



CHIEF MARKETERS DEPART FROM THE RETAIL RANKS

By David Moin

APRIL 12, 2016

The chief marketing slot has become retail's hot seat.

In the past two weeks, three leading chief marketing officers vacated their jobs suddenly — Martine Reardon at Macy's, Will Setliff at Kohl's and Wanda Gierhart at the Neiman Marcus Group. Reardon and Setliff also were executive vice presidents and Gierhart held the senior vice president title. Last January, Michael Crotty, executive vice president and chief marketing officer for the Hudson's Bay Co., left the retailer.

Executives have been under pressure due to slumping results, though sales and traffic trends have been weak across the retail landscape recently. Experts said Tuesday that retail marketing positions turn over rapidly in periods of weak traffic, with performance sometimes tied to the success or lack of success of seasonal campaigns and the ability to woo new customers.

"Retail operations are always relentless about attracting, retaining and servicing their customers and that's putting pressure on marketing departments," said Jaimee Marshall, executive vice president of Kirk Palmer Associates. "Companies are looking for modern skill sets in their chief marketing officers. In an omnichannel business, the digital experience becomes that much more important and the historic skill set in advertising on TV and in print is not as relevant."

Macy's and Neiman's said their top marketing executives left on their own accord. Kohl's said Setliff, who was executive vice president of marketing for just two years, resigned this week. Kohl's did make a splash this year by becoming a retail sponsor of the Oscars, replacing J.C. Penney. Before Kohl's, Setliff worked at Darden Restaurants and Target. Crotty's departure is believed to have stemmed from consolidations at HBC.

The three retailers have not yet found successors for their marketing executives.

Macy's Reardon was instrumental in transitioning a traditional brick-and-mortar retail business into social media and the digital world. She officially leaves Macy's on May 13, after 32 years of service.

“I will miss my Macy’s family terribly, but I am looking forward to taking time for me now,” Reardon said Tuesday. “The marketing organization at Macy’s is incredibly deep and talented, and I am excited for my colleagues to carry on the work we began together.”

Reardon early on foresaw the rise of mobile shopping, and was involved in a wide range of activities, from getting Macy’s involved with location-based services like Shopkick to designer collaborations and major merchandise campaigns, be it a Karl Lagerfeld capsule collection or an America promotion. She led macys.com, Macy’s advertising, creative development, brand public relations, cause and tourism marketing, media planning and consumer insight efforts and data analysis, in addition to special events like the Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade.

Reardon began her career in special events at Abraham & Straus, which was converted to Macy’s and Bloomingdale’s in 1995. Her ascendancy in the marketing ranks came despite periods of consolidations, management and ownership changes.

“It is with deep sadness that we accept Martine’s resignation from Macy’s,” said Terry J. Lundgren, Macy’s Inc. chairman and chief executive officer. “Martine’s leadership, insight, creativity and expertise have enabled Macy’s to compete in physical stores and digitally as customer shopping preferences have evolved. Our entire organization will miss Martine.”