION 2: UNLEASH THE POWER OF DIGITAL TWINS

Dr. Justin Lane, CEO and Co-Founder, CulturePulse

Summary:

This session introduced the concept of psychological digital twins: AI-powered models that go beyond the limitations of conventional large language models to simulate how real audiences actually think, feel, and make decisions. Dr. Justin Lane argued that the future competitive advantage for brands lies not in knowing what consumers do, but in understanding the psychological motivations behind their behaviour. The session explored how digital twins can be used to predict campaign resonance, stress-test messaging, and surface the tensions that traditional research methods consistently miss.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. Digital twins model minds, not just behaviour.

Unlike conventional AI tools that analyse what people have said or done, psychological digital twins simulate how audiences think and feel, enabling brands to predict responses to campaigns, products, and policy changes before launch.

2. LLMs alone are not enough.

Standard large language models reflect aggregate patterns in data rather than the nuanced psychological reality of specific audiences. Digital twins go deeper, incorporating values, motivations, and cultural context that LLMs routinely flatten.

3. Brands can test before they spend.

The technology allows marketers to model how a specific audience will respond to a message, a product, or a campaign before committing media budget, dramatically reducing the risk of costly creative and strategic missteps.

4. Human insight is augmented, not replaced.

Digital twins surface the psychological tensions and motivations that focus groups and surveys often fail to reveal, giving strategists a richer foundation for creative and messaging decisions without removing human judgement from the process.

5. Psychological understanding is the next competitive frontier.

As AI capabilities become commoditised and accessible to all, the brands that win will be those that understand not just what their customers do, but why they do it, and what they are likely to do next.

Bottom Line:

The era of treating audiences as demographic segments defined by age, location, and purchase history is coming to an end. The organisations that understand the psychological architecture of their consumers, their values, their fears, their motivations, and their decision-making patterns, will be the ones that create communications and experiences capable of genuinely moving people. Digital twins are not a replacement for human empathy. They are a way of scaling it.

SESSION 3: THE AI SHOPPING SHIFT – HOW GEN AI IS REWRITING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND BRAND STRATEGY

Steve Ricketts, Chief Commerce Officer, Publicis Media & Prasanna Kumar, Global Director Connected Commerce, Diageo

Summary:

This session explored how generative AI is rapidly and fundamentally changing the way consumers discover, research, and purchase products. Drawing on practical experience from both a major media agency and one of the world's largest FMCG businesses, the discussion examined how the traditional path to purchase is being disrupted by AI assistants, recommendation engines, and autonomous agents that increasingly intercept the customer journey before a brand's owned channels are ever reached. The conversation introduced the concept of B2A (business to agent) and explored what it means for brand strategy, media planning, and commerce architecture.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. The path to purchase is no longer linear.

Generative AI is fragmenting the traditional discovery-to-purchase journey, introducing new points of intervention where AI systems, not consumers, are making filtering and selection decisions on behalf of the people brands are trying to reach.

2. B2A is the next frontier of commerce strategy.

Business to agent (B2A) is an emerging reality: AI agents acting on behalf of consumers are increasingly selecting, recommending, and purchasing products without direct human involvement in the decision, meaning brands must now optimise for machines as well as people.

3. Brands must now optimise for AI discoverability.

Just as brands invested in search engine optimisation to remain visible in Google, they must now think carefully about how they are found, represented, and selected by AI systems, requiring a fundamental rethink of content architecture and data structure.

4. Brand distinctiveness becomes a machine-readable asset.

In an AI-mediated commerce environment, clarity, consistency, and structured brand data are not just creative values. They are the technical foundations that determine whether an AI system can accurately identify and recommend a brand at the right moment.

5. Even established FMCG brands must rethink from the ground up.

Diageo's experience demonstrates that no brand, however well established, can assume its existing commerce infrastructure is ready for the AI era. The shift requires investment in data, content, and channel strategy simultaneously.

Bottom Line:

The AI shopping shift is not a future scenario. It is happening now, and it is changing the rules of commerce faster than most brand strategies have been able to adapt. The question is not whether AI agents will play a role in how consumers discover and choose products, but whether your brand has the data, the content architecture, and the strategic clarity to be visible and selectable when they do.

SESSION 4: BRINGING AN EXPERIMENTATION CULTURE TO LLOYDS THROUGH DATA, TECH AND LEADERSHIP

Rachael Pettit, Director of Consumer Marketing, Bank and Borrow, Lloyds Banking Group & Sam Fletcher, Director of Customer Insight, Planning & Effectiveness, Lloyds Banking Group

Summary:

This session offered a candid and practical account of how Lloyds Banking Group has built a genuine test and learn culture across a marketing organisation of more than 1,200 people. Rather than describing experimentation as a values statement, the speakers shared the specific structural decisions, leadership behaviours, and operational tools that have made it real. From the '1% Club' philosophy borrowed from elite sport to a three-way AI creative experiment that produced evidence rather than opinion, the session demonstrated what it actually takes to make experimentation a competitive advantage at scale.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. Culture requires structure, not just intent.

Declaring a commitment to experimentation is not enough. Lloyds built the operational scaffolding to support it, including a dedicated test and learn manager, a structured triage process, and a shared platform for logging and accessing learnings across the organisation.

2. The '1% Club' reframes how improvement is understood.

Borrowing from elite sport, the team applied the principle of marginal gains to marketing, focusing on small, compounding improvements rather than singular transformational initiatives. Applied consistently across a large organisation, the cumulative impact is significant.

3. Celebrating failure is a leadership act.

The leadership team actively created space to share experiments that did not work, modelling the behaviour they wanted to see across the team. Without visible leadership commitment to learning from failure, experimentation remains a stated value rather than a lived one.

4. Crowdsourcing ideas democratises innovation.

By opening the ideation process to the full organisation, Lloyds tapped into knowledge and perspectives that would otherwise remain invisible to leadership, while also building a broader sense of ownership and engagement around the test and learn programme.

5. AI in creative requires honest evaluation.

Rather than taking a position on whether AI is good or bad for creative, the team ran a rigorous three-way experiment comparing AI-only, AI plus human, and human-only creative outputs. The results gave them evidence to work with rather than opinions to debate.

Bottom Line:

Experimentation culture is not something that happens because leaders say they want it. It is built through deliberate structural decisions, consistent leadership behaviour, and investment in the operational infrastructure that allows learning to scale. Lloyds' experience demonstrates that when those ingredients are in place, an organisation of any size can turn the test and learn principle from aspiration into competitive advantage.

SESSION 5: HOW A 211-YEAR-OLD FINANCIAL SERVICES BRAND TAUGHT 'TV' TO THINK LIKE PERFORMANCE MEDIA

Kristian Claxton, Managing Director, Broadlab & Sam Taylor, Head of Marketing for Pensions and Insurance, Lloyds Banking Group

Summary:

This session told the story of how Scottish Widows, one of Britain's oldest financial services brands, used postcode data and performance media thinking to transform the way it uses television advertising. Working within some of the tightest regulatory constraints in any marketing category, the team rethought its approach to TV from the ground up, combining CRM data and addressable technology to turn a brand channel into a measurable, targeted performance medium. The results were striking: an 81% efficiency gain and one million app downloads from a campaign that many would have considered impossible given the constraints.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. Constraints are a creative brief in disguise.

Operating under strict financial services regulations that severely limit what can be said and how, the team reframed their limitations as design parameters. The result was a more creative and ultimately more effective solution than a less constrained brief might have produced.

2. One data point, used well, can unlock significant targeting capability.

Scottish Widows had only postcode data to work with. Rather than treating that as a barrier, the team used it as the foundation for an addressable TV strategy, demonstrating that data volume matters far less than data application.

3. TV is no longer a brand-only medium.

The campaign proved that television, when combined with audience targeting logic and CRM data, can function as a genuine performance channel with measurable ROI, challenging the assumption that reach and accountability are mutually exclusive in broadcast media.

4. Efficiency gains at this scale change strategic thinking.

An 81% efficiency gain is not an incremental improvement. It is the kind of result that forces a fundamental rethink of channel strategy, planning assumptions, and how budget is allocated across the full media mix.

5. Performance thinking is a mindset, not a channel.

The most lasting change from the campaign was not the media innovation itself but the shift in how the team approaches all channel planning. Starting from data and objectives rather than from channel convention is now embedded in how they work.

Bottom Line:

The idea that brand and performance are separate disciplines, served by separate channels and measured by separate metrics, is increasingly difficult to sustain. Scottish Widows and Broadlab demonstrated that with the right data thinking, the right technology, and the right creative mindset, even the most traditional brand-building channel can be reimagined as a precision performance medium. The question is not whether your brand could do this. It is whether you are prepared to rethink the assumptions that are stopping you.

SESSION 6: LINKEDIN ISN'T SEXY AND THAT'S WHY IT WORKS

Alicia Teltz, former Global Client Executive at LinkedIn, Founder of The Hype Department

Summary:

Drawing on years of insider experience at LinkedIn, Alicia Teltz made a compelling and counterintuitive case: the platform's unglamorous reputation is precisely what makes it the most commercially effective social media channel available to marketers. The session dismantled common myths about how LinkedIn works, explored the gap between how most brands use the platform and how it actually rewards content and engagement, and made a strong argument for why personal voice and thought leadership consistently outperform corporate broadcasting in ways that directly affect pipeline, reputation, and growth.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. LinkedIn's 'boring' reputation is its commercial superpower.

Unlike platforms built around entertainment and distraction, LinkedIn's audience arrives with professional intent. That intent makes it a uniquely high-quality environment for reaching senior decision-makers and building relationships that drive real commercial outcomes.

2. Most brands are using it wrong.

The majority of organisations treat LinkedIn as a corporate broadcast channel, posting company news and polished brand content to a page that relatively few people see. The platform's algorithm rewards very different behaviour than most marketing teams are trained to produce.

3. Personal voice dramatically outperforms corporate content.

Content posted from individual profiles, especially senior leaders, consistently reaches more people and generates more meaningful engagement than equivalent content from brand pages. The platform was designed around people, not organisations.

4. The 'cringe' stigma is costing brands real reach.

Reluctance among senior leaders to post on LinkedIn, driven by fear of looking self-promotional or try-hard, is leaving significant organic reach on the table. Alicia's insider data made clear that authentic, generous, and consistent posting from individuals outperforms almost any paid alternative.

5. Underinvestment in LinkedIn creative is widespread.

Brands that do show up on LinkedIn typically invest far less in content strategy, creative quality, and posting discipline than the platform's commercial returns justify. Closing that investment gap represents a significant and relatively low-cost growth opportunity.

Bottom Line:

The most valuable professional audience in social media is spending time on a platform that most marketing teams treat as an afterthought. LinkedIn's perceived unglamorosity is not a bug; it is a feature that keeps the competition low and the signal-to-noise ratio high. The brands and leaders who show up consistently, generously, and authentically on LinkedIn are quietly building influence and pipeline while others are chasing attention on more crowded channels.

SESSION 7: COMMUNITY-LED GROWTH AS A DEFENSIBLE MOAT IN THE AGE OF AI

Pip Jamieson, Founder and CEO, The Dots

Summary:

Pip Jamieson made a passionate and well-evidenced case that community is not a marketing tactic but a strategic business asset, and one that becomes more valuable as AI floods every channel with content and algorithmic reach becomes increasingly unreliable. Drawing on the experience of building The Dots into a thriving professional community, the session explored the fundamental difference between an audience and a community, and why the brands that invest in genuine belonging rather than passive followership are building a form of competitive advantage that technology cannot replicate or disrupt.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. An audience is rented. A community is owned.

Social media followers exist on platforms that control the relationship, the algorithm, and the terms of access. A genuine community is a direct relationship between a brand and its people that no platform change or AI disruption can take away.

2. AI makes community more valuable, not less.

As generative AI floods every channel with content, the scarcity of genuine human connection and peer-to-peer trust becomes more pronounced. The brands that facilitate authentic community interactions are building something that AI cannot commoditise.

3. Community requires infrastructure, not just intention.

Building a community is not the same as creating a social media group. It requires investment in platforms, moderation, value exchange, and genuine facilitation of connection between members, none of which happens passively.

4. Fans who feel belonging become advocates.

The transition from having fans to owning a community is the transition from passive appreciation to active advocacy. Members who experience real belonging refer, defend, and amplify a brand in ways that no paid media can manufacture.

5. The Dots' model demonstrates commercial viability at scale.

Community-led growth is sometimes dismissed as a soft or unscalable strategy. The Dots' experience shows that when community is treated as a structural business priority rather than a marketing channel, it drives measurable retention, referral, and revenue outcomes.

Bottom Line:

In a world where content is infinite, attention is scarce, and algorithms are unpredictable, the brands that own genuine communities have something no competitor can easily acquire and no technology can quickly replicate. Community-led growth is not the alternative to performance marketing. It is the foundation that makes every other form of marketing more effective, more durable, and more human.

SESSION 8: LEADING THROUGH HESITANCY – THE HUMAN SIDE OF WHAT COMES NEXT

Antoinette Dale Raymond, Organisational Psychologist and Author

Summary:

Antoinette Dale Raymond opened the afternoon with an energising and unexpectedly personal session, delivered, as Sophie Devonshire noted from the stage, on her 63rd birthday. As an organisational psychologist and author, Antoinette brought the human dimension to a day dominated by technology and strategy. Her central argument was that the biggest barrier to navigating what comes next is not capability or knowledge, but hesitancy, and that the antidote is not more information but a conscious decision to lead with presence and confidence. Through a practical paired exercise, she challenged attendees to identify what they needed to do in the next couple of months and, crucially, what was blocking them from doing it.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. Hesitancy is the real obstacle, not knowledge.

Most marketing leaders in the room already have a clear enough sense of what needs to happen. The gap is not understanding but action. Antoinette reframed the challenge: the complexity is not just out there in the technology and the landscape, much of it is internal.

2. Confidence is practice, not a personality trait.

Confidence is not something you either have or you do not. It is something you rebuild every time you are knocked off course. Spilling a coffee, encountering an unexpected challenge, facing a new technology: each is a moment to practise getting back to a place of grounded certainty.

3. Leaders navigate by showing up, not by knowing everything.

You do not need to master every platform or understand every AI tool. What you need is the presence and clarity to make people stop, listen, and follow. That is a decision and a discipline, not a qualification.

4. Name the thing that is blocking you.

The paired exercise asked two questions: what do you need to do in the next couple of months, and what is the obstacle you need to remove to get there? Simply naming that second thing out loud, to another person, is often the first step towards clearing it.

5. The tech will keep changing. How you lead will not.

Platforms evolve, tools multiply, and the landscape shifts constantly. What remains in your control is how you show up: the presence you bring, the decisions you make, and the way you lead your teams through uncertainty. That is what Navigate: Now and Next is ultimately about.

Bottom Line:

In a day full of frameworks, data points, and technology demonstrations, Antoinette's session was a reminder that leadership is fundamentally human. The marketers who will navigate the next phase most effectively are not necessarily the ones who understand the most tools. They are the ones who have done the inner work to show up with enough clarity and confidence to lead others through the uncertainty alongside them.

SESSION 9: HOW DO HERITAGE BRANDS BUILD HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN TODAY'S WORLD?

Nicky Smith, Strategy Director, GAIN & Ben Whattam, Marketing Director, Bentley

Summary:

GAIN works at the intersection of creativity, data, and technology, partnering with some of the world's most recognisable brands. This session brought that perspective to bear on one of the most interesting strategic questions in marketing: how do heritage brands, with all the weight of legacy, cultural equity, and established expectation behind them, evolve for a world that is moving faster than any of them were built for? Using Bentley as a live case study, Nicky Smith and Ben Whattam explored the tension between honouring what a brand has always stood for and adapting it for what the world needs it to become.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. Heritage is an asset and a constraint simultaneously.

The same brand legacy that drives affinity and trust can also slow down the pace of change. Navigating that tension requires honesty about which parts of the heritage are genuinely valuable and which are simply familiar.

2. Brand and product strategy must move together.

For heritage brands in particular, there is a risk that the brand story gets ahead of or behind the product reality. Bentley's experience illustrated that sustainable growth requires both to evolve in the same direction at the same pace.

3. Discovery behaviour is changing the rules of brand visibility.

As social platforms become search engines and short-form content reshapes how consumers encounter brands, heritage organisations must rethink how they show up in environments that were not built with their aesthetic or communication style in mind.

4. Stars are aligning for heritage brands, but only if they move.

In times of uncertainty, consumers gravitate toward the familiar and the trusted. Heritage brands have a structural advantage in that environment, but capitalising on it requires active investment in relevance, not passive reliance on reputation.

5. The growth conundrum is real: evolve too fast and you lose what you are, move too slowly and you lose where you are going.

The most important strategic question for any heritage brand is not whether to change but how to change in a way that strengthens rather than dilutes the core of what makes the brand worth caring about in the first place.

Bottom Line:

Heritage brands are not at a disadvantage in today's market. If anything, the conditions of uncertainty, distrust, and information overload favour brands with genuine history, proven values, and established emotional equity. The challenge is not survival but evolution, and the brands that approach that evolution with strategic rigour, creative courage, and a clear-eyed view of what must never change will be the ones that turn their legacy into their greatest competitive advantage.

SESSION 10: THE INTELLIGENT ECOSYSTEM – HOW THE WORLD'S BEST MARKETING TEAMS ARE REDESIGNING WORKSTREAMS FOR THE AGE OF AI

Nick Ford-Young, Co-CEO, Boldspace Group

Summary:

Nick Ford-Young brought a practitioner's perspective to the question every marketing leader in the room was wrestling with: not whether to adopt AI, but how to architect a marketing operation around it in a way that actually works. Drawing on Boldspace's own experience building AI-powered workstreams and the platform they have developed to support it, Nick argued that the challenge is not tool selection but ecosystem design. The most effective marketing teams of the next decade will not be the ones with the most AI tools. They will be the ones who have reimagined how all the component parts of their operation connect, communicate, and compound.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. The challenge is not tools, it is architecture.

Most marketing teams are accumulating AI tools without redesigning the operating model around them. The result is a more complex patchwork rather than a more effective system. What is needed is a deliberate approach to how intelligence, execution, and human judgement connect.

2. Map your workstreams before you select your technology.

The most effective approach to AI integration starts not with tool evaluation but with a clear map of the work itself: what are the steps, where do they connect, where does judgement matter, and where can automation add speed without losing quality?

3. The new competitive advantage is the intelligent ecosystem.

Boldspace's model breaks marketing AI into distinct layers, from the broad platforms through to point solutions for specific functions, and argues that advantage comes not from any single layer but from how they are connected and orchestrated together.

4. Brand voice, judgement, and creative instinct are the irreplaceable human contribution.

AI can handle competitive intelligence, content variation, testing, synthesis, and workflow orchestration. What it cannot replicate is the brand knowledge, cultural intuition, and creative judgement that comes from experienced marketing leadership. That is where human effort should be concentrated.

5. The question is not what AI can do but what you can now do differently.

The most powerful reframe Nick offered was this: do not ask what tasks AI can replace. Ask what becomes possible when those tasks no longer consume your team's time and energy. That is where the real opportunity for marketing transformation lives.

Bottom Line:

The marketing teams that will look back on this period as a turning point are not the ones that adopted the most AI tools the fastest. They are the ones that stepped back, mapped their operating model honestly, and made deliberate choices about how to redesign it for a world where intelligence is embedded in every workstream. The technology is ready. The harder work, as always, is organisational.

SESSION 11: B2A IS HERE – YOUR CUSTOMER JOURNEY NEEDS A RETHINK

Isabel Perry, Global EVP of Strategy, DEPT

Summary:

Isabel Perry brought clarity and urgency to a concept that many marketers are aware of but have yet to fully act on: B2A, or business to agent. The session explored how AI agents acting autonomously on behalf of consumers are already reshaping the customer journey from discovery to conversion, and why brands whose digital infrastructure was designed for human navigation are increasingly at risk of becoming invisible in an AI-mediated world. The discussion was practical and strategic in equal measure, exploring both the structural changes brands need to make and the experience investments that will create lasting preference.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. B2A is not a future scenario. It is already happening.

AI agents are already making decisions that previously required human intent and engagement, from product discovery and price comparison to appointment booking and purchase. Brands that treat this as an emerging trend rather than a present reality are already behind.

2. AI legibility is a new form of brand infrastructure.

If a brand's content, data, and digital architecture cannot be accurately read and processed by an AI agent, that brand will not be selected. AI legibility is becoming as fundamental to marketing infrastructure as website usability was a decade ago.

3. Invisibility is the primary risk, not irrelevance.

The existential threat from B2A is not that consumers will choose a competitor. It is that an AI agent acting on their behalf will never surface your brand at all, removing you from consideration before a human decision is ever made.

4. Heritage brands and complex services are most exposed.

Customer journeys built around human navigation, extensive research, and relationship-based selling do not translate cleanly into the structured, machine-readable formats that AI agents require. The more complex the proposition, the more urgent the need to rethink the journey.

5. The response requires investment at both ends of the funnel.

Brands must invest in the technical foundations that make them AI-selectable at the commodity layer, and simultaneously invest in the human experience and brand distinctiveness that make consumers ask for them by name, overriding the agent's default recommendation.

Bottom Line:

The customer journey has been redesigned by a force most brands have not yet fully accounted for. AI agents are not just another channel to optimise for; they are a structural intermediary that sits between your brand and the consumer, making decisions at speed and at scale. The brands that respond now, building both the technical infrastructure to be findable and the brand equity to be preferred, will navigate the B2A era with confidence. The ones that wait will find themselves invisible in conversations they never knew were happening.

SESSION 12: DISCOVER HOW WHATSAPP BUSINESS MESSAGING IS REVOLUTIONISING THE WAY COMPANIES CONNECT WITH THEIR CUSTOMERS

Russell Pert, Meta Group Vertical Director, Financial Services, Tech, Travel & Entertainment

Summary:

Russell Pert made a compelling case that WhatsApp Business is the most underutilised channel in most marketers' toolkits, and one of the most commercially powerful. The session explored how industries across financial services, travel, and entertainment are using WhatsApp to transform customer engagement, moving far beyond the notification and verification use cases many brands have adopted into genuine two-way dialogue that builds loyalty and drives retention. Drawing on live examples from NatWest and Booking.com, the discussion demonstrated how human agents supported by AI can deliver personalised, conversational experiences at scale that neither channel alone could achieve.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. WhatsApp Business is a conversation channel, not a broadcast one.

Brands using WhatsApp to push one-way notifications are missing the platform's most powerful capability: the ability to have genuine, two-way dialogue with customers in a channel they already use and trust for personal communication.

2. Open rates are dramatically higher than email or SMS.

Messages sent via WhatsApp Business are seen and acted upon at rates that dwarf traditional digital channels, making it one of the most effective channels available for time-sensitive and high-value customer communications.

3. AI and human agents work better together than apart.

The session highlighted how human agents supported by AI can manage significantly more WhatsApp conversations simultaneously than they could handle via phone, without the loss of quality and personalisation that fully automated responses often produce.

4. The platform sits across the full digital ecosystem.

WhatsApp does not operate in isolation. Brands can move customers seamlessly from an Instagram DM, a Facebook ad, or a website interaction into a WhatsApp conversation, creating a connected experience that follows the customer rather than forcing them into a separate channel.

5. The opportunity goes well beyond utility messaging.

Delivery updates, authentication codes, and appointment confirmations are just the entry point. Brands like Booking.com are using WhatsApp to drive retention, resolve issues, upsell, and create genuinely delightful customer experiences that build long-term loyalty.

Bottom Line:

WhatsApp Business is not a new idea, but most brands are using a fraction of its commercial potential. The brands treating it as a notification channel are leaving its most valuable capability untouched: the ability to have real conversations with customers in an environment where they are already engaged, already trusting, and already open to dialogue. As messaging continues to grow as the default mode of consumer communication, the distance between brands using WhatsApp well and those using it poorly will become one of the clearest competitive differentiators in customer experience.

SESSION 13: PREVENTING THE NEXT CRISIS IS A MARKETING MISSION

Peter Miller, Co-Founder, Octopus Energy

Summary:

Peter Miller closed the day with a session that was equal parts strategic provocation and human storytelling. Drawing on the energy crisis unfolding across Europe and the structural parallels with the oil shocks of the 1970s, he made the case that the shift to renewable energy is not primarily a technology challenge but a trust and behaviour change challenge, and that marketers are uniquely positioned to lead it. Through the lens of Octopus Energy's brand and customer experience philosophy, the session explored how trust is built at scale, why human connection and technology are not in tension, and what it actually means for a brand to have its customers' backs in a moment of genuine crisis.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. The energy transition is a marketing problem.

The technology and economics of renewable energy already favour the switch. Solar and onshore wind costs have fallen by around 90% over the last decade. Battery costs continue to fall. The barrier is not capability; it is consumer trust and willingness to change behaviour.

2. Trust is the single most important asset a brand can build.

The Edelman Trust Barometer data Peter shared was stark: trust in institutions and brands has been declining globally for two decades. In Britain, only 14% of people expect the next generation to be better off. In that environment, building genuine trust is not a brand nicety; it is the only viable commercial strategy.

3. Human connection can be built at scale through technology.

Octopus routes customers to the same team of eight to ten agents, personalises communications using around 500 data points, and uses AI to draft responses in an individual agent's tone of voice. The result is a genuinely human-feeling experience delivered to millions of customers simultaneously.

4. Empowering people to act on instinct beats scripting them.

Octopus Energy gives its agents the authority to decide how to help customers, whether that means sending an electric blanket to a vulnerable customer living alone or sending flowers to someone clearly having a difficult time. No scripts, no approval chains. The results speak for themselves.

5. Technology should free people up to be more human.

The 1,000,000th smart metre installation was celebrated with a brass band, a unicorn-horned horse, and a visit from Jason Manford because the customer was a fan. Technology made the scale possible; humanity made it memorable.

Bottom Line:

Marketing's role in the energy transition, and in any crisis, is not to sell a product or manage a reputation. It is to build the trust that allows people to make choices they are currently too scared, too sceptical, or too overwhelmed to make alone. Faye's email said everything: 'I'm less scared today than I was yesterday.' If a brand can say that about its customers, it is doing its job. And if it can say it at the scale Octopus Energy is operating, it is doing something genuinely important.